The Japanese Quince Study Guide

The Japanese Quince by John Galsworthy

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Introduction

Since its first publication in 1910 in the collection *A Motley,* John Galsworthy's "The Japanese Quince" has been popular with readers for 1ts richly suggestive, yet subdued, narrative. The story recounts an episode from the life of Mr. Nilson, who is momentarily diverted by the sights, sounds, and smells of an early spring morning. Seized by the beauty of the natural world, Mr. Nilson is briefly lifted out of his highly regimented, well-ordered life. Born to wealth and having lived his entire life in the Victorian English world of the upper middle class, Galsworthy wrote about what he knew. The hollow lives of his patric1an characters provide the matrix for the primary pathos of his work. He once stated that "The Japanese Quince" was his attempt to "produce in the reader the sort of uneasy feeling that now and then we run up against ourselves." Like much of Galsworthy's fiction, this story has been commended for its complex insights into the ambivalence of human nature, and for its glimpse into a world that reveals its shortcomings while suggesting the possibilities for its redemption.

Author Biography

A prolific novelist, playwright and short-story writer, Galsworthy is considered one of the most successful English authors of the early twentieth century. Born 14 August 1867 at his wealthy family's estate near London, Galsworthy was a member of the upper-class Victorian society he later challenged in his fiction His work is admired for capturing the proud but declining spirit of upperclass society from the 1880s to the years following World War I. While revealing the shortcomings of society, particularly its material and consumer values, Galsworthy's best work also manages to communicate the possibility of change for the better, or the poignant reality that the possibility for betterment has passed unacknowledged before the eyes of his characters.

Educated at Oxford to be a lawyer, Galsworthy never took up the practice, choosing instead to travel. In 1891, at the age of twenty-four, Galsworthy sailed to Russia, South Africa, Australia, and Fiji. During his voyages he met Joseph Conrad, the novelist best known for *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness,* who encouraged Galsworthy to pursue his own literary efforts. In rejecting a prosperous living to be gained from practicing law, and in carrying on an illicit love affair with a married woman (who would later become his wife), Galsworthy was somewhat of a rebel against the conventions of his life. Such testing and questioning of English bourgeois values is a prominent feature in Galsworthy's writing.

By publishing short stories, novels, and plays, Galsworthy gradually made himself into a successful man of letters. He was remarkably generous with his fortune; over the years he gave large sums of money to charity, supporting such causes as slaughterhouse reform and aid to the poor. His writings reflect this socially conscious spirit by portraying the dreadful plight of prostitutes and prison inmates, whom Galsworthy thought suffered under an unfair social and political system. For example, his play *Justice* (1910), which examines the practice of solitary confinement in prisons, has been credited with prompting Winston Churchill to introduce legislation for prison reforms before the House of Commons. Although a few critics consider Galsworthy's social plays his most important works, his accomplishments as a dramatist have been largely overshadowed by the renown of "The Forsyte Chronicles."

Publication of *The Forsyte Saga* (1922) established Galsworthy's reputation as a novelist. The works known as "The Forsyte Chronicles" include the novels and short fiction collected m *The Forsyte Saga* and *A Modern Comedy* (1929); the short story volume *On Forsyte 'Change* (1930); and several places of short fiction published in other works. Galsworthy modeled many of the characters in these works upon his ancestors and immediate family members. (Soames Forsyte, the central figure of the "Chronicles," is based on Galsworthy's cousin Arthur.) Commentators have noted that while Galsworthy satirized the wealthy in his early works, his later works, especially those collected in *A Modern Comedy,* present a more sympathetic view of the Forsytes.

The recipient of numerous awards, Galsworthy also founded PEN, the important international writers' society, and served as its first president for twelve years. (The

acronym stands for poets, playwrights, editors, essayists, and novelists.) Offered knighthood for his literary and social achievements, Galsworthy declined the honor, perhaps his country's highest, claiming that such a title was incompatible with the identity he had worked to construct as a socially conscious writer. Shortly before his death in 1932, Galsworthy was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. Although his works were highly regarded during his lifetime, Galsworthy's reputation declined abruptly after his death. In 1967 the British Broadcasting Corporation tried for television a twenty-six hour adaptation of *The Forsyte Saga.* Syndicated in more than forty countries, thus adaptation is credited with rekindling interest in Galsworthy's life and works.

Plot Summary

The action of "The Japanese Quince" appears at first glance quite simple and straightforward, perhaps deceptively so On a beautiful spring morning, Mr. Nilson opens his dressing room window, only to experience "a peculiar sweetish sensation in the back of his throat." Descending to his dining room and finding his morning paper laid out, Mr. Nilson again experiences that peculiar sensation as he takes the paper in his hand. Hoping to rid himself of this uncomfortable feeling, Mr. Nilson determines to take a walk in the nearby gardens before breakfast.

