The Gift of Sarah Barker Short Guide

The Gift of Sarah Barker by Jane Yolen

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The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

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Overview

The Gift of Sarah Barker, unlike the fantasy fiction for which Yolen is best known, is an absorbing historical novel. It addresses in frank terms the issues of growing up. The story is especially intriguing because this growingup process takes place in an atmosphere of self-denial and strictest celibacy. Two teenage characters, Sarah Barker and Abel Church, are drawn to each other despite residing in a religious community that rejects marriage as the greatest sin of the flesh. The community observes rules that keep boys and men apart from girls and women. Members are taught to regard themselves as brothers and sisters, and to address each other as such.

This strict community, although fictional, is based upon fact. Yolen explores her themes in terms of the history of the United Society of Believers in the First and Second Appearing of Christ, commonly known as the Shakers. The Shakers flourished from Revolutionary times in America to the 1860s, then went into a period of decline. The Shakers eventually disappeared because they rejected marriage and childbearing. The novel covers a two-week period in 1854 during which Sarah and Abel meet secretly while they wrestle with inner doubts, longings, and questions about the outside "World."

Although readers may be especially gripped by the testing tensions within Sarah and Abel, as well as by the vexatious relations between them and the adults they live among, their story holds universal implications. Through Sarah especially, Yolen explores the haunting problem of child abuse by a parent that is found in every community and society. In addition, the Shaker community revolves around strict observances and absolute supervision by a man addressed as Father and a woman as Mother. Yolen's picture of this rigidly structured group evokes images of modern cults and of dictatorial practices which still exist in many countries. The story of Sarah and Abel touches on important issues of thought control, invasion of privacy, child development, community responsibility, and gender roles.

About the Author

Jane Yolen was born in New York City on February 11, 1939, and she went to grade schools there until she attended high school in Westport, Connecticut. She was encouraged in imaginative pursuits by a family life rich in writing, storytelling, and singing. She studied piano and ballet, read avidly, and showed talent at a very early age, composing the script and music for her first-grade class play.

While an eighth-grader at New York's Hunter Academy, a school for gifted girls, she authored two "books," a nonfiction piece on pirates and a seventeen-page western novel. Yolen's first book accepted for publication, a children's nonfiction work Pirates in Petticoats (1963), developed from those early efforts.

Yolen continued to thrive in her teenage years; she was active on the staff of the high school newspaper, joined music groups, wrote term papers in verse, and won an English prize. Yolen, who is Jewish, developed a lasting interest in religions during these years, and she was introduced to Catholicism by a best friend. A cousinby-marriage, whom Yolen credits as a great influence in her creative career, introduced her to Quakerism as well as to folk-song fests. Yolen's later nonfiction books about the Quakers and their strange offshoot, the Shakers, as well as the fictional The Gift of Sarah Barker, reflect these early religious influences.

Yolen attended Smith College where she won poetry prizes, published poems in magazines, and performed folk songs. She graduated from Smith in 1960, then worked at desk jobs in publishing. When her first manuscript was accepted, she quickly followed it with the concept book for children,See This Little Line? Yolen has since published over a hundred books, most for children, and gained a reputation as an editor, critic, poet, and musician.

She received the degree of Masters of Education in 1976 from the University of Massachusetts and pursued a doctorate in children's literature. She has taught at Smith College and lectured throughout the country about writing for young people.

Yolen is best known for applying to topical themes the forms of fantasy and folklore, and her career received a boost when storytelling was revived in the 1980s. Although she remains identified primarily with children's books, Yolen has published short stories, reviews, poems, and articles in numerous periodicals for adults.

These include The Writer, Fantasy and Science Fiction, and Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine. Yolen has written ground-breaking, feminist literary fairy tales suitable for readers of any age.

She has won numerous awards for her children's books, and her first adult speculative fiction, Cards of Grief (1984), won the Mythopoeic Society's Fantasy Award. Her Briar Rose (1992) won an ALA Best Book for Young Adults award and was a Nebula nominee. Yolen has edited critically acclaimed collections, among them Favorite

Folktales from Around the World (1986) which won the World Fantasy Award. Yolen says that many bits and pieces of her life inform her books, including experiences with her husband David Stemple, a computer science professor, and their daughter and two sons. Yolen believes that literature begins in the cradle. She advocates a tough honesty in writing for children and young adults.

