The Gold of Tomas Vargas Study Guide

The Gold of Tomas Vargas by Isabel Allende

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Isabel Allende's "The Gold of Tomás Vargas" was first published in Barcelona in the story collection, *Cuentos de Eva Luna*, in 1990. A year later, it was translated into English and published by Atheneum as *The Stories of Eva Luna*. The collection was inspired by Allende's 1988 novel, *Eva Luna*, in which the title character is a storyteller and screenwriter who alludes to many stories that she never tells. At the beginning of the short story collection, Eva Luna is responding to the request of her lover from the novel, Rolf Carlé, to tell him one of her stories. Instead, she tells him twenty-three. Like the other stories in the collection, "The Gold of Tomás Vargas" takes place in an undetermined time in the fictional village of Agua Santa, which resembles a South American town.

The story concerns the buried gold of Tomás Vargas, a wife-beating, adulterous miser who is disliked by everybody in the town. Vargas receives his comeuppance when one of his adulterous affairs comes back to haunt him, and his wife and concubine team up against him. The story, which reads like a moral fable, cautions against greed and promotes a life in which women are respected, not taken advantage of. Although it is less prevalent in this story, many of Allende's other writings are known for their use of magical realism, a technique where fantastical elements combine with realistic elements. This was used to greatest effect in Allende's first novel, 1982's *La casa de los espiritus*, which was translated as *The House of the Spirits* in 1985. A current copy of "The Gold of Tomás Vargas" is available in the 1992 reprint edition of *The Stories of Eva Luna*, which was published by Bantam Books.

Author Biography

Allende was born on August 2, 1942, in Lima, Peru. Tomás Allende, Allende's father, was a Chilean diplomat. Allende's uncle and godfather was Salvador Allende, the president of Chile. Her mother, Francisca, divorced Tomás two years after Allende's birth and took her to the maternal grandparents' home to be raised. Despite the fact that Allende never kept contact with her father after this point, she still remained very close to the paternal side of the family, especially Salvador Allende.

In 1973, Salvador Allende was assassinated as part of a military coup against his socialist government. This changed Allende's life profoundly. She was very close to her uncle, and his death would affect the rest of her life. From that point on, the author felt her life was divided into events that happened before the assassination and events that happened after. Residing in Chile eventually proved to be too dangerous for Allende and her family, and they relocated to Venezuela. It was at this point in her life that she would run into obstacles in her career. While she was a noted journalist in Chile, Allende found it extremely challenging to find work in Venezuela. She ceased writing for several years.

Allende's literary drought would continue until receiving word from her one-hundred-year-old grandfather, who was still living in Chile. She decided to begin writing again, and the first thing she did was to begin composing a response to her grandfather that would let him know his memory would always be with her. Allende never sent the response and, shortly afterward, her grandfather died. However, the memories of her family and her country inspired the beginning of her first novel, *The House of the Spirits*, which she published in 1982. Her only short story collection, *Cuentos de Eva Luna* (1990), published in English in 1991 as *The Stories of Eva Luna*, was inspired by another one of Allende's novels, *Eva Luna* (1988). "The Gold of Tomás Vargas" appears in *Cuentos de Eva Luna.*

Allende currently resides in San Rafael, California. Her latest novel, *Portraits in Sepia*, was published in 2001 by HarperCollins.

Plot Summary

Tomás Vargas's Buried Gold

"The Gold of Tomás Vargas" takes place in the fictional town of Agua Santa, in an unnamed South American country. The story begins with a short history of how the region's people used to bury their gold and silver but stopped this practice when they began to put their money and trust in banks and new paper money. Unfortunately, the paper money loses its value in the long run and as a result, many people lose their savings. Tomás Vargas, however, never trusted the new banks and continued to bury his gold nuggets.

While he is rich from this buried gold, he shares none of it with his wife or children who sometimes have to rely on the kindness of others for food, clothes, and schooling. In addition, Vargas borrows money and does not pay it back, gets drunk often, commits adultery, and abuses his family. As a result, he is universally disliked by the town. The only person who is able to calm down Vargas is Riad Halabí, a Turkish storekeeper. Meanwhile, Vargas's wife, Antonia Sierra, a nearly toothless mulatto woman, has become prematurely aged from the many births, miscarriages, beatings, and childrearing duties she has had to endure during her marriage to Vargas. Because Vargas refuses to pay for anything or dip into his buried gold, she also works as a cook to help support the family.

The Arrival of Concha Díaz

One day, Concha Díaz, a young, pregnant girl, comes to town. Halabí is the first to see her and although she is distraught and can hardly speak, she manages to tell him that she needs to see Vargas. Halabí sends for Vargas who is at the tavern, and when Vargas arrives, Halabí admonishes him for adultery with a girl young enough to be his granddaughter and says that the townspeople are not going to let him get away with it this time. Halabí offers to let Concha stay in his house until the baby is born, but Concha insists on staying with Vargas.

The Conflict between Concha and Antonia

When Antonia Sierra comes home from work and finds her husband's concubine, she snaps. Although she has suffered silently in the marriage to Vargas, this latest transgression by her husband is the last straw and she flies into a blind rage that lasts for a week. She finally calms down, and other people try to get her to see that Vargas is to blame, not Concha, but Antonia is unconvinced. She silently curses Concha, who avoids Antonia, and refuses to feed Vargas, a task that now falls onto Concha. The townspeople fear that Antonia will kill Concha from jealousy.

A Friendship Develops

However, against her better judgment, Antonia ends up pitying Concha when the girl's pregnancy becomes complicated and almost kills her. Antonia appeals to Halabí, who takes Concha to the hospital for some medicine. Antonia begins to treat the girl like a daughter and her anger and pity turn into protectiveness. In return, Concha begins to pitch in more around the house, cleaning and cooking when she has the energy to do so. When Concha's baby is ready to be born, she has to go back to the hospital for a cesarean section. Upon their return, Antonia helps Concha display the baby, beaming like a grandmother. The baby is named after Halabí, who pays for all of the hospital expenses. Vargas had acted like he was drunk so that he did not have to dig up his gold and pay for the baby.

Although Antonia lets him get away with this, she fights back when Vargas tries to sleep with Concha—who has not fully healed from the baby's birth—finally finding the strength necessary to stand up to her husband. All of Agua Santa hears how Antonia has stood up to Vargas, and his reputation as a womanizer is tarnished. He tries to appear in control of the two women when he is bragging in public, but everybody knows that he has been whipped, and they will no longer listen to him.

Tomás Becomes Addicted to Gambling

With his reputation shattered and his wife and concubine alienating him, Vargas turns to gambling, something that his greed and fear of losing money had prevented him from doing in the past. In Agua Santa, the one sin the townspeople will not forgive is defaulting on gambling debts, and Vargas's biggest fear is to lose his buried gold. However, as his luck at cards leads to bigger and bigger bets, he begins to get cocky and tries to regain his lost pride through gambling wins.

One day, the Lieutenant, another unscrupulous character who the townspeople do not like, challenges Vargas to a game of cards. The Lieutenant loses two hundred pesos, and Vargas brags about his win for two days until the Lieutenant demands another game. This time, the bet is one thousand pesos, the largest bet ever in Agua Santa. The Lieutenant posts the title to his house as his collateral, while Vargas pledges his famous buried gold.

The whole town, minus Antonia and Concha, shows up to watch the gambling match and Halabí serves as a judge to make sure the game is fair. Vargas loses, and the Lieutenant demands that he dig up his gold. Although he is very distraught, even Vargas knows better than to not pay up. The Lieutenant, Halabí, and the rest of the town follow Vargas to his hidden gold but it is gone; somebody has stolen it. The Lieutenant is enraged and kicks Vargas repeatedly until Halabí breaks up the two men.

Vargas becomes very ill and feverish and everybody assumes he will die of grief over his stolen gold. More than a week later, he is well enough to go out and finally ventures his way to the tavern. He does not return that night and his mutilated body is found in

the ravine where his gold used to be buried—presumably, he has been murdered by the Lieutenant. His burial is handled without ceremony and nobody mourns him.

On the Road to Prosperity

Shortly thereafter, Antonia and Concha start to buy livestock and clothes for the family. Later that year, they repair their house, build an addition, and start a cookery business, producing meals that they deliver to the jail, school, and post office. Although it appears to be true that the women had stolen Vargas's buried gold, none of the townspeople objects to the women's sudden fortune.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

The Gold of Tomas Vargas tells the tale of a greedy, pride filled man that lets his family live in poverty while he hoards his own secret riches. The third person narrative used by the author reveals an unsympathetic depiction of the story's villainous protagonist. Tomas Vargas is a lazy man and a self-declared adulterer. He brags about his conquests, hoping that his declarations will give others the impression that he is macho. He claims to have over three hundred illegitimate children. In spite of his saved fortune, he borrows money with no intention of paying it back. He is a drunk that beats his wife and children. He is a selfish man who respects no one except Riad Halabi, the town's storekeeper. When neighbors expect that Tomas is out of control, they turn to Riad, he is the only man that can calm Tomas down and talk some sense into him.