With paper firmly m hand behind him, Mr. Nilson notes with some alarm that even after two laps around the park, the unsettling sensation has not ceased. Breathing deeply only exacerbates the problem. Mr. Nilson is unable to account for the way he feels, until it occurs to him it might possibly be "some smell affecting him," a scent evidently emanating from the budding bushes of spring. When a blackbird begins singing, Mr. Nilson's attention is drawn to a nearby tree.

Mr. Nilson pauses to enjoy the flowering tree. He congratulates himself on having taken the time to enjoy the beautiful morning. He then wonders why he is the only person who has bothered to come out and enjoy the square. Just then he notices that he is, in fact, not alone. Another man is standing quite near to him, likewise "staring up and smiling at the little tree." At the sight of the man, Mr. Nilson ceases to smile and regards the "stranger" cautiously. The man, as it turns out, is Mr. Nilson's neighbor, Mr. Tandram. His presence causes Mr. Nilson to perceive "at once the awkwardness of his position, for, being married, they had not yet had occasion to speak to one another. "

Unsure of how to respond to Mr. Tandram's presence, Mr. Nilson finally murmurs a greeting before continuing on his way. When Mr. Tandram responds, Mr. Nilson detects "a slight nervousness in his neighbor's voice." A glance reveals that his neighbor is remarkably similar to him in appearance, both possessing "fine, well-colored cheeks, neat brown mustaches, and round, well-opened, clear grey eyes." Both clasp newspapers behind their backs.

Feeling that he has been "caught out," Mr. Nilson asks his neighbor the name of the tree they have both been admiring. A nearby label reveals that the tree is a Japanese Quince. Both men remark on the beauty of the day and the blackbird's song. They gaze again in silence at the beautiful tree before them, until Mr. Nilson suddenly, in a moment of self.recognition, regards Mr. Tandram as appearing a little foolish, "as if he had seen himself," and Mr. Nilson bids farewell to his neighbor.

The neighbors retrace their steps to their respective homes. As he approaches the doorstep, Mr. Nilson's attention is drawn to the sound of Mr. Tandram's cough. He sees his neighbor standing "in the shadow of his French window. . . looking forth across the Gardens at the little quince tree." Mr. Nilson returns to his newspaper, "unaccountably upset."

Summary

"The Japanese Quince" is John Galsworthy's short story of the beauty of nature, and its symbolism of perfection in contrast to the sameness of everyday life.

As the story begins, it is a spring morning in 1910 London. A man named, Mr. Nilson, opens the window of his dressing room and experiences "a peculiar sweetish sensation" in the back of his throat, in addition to a feeling of emptiness under his ribs. Mr. Nilson notes the temperature of 60 degrees and sees that the little tree in the garden has begun to blossom.

Mr. Nilson is momentarily exuberant at the thought that spring has arrived, but then turns back to the business of his stocks and his scrutiny of his face in the mirror. Reassured that he is the picture of health, Mr. Nilson dons his frock coat and heads downstairs to retrieve his morning paper. Overcome, once more, with the sweet sensation felt a short time ago, Mr. Nilson walks out of the French doors and into the garden, determined to walk a bit before breakfast.

As Mr. Nilson walks in the park, the feeling he had experienced is not going away, but rather is increasing in intensity. Mr. Nilson tries to recall what recently eaten foods may be the culprit for this feeling, but determines that the source of the feeling must be coming from a lemony scent from some nearby shrubs.

Satisfied with this explanation, Mr. Nilson is ready to resume his morning walk, when the sound of a blackbird draws his attention to a small tree. At closer inspection, Mr. Nilson realizes that this pretty little tree is the same one that he had viewed from his dressing room window. As Mr. Nilson stands smiling at the little tree, he realizes that another man, who also admires the tender blossoming tree, has joined him.

Mr. Nilson recognizes the man as his neighbor, Mr. Tandram. He speaks coolly, not appreciating the interruption. Mr. Nilson regrettably realizes that he and Mr. Tandram have never spoken, and Mr. Nilson awkwardly acknowledges his neighbor. Mr. Tandram responds, and Mr. Nilson detects nervousness in the man's voice that makes Mr. Nilson stop to take closer note of the man.

Mr. Nilson is a little unnerved to see that Mr. Tandram resembles himself in appearance and deportment, even carrying their morning newspapers behind their backs in the same manner.

Both men comment on the little tree and move closer toward it to read the plant tag identifying it as a Japanese Quince. Both men acknowledge that it was the singing of the blackbird that drew their attention to the tree, and Mr. Nilson thinks to himself that he actually likes Mr. Tandram.

The sound of the blackbird calling interrupts the reverie of the men still admiring the little tree, and the two men part company. Mr. Nilson and Mr. Tandram go their separate way

to their homes. Mr. Nilson watches Mr. Tandram mount the steps to his home, and Mr. Nilson gazes longingly once more at the little tree where the blackbird has once again taken up its perch.

Mr. Nilson thinks that the Japanese Quince appears to be more alive than a tree and begins to feel that strange sensation in his throat once more. The sound of Mr. Tandram's coughs divert Mr. Nilson's attentions from the little tree, and he realizes that Mr. Tandram is also still admiring the tree. Mr. Nilson feels annoyed at this and enters his home to read his newspaper.