Setting

The story takes place, except for a brief epilogue, in the Shaker community of New Vale, Massachusetts, from April 27 to May 9, 1854. The inhabitants of New Vale keep strictly to themselves. Their sole contacts with the outside World occur when curiosityseekers come to view the Sabbath rituals, and when a selected few Shakers take the group's products to market.

The Shakers need little in return except the money and news they get from the World's folk, since they maintain a self-sufficient, hardworking communal settlement.

Besides buildings for various purposes, a Holy Hill exists on Shaker land for the observance of Mountain Feast days. Shakers observe rituals that include periods of prayerful silence, processions in perfect rows to meals, and meetings and ceremonies that include the frenzied dancing or "shaking" that gave the group its popular name. Shakers sing hymns of praise for love and freedom, while their lives are rigidly ordered to discourage personal expression. Strong measures are taken to prevent the growth of meaningful relationships, above all those that might occur between men and women.

Tasks are arranged so that the sisters perform traditional "women's work" of housekeeping and cooking.

The brothers perform the usual "men's work" of farming and heavy maintenance. The Quarters in the central Dwelling House are separated according to gender, with rooms assigned by age as well. Meals are taken in common, but men and women are separated by at least five feet of space.

Daily activities require participation in a gender group of two or more.

There is no privacy: "Secrets are not the Shaker way."

Social Sensitivity

Yolen's treatment of a repressive community is honest, realistic and worthwhile, but several aspects may trouble some readers, parents, and concerned adults. The novel treats frankly the sexual tensions that can occur within a celibate community; These tensions are centered in the physical desires of a central teenage character, Abel, and at times they are graphically described. Abel's confessor Brother Joshua also testifies to a past carnal affair. The novel, however, clearly emphasizes the essential innocence of Abel and, even more starkly, that of young Sarah, the other central character, with whom he feels so close a bond. No lovemaking occurs, and the rare times of physical contact are limited to the touching of hands.

So far as Yolen addresses in this novel the question of teenage romance, she points to the need for real love, mutual understanding, and commitment. Brother Joshua's character addresses the question of adequate care and guidance from adults. Joshua's confession is intended to warn against hasty acts. "A moment of sweaty pleasure is not worth a lifetime of regrets." There is an underlying assumption in the novel that chaste relations will continue until marriage.

Although Yolen develops an intriguing romance, she raises serious and enduring social issues.

Readers concerned about treatments of religious themes should find their misgivings largely erased by the fact that the Shakers actually existed.

Yolen stresses the social aspects of Shaker communal life rather than religious interpretation, including the portrayal of harsh child abuse on a mother's part. The mother involved, Sister Agatha, is a disturbing and powerful character, but she is portrayed in a disapproving mannershown to be unbalanced and in dire need of help. A scene in which Sister Agatha tells her past indicates that she was married against her will, so that her behavior can be seen as relevant to the major theme of freedom as human necessity. The scene includes, however, frank comments about sexual activity and the physical aspect of childbirth.

There is an act of suicide in the novel. It is not graphically portrayed, although there is very brief, gruesome comment about the body's appearance. The act is redeemed somewhat by the portrayed failings of the character so that a reader's sympathy is not strongly engaged. The suicide is relevant also to the theme of community responsibility in aiding troubled individuals. Yolen's overall intent is to convey the dangers that can arise when a community ignores individuality, stifles normal physical expression, and separates and typecasts the genders.

Literary Qualities

Yolen employs a variety of techniques that sustain interest, support mood and theme, and develop character and plot. Reader interest is drawn by rhythmic, flowing writing, but the style is somber as well. This device helps to communicate the repressive flavor of Shaker living even when the scenes involve joyful celebration. The novel's convincing realism derives in part from Yolen's research into Shaker history, including her observation of the actual round barn at Hancock Shaker Village in Massachusetts.