While the rest of the town's citizens start trading in paper money, Vargas holds onto his gold nuggets because he does not trust banks. This choice allows him to maintain his fortune after the El Benefactor government loses power, which causes paper money to lose its value. Throughout most of his life, Vargas keeps his money buried near a ravine where he believes no one will find it. Tomas treats himself to various luxuries like alcohol and fine cigars while his wife Antonia works to feed the family. Vargas refuses to pay for the education of his six children. Fortunately, the town's schoolteacher Ines offers to teach the children for free, as she is determined that none of the children in her town will grow up without an education.

Antonia Sierra is twenty years younger than her husband Tomas is. In her youth, she was beautiful and like Vargas, she carried herself with pride. However, years of hard work and abuse from Tomas aged her quickly. Now at forty years old, her figure has disappeared and she has lost many of her teeth. With her beauty diminished, she displays no more than a twinge of her former arrogance. Antonia balances taking care of the children, the garden and hens while working as a cook for the police and a cleaner for the school to bring in money. Everyone in Agua Santa knows that her husband abuses her but no one dares to ask Antonia about it. Riad Halabi and Ines try to help her out by giving her clothes, food and vitamins for the children. Antonia's already bleak future grows darker when one of Vargas' mistresses arrives in town.

Concha Diaz is a young victim of Tomas Vargas' womanizing nature. Finding herself pregnant and in poverty she sets off for Agua Santa in the hopes of living with Vargas. She does not know that Vargas is already married and has six children. Concha begins her journey on foot. A national petroleum truck driver sees her walking down the road barefoot, carrying two heavy bundles that contain all of her belongings and he offers to drive her to Agua Santa. Upon their arrival in town, the truck driver leaves Concha in the care of Riad Halabi. In tears, Concha explains her dilemma to the storekeeper. Riad offers the young girl a seat and some refreshment while he sends someone to the tavern to bring Vargas to the store. When Vargas presents himself at the store, the girl's

story is recounted to him. Vargas denies that the baby is his, exclaiming that no one can prove that he is the father of Concha's baby. Riad tells Concha that she can stay with him until she has her baby but Concha refuses, replying that she will only stay with Tomas. Neither Vargas nor Riad can muster up the courage to tell Concha that Tomas is already married. Instead, Vargas gathers up her belongings and takes her to his home.

That evening Antonia comes home to find the young pregnant girl resting in her hammock. Antonia is so enraged about what her husband has done that her screaming can be heard all through the town. She calls Concha a sewer rat and vows to make her life there so miserable that she will wish she had never come to Agua Santa. The narrator explains that on this day, Antonia had lost the last of her beauty and her prideful walk. This final humiliation brought on by her husband had forced her to surrender her pride. Antonia's resentment of the girl increases when she is cast out to sleep beside her children because Concha shares Vargas' bed. Each day Antonia completes her chores robotically while resentment toward Concha grows in her heart. The town's people begin to fear that Antonia's hatred is so strong that she may murder Concha. Antonia refuses to cook for her husband so Concha takes over this task but she waits until Antonia has left the kitchen, Concha avoids her at all costs.

After two months pass, Concha grows more lonely and fearful. She cries all the time. Vargas cannot stand to be around the crying so now he only comes home to sleep, leaving the two women alone in the house together. Concha becomes depressed and loses all incentive to get out of bed in the morning. Antonia tries to ignore this at first but by the evening of the first day that Concha does not get out of bed, Antonia brings Concha some food. Antonia's justification for this action is so that no one can say that she let anyone starve to death in her home. The two women repeat this routine for a few days until one morning when Concha gets up to join the rest of the family in the kitchen to eat. Antonia pretends to ignore the girl's presence initially but she grows sympathetic in the remembrance of her own first pregnancy.

As more time passes, Concha begins to get ill. She is unable to eat without vomiting, and she is growing very thin. Antonia is worried about the girl's condition so she brings her to Riad for help. Riad takes the women to the hospital in the city. When they return, Antonia cares for Concha. Her anger towards the girl begins to disappear and she develops a secret compassion for Concha. Antonia starts to view Concha as a daughter who has chosen the wrong path in life. When Concha gives birth to her son, Antonia stays with her at the hospital for a week. She has Ines, the schoolteacher, watch her children at home while she is away.

The whole town welcomes the women back. Antonia acts like a proud grandmother. The baby is named Riad Vargas Diaz. Concha chose to name him after the storekeeper because his help saved her. Riad also paid all of Concha's expenses when Vargas ignored the girl's needs. Shortly after Concha's return home, Vargas tries to coax her back into bed with him. Antonia steps in to stop this from happening because she is determined not to let him have his way again. Tomas tries to whip Antonia but she lunges at him furiously. He realizes that she is stronger now and fearfully backs away from her. While this was happening, Concha had set her baby in the corner of the room

and picked up a heavy clay pot that she intended to hit Vargas with in defense. Realizing that he is at a disadvantage, Vargas leaves the house. Before long, the whole town hears about what had happened. After Vargas left his home, he went to the whorehouse where he recounted the tale to some women who worked there. These women told everyone that Vargas could not cut in anymore, and that he could no longer live up to his reputation of being a stud. After giving birth, Concha's health improves rapidly. She helps Antonia out. For instance, when Antonia is at work, Concha watches the children. They work as a team. In the meantime, Vargas brags about his bigamy, never letting on to others that he has no longer has any power in his house.

After Vargas loses some power, he feels the need to regain his manhood and he turns to gambling. His greed had stopped him from betting in the past. Although the town has tolerance for many offences when it comes to gambling, a code says everyone who loses must pay up in full. Vargas starts with small bets but he discovers that he has luck with cards and his hopes of getting rich turn him into a bigger risk taker. While Vargas is off gambling, the financial situation at home is getting worse. Concha has to start working too to bring in enough money to feed all of the children. While Antonia and Concha are both at work, there is no choice but to leave the children home alone.

Vargas' itch for gambling keeps increasing and one Saturday he plays against the town's Lieutenant. The Lieutenant is a corrupt man who changes the law to suit his whim. The town's people hate him for his unpredictable and violent nature. He makes a habit of beating anyone who is jailed, and for this reason, he causes the town's people to fear the law. The Lieutenant loses two hundred pesos to Vargas. Although he is angry, he does not show it. He confiscates his subordinate's salaries to pay his debt. Vargas brags about his victory for days after the card game until the Lieutenant challenges him to a one thousand peso game to be held on the following Saturday. Like everyone else in town, Vargas fears the Lieutenant. Therefore, he does not dare to refuse his challenge.

Everyone in town except for Concha and Antonia attends the game. On lookers are very excited because no one has ever bet that much before in Agua Santa. The two challengers are equally disliked so the audience does not care who wins. Riad watches over the game to ensure that no one is cheating. Neither of the players puts their wager on the table before the game. The Lieutenant says that if he loses he will give up his house. Vargas says that if he loses he will hand over his gold nuggets. After a lengthy game, the Lieutenant is declared the winner. Vargas leads the crowd to the ravine where his gold is buried. Tomas crawls under plants and tree limbs out of the site of onlookers to dig up his treasure. The spectators hear him cry out that his money is gone. He says that it has been stolen. The Lieutenant warns Vargas that he will get his money somehow.

Tomas is in shock. Riad takes him home. Concha and Antonia are sitting outside of the house, drinking coffee. Riad tells them what happened but they do not care. Over the next week, Vargas is sick. He has a fever and is delirious. He keeps ranting about his gold nuggets and marked cards. Eventually, Tomas recovers and out of habit, he makes his way to the tavern. He does not return home that night. Two days later, someone

brings the news that he was mutilated and murdered. Someone had used a machete to dismember his body and his remains were found at the ravine where his gold was buried. Antonia and Concha bury him without grief. There is no funeral. Riad and Ines are the only visitors. After Vargas' death, the women buy hens, pigs and rabbits. They buy new clothes for the whole family. They repair and repaint the house. They also buy a gas stove and start a cookery business out of there home. The two women live happily together. They help each other out of poverty and towards prosperity.