Analysis

The story is told from the perspective of a third person omniscient narrator that means that the reader is privy to the thoughts and motivations of the main character, without that character revealing them himself. By the author's use of this perspective, the reader understands Mr. Nilson's flood of feelings about the spring morning, as well as his discomfort around Mr. Tandram. A basic third person narrator would be able to comment on the actions and descriptions of the scene, not the internal thoughts and emotions.

The blackbird plays an important role because of its mystical symbolism of both fear and promise. The blackbird lures both men to the Japanese Quince tree to revel in its beauty, but the presence of the other man is uncomfortable for both. They fear the proximity and the intimate setting.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Tandram, whose name closely mimics the word "tandem," is so much like Mr. Nilson. Both are businessmen with similar physical characteristics and carriage, along with a business sensibility. Both men are drawn out of themselves by the more powerful lure of the beauty of nature, but quickly retreat when the situation becomes one in which they feel out of control.

It is not clear if Mr. Tandram experiences the same feelings which make Mr. Nilson feel as if he were ill, specifically the "sweetish sensation in the back of his throat and a feeling of emptiness just under his fifth rib." Mr. Nilson is a man who does not indulge in sentimentality. The overwhelming joy of a spring morning is completely out of character, causing him to check his appearance in the mirror for traces of illness.

Philosophically, Galsworthy tells the reader that beauty is available at all times, and that each person needs to access it where he finds it in order to be a fully functioning person. The alienation between the two men is symbolic of their alienation to life in general, as they push down pleasurable pursuits in favor of those related to their businesses.

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Characters

Mr. Nilson

"The Japanese Quince,"_ by some definitions, is a character sketch of Mr. Nilson. In a brief scene, Galsworthy paints a fairly complete portrait of a well-to-do man who is out of touch with himself and others. His wealth and class is established in the first sentence: He is 'well known in the City "-the financial center of London-and though he right away notices the spring morning, he prefers to contemplate the price of Tintos-stock shares. While looking in an ivory-backed mirror, he is described physically as exhibiting "a reassuring appearance of good health,"' despite the aching feeling beneath his fifth rib. His life is rigid and ordered, a fact that can be deduced from the striking of the cuckoo clock that tells him he has exactly a half-hour to breakfast. When he goes out to the square to enjoy the morning, he walks around the circular path two times. He marvels at the blooming quince tree but is also quite concerned about the sensation of "some sweetish liquor m course within him." This illness suggests a disparity between the appearance of Mr. Nilson's life-the way it looks from the outside-and the reality of his inner life.

Mr. Nilson's true character is exposed when he confronts Mr. Tandram, who functions as his counterpart, or doppelganger. Their brief conversation, though their thoughts echo one another's almost perfectly, leaves Mr. Nilson "unaccountably upset." The men's exchange creates the tension between appearance and reality-between the outer world of the City and the inner world of Mr. Nilson's soul-in various ways. Appearing at times uncertain and at other times resolved, Mr. Nilson moves through the story in a series of stops and starts. Several times he begins to achieve an action or utter a thought, only to halt abruptly before revealing his feelings.

Mr. Tandram

Mr. Tandram functions as a mirror-image of Mr. Nilson. Both men are well-to-do London financiers who are married and live in the same neighborhood. Both men are strolling through the Garden Square with their newspapers before breakfast. Both prefer the song of the blackbird to the thrush They are also moved in similar ways by the blossoming quince tree. Though he responds to the natural beauty of the morning, the fact that he is not able to give himself over to this world underscores Mr. Nilson's similar adherence to a safe, familiar, well-ordered, and illness-inducing life.

Themes

Alienation

Mr. Nilson is alienated from both nature and humankind. Although he praises himself for taking a walk in the square on a beautiful morning, he takes his newspaper with him. Still, the strange sensation does not abate, and he suspects it might be caused by something he ate. Upon encountering the quince tree, his first instinct is to find out exactly what species it is, rather than simply enjoy the flowers. Towards the end of the story, when the blackbird resumes its singing, "that queer sensation, that choky feeling in his throat" returns, further underscoring his alienation from nature.

Related to Mr. Nilson's alienation from nature is the alienation he feels from humankind, which is demonstrated by his stilted exchange with Mr. Tandram. Though they have been next-door neighbors for five years, they have not yet introduced themselves to one another. Mr. Nilson blames this on his marital status-inferring that one of his wife's duties is to protect mm from unnecessary Social intrusions. The men's exchange in front of the quince tree is indirect and somewhat empty; it also suggests the desire on the part of both Mr Nilson and Mr. Tandram for something more: "Nice fellow, this, I rather like him," thinks Mr. Nilson. These successful businessmen seem to yearn, at some level, for more meaningful connection. Yet, both fear appearing foolish for exhibiting the feelings that nature has produced in them: "It struck him suddenly that Mr. Tandram looked a little foolish. . . as if he had seen himself." Even as they part awkwardly, Mr. Nilson takes precautions to make sure he does not encounter Mr. Tandram on the way back to his house. The exchange has left him "unaccountably upset," and he returns to the solitary, hermetic world of his newspaper. Likewise, Mr. Tandram resorts to contemplating the quince tree from "the shadow of his French window."