Realism is also conveyed by deft portrayal of human nature and the effective differentiation of characters, although the overall group is stereotypical. The plot and Sarah's nuanced, realistic characterization stem largely from Yolen's perception of her daughter Heidi, when at the age that girls become interesting to boys. The tension between celibate rule and human yearning is heightened by the youth of the central characters, and by the setting of springtime awakening. Yolen repeatedly employs sensory adjectives and outdoor settings to underscore the idea that human life is part of nature and entitled to expression.

Yolen mirrors the Shaker separation of genders by alternating chapters between Sarah and Abel. By shifting the viewpoint from one central character to the other as the chapters progress, Yolen equalizes the sexes, heightens interest, and fills in essential detail. Several chapters entitled "Meeting" enable Yolen to develop viewpoints of other characters and to describe pivotal group moments. Shifts between the spellings of "Sara" and "Sarah" subtly stress the difference between the community's formal point of view and the character's desire to be her natural self.

Memory flashbacks are used very effectively to facilitate the understanding of characters and events.

Sarah's memories of her Worldly past are developed to evoke intrigue. Sarah glances around her "perfect" Shaker room, for example, and suddenly recalls another: "small, crowded, and smoky." Her mind sees homey things, hears sounds: "a woman crooning a low lullaby and the voice of a laughing man." The mind-picture stops there, to be filled in gradually by other memories until the man emerges as Sarah's Worldly father. The failure of Father James in Sarah's life is underscored by a scene that finds the teenager looking at his face but seeing imposed upon it the laughing one of Worldly memory. Abel is linked to Sarah's happiness as he too can laugh, like the man her mind lovingly recalls.

Carefully introduced recollections help to clarify the state of degeneration in Sister Agatha, as well as anguish over it in Sarah. In the scene of the pair's final confrontation with Father James, Yolen deftly employs the recurring symbol of a cloak to indicate Sarah's newfound awakening to self. When Sarah falls to her knees within a circle of shouting, condemnatory Shakers, she hears suddenly her inner "silence" that is warmer and bigger than the cloak, the noise, and the threatening admonitions. Yolen carefully prepares the reader for this final scene of group ecstasy turned sour by prior portrayals

of individual Shakers yielding to the excitement of a moment, dancing or chanting about the love and freedom they are denied in practice. Yolen underscores the incongruities in Shaker life by a poignant scene in which Sarah stops humming her own tune and gets caught up in the song the women's workroom group is singing: "'Tis a gift to be free."

Themes and Characters

The story begins with fourteenyear-old Sarah's efforts to keep secret the happy time she has spent alone enjoying the early spring on top of Holy Hill. She is naturally exuberant, self-questioning, and fond of secrets.

She is stubborn enough to ignore the Shaker rule of openness, and she tells lies to hide her innermost thoughts and forbidden acts. Sarah tries to be pure and obedient in the Shaker way, but she cannot seem to find her particular "gift." She vaguely remembers happy times with her parents before she was a Shaker, although these are hard to reconcile with the harshly abusive presence of her mother in the settlement.

Sarah's inner struggles are increased by her awareness of Abel, the novel's other prominent character.

Sixteen-year-old Abel, left to the Shakers as a foundling, also wonders about the World outside. He questions most of all the Shaker rule of celibacy. Although he tries to be a faithful Shaker, he is gripped by "sudden Worldly thoughts" that center on pretty Sarah.

He admires her frightened yet "defiant" attitude, and he too can keep a secret. Sarah is drawn as well to Abel because he seems to be like her, "spoiling the perfect Shaker picture."

The teenagers, in unchaperoned meetings that are a Shaker "sin almost beyond confessing," help each other gain a better understanding of themselves, their world, and what it means to be friends. Their quests for true identity and intimate caring involve themes that are not limited to Shaker history. The pair's plight addresses the need for life-enhancing relations with others and brings into question the proper purposes of community.

The teenagers proceed through contacts with a range of lesser Shaker characters, who generally fail them: "They hear but they do not listen."

Abel finds no way to "fit in" with younger Brothers John, Jacob, Jonas, and Andrew. Older Brothers Theodore, Stephen, and Matthew—"all hardworking and soft-spoken"—strikingly exemplify the imposed confor mity that destroys self-identity.

"Though he had known them all his life, Abel found them almost indistinguishable." Old Brother Eben suppressed his personal desires long ago, and Brother Frank yields himself to the silent comfort of a long-stemmed clay pipe.