Analysis

The Gold of Tomas Vargas is one of twenty-three stories that appear in a collection called "The Stories of Eva Luna" written by Isabel Allende. The character Eva Luna, who serves as the book's narrator, was first introduced in Allende's novel "Eva Luna." The stories that make up this collection are an extension of the novel itself, in which the protagonist refers to various stories that took place in Agua Santa, a small fictional town in Latin America.

The third person narration used to tell this story allows for critical, unbiased look at all of the characters in the story. Aside from the kind-hearted, hospitable shopkeeper Riad, and well-intentioned schoolteacher Ines, none of the story's characters is without flaws. The importance of this severe look at each of the characters is that it adds realism to the story.

Human a nature is neither good nor evil, it sits somewhere in the middle and touches upon light and darkness in small increments. Therefore, Concha and Antonia are not presented as ultimately good. Likewise, Vargas is not presented as ultimately evil. He is certainly sinister, but his actions are not pre-mediated they are simply a result of his selfishness.

Tomas Vargas and his wife Antonia symbolize pride in the story. Vargas is obsessed by obtaining the title of most "macho." He builds his pride by dominance. He views his womanizing and the mistreatment of his wife and children as something about which to brag. The story illustrates how those who are prideful are brought down. In the case of Tomas Vargas, the women that he mistreats turn on him and ultimately destroy his power. Antonia was prideful in her youth but living with Vargas changed her. Antonia discovers that once she lets go of her pride she actually becomes stronger.

Tomas Vargas Gold itself serves as a symbol of his greed. Tomas displays greed relentlessly over his lifetime. He refuses to pay for his children's education and he allows his wife to dress in rags while he spends his money on novelties like fine cigars. When Concha gives birth to his child, he pretends to be too drunk to comprehend her need for money, leaving the storekeeper Riad to pay for Concha's expenses. Tomas' greed is what leads him into trouble. Although it was greed that stopped him from gambling in the past, as soon as he gets a taste of easy money he risks the well-being of his family, leaving them destitute while he fritters his money away on card games.

Ultimately, Vargas' greed leads to his death. Had he not been gambling he would not have been murdered when he did not pay up to the winner.

A struggle against one's own nature is presented. Tomas and Antonia battle with their pride. Tomas additionally battles with his greed and the repercussions of his choices. Concha struggles with her fearfulness. Antonia and Concha evolve over time and benefit from their willingness to change and adapt. Tomas Vargas, on the other hand, is stagnant. His refusal to change leads to his descent and finally to his death.

The story's setting is relevant to the theme of empowerment that is addressed by the author. The old world customs of Agua Santa are incredible oppressive towards women. In prelude to the beginning of Vargas' troubles the narrator states, "In Agua Santa they could tolerate a man who mistreated his family, a man who was lazy and a troublemaker…" Early in the story, the narrator points out that everyone in town knew that Tomas beat Antonia but no one ever said anything about it. When Antonia and Concha begin to accept each other, they become unified against the same enemy, Vargas. The women are oppressed by Vargas' greed. They live in poverty while he is alive. When he dies, the women become prosperous. As a team, they are stronger. By working together, they triumph over Tomas Vargas and establish their own power.

The Gold of Tomas Vargas ends on a suspenseful note. The reader is aware that Tomas Vargas' much protected gold has been stolen but it is not clear who the thief is. The next course of action brings the reader to Tomas' murder. The town's people expected that he would be murdered when he did not pay off his gambling debts. The description of the Lieutenant in this case can be viewed as a type of foreshadowing. Comparing the violent nature of Vargas' death (dismemberment by a machete) with the description of the Lieutenant's sadistic history makes him the most likely perpetrator. As for what happened to Vargas' gold, it is inferred that Antonia and Concha have possession of Tomas' treasure. After his death, they make a number of large purchases. Of course, this last fragment of information is not revealed until the story's final lines, allowing the reader to discover this likelihood for their selves.

Characters

Conchita

See Concha Díaz

Concha Díaz

Concha Díaz is a young girl who comes to town and claims that her unborn baby is Vargas's. Although Halabí offers to let her stay with him until her baby is born, she insists on staying with Vargas, which initially turns Vargas's wife, Antonia, against her. For the first part of her stay, Concha avoids Antonia, who refuses to cook for her adulterous husband. As a result, Concha cooks for Vargas but only after Antonia has left for work. Concha is so lonely that she constantly cries, which drives Vargas away from the house. When Concha's pregnancy takes a turn for the worse, Antonia and Halabí take pity on her and take Concha to the hospital for medicine.

Concha is horrified by the transformation her body undergoes during her pregnancy. Some days are so bad that she cannot even get out of bed, although on other days she feels well enough to cook and clean. Antonia's pity turns to protectiveness, as she remembers her own pregnancies and begins to treat Concha like a daughter. Not long after the baby is born by cesarean section, Vargas tries to sleep with Concha, who still has not healed from her operation. Antonia and Concha both stand up to Vargas. This ferocious violence scares Vargas away, and from this point on, Concha becomes a new woman, taking care of the children and the house while Antonia is at work. After a while, they are in such need of money that Concha also starts working.

When Vargas returns home from his gambling match with the Lieutenant, saying that his gold is gone, neither Concha nor Antonia show any sign of dismay. After Vargas's murder, the two women start providing for the children and even start a cookery business at home, presumably using Vargas's buried gold to do it.

Riad Vargas Díaz

Riad Vargas Díaz is Concha Díaz's baby, who she has with Tomás Vargas. The baby is the reason that Concha comes to Agua Santa and why she asks to live with Vargas. The baby is christened after Riad Halabí, the local storekeeper, who pays the hospital bills for the birth when Vargas refuses to pay for them.

Riad Halabí

Riad Halabí, also referred to as "the Turk" by Vargas, is the only one who Vargas respects, and so is the only one who is able to shame Vargas when he is drunk or

violent. Halabí, who owns the town store, is also one of the few people who takes pity on Vargas's estranged family. Along with the schoolteacher Inés, Halabí finds excuses to give Antonia Sierra and her children clothes, food, school supplies, and vitamins. Because his store is a popular stopping point for the National Petroleum trucks, Halabí is the first to hear Concha's story and summon Vargas to account for Concha's child. Halabí is a very giving person and offers to house Concha, although she ends up staying with Vargas. This transgression by Concha makes Antonia snap, and the townspeople fear that she will kill Concha in her rage. As a result, Halabí is one of two people—the schoolteacher Inés being the other—who the townspeople ask to intervene in the Vargas household when they suspect that Antonia will kill Concha.

Halabí also drives Antonia and Concha to the hospital when the girl's pregnancy goes bad and she needs medicine. He pays for the girl's hospital bills—since Vargas will not—when the girl needs to have a cesarean section. Because of this kindness, Concha names the baby Riad, after the storekeeper. Also, since he is so honest, Halabí is tapped to serve as judge during the gambling match between Vargas and the Lieutenant and declares the Lieutenant the winner. He helps to support Vargas when the old man is so distraught over his loss that he cannot stand up. In addition, Halabí intervenes when Vargas says the gold is gone and the Lieutenant starts kicking him as a result. Finally, after Vargas is dead and the two women have started their cookery business, they leave any extra money they have with Halabí, to give to the truck drivers.

Inés

Inés is the local schoolteacher, who teaches Antonia Sierra's children for free, when Vargas refuses to pay for their schooling. It is Inés's goal to make sure that no child in town is illiterate. Inés is one of two people—Riad Halabí being the other— who the townspeople ask to intervene in the Vargas household when they suspect that Antonia will kill Concha. Inés also watches after Antonia's children for a week, when Antonia is caring for Concha following her baby's birth.

The Lieutenant

The Lieutenant is a cocky and violent man who challenges Vargas to the fateful card match in which Vargas loses his gold. However, when the Lieutenant follows Vargas to get the gold, it is gone. The Lieutenant vows that he will get his money and shortly thereafter, Vargas is found murdered, presumably by the Lieutenant. The townspeople dislike the Lieutenant almost as much as they do Vargas because the Lieutenant beats anybody who comes into his jail and gives himself the authority to invent laws.

The Schoolteacher

See Inés

Antonia Sierra

Antonia Sierra is the wife of Tomás Vargas, who eventually stands up to her husband's abusive ways, leading him to turn to his fateful bout with gambling. Antonia is a nearly toothless mulatto who was once beautiful, but whose beauty has faded through the many births, miscarriages, and housekeeping activities that are part of her marriage as well as from her husband's abuse. She is still very proud, however, and never speaks out about Vargas's treatment of her or willingly accepts charity. Her pride is shattered when she comes home from work one day and finds Concha—her husband's pregnant concubine—sleeping in her cot.