Illness as Metaphor

As a result of his alienation from the environment and Ins own humanity, a "feeling of emptiness" at times comes over Mr. Nilson. Described variously as a "queer sensation," a "faint aching just above the heart," and a "choky feeling in his throat," Mr. Nilson's ailments are the effects of a dissatisfaction with Ins life that he attempts to bury beneath order and affluence. Although he reassures himself while gazing in a mirror that his eyes exhibit "a reassuring appearance of good health," the "queer" feeling within him only increases as he enjoys the nice morning. The "emptiness Just under his fifth rib" hints at a figurative "hole in his heart," which he tries to explain away as indigestion. Mr. Tandram, who is heard coughing at the end of the story, may well be suffering the same malaise.

Beauty

Hovering near the surface of "The Japanese Quince" is the theme of beauty. In a review published in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1920, Louise Mannsell Field remarks that if she "were to try to sum up in a single word that for which John Galsworthy stands, both in the matter of expression and of creed, it would seem inevitable that the word should be 'beauty.'" The events of "The Japanese Quince" support such a claim A reverence for beauty permeates the story through the descriptions of the spring morning, the flowers of the qUince tree, and the song of the blackbird. Galsworthy's implication, according to some interpretations, is that people will remain divided and Isolated as long as they neglect the beauty that the world offers them. No matter what other qualities they possess or what possessions they secure, an inability to appreciate nature--even in smaII ways-is to deny the senses and to be deprived of a force that has the power to heal.

Style

Omniscient Narrator

An third-person omniscient narrator relates the events of the story. Galsworthy' s choice in narrative technique is an important feature of "The Japanese Quince" and contributes to the ultimate meaning of the story. Permitted access to unspoken thoughts, an omniscient narrative traces the workings of Mr. Nilson's mind as he moves through his morning. Although Mr. Nilson says nothing out loud, readers are privy to his health concerns and his uneasiness around Mr. Tandrarn. Likewise, readers are aware that he is doing his best to appreciate the morning, whereas a third-person limited narrator would not be able to impart much more than the fact that he took a walk around the square while holding his newspaper.

Doppelganger

"Doppelganger" is the literary term sometimes used to describe a character who functions as a double for the protagonist. In "The Japanese Quince" Mr. Tandram is Mr. Nilson's doppelganger, a man of "about Mr. Nilson's own height, with firm, well-colored cheeks, neat brown mustaches, and round, well-opened, clear grey eyes; and he was wearing a black frock coat." Mr. Nilson's neighbor is also strolling the square with a newspaper clasped behind his back Even Mr. Tandram's name, which is similar to the term "tandem," meaning working in conjunction with, seems to imply his role as Mr. Nilson's doppelganger. The purpose of the doppelganger is to reveal what happens when the narrator encounters someone with the same characteristics that he or she possesses. In the case of Mr. Nilson, such an encounter fails to rouse him from his hermetic world. Both men, after failing to connect in any significant way during their brief conversation, return to "the scrolled iron steps" of their houses.

The Senses

The language of "The Japanese Quince" includes terms that evoke all five senses. Through such vivid language, Galsworthy reveals his appreciation for the natural world and attempts to spark similar appreciation in the reader. The imagery used to evoke sight includes the description of the quince tree, with its "young blossoms, pink and white, and little bright green leaves" on which "the sunlight glistened." Sound is represented by the cuckoo clock, the song of the blackbird-whose voice has "more body in the note" than a thrush, according to Mr. Tandram-and the cough that attracts Mr. Nilson's attention at the end of the story. The sense of touch is prefigured by the use of such adjectives as "spiky" to describe the leaves of the quince tree and the "faint ache" that ails Mr. Nilson. Smell rendered in the phrase "faint sweet lemony scent, rather agreeable than otherwise," which Mr. Nilson notices coming from the blooming bushes.

Finally, taste is evoked by the narrator's description of Mr. Nilson's ailment, which courses through him like "some sweetish liquor."