Abel relates only to Brother Joshua, an unassuming, twenty-year Shaker by personal choice. Abel trusts Joshua, who still possesses a "crusty honesty and unshakerly heart." Joshua can provide quietly realistic guidance. He urges Abel to feel free to make his own choice in life, to beware of yearnings that could be "spring jimjams," and to trust

himself. The older man has no use for the men's group leader, Father James. "I have been your father," Joshua tells Abel, "more than that selfrighteous prig ever has been."

Father James, unlike Joshua, is a self-righteous lifelong Shaker. He is stern, watchful, unforgiving, and "as rigorous as any prophet in seeking out sins in others." Abel resists the power of Father James, while Sarah fears it.

Sarah likes the women's leader, Mother Jean, who possesses a degree of human warmth and mercy. Mother Jean joined the Shakers many years ago at the death of her Worldly husband and child, and she is very fond of Sarah. Still Mother Jean supplies Shaker maxims rather than help. "The answers to questions come only in silence," she says, when Sarah desperately needs serious discussion.

Sister Agatha, a very vivid character, most rouses Sarah's need to talk.

Agatha is Sarah's mother, who fled with her daughter to the Shakers.

Sarah cherishes ten-year-old memories of a lullaby-singing mother and a loving father full of laughter. A changed, self-punishing Agatha renounces her husband, Sarah's father, as Satan; worse, she rejects Sarah and spurns her daughter's repeated loving overtures. At times Agatha beats Sarah mercilessly, and shouts at her: "Imp! Devil! Satan's child!"This cruelty of mother to daughter raises the issue of community responsibility in cases of emotional instability and child abuse.

Sarah finds comfort in the other mature women—Eldress Tabit and Sisters Ruth, Martha, and Faith— who weave the cloaks so popular among Worldly folk. The Sisters always intervene when a beating occurs, but their workroom talk about banishing Agatha resolves nothing. The women bow to the leadership of Mother Jean, who calmly regards Agatha as a hardworking, "misguided soul," even if subject to "ungovernable rages" and "changes in mood." In the end, Father James takes decisive action primarily for reasons of personal revulsion. He shows no interest in Sarah's physical or emotional wounds or in Agatha's pitiful mental state.

Sarah's roommate Ann is as unsympathetic as Father James, and an enemy as well. Sister Ann, "whey-faced and whiny," is driven by her jealousy of popular Sarah. Ann is determined to expose Sarah's secrets in spite of having hidden "dreams" of her own.

Ann's personal hatred brings about the ultimate confrontation between Sarah and her mother. In a scene that illumines the theme of misguided group frenzy, the Shakers become an "army of shouters" against Sarah.

Sister Elizabeth is the roommate who approves Ann's action. Elizabeth is "sensible" as well as "organized and forthright and honest." She is a perfect young Shaker, sure of herself and incapable of laughter. She sees it as "duty" to tattle on others.

"Good, solid, loving Sister Mary," on the other hand, has Sarah's warm regard. Mary's Worldly parents were runaway slaves too ill to survive long.

Mary's special need for comfort causes Sarah to invent a religious vision, then to ponder ethics. Can truth be measured, its quantification used to determine the true from the false?—"four parts out of five being truthful means a statement is true? Only eight parts out of seventeen, and the statement is a lie?" Mary's case also relates to themes of repression and community failure to help individuals adjust to new environments in life. When Mary begins telling her past slave experiences with heat, cotton, and whips, she is cut short at a meeting by Sister Martha. "Memory is a treacherous path," Martha says. The "terrible plight of the black slaves" is "not for us to ponder."

Topics for Discussion

1. Is the development of plot or of character more important in this novel.

2. What does having a "gift" mean, exactly, to the Shakers? What is Sarah Barker's "gift," which gives the novel its title? Does Yolen make the meaning clear?

3. Why does Sarah spell her name with an "h," when the community calls her Sara?

4. Does Yolen give equal emphasis to the characters of Sarah and Abel? Is one character more rounded or better developed than the other?

5. What does Abel mean when he says: "They hear, but they don't listen?" Why does Sarah agree?

6. At one point Sarah suddenly understands her roommate Ann's creation of "dream messages" or "paper visions." What does Sarah mean? What is Ann's purpose?