Although she initially displays such a rage that everybody thinks she will kill Concha, Antonia eventually grows to pity the girl when her pregnancy goes bad, and Antonia remembers her own first pregnancy. Antonia arranges for Concha to be taken to the hospital for medicine, and exhibits a mother's protectiveness when Vargas tries to sleep with the girl when she is still healing from her cesarean section operation. At this point, both Antonia and Concha stand up to Vargas, who is scared away by this ferocious display of violence.

From this point on, Vargas avoids the two women, who strike up a friendship and a partnership. While Antonia works, Concha takes care of the children and the household. Although the economic situation gets so bad that Concha eventually has to work too, it is not for long. Once Vargas is murdered because his gold was stolen and he cannot pay his gambling debts, Antonia and Concha suddenly come into a lot of money, presumably from Vargas's stolen gold. The two women start providing for the children and even start a cookery business at home.

The Truck Driver

The National Petroleum truck driver takes pity on Concha by offering her a ride to Agua Santa after he sees her walking down the road, obviously pregnant. In general, the National Petroleum truck drivers stop by Agua Santa to gamble but, going against the city's custom, they never show their money before they gamble. However, they honor the city's unwritten code of ethics that says one should not play if he cannot pay.

The Turk

See Riad Halabí

Tomás Vargas

Tomás Vargas is a greedy old man who is famous for his buried gold nuggets, which he loses in a card match. However, somebody steals his gold without his knowledge and he is unable to pay his gambling debt and is murdered. Vargas buries his gold because

he does not trust the new bank system or paper money, which have ruined others' fortunes. Although he is financially rich, he is morally bankrupt and he is known throughout the town as an adulterous, abusive husband who makes his wife work and his children go without food or clothes while he enjoys the finer things in life. The only person who can shame Vargas over his behavior is Riad Halabí, the local storekeeper. Vargas's life changes when one of his adulterous conquests, a young girl named Concha, arrives in town, and demands that he take her in. Vargas's wife, Antonia, is outraged and speaks out for the first time at this unforgivable transgression.

Although Antonia eventually accepts responsibility for Concha, Vargas cannot do the same for their baby and when he is called upon to pay for hospital costs, he acts like he is drunk so he does not have to touch his buried gold. Vargas tries to sleep with Concha even before she has healed from her cesarian section, an act that inspires Antonia to stick up for the girl and not let Vargas get his way. Concha also threatens Vargas, by indicating she will kill his newborn baby if Vargas comes near her. Frightened by this violence, Vargas turns to gambling to restore his macho reputation.

He becomes addicted to gambling after he starts winning and makes larger and more cocky bets. After winning two hundred pesos from the Lieutenant, he brags about his win for two days. The Lieutenant calls for a second match that weekend, and the two men play for one thousand pesos. Vargas loses, and is forced to go dig up his buried gold to pay his debt. When he gets to the hiding place, however, he finds that his gold has been stolen. The Lieutenant is unsympathetic and Vargas is found murdered shortly thereafter, with nobody to mourn his passing.

Themes

Greed

The story details the consequences of greed in many ways. In the beginning, Vargas's family has been suffering from his greedy refusal to dig up his gold. As a result, Vargas's "children went hungry and his wife wore rags." Vargas even refuses "to pay the fees for his children's schooling," and when his illegitimate child from Concha is born, he pretends that he is "drunker than usual, to keep from digging up his gold." In the end, however, it is Vargas who pays the ultimate consequence for his greed—with his life. After he gets hooked on gambling, "with the hope of getting rich at one lucky stroke," Vargas makes larger and larger bets. When he makes his largest bet to the Lieutenant, he lets everybody know that if he loses, "I will pay with my buried gold." Although he is completely distraught after he loses the gambling match, when he has recovered, he at least thinks he can count on the buried gold to save his life.

However, his greedy actions have come back to haunt him. Somebody—most likely Antonia and/or Concha, as Allende's ending indicates—has stolen the gold without his knowledge, so he cannot pay his gambling debt. Pretty soon, he comes to "the end everyone had known would be his sooner or later," when he is found murdered. "He did not return that night, and two days later someone brought the news that his mutilated body had been found in the very ravine where he had hidden his treasure." It is a cruel irony that the very place that used to hold his treasure becomes the place where the murderer or murderers leave Vargas's body, since Vargas was so greedy that he loved his gold more than life itself.

Ethics

Agua Santa is ruled by an interesting set of ethics. Vargas lives in a town where "they could tolerate a man who mistreated his family, a man who was lazy and a troublemaker, who never paid back money he borrowed." For his part, Vargas makes the most of the town's tolerance. When talking about his wife, Allende notes that "there were times that her body was covered with black-and-blue marks; no one had to ask, all Agua Santa knew about the abuse she took from her husband." Also, Vargas "had no decency; he borrowed money with no intention of paying it back." When Concha comes to town carrying Vargas's baby, Riad Halabí, the storekeeper and "the only person capable of shaming the brute," tells Vargas that he is really in trouble this time. He says that Vargas is "old enough to be the girl's grandfather, and if he thought that people were going to forgive him his sins this time, he was mistaken."

However, Vargas knows this is an idle threat because he realizes that the only unforgivable offense in the town is not paying back gambling debts, which are "sacred." Not even the "crooked" guards "dared play if they couldn't pay. No one violated that rule." For this reason, he is safe for most of the story because he is so afraid of losing

his gold that he does not gamble. However, he goes too far when he tries "to coax Concha Díaz back to his hammock, despite the fact the woman had an unhealed scar and battlefield dressing across her belly." This highly unethical act inspires Antonia "to keep the old vulture from getting his way," and she and Concha team up to scare Vargas away. This unexpected defense from the two women wounds Vargas's pride, and he turns to gambling to try to regain his strong reputation. In the process, he makes himself vulnerable to the gambling debt that undoes him, and he ends up paying for his past unethical behavior with his life.

Responsibility

Although the town's ethically loose rules allow Vargas to shirk his responsibility for himself and others on most occasions, many in the town are good people who do feel responsible for others. Halabí is the strongest example and has a reputation for helping people. When visitors stop in his store, he gives them "a cool pineapple drink," and listens to their "misfortunes," if they have any. He is also the one that offers to let Concha stay with him until her baby is born, which is "what everyone knew he would say." Halabí is also responsible for keeping Vargas in line, since he is the only one who can control Vargas. And when the town needs somebody who can serve as an impartial judge, Halabí is "appointed to ensure the fairness of the proceedings."

In the case of Concha, this responsibility is learned. When she comes to town, Concha wants to live with Vargas, not knowing that the man is married. The initial conflict between Antonia and Concha subsides when Antonia, who is already responsible for her children and husband, begins to change her feelings toward the girl. "She felt no anger toward her now, but a secret compassion, and she began to treat her like a daughter who had gone wrong." For her part, Concha appreciates this compassion, and many times, when Antonia returns from work, "exhausted, she found dinner waiting and the house cleaned." When Concha serves Antonia coffee, she stands by the older woman, "waiting for her to drink it, watching Antonia with the moist eyes of a grateful animal." In addition, after the baby is born, when money gets really tight, "Concha also had to go out and work," since Vargas still will not part with his gold.

At the end of the story, after Vargas is dead and the two women suddenly have money, they use it to take care of the children as well as fix up the house so they can start a "cookery business," which provides the means for them to continue to provide for their children. In addition, when there is any money left, "they left it on the store counter for Riad Halabí to offer to the truckdrivers." It is interesting that Allende has the women do this, since out of all of the characters in the story, one would think they would give the extra money to Halabí himself, to pay him back for all of the times he helped them. But this line from Allende may be the key to solving the mystery of the gold.

Although it is assumed that the two women have used the gold to pay for all of the items they have bought recently, Allende never says how the women found the gold. However, since Agua Santa is located off the highway, where the National Petroleum trucks travel —and since Vargas goes "in the direction of the highway" when he leads the town to his

hiding place—it is probable that the truckdrivers have seen where Vargas has hidden his gold. They could have either dug up the gold or told the two women where to dig it up. In either case, this would only demonstrate further the profound sense of responsibility that many people—besides Vargas—feel for other people, since the truckdrivers could have easily taken the money for themselves and chose instead to leave the money to the women.

Style

Epiphany

Like many of the stories in *The Stories of Eva Luna*, "The Gold of Tomás Vargas" ends on an epiphany, or a sudden revelation. When the story begins, the reader is introduced to "Vargas's gold nuggets," which he refuses to dig up, even when he should to pay for family expenses. Throughout the story, many references to the gold illustrate that Vargas is deathly afraid of having to give it up, to the point where, even though he loves the idea of gambling, "the magnitude of his greed had protected him from temptation." The narrative tension in the story starts to build to its climax after Vargas, in an attempt to prove himself after being threatened by Antonia and Concha, begins gambling. When he loses the largest bet ever in Agua Santa, "a thousand pesos," Vargas, feeling very beaten and almost sick over the thought of losing his gold, leads "the Lieutenant, the police, the Turk, the schoolteacher Inés, and, behind them, the whole town in a boisterous procession," to his secret hiding place to turn over the gold.