Historical Context

Modernism in Art and Literature

In the decade immediately before World War I, the constraints of the Victorian Age were slowly shed, and new styles of art and literature began to appear. Surrealism, a style of art that depicted dreamlike landscapes scattered with objects of symbolic importance, became popular through the works of Giorgio de Chirico, a young Italian painter, whose *Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* was one of several works who exhibited notably new styles in art. Ferdinand Leger, a French painter who was influenced by the Cubists, became known for his "mechanical" paintings like *Nudes in the Forest,* and Henri Matisse, because of his bold colors and broad shapes, became known as one of the "Fauves," a term meaning "wild beast." In 1910 Wassily Kandinsky painted the first nonrepresentational painting, an act that paved the way for many twentieth century art movements, most notably Abstract Expressionism. In literature, James Joyce had written and would soon publish *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), a book that would signal a break from old literary styles in its stream-of-consciousness style and in its rejection of society in an era in which old beliefs and traditions no longer seemed to make sense. Other English-language works published in 1910 reflected the world that was about to disappear amid the upheaval of World War I, an event that would leave no facet of Western society untouched. E. M. Forster's novel *Howard's End* was an Edwardian love story set in upperclass British society; Rudyard Kipling and Frances Hodgson Burnett also published books that year which, in less than a decade, would come to be seen as invariably old-fashioned. Galsworthy was seen as a writer of the old order, and following World War I, when the Bloomsbury Group, led by Virginia Woolf, gamed literary prominence, he was chastised as being out of touch with the ideas of the day, and was relegated to minor status m the literary canon.

British Imperialism

On May 6, 1910, King Edward VII died, and within four years the period of relative peace and prosperity known as the Edwardian Era came to a close with the onset of World War I. Edward's reign had followed the Boer War, fought from 1899 to 1902 to gain control over the Boer Republics of South Africa, which had resulted in bloody losses among British forces. As a result, many Britons begin to seriously question whether the nation's imperialism was worth the cost m lives and resources. Over time, the British Empire was gradually transformed into the British Commonwealth, an association of self-governing countries, a process which continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Galsworthy is often considered emblematic of the era of British Imperialism, during which the ruling classes, made up of landed gentry, lived m prosperity and benefited greatly from the country's industrialization and Imperialism, relatively oblivious to the wretched conditions of many in the city, particularly children.

Critical Overview

Galsworthy's first works can be seen as studies or apprentice work, and perhaps for this reason he published his first works under the pseudonym John Sinjohn. Significantly, after his father's death in 1904, Galsworthy began publishing under his own name. *The Man of Property,* the first novel in his acclaimed *Forsyte Saga,* was published in 1906; and the year also saw the critical and commercial success of his play *The Silver Box.* From this year onward Galsworthy was an important figure in English literary life, receiving numerous awards and honors. He continued to publish prodigiously; in the first two decades of the twentieth century he wrote fifteen novels, thirteen plays, and numerous essays, poems and volumes of short stones. Galsworthy had been writing and publishing for over a decade when he wrote "The Japanese Quince." Although Ins early works are considered derivative, influenced heavily by English writer Rudyard Kipling, "The Japanese Quince" exhibited his talents as an original writer. In addition to addressing themes of love and beauty, much of Galsworthy's fiction challenges the standards of upper-class Victorian society; both ideas are prevalent in "The Japanese Quince." Noted as much for his short stories as for his novels, particularly *The Forsyth Saga,* Galsworthy has long been regarded as a representative of an outworn narrative tradition, but in recent years his reputation has been enhanced as critics have come to appreciate pre- World War I fiction as a product of Its times.

In J. Henry Smith's essay from *The Short Stories of John Galsworthy,* appears a letter from Galsworthy explaining to a reader his purpose in writing "The Japanese Quince":

"The Japanese Quince" attempts to convey the feeling that comes to all of us-even the most unlikely in the spring. It also attempts to produce in the reader the sort of uneasy feeling that now and then we run up against ourselves. It is also a satire on the profound dislike which most of us have of exhibiting the feelings winch Nature produces ill us, when those feelings are for one quite primitive and genuine.

Smit characterizes "The Japanese Quince" as one of the "few short stories by Galsworthy written in the modern unromantic manner." He also notes that many fail to see the point of the story.

In his essay "Another Way of Looking at a Blackbird" *(Research Studies,* Vol. 39, June, 1971), Roger Ramsey quotes Laurence Perrine, who analyses the story as a comment on social class. Perrine interprets the characters of Mr. Nilson and Mr. Tandram as men who are "clearly meant to be representative of a Social class" and the quince tree as "a radiant symbol for beauty, joy, life, growth, freedom, ecstasy." Ramsey summarizes the story as a tale in which "the reader is left with the pathos of life missed, life. . . understood as dark, mysterious, dangerous, not quite proper." He also quotes Herbert J. Muller, who wrote in *Modern Fiction: A Study of Values* (1937) that Galsworthy's "melancholy is a gentle melancholy, quite lacking in wild, strange, rebellious moments." As "the dark place of his heart continues to sing," Ramsey summa rizes, "Mr. Nilson returns to his morning paper, to an 8:30 breakfast, and to that other, safer bird song-the cuckoo clock." Appraising the collection A *Motley* in his study *John Galswarthy* (1987),

Sanford Sternlicht calls the story "a charming vignette in which a flowering tree attracts two very conservative business men. . . . The tree brings them together, but alas, their inbred reticence prevents friendship for these mirror-image men, and they return to relating to life through their newspapers.