7. What does Sarah mean when she thinks about "how perfect the Dwelling House was and how like a dream."

It was "as preserved as a tomb" (Chapter 5).

8. What purpose is served by repeated references to the symbolic cloak of Mother Ann Lee? Why does Sarah turn to the image? Why does Sister Mary?

9. The Shakers are occasionally shown chanting about love (as in Chapter 7), or singing and dancing.(as in Chapter 26). How truly exciting are these scenes as Yolen describes them?

Do they convey happy religious union?

10. What does Abel think during the Mountain Eve and Feast rituals? Is this a decisive moment in his life?

11. Why does Sarah plan to give a note to Abel during Mountain Feast?

What does it signify for the relationship?

12. What are Brother Eben's thoughts at the departure of Abel and Sarah (Chapter 26)? Is there some truth to these thoughts?

13. Is Sister Elizabeth a good choice for Mother Jean's successor? Why, or why not?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Research the life of Ann Lee in greater detail than Yolen provides in her historical note. How did Lee gain her following? How extensive a movement was the group she founded?

What other Shakers held leading roles?

2. Consider the Shaker songs, chants, and sayings that appear in the novel. Based upon these, what virtues or values did the Shakers exalt? Did they actually practice them? Do any have value for today's world?

3. Is the novel best classified as a romance? As a coming-of-age story?

As fictionalized religious or social history? Explain.

4. Does Sarah change in the course of the novel? Include comments about Sarah's reactions to the Mountain Eve and Feast at the ages of six and fourteen (Chapter 20), and to the shouts of "woe" when she hears "for the first time, the silence that she carried within" (end, Chapter 22).

5. Explore Abel's relationship with Sarah, which develops in just two weeks' time. Does it spring from real love or from the "spring jimjams" on Abel's part? How much is it the result of circumstances in the Shaker community?

6. Explore the characters of Sister Agatha and Father James. Are they rounded? One-dimensional? Overdrawn? What character traits, if any, do the two share? Is Father James right to believe that Sister Agatha represents the "madness of the world" (Chapter 22), or is there more to her character, perhaps a sympathetic side?

7. What, if anything, is accomplished toward "union" at the meeting guided by Sister Martha and Brother Frank (Chapter 15)? Does the talk have a helpful effect on any one of the various participants? Does the meeting confirm in any way Sarah and Abel's complaint that the Shakers "hear, but they do not listen?"

8. Shaker designed furniture and other artifacts have been fashionable in recent decades. Research and report on the type of furniture the Shakers produced.

For Further Reference

"Jane (Hyatt) Yolen." In Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series. Vol. 29.

Edited by Hal May and James G. Lesniak. Detroit: Gale Research, 1990: pp. 463-469. The entry's "Sidelights" section contains an interview conducted February 6, 1989. One topic covered is Yolen's disregard for age level when she writes. "I write to tell a story. That may be why a lot of my things seem to cross boundaries."

"Jane Yolen." In Authors and Artists for Young Adults. Vol. 4. Edited by Agnes Garrett. Detroit: Gale Research, 1990: pp. 229-241. A "Sidelights" section contains extensive autobiographical comments that are particularly informative about career development. (These comments are based upon earlier Gale Research works; see Something About the Author, edited by Anne Commire, 1985: 217-230, and Something About the Author: Autobiography Series. Vol. 1. Edited by Adele Sarkassian. 1986: 327-346.)

"Jane Yolen." In Something About the Author. Vol. 75. Edited by Diane Telgen. Detroit: Gale Research, 1994: pp. 223-229. The entry contains a brief biography with updated listings of awards, honors, and publications categorized by type and reader audience.

"Jane Yolen [Interview with John Koch, reprinted from The Boston Globe]. The Writer (March 1997): 20.

Yolen talks about how she avoids writer's block, her enjoyment of the writing process, and the importance of "intimation and suggestion" rather than graphic details in fiction.

"Jane Yolen: The Bardic Munchies" [Interview]. Locus 26 (January 1991): 4, 78. Yolen discusses the place of storytelling in her writing, and advocates respect for children's literature. "In fact, because children's books have the compression of po etry, they are quite often more difficult to write." She adds: "Children really are a less forgiving audience."