This alone would be a satisfying conclusion to the story because Vargas would have lost the item most dear to him and learned his lesson. However, Allende throws in a surprise for both the reader and Vargas, who trudges into the underbrush where he has hidden his treasure. "A long minute went by before they heard his howl." As Vargas frantically exclaims to the Lieutenant, "It isn't there, it isn't there! . . . I swear, Lieutenant, I don't know anything about this; they stole it, they stole my treasure!" although he never says who the "they" might be.

Vargas is eventually murdered, presumably for not paying his gambling debt, the one unforgivable offense in Agua Santa, and Antonia and Concha bury him. It is at this point, in the very ending of the story, that Allende gives a strong suggestion where the money went, and it is a revelation for the reader. When talking about Antonia and Concha, she notes, "Not long after the burial they bought hens, rabbits, and pigs; they rode the bus to the city and returned with clothes for all the family." Although it is never stated outright, it appears that Antonia, with the help of Concha, has stolen the gold from Vargas, in the process paying back his debt to them, for all of the years of abuse and miserliness.

Characterization

In the story, Allende divides her characters along some very stark lines. The characters are either despicable, sympathetic, or heroic. The two despicable characters, Vargas and the Lieutenant, are not well liked by the town. During the gambling match between them, the majority of the town turns out to watch the two men, although not because they are rooting for either side. Says Allende, "Neither the Lieutenant nor Tomás Vargas inspired any sympathy, so no one cared who won." Instead, the townspeople are there to speculate "on the agonies of the two players," or to place bets on who will win. The

reasons behind Vargas's bad reputation with the town stem from his greediness, his bad treatment of his wife, his drunkenness, and his adultery.

As for the Lieutenant, "No one in Agua Santa liked him" because they do not appreciate his tendency "to invent laws according to his whim and convenience," which has landed many people in his jail who normally would not end up there. His policy of making sure that no one leaves "his jail without a sound beating first," has also helped to inspire fear and loathing for the man. Also, like Vargas, the Lieutenant is a womanizer, who leaves "his jacket unbuttoned so the girls could appreciate his hairy chest and collection of gold chains."

On the other end of the spectrum are the sympathetic or heroic characters, both of whom inspire the reader's affection. Concha and Antonia are women who have been taken advantage of. Concha is a young girl who is impregnated by Vargas, and who initially has to deal with the wrath of Antonia, Vargas's scorned wife. Concha is an innocent, and when her pregnancy reaches its later stages, she is horrified by the changes her body is going through, including "the ungovernable swelling, the shame of the constant need to urinate . . . the wishing she could die."

Antonia inspires sympathy for different and more profound reasons. At one point Antonia was young, beautiful, and innocent like Concha. Through the marriage to Vargas, and the many pregnancies she's experienced, her body has become ruined and she has had to stand by and watch while her husband has abused her, committed adultery, and spent all of their money on his habits.

Luckily for Concha and Antonia, they have heroic characters who give them the help they need. The strongest of these is Halabí, the storekeeper who frequently helps "to set things right in the Vargas household," who takes Concha "in his truck . . . to the hospital" when she is sick, and who even pays "all the expenses" for Concha's pregnancy when Vargas refuses to dig up his gold. Halabí is helped on occasion by another heroic character, the schoolteacher Inés, who, along with Halabí, are the only ones who are able to give Antonia charity, by "thinking up excuses to keep from offending her." Inés is also the one who educates Vargas's children for free when he will not pay her fees, since she is determined that "no child in her town would go without learning to read."

Introduction

At the beginning of her story, Allende includes a short section that introduces Vargas and the other major characters, including the schoolteacher Inés, the Lieutenant, Riad Halabí, and Antonia Sierra. The descriptions act like thumbnail sketches, filling in the reader before Concha Díz arrives, beginning the actual narrative.

Historical Context

Although the disappearance of Vargas's gold is the big mystery in the story, the setting of the story is also mysterious. It takes place in the fictional village of Agua Santa, in an indeterminate time. This is how Allende wanted readers to experience the story.

Still, the location is not totally ambiguous. Even though the village is not described as being part of any specific country, several cues in the story, starting with the names of some of the characters—Tomás Vargas and Concha Díaz, to name two examples—indicate a Latin-American setting similar to Allende's own background. Other examples that support this idea include the type of currency used in the town, "pesos," the types of food Vargas's family eats, "cornmeal cakes," and the weather, which is described at one point as "humid and oppressive" even though it is "almost sunset." Most critics carefully avoid naming a location, either not discussing it at all or speaking about it general, such as naming the work as an example of "South American fiction," as Daniel Harris did in the *Boston Review*. However, one critic, Suzanne Ruta, bucked this trend when she stated in her 1991 review that the story is "set in Venezuela, where Allende sought asylum in 1973," and that Allende did this as a "tribute to the country." Furthermore, Ruta cites the fact that "the very name Eva Luna is nearly an anagram of Venezuela," as further proof of the story's location.

The story's time period is also hard to pinpoint. The story shows signs of modernization, like the "National Petroleum trucks," and "highways," which places the story sometime in the twentieth century. Allende also mentions that "Riad Halabí and the schoolteacher Inés dared to give [Antonia] . . . vitamins for the children." Vitamins are a nutritional advance that also came into use in the early twentieth century. The word vitamin came into use in the 1910s. On a similar note, when Halabí and Antonia take Concha to the hospital for help with her troublesome pregnancy, they return with "a variety of colored pills." Synthetically produced medications, which began being produced in the late nineteenth century, were available in the early twentieth century. Other than these modern clues, Allende does not give many other indications of when the story might take place, so it could be anytime in the early twentieth century.

In the end, however, the story can take place where and when the reader wants it to.

Critical Overview

"The Gold of Tomás Vargas" has received mixed reviews since it was first published in the story collection, *Cuentos de Eva Luna*, in 1990, and in English as *The Stories of Eva Luna* in 1991. Since the story was first published as part of a collection, the majority of the criticism covers the entire collection.

Even then, many critics, like Donald L. Shaw, did not consider *The Stories of Eva Luna* an important work in Allende's career, saying that the stories "in general seem marginal to Allende's mainstream development as a writer of fiction and as a representative of the Post-Boom." The "Post-Boom" that Shaw refers to is the group of Latin-American writers who grew up reading and being influenced by "boom" writers such as Gabriel García Márquez. Other negative criticism includes Jane Urquhart's review in *Quill and Quire*, where she said that the book features a "barrage of multiple situations and characters," and that Allende's writing in the book would benefit from "a moment or two of reflection and a clearer view of the inner lives of her characters."

Other reviewers discussed the damage that Allende, who is considered by most critics to be a feminist in her other works, has done with her portrayals in her short stories. Eleanor J. Bader of *Belles Lettres*, who considers Allende "a master storyteller," nevertheless is concerned by the author's "troubling blind spots." As Bader noted, in both *The Stories of Eva Luna* and *Eva Luna*, the novel that inspired the story collection, "several of the stories involve middle-aged men lusting after teenaged girls." Bader said that when these "prepubescent nymphs" express interest in these advances, "it is as if Allende, in one fell swoop, is attempting to wipe out the two decades of important work feminists have done to publicize and condemn" such situations. On a similar note, Suzanne Ruta, in *The Women's Review of Books*, said she was "less enthusiastic" about *The Stories of Eva Luna* than Allende's other work because "The heroines of these stories are almost never sad, weary, defeated."

Not all reviews have been bad. In her *Library Journal* review, Mary Margaret Benson said that Allende created "a vivid world full of humor, passion, pathos, and color," and said that she "highly recommended" the book. In addition, Patricia Hart, in her review in the *Nation*, noted that, "The range of stories is quite broad and demonstrates Allende's ability to move easily from one stratum of the social register to another." *Boston Review* critic, Daniel Harris, was one of the most complimentary, saying that "The lush and moody pieces collected in *The Stories of Eva Luna* are some of her finest work to date." Harris thought that Allende was better writing short stories than novels, which he felt suffered from "an irrepressible garrulousness and a narrative style that occasionally tends to be slack and improvisational." Even those who made negative comments about the book occasionally had something good to say, like Urquhart, who noted that "What one takes away from this collection is a sense of the richness of life with all its attendant mysteries, celebrations, and miseries."