Impressive for its quantity and its high quality, Galsworthy's body of work won him much praise until the author's death in 1932, when his reputation declined steeply. Targeted by Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence as an outmoded figure of the pasta writer of hackneyed narratives and techniquesGalsworthy's influence remained slight through much of the mid twentieth century. But with the BBC production of *The Farsyte Saga for* television in 1967, coupled with a gradual shift in taste, interest in Galsworthy has rekindled. Above and beyond the shifts in the winds of taste, critics and readers have registered similar criticisms in their observations on Galsworthy's fiction. Expressing the reservations of many, the American poet and critic Conrad Aiken has remarked, "One has the feeling, occasionally that [Galsworthy] is describing his characters rather than letting them live; that when they face a crisis, he solves it for them *intellectually:* and that again and again he fails to sound the real truth in the situations which he himself has evoked." few would deny that Galsworthy is a skilled technician. Yet, for his indirect observation of life, his reliance on cliche and stock characters, and his use of tidy plots that depend rather heavily on contrivance, Galsworthy is widely deemed a writer with evident limitations, though a writer of astonishing productivity capable of illuminating moments. As a first-rate chronicler of a particular time and a particular class of people, Galsworthy will always hold the interest of readers.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Kippen is an educator and specialist on British colonial literature and twentieth-century South African fiction. In the following essay. he examines the many symmetrical reflections in Galsworthy's story and argues that they. together, create a larger rhetorical mirror directed outward at the reader.

At first blush, Galsworthy's "The Japanese Quince" seems quite simple; however, the story's superficial simplicity is deceptive. Mr. Nilson, a well-to-do man of commerce walks out, one fine spring day, into the Garden Square adjacent to his home. He ruminates on spring, meets and converses with a neighbor indistinguishable from him in all but name, becomes self-conscious, and returns to his home. Though this summary fails to describe Nilson's concerns about his heart, which motivate his stroll, and the Japanese quince and blackbird at the story's linear and gravitational center, it is nonetheless a reasonable summation of what happens What is remarkable about Galsworthy's story is clearly not the originality of his plot nor the depth of his characterizations; he is neither an O. Henry nor a James Joyce. What sets "The Japanese Quince" apart is the nearly perfect formal balance between elements within the story, and the story's mimetic representation of Itself in its rhetorical function: the story's smooth surfaces are intended to mirror its reader.

"The Japanese Quince" can be conveniently divided into two halves. **In** the first, the story follows Nilson's motion toward Tandram. In the second, it follows his retreat back into his house, a retreat mirrored by Tandram's retreat to his home. Now, if one overlooks the preamble to these events in Nilson's house (I shall have more to say about the preamble later), these halves are evenly balanced in length and thematic shape, mirroring each other's content and motion as closely as Nilson is mirrored by Tandram. An important effect of this near perfect symmetry is that it directs the reader's attention toward the middle, or the fulcrum, upon which the halves balance, toward Nilson and Tandram's closest point of approach:

Tandram reads the tree's label. "Japanese Quince!" "Ah!" said Nilson, "thoughts. Early flowerers." "Very," assented Mr. Tandram, and added: "Quite a feeling' in the air today." Mr Nilson nodded.
"It was a blackbird singing'," he said "Blackbirds," answered Mr. Tandram. "I prefer them to thrushes myself, more body in the note." And he looked at Mr. Nilson in an almost friendly way. "Quite," murmured Mr. Nilson. "These exotics, they don't bear fruit"

Two important things happen in this brief passage, each of which demonstrates that Tandram is not only "like" Nilson, but is a perfect reflection of him. The more obvious point is that both men drop a terminal "g" in their sentences (feelin'; Singing'). Though this might escape the modern American reader, it certainly would not have passed the eye of an English reader-particularly a reader from Nilson's and Tandram's class background In turn-of-the-century London, dropping a terminal "g" was briefly popular among the well-to-do; the intended signification was perhaps similar to wearing the same university tie, or offering a Masonic handshake: it said, "we're in the same club."

However, Within the world depicted in "The Japanese Quince," the dropped consonants signify an even closer kinship. They are best understood as Galsworthy giving the reader a subtle nudge, in effect saying "notice this-they're exactly alike!"

Nilson's and Tandram's exact likeness is expressed with more subtlety in the same passage, this time in Tandram's preference of blackbirds to thrushes. Tandram says "I prefer them to thrushes myself; more body to the note," and Nilson agrees. Interestingly, their agreement goes against the conventional wisdom that says the thrush is a far lovelier singer than the blackbird. Compare, for example, this description from the 1910 *Encyclopedia Britannica* with Tandram's observation "the notes of the blackbird are rich and full, but monotonous as compared to those of the song-thrush." Why, then, do both men prefer the blackbird's song?

The more obvious answer would be that this unconventional choice underscores that Nilson and Tandram are not similar, but the same (While it might not say a great deal to observe that two people like cream in their coffee, it says much if they both like it in their beer.) Tills point has more to yield. Galsworthy could have underscored their likeness with almost any vehicle-as he does with the paper they carry, their outfits, their identical features, even a shared preference for dry toast to buttered but he chooses to demonstrate it with a shared preference for blackbirds to thrushes. Why?