"Jane Yolen: Telling Tales" [Interview]. Locus 39 (August 1997): 4-5, 72. Yolen discusses her Sister Light, Sister Dark trilogy, the market for young adult books, reasons she likes to write fantasy, and the nature of her writing.

Roginski, Jim. "Jane Yolen [Interview]." In Behind the Covers: Interviews with Authors and Illustrators of Books for Children and Young Adults.

Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1985: pp. 224-238. Yolen comments on the working side of her life, its frustrations and joys. "A writer writes because he/ she has to write.

Because a story is bursting the walls of the heart."

White, David E. "Profile: Jane Yolen."

Language Arts 60 (May 1983): 652660. Yolen is profiled primarily in her own words on topics of her writing, criticism in the field of children's books, and her opposition to censorship.

Yolen, Jane. "America's Cinderella."

Children's Literature in Education 8 (1977): 21-29. In an important article that defines her position, Yolen considers historical changes in the fairy tale "Cinderella" in order to attack the mass-market versions of the last two centuries, especially the Disney depiction of "a sorry excuse for a heroine, pitiable and useless."

Yolen prefers the "tough, resilient heroine" of the original tales. (For a discussion of feminism and fairy tales which incorporates remarks about Yolen and this article, see Jack Zipes's introduction to his Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England. New York: Routledge, 1986: 136, especially 7-8, 12, 19. Zipes reprints Yolen's "The Moon Ribbon" as a revised "Cinderella," pp. 81-87.)

——. "Strings That Touch the Sky."

The Writer (January 1984): 7-8. Yolen tells how writers recycle their research, or "loop upon loop," using examples that relate to The Gift of Sarah Barker. A children's nonfiction book Yolen wrote about the Quakers, Friend: The Story of George Fox, led to the idea for her history of the Shakers, Simple Gifts. The research for this young people's book led in turn to several novels.

——. Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood. New York: Philomel Books, 1981. Yolen incorporates many ideas from her lectures in this invaluable source on her perspective. She identifies, for example, functions in myth and folklore that establish them as among "the most basic elements of our education." She argues against watered-down, mass-market heroines and advocates "tough magic" tales that confront evil boldly and so provide a moral reference point for the young.

——. Writing Books for Children. Revised edition. Boston: The Writer, 1983. Yolen discusses the "how-to" of writing for children and comments informatively on various kinds of literature.

Related Titles

Yolen notes a strong relationship between The Gift of Sarah Barker and her young adult fantasy, Dragon's Blood (1982). Both are set in farming communities which rigidly separate men and women and assign them traditional roles. A central motif of the Big Dragon barn in Dragon's Blood comes from a description in The Gift of Sarah Barker. In both novels, young people fall in love without fully understanding the consequences. Yolen built The Gift of Sarah Barker upon her children's nonfiction book Simple Gifts, which treats the lives of Mother Ann Lee and various Shaker leaders, as well as the rituals and origins of the group.

Insofar as The Gift of Sarah Barker concerns a specially ordered community, it relates to the adult novel Sister Light, Sister Dark (1988) which describes a community of women. Insofar as the Shakers shun the realities of Worldly life, The Gift of Sarah Barker relates to Yolen's perception that the concept of "walls" recurs in her stories. Two examples along this line are the fairy tales entitled The Girl Who Loved the Wind (1972) and The Seventh Mandarin (1970). In the first tale, an overprotective father keeps his daughter secure in a walled-in palace until the wind lifts her from dullness to the challenges of the changing world outside. In the second tale, the youngest mandarin loses the string to the kite that carries the king's soul into the sky. The search to retrieve it brings the mandarin into contact with the harsh realities of life, which he reveals to the king. Unlike Sister Martha, who silences talk of slavery and the impending Civil War, the king prefers to know the truth.

Yolen co-authored with Bruce Coville the young adult novel entitled Armageddon Summer (1998), which recalls The Gift of Sarah Barker in its depiction of romantic attraction in a religious context. Marina and Jed belong to families of religious fanatics who call themselves Believers and prepare on a mountaintop for the world's imminent end. The two young people hold differing opinions, and their situation permits the authors to explore themes related to cult activity.

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