Like the book itself, the very little criticism that has been written about the story, "The Gold of Tomás Vargas," has been mixed. Ruta compared the story to Alice Walker's *The*

Color Purple, which also featured a "really nasty tightwad and wifebeater" who "gets his come-uppance," and said that she had the "same complaint" with Allende's story as she did with "the last chapters" of Walker's story. The "complaint" is that the women "go from strength to strength," which prevents Allende's female readers from having "role models and success stories." Ruta did note, however, that in "The Gold of Tomás Vargas," the "gradual softening" of Antonia, who has been "angry and tough" for most of the story, "gives the reader something to grapple with."

Harris noted of the story that it reads like a "raunchy fabliaux," referencing the types of coarse and usually comic verse tales that were popular in the Middle Ages. And Hart, in her chapter in *Multicultural Literatures through Feminist/ Poststructuralist Lenses*, focused on the fact that the story uses "the mysterious disappearance of the famous fortune" in the story "to condemn prostitution," remarking that the marriage between Antonia and Vargas is reduced "to the level of sex for sale," and saying that since Vargas refuses to pay his "debt" for these services, Antonia and Concha collect it after his death, when they "become suddenly prosperous."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Allende's use of a seven deadly sins motif in the modern fable in Allende's story.

Allende goes to great lengths to paint Vargas as a despicable character and to do so, she relies on a very old idea, the seven deadly sins—pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth. The seven deadly sins were identified by the first Christian monks and were used to great effect in the European Middle Ages. There, they were incorporated into both church sermons and the arts—including the morality play, an allegorical play in which a moral lesson is taught, and where specific characters represent moral qualities. In "The Gold of Tomás Vargas," however, the title character embodies *all* of the seven deadly sins.

Allende set "The Gold of Tomás Vargas" in the fictional village of Agua Santa, which she intended to exist in whatever time or place the reader saw fit. This indeterminate nature of setting gives the story the feeling of a fable, a moral tale that concerns extraordinary events, which are often derived from legend or myth. Indeed, with its moral message, the story reads like a fable. The prized gold of a greedy and adulterous wife-beater is secretly stolen by the man's wife and concubine, leading to the man's murder when he is forced to default on a gambling debt. However, in traditional fables, the moral issue is clearly defined and characters display either distinctly evil or distinctly good characteristics. In "The Gold of Tomás Vargas," however, the entire town of Agua Santa is morally ambiguous. Although Vargas is universally hated for his immoral behavior, nobody makes him stop because the town has only one morally reprehensible offense: "they could tolerate a man who mistreated his family, a man who was lazy and a troublemaker, who never paid back money he borrowed, but gambling debts were sacred."

This lack of a moral enforcement code in the town gives Vargas license to live a very immoral lifestyle without fear of serious retribution. He uses his moral freedom to indulge in many sins and his proclamation that this is a good way to live often subverts the attempts of the town's priest, who preaches a moral lifestyle: "When he was drunk he shouted the joys of bigamy to the four winds, and for several Sundays the priest would have to rebut that sacrilege from the pulpit." The priest is worried that this idea might catch on, causing his "many years of preaching the Christian virtue of monogamy" to be wiped out. The fact that Allende has Vargas struggle against a Christian priest is very symbolic. Vargas is obviously one of the main evil influences on the town, and somebody who is not afraid to indulge in all seven of the sins that Christians have identified as deadly.

Greed is the most apparent of Vargas's sins. His gold nuggets, which are "buried in a safe hiding place," corrupt his behavior. He is so terrified of losing his fortune that he keeps the gold buried, even when others start to exchange their "gold and silver coins" for paper money and start to trust the new bank system. As it turns out, Vargas is right

for not giving up his gold at this point since the worth of the paper money diminishes and many lose their fortunes. However, as Allende's narration notes, "his good fortune did nothing to mitigate his miserliness or his scrounging." Vargas is wealthy from his buried gold, but instead of digging it up to pay for his expenses, he instead "borrowed money with no intention of paying it back." In addition, his greed forces his children to go hungry and his wife to wear rags, and almost impacts his children's education, since he "refused to pay the fees for his children's schooling." Fortunately, the schoolteacher donates her time to the children for free.

Vargas also demonstrates the sin of sloth, or laziness. In addition to his failure to provide for his family from his buried gold or from the money he borrows, Vargas also refuses to work, which prompts Antonia Sierra, his wife, to pick up his slack. For Antonia, the days are long, since "besides caring for her children and looking after the garden and the hens, she earned a few pesos by cooking lunch for the police, taking in washing, and cleaning the school." At one point, after Concha has had her baby, "things went from bad to worse, and Concha also had to go out and work." The two women end up supporting Vargas and the children, but he never works. Instead, he spends his time at the tavern or at gambling matches where "he could spend hours observing a game of dominoes."

At these gambling matches, Vargas's actions demonstrate the envy that he has for others who have won money gambling. Because he is so afraid of losing his buried gold, "Vargas never bet, but he liked to watch the players. . . . he was the first to pick a spot at the cockfights." In addition to watching actual gambling matches, Vargas is so envious of others' winning money that he cannot stop himself from listening "to the announcement of the lottery winners over the radio, even though he never bought a ticket."

Vargas is also an angry man, and takes out his wrath on his wife and children frequently. When talking about his wife, Allende notes that "there were times that her body was covered with blackand-blue marks; no one had to ask, all Agua Santa knew about the abuse she took from her husband." Vargas is a violent man, and even though he does not provide for his family either through his gold or through working to make money, he still feels justified in beating his wife. At one point in the story, Vargas and Antonia face off, and Vargas "made a move to whip off his belt to give her the usual thrashing." However, when Antonia counters her husband's wrath with her own "ferocity," he backs down.

This does not diminish his feelings of lust. Vargas has had six children with Antonia, and in his old age is still adulterous. In his more drunken moments, he has "broadcast at the top of his lungs the names of all the girls he had seduced and all the bastards who carried his blood." Whether or not his legendary conquests are true—Allende notes that "if he were to be believed, he had sired at least three hundred" children—Vargas does have at least one concubine, Concha. When she comes to town carrying his baby, Antonia is outraged, but Vargas does not pay too much attention because Concha becomes another outlet for his amorous attentions. Even while he sleeps, Vargas is "cuddling the girl." However, when his lust goes too far and he tries to "coax Concha . . .

back to his hammock," even before the scars from her cesarean section have healed, both Antonia and Concha stand up to him. When the two women "nipped his manly impulses in the bud," he finds solace with "the girls in the whorehouse."

One other consequence of Antonia and Concha standing up to Vargas is that his pride is wounded. Vargas "took great pride in being the most macho macho in the region, as he bellowed in the plaza every time he went off his head with drink." When the two women stand up to him, Vargas makes the mistake of telling the prostitutes about it, and they tell "everyone that Vargas could not cut the mustard anymore and that his bragging about being such a stud was pure swagger." Because of this damage to his reputation, Vargas turns to gambling. In addition to the lure of "easy money," Vargas hopes that, by "getting rich at one lucky stroke," he can use this "illusory projection of that triumph" to mend his wounded pride. He figures that if he is rich, then people will overlook the treatment he received from the two women and perhaps he can attract other women with his newfound money.

Even if he were to win more money, Vargas is prone to gluttony so he would probably waste it. Although his family is poor and suffers, Vargas uses the little money he is able to borrow to buy "Panama hats" and smoke "expensive cigars." However, gluttony mainly manifests itself in Vargas's drinking. Throughout the story, Vargas is depicted as drunk or drinking. This common occurrence often prompts Vargas's neighbors to come to Halabí, the only one who can shame Vargas, "when they suspected that Vargas was drunk and out of control." In fact, Vargas's drinking problem is so pronounced that, when Concha comes into Halabí's store and breaks down, telling him that she wants to see Vargas, Halabí "sent someone to fetch him from the tavern."

Even when Vargas is not drunk, he can use his reputation as a drunkard to get out of situations that he does not like, such as when he "turned a deaf ear and pretended he was drunker than usual," when he does not want to pay for Concha's hospital bills. In the end, although all of Vargas's sins contribute to his downfall, it is his gluttonous need for alcohol that kills him. After Vargas gets over his delusional fever, he realizes that the Lieutenant will probably kill him for not being able to pay his gambling debt. As a result, "he did not venture out for several days." However, "his habit of dissipation," or excessive drinking, "was stronger than his prudence, so he took his Panama hat and, still shaky and frightened, went down to the tavern." This proves to be Vargas's fatal mistake, since "he did not return that night," and his "mutilated body" is found two days later.