The blackbird and thrush are both members of the thrush family *(turgid:* the blackbird's Latin name is *turnips medulla,* while the song-thrush is aptly named *turnips music's).* For my purposes here, the important distinctions between these closely related birds are two: their coloration and their habit. In each regard, Nilson and Tandram prefer the blackbird to the thrush not because of any viable aesthetic theory, but because the blackbird's coloration and habit are so like their own. Unlike the thrush, with arresting, colorful brown back and spotted breast, the blackbird's coloration is-like Nilson's and Tandram's-somber and, among birds, conservative. And while the thrush is commonly seen hopping, robin-like, through grass and field in search of snails, the blackbird's habit is "of a shy and restless disposition, courting concealment, and rarely seen in flocks, or otherwise than singly or in pairs." These habits, as the story shows, are Nilson's, too. So rather than being a distinction Without a difference, the men's shared preference for one bird to another demonstrates yet another level at which Nilson's external world reflects and illuminates his internal reality. (A similar point can be drawn from Nilson's comment about the Japanese quince: "these exotics, they don't bear fruit" The quince family is in fact comprised of two groups, both of which blossom, but only one of which produces fruit-a fruit Nilson and Tandram would certainly be famil1ar with in the form of quince jam. Again, the preference for the less-spectacular fruiting quince to the magnificent flowering quince again shows the text's mirroring of Nilson's unexamined self.)

There is, however, an extremely important distinction to be made between the habits of the blackbird, the quince, and Nilson. while bird and tree recognize and revel in the arrival of spring, he, finally, cannot. At the story's opening, Nilson feels a "peculiar sweetish sensation" at the back of his throat, "a feeling of emptiness just under his fifth rib" (at his heart) Though the opening page and a half paint a convincing portrait of a man on the verge of a heart attack, the reader soon realizes that it is the coming of

spring which has Nilson feeling peculiar. Unlike the blackbird, he cannot burst into song, but instead, must search for a reasonable, preferably medical, explanation for his feelings.

In the final analysis, then, Galsworthy's portrait is of a pathology: of a living creature unable to recognize the joyous resurrection that spring brings. And taken at this level alone, the story does what it sets out to do quite well. But "The Japanese Quince" also has a rhetorical dimension. Galsworthy' s textual mirror is not confined to Nilson, its apparent subject. Just as the fruiting quince, blackbird, Tandram, and even his own ivory-backed mirror serve to reflect Nilson's inner and surface selves back to him; just as he recognizes some of these reflections (his face; Tandram) and does not recognize others (blackbird; quince; and finally, the reflection of his own life in the bird' s song), so the text itself mirrors its reader. When the reader looks into this text, Galsworthy asks the reader to see, through the many reflections of Nilson, a reflection of the reader's better self, a self uncorrupted by the world: a self unafraid to sing.

Source: David Kippen, "The Blackbird's Song," for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

Lanier is an educator at Georgia Southern University. In the following essay, she discusses the blackbird of Galsworthy's story as a symbol of "the call to spontaneity," a concept that is difficult for Mr. Nilson to accept.

According to Laurence Perrine and Thomas Arp, the blackbird in John Galsworthy's "The Japanese Quince" is not symbolically significant: it is "simply" a "part of the tree symbol," the "song at the tree's heart, the expression of lyric ecstasy." Galsworthy' they say, "has chosen a blackbird simply because the English blackbird. . . is a rich singer and would be found in London in the spring."

In the June 1971 issue of *Research Studies,* Roger Ramsey presents "another way of looking at [the] blackbird" in "The Japanese Quince." Ramsey relates the blackbird to the "empty feeling in Mr. Nilson's heart," saying its call is a "call to the darker places of the heart for which [Mr. Nilson] finds no place in his regulated world." To Ramsey, the "darkness of the heart's recesses, the bird' s blackness, and the black frock coat worn by Mr. Tandram imply "the world of unknowns." He even goes so far as to say that "blackness may suggest nothingness," a "destructive principle or element" or "even. . . evil" but that Mr. Nilson rejects the unknown world and fails "to immerse himself in this destructive element." An even more implausible interpretation of the story is Nathan Cervo' s in a 1989 issue of *The Explicator.* Cervo attempts to "explicate the word 'five'" in "The Japanese Quince" "within the 'Trismegistan' context of [Sir Thomas Browne's] remarks on decussation and 'the Quincunciall Ordination' that Sir Thomas perceives to pervade nature."