As the above examples show, Vargas embodies all seven of the deadly sins, unlike traditional moral tales, in which a specific character will often embody one moral value, while another specific character will embody a different moral value. However, in a town where gambling debts are the only unforgivable offense, Vargas is not the only one who indulges in the deadly sins. Vargas is murdered, presumably by the Lieutenant who is wrathful over Vargas's defaulting on the debt. Also, Halabí becomes "choked with righteous wrath" every time he hears that Vargas is beating his family. Although it may be righteous, it is still wrath. Vargas's wife, Antonia, has a "ferocious pride that arrested any overture of pity." This pride threatens at times to prevent her children from getting

the vitamins and other items they need to remain healthy. Others who visit the town also display sinful qualities, such as the prison guards, who indulge in their lust: "Saturdays the guards from Santa María Prison came to town to visit the whorehouse." In fact, the town is so morally ambiguous that Allende even describes the vegetation that surrounds it as "gluttonous." These additional examples of the seven deadly sins in other characters and in the town itself help to underscore Allende's depiction of Vargas as the ultimate sinner and Agua Santa as the ultimate haven for sin.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "The Gold of Tomás Vargas," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Hart has degrees in English literature and creative writing and focuses her writing on literary themes. In this essay, Hart looks at the theme of motherhood by comparing two of Allende's stories, "Clarisa" and "The Gold of Tomás Vargas."

Both of Isabel Allende's stories, "Clarisa" and "The Gold of Tomás Vargas," are found in Allende's collection *The Stories of Eva Luna* and are connected not only by having been published together but by a having a unifying theme. The fictional character of Eva Luna was first created by Allende in her novel whose title bears Eva Luna's name. The name itself reflects the theme of motherhood in that *Eva* in Spanish refers to life; and *Luna*, of course, refers to the moon. As life is incubated in a mother's body and the moon is a symbol of a mother's procreative cycle, these words, when brought together, represent the power of the matriarchy.

In both "Clarisa" and "The Gold of Tomás Vargas," Allende creates women dedicated to their children. Those women are also portrayed as being unselfish, long-suffering, and patient. Both women are married to abusive and arrogant men who give their wives nothing except babies, to whom the men give no time or love. The women, in comparison to their husbands, are saints, at least in reference to most of their actions. However, in both stories, Allende throws in an unexpected twist. The twists, both in the stories as well as in the maternal characters of the women themselves, do not appear until the very end of each story. It is not until the finale that readers gain a full picture of the female characters, who, up until the end of the stories, appear to have submitted to a totally oppressive situation. What might appear as slight flaws in the characters of Allende's mother figures are actually celebrated by the reader at the end of each tale, for it is through the small defects that these women exhibit their full power.

The underlying themes of both stories are very similar but each is told through a different focus. "The Gold of Tomás Vargas" centers, for the most part, on Tomás, with his wife, Antonia Sierra, remaining in the background throughout most of the story. Whereas in "Clarisa," the main character's husband remains literally behind a locked door during the telling, and the narration centers on Clarisa while she wends her way through the years of her life, trying to make up for the lack of support of her husband. These different approaches to the stories is one reason why it is so interesting to read them together, as if the two stories complete each other, giving the reader a full account of Allende's theme, despite the different characters and slightly dissimilar circumstances.

Both Clarisa and Antonia Sierra are impoverished. They both struggle to keep their children fed. Although Clarisa's husband is a judge and could earn a decent salary, he has gone somewhat mad due to his inability to accept his children, who were "abnormal." Since the birth of his children, the judge has locked himself in a room where he copies stories from the newspaper and only opens his door to "hand out his chamber pot and to collect the food his wife left for him every day." Tomás Vargas, on the other hand, is almost never home. He is a boastful man and a drunk. After a drinking binge,

he roams the streets of the small town where he and his family live, shouting out the names of every woman he has gone to bed with and all the children he has sired outside of his marriage. He is no more attached to his children than Clarisa's husband, for Tomás's pride of creating children does not lie in the children themselves but rather in his self-inflated skills as a stud. How Tomás accumulated his gold pieces is not revealed. What is told is that he has buried the gold because he does not trust banks, and he borrows money from other people and never repays them. He is so stingy that he never gives Antonia any money for food or for the children's education.

Despite their varying circumstances, Clarisa and Antonia are left with no money in their pockets, no food on their tables, and no clothes for their children except through their own efforts of working menial jobs. With this rendition of hardships, it is not difficult for readers to conclude that the patience and understanding that both women are forced to practice are suitable qualifications to classify them in the realm of saints. Allende, in the story "The Gold of Tomás Vargas," leaves this declaration of saintliness solely in the hands of the readers. She lists the hardships that Antonia suffers, including the fact that she has aged prematurely, has lost her teeth, has experienced several miscarriages, works three jobs, and is often physically beaten by her husband. The narrator never even hints at the fact that Antonia is in any way holy.

This theme of saintliness, however, is fully exposed in the story "Clarisa." Allende does not hesitate to inform the reader of her belief. As a matter of fact, she comes right out and states it in the opening paragraphs: "Over the course of a long lifetime she [Clarisa] had come to be considered a saint." Clarisa is not a "cathedral" saint, one sanctioned by the church for her great miracles, but rather she is a more humble saint. She is the kind of saint who performs practical miracles, like curing hangovers, "or problems with the draft, or a siege of loneliness," acts that the reader can imagine any good mother performing. Antonia too shows signs of saintliness, if not for the community in general, at least for those who live under her roof. For although Antonia is disgusted at first and tries to dismiss the presence of the new intruder in her household, she comes to embrace and care for Concha Díaz, Tomás Vargas's pregnant concubine.

As Concha intrudes into Antonia's life and figuratively holds Antonia hostage, so too does a thief break into Clarisa's house and hold her at knifepoint, demanding all her money. Clarisa, unlike Antonia, immediately laughs at the intruder and tells him that she will give him all the money that she has. She tells him to put away his knife so that he does not hurt any one; then she sends him home, after serving him tea. Although Antonia is a little slower in inviting Concha into her home and life, when she does open up to her, she gives herself fully over to the young woman. At first, Antonia throws a fit at the girl's arrival, but it is to no avail. Then she tries to ignore the pregnant mistress of her husband. It is not until Concha starts to grow so sick that Antonia fears her death that her heart begins to turn. It is interesting to note, however, that Antonia's first thought is not for the girl, to whom she cannot yet relate, but rather to the mother of Concha. "It's not that I care, none of this is any of my affair," Antonia says, "but what will I tell her mother if she [Concha] dies on me?" At this point, Antonia does not see Concha as a mother figure. Concha is still the mistress, the other woman. However, motherhood itself binds Antonia to Concha's own mother, even though Antonia has never met the woman.

This bond to motherhood is what eventually opens Antonia's heart to Concha, for when Concha gives birth, the entire household environment changes.

Of course, motherhood has a strong presence in Clarisa's story, too. Although she gives birth to two children who will never be independent of her, two children who will never fully understand all the elements of life, she "considered them pure souls immune to evil, and all her relations with them were marked by affection." Clarisa, the narrator suggests, was so optimistic about life that she became pregnant twice again. With her third and fourth births, she gained two very healthy sons, for which she was grateful merely for the fact that they would be able to take care of their older siblings upon her own demise. The narrator also implies that everything in Clarisa's life, except for the constant scrambling for food, of course, takes a turn for the better upon the births of her second set of sons.

Antonia's life also takes a turn as she begins to see Concha less as a threat and more as a woman, a potential mother. "The other woman's misery forced Antonia Sierra to relive portions of her youth, her first pregnancy, and similar outrages she had lived through. In spite of herself, she wanted Concha Díaz's future to be less dismal than her own." This statement marks the beginning of compassion in Antonia's heart for Concha, and from this point, "she began to treat her [Concha] like a daughter who had gone wrong."

Through Antonia's benevolence, Concha too learns to give. Antonia often comes home and finds that Concha has cleaned the house and prepared dinner. Shortly after, Antonia finds herself rushing home from work so that she can care for Concha in the final stages of her pregnancy. Upon the birth of Concha's child, Antonia shows the baby off "with a grandmother's ebullience." It is also with the birth of the child that Antonia finds her voice and confronts her husband, "determined for the first time in her life to keep the old vulture from getting his way." Although she had not been able to find the strength to defend herself for her own children's sake, Antonia is imbued with power upon becoming a surrogate grandmother, the grand matriarch. As the narrator states, "Things changed after that."

Tomás Vargas's downfall was mostly his own fault. His pride, false assurance, and greed led him to the circumstances that would begin his descent. His wife and mistress, however, were responsible, although obliquely, for his death. How they knew where he had buried his gold is not revealed. It is not known if Antonia knew all along but did not have to audacity to dig it up and use it for her family. What is known is that once Antonia found her voice, she also found it within her capacity to discover the hidden cache and use it. Did she know that this would lead to her husband's death? The narrator does not answer this question. All that is known is that upon Tomás Vargas's demise, Antonia and Concha apparently live happily ever after. They are easily forgiven for their theft, for the wealth that Tomás hid from them was rightly theirs. Since they did not have a direct hand in his death, they are easily cheered for their courageous enterprise. Their courage came to them not merely for themselves but rather as a direct result of being mothers.

The twist in Clarisa's story differs slightly, but also hinges on motherhood. Throughout the story Allende exposes hints as to the final outcome, but it is easy for the reader to overlook them as Allende hides them very craftily. The reader is introduced to Clarisa through the narrator's memories of having met Clarisa at the house of a prostitute, where the narrator worked as a housemaid. Clarisa was a healer and often came to the prostitute's home to relieve the pain in her back. While laying her hands on her, Clarisa "would rummage about" in the prostitute's soul "with the hope of turning her life around and leading her along the path of righteousness." With this backdrop, Clarisa once again is painted in the glow of a saint, a healing kind of saint, this time. It is only upon her deathbed that the narrator finds out that quite contrary to this holy image, Clarisa, herself, upon a few occasions, wandered down a path that was not so righteous.

Most of Clarisa's paths were very moral. She often went to the homes of the rich and powerful people in her town to convince them to give money to the poor. One such person was Congressman Diego Cienfuegos, known as one of the "incorruptible politicians" in Clarisa's country. After wheedling a donation from him, the narrator comments, "That was the beginning of a discreet friendship that was to cost the politician many sleepless nights and many donations." This is the first hint of Clarisa's other-than-saintly side. The next clue follows, a couple of paragraphs later: "Neither the husband interred in the mausoleum of his room nor the debilitating hours of her daily labors prevented Clarisa's becoming pregnant again."

No one questioned the coincidence of Clarisa having borne two sets of children who bore little resemblance to one another. She was, after all, considered a saint. Upon her deathbed, however, she confides in the narrator, telling her that it would come as a great surprise to all her friends if she did not go to heaven, as they expected, but rather went to hell. The narrator cannot imagine what horrible deed Clarisa might have been guilty of to warrant such an afterlife sentence. The answer comes, however, upon the arrival of an unexpected guest on the eve of Clarisa's death.

"About ten that morning, a blue automobile with Congressional plates stopped before the house," and out steps an elderly gentleman, whom the crowd recognizes as none other than Diego Cienfuegos, who has now become a national hero. When the narrator sees the younger set of Clarisa's sons assist the elder statesman up the stairs, she notices their resemblance. "The three men had the same bearing, the same profile, the same deliberate assurance, the same wise eyes and firm hands." Later, when the narrator confronts the dying Clarisa, asking her if the congressman was indeed the father of her second set of sons, the sin that might be responsible for sending Clarisa to hell, Clarisa responds, "that wasn't a sin, child, just a little boost to help God balance the scales of destiny."

In Clarisa's mind, as in Antonia's, the need to balance the scales of destiny in favor of the children, is the motivating force in their lives. Clarisa needed to find benefactors for her older children. She chose the congressman to sire her third and fourth sons for his strength, good heart, and strong will. She could not depend on her husband to leave anything behind of benefit, so she took matters into her own hands.

In Allende's other story, Antonia suffered her husband until she finally awoke and gained a clear vision of her life through Concha. She, too, could not depend on her husband for support, so she did what she had to do to find security for the future. For the sake of her children, she stole her husband's gold and "made their way out of poverty and started off down the road to prosperity."

Thus, through the combination of these stories, Allende fully develops her concept of motherhood, the strength that is required to raise children as well as the sacrifice that must often be made to maintain them. In her stories, both Clarisa and Antonia find the courage and understanding to make their way through what, at times, appears as insurmountable challenges. The ways of these mothers may not be conventional, but they work.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on "The Gold of Tomás Vargas," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Adaptations

The Stories of Eva Luna was released as an audio book in 1991. It was published by Dove Books and read by Margaret Sayers Peden.

Topics for Further Study

The Stories of Eva Luna is comprised of many short stories that are being told by the main character of the book. Research other authors who have been known to use this style of storytelling and compare one of their works to Allende's collection.

Allende is well known for using the techniques of Latin-American magical realism in her stories, although this story is not a good example. Research the ideas and techniques of magical realism, then create a one-page plot summary for a different version of the story that incorporates these techniques.

Research life in a Latin-American village in the late 1980s, at the time when Allende wrote the story. What are the similarities between this real village and Agua Santa, Allende's fictional town in the story? What are the differences?

Research the history of feminism in the twentieth century, including the main goals of the feminist movement, and how each of these goals has or has not been met. Create a timeline that plots the major successes of the movement, then discuss where feminism stands today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In this story, familial power passes from Vargas to his wife and concubine when they stand up to his abuse. Research the current dynamics in families in both Latin America and the United States and compare Allende's depiction with your findings.

Gambling is one of the main focuses of this story and helps to define both the culture and morals of Agua Santa's residents. Find another culture that has been profoundly affected by gambling and discuss how the effects have been either good or bad. Use statistics to support your claims.

What Do I Read Next?

Allende's *Eva Luna*, which inspired her short story collection, *The Stories of Eva Luna*, was first published by Plaza & Janes Editores in 1998. The story, a good example of the Latin-American magical realism that Allende is known for, concerns the strange life of the title character, a woman who is conceived on her father's deathbed and nearly dies when she is strangled by the umbilical cord in her mother's womb.

Allende's *Portrait in Sepia* details the life of Aurora del Valle, a daughter in a wealthy and powerful family in Allende's native Chile. She becomes a photographer in order to capture, record, and attempt to untangle the complicated mysteries of her family and life. The author draws on characters from *The House of the Spirits* and *Daughter of Fortune*, two of her earlier novels. This book was published by HarperCollins in 2001 and was translated from the Spanish by Margaret Sayers Peden.

Jorge Luis Borges was another notable proponent of the magical realism technique found in much Latin-American literature. His *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley, is the first volume that combines all of Borges's published works and includes some previously unpublished works as well. This book was published by Penguin USA in 1998.

Allende grew up reading the works of writers like Gabriel García Márquez. In fact, her novel, *The House of the Spirits* has often been compared to García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, his wildly popular story that follows one hundred years in the life of Macondo, a fictional village like Allende's Agua Santa. The novel was originally published in 1967. It was translated from the Spanish by Gregory Rabassa, and published by HarperCollins in 1970.

Alice Walker's 1982 *The Color Purple* won a Pulitzer Prize. The story details an uneducated and abused black woman's struggle for empowerment and freedom. A reprint edition was published by Pocket Books in 1996.

Further Study

Heyck, Denis L., *Barrios and Borderlands: Cultures of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*, Routledge, 1994.

This book highlights the diversity of the United States's three major Latino cultures—Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban—and points out their distinctive features. The chapters are organized around the six central issues to these groups, which are family, religion, community, the arts, immigration and exile, and cultural identity. Each chapter includes readings from various genres, including poems, essays, short stories, and novel excerpts.

Jackson, Richard, *Black Writers and the Hispanic Canon*, Twayne's World Author Series, No. 867, Twayne Publishing, 1997.

This book is designed to broaden the reader's view of the Hispanic literary canon beyond Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez and discover the realm of Black Hispanic writers such as Manuel Zapata Olivella, Pilar Barrios, Juan Pablo Sojo, and many more. The book gives an overview about these authors from the early nineteenth century until the present day.

Marvis, Barbara, and Valerie Menard, *Famous People of Hispanic Heritage: Oscar de La Hoya, Isabel Allende, Roy Benavidez, Jackie Guerra*, Contemporary American Success Stories series, No. 9, Mitchell Lane Publishers, 1997.

This is one of a series of books, each one highlighting four accomplished people of Hispanic origin. Persons covered in the book vary in their country of origin, as well as area of achievement.

Tierney-Tello, Mary Beth, *Allegories of Transgression and Transformation: Experimental Fiction by Women Writing under Dictatorship*, State University of New York Press, 1996.

This book examines the experimental fictions of four contemporary female authors whose writings helped to challenge the effects of dictatorship and restrictive gender codes in the South American authoritarian regimes in which they lived. The author shows how each writer used feminist, psychoanalytic, and sociopolitical literary theories to illustrate different aspects of the effects from dictatorship as well as finding new ways to define gender.

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Urquhart, Jane, "Tales from Isabel Allende's Passionate, Magical World," in *Quill and Quire*, Vol. 56, No. 11, November 1990, p. 25.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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