Of the three readings of "The Japanese Quince," Perrine's has the most merit, but it still leaves the reader unsatisfied about the role of the blackbird, which is obviously more than a part of the tree symbolism. On the other hand, Ramsey goes too far in suggesting that the bird's blackness suggests "evil" and "destruction" and is tempting the darker side of Mr. Nilson, and Cervo's complex interpretation leads the reader through a maze of circles and numbers, the outcome of which is confusion rather than enlightenment. Thus, to understand the role of the blackbird in the story, one must look beyond the interpretations already offered. In doing so, the reader should first fix upon the major problem that is being addressed in the story. In "The Japanese Quince," Galsworthy's main concern is with Mr. Nilson's alienation from man and nature, a condition that is the result of his living in an ordered and structured world where his every action, the way he dresses, his friends, and his lifestyle are dictated by the rules of his society. Mr. Nilson's formal and regulated life, in which everything is identified, labeled, and in place, is reflected in his black frock coat, the clock, his morning ritual, the thermometer, and even the name tag on the quince tree: nothing unexpected or out of place in his ordered world; however, in conforming to a life that is governed by rules and regulations, Mr. Nilson has lost the ability to react spontaneously to life-to react to life freely, without undue concern for others' opinions of his actions or for rules that govern behavior. The story focuses on a moment in his life when he becomes aware of the oppression, the artificiality, and the emptiness of his existence and is tempted to

break away from it, a temptation he resists. The blackbird's call, which is clearly directed toward Mr. Nilson, is a call to spontaneity, the quality most lacking in Mr. Nilson's life-a call to the natural life, unencumbered by duty, rules, etiquette.

One sign of approaching emotional and mental illness in a person is a lack of spontaneity-the inability to react instantly and naturally to situations without premeditation or restraint-mainly be cause the person has become suspicious and afraid of others and is, thus, reluctant to reveal himself to them. Because he is abnormally afraid of doing something wrong, his every word and action becomes calculated, his whole life structured to avoid being "caught out." This is the situation of Mr. Nilson in "The Japanese Quince."

At first glance it is difficult to understand Mr. Nilson's apprehensions. He is clearly a successful person, at least by the standards of his world. He is "well-known in the City," he lives in a comfortable house that has French windows, scrolled iron steps and a garden. Dressed in a black frock coat, with his "neat brown mustaches," his "clear grey eyes," and "the reassuring appearance of good health," his very image says to the world that he is a prosperous man; his feeling of success is intruded on only by an imagined illness, "a peculiar sweetish sensation in the back of his throat, and a feeling of emptiness just under his fifth rib"; yet, his Illness isn't physical as a glance in hIs ivory-backed mirror reveals. And tills peculiar feeling is certainly not enough to keep him from his morning walk in the gardens. The residents of Campden Hill, where he lives, can rest assured that Mr. Nilson is one of them.

Mr. Nilson's remarks to himself when alone are spontaneous enough. After noticing the bright blossoms of the quince tree, he says to himself, "Perfect morning. . . . spring at last," as if he has looked forward to such a day. Still talking to himself, he says, "Half an hour to breakfast. . . I'll take a turn in the Gardens." Afterwards, with no one else around, he smiles at the blossoming tree, It is "so alive and pretty!" As he continues to "[smile] at the tree," he begins to look with disdain on others, seeing himself as somewhat superior even though he is unable to understand Just what It is that makes him superior. "Morning like this!" he thinks to himself, "and here I am the only person in the Square who has the-to come out and-!" Though It isn't clear what Mr. Nilson is thinking, he obviously believes that he is different from the other residents of Campden Hill in that he has appreciation enough, nerve enough and takes time enough to enjoy the beauty of the morning.

Though proud of himself for being slightly different from his neighbors, he completely freezes when Mr. Tandram, a mirror Image of himself, comes on the scene. Even his thoughts are affected by the presence of another. He immediately becomes defensive, "[ceases] to smile," and "[looks] furtively" at "the stranger," (a neighbor for five years I), feeling that he is in an awkward position, that he has "been caught out." Finally, "doubtful as to his proper conduct," he murmurs a very proper, "Fine morning." It is only when Mr. Nilson notices that Mr. Tandram, who is also uncomfortable at the meeting, has a "slight nervousness in his . . . voice," that he is "emboldened to regard him openly." After that, since both feel "caught out," they focus their attention on the tree to avoid looking directly at each other. Then unwilling to share their rejoicing at the beauty

of the morning or to admit that, as Emerson says, "beauty has its own excuse for being," they turn the conversation from the beauty of the tree to its label, as if concerned with the technicalities of the physical world rather than with its beauty. On safe ground, they then identify the tree and the bird. Mr. Nilson, wanting to appear practical, points out that the tree is not fruit bearing, in spite of its pretty blossoms. After this they are both more at ease, almost casual "Nice fellow," Mr. Nilson thinks, "I rather like him." And for a moment, at least, it appears that they will bridge the gap between them; but in the end both men fail to yield to the spontaneous impulse to be open and friendly and to share the beauty of the day.

The blackbird's reaction to life, to spring, to nature contrasts sharply to that of the two men. If the two men represent a lack of spontaneity, the blackbird, one of the most common creatures of nature and, by the way, very sociable, symbolizes the spontaneous response of a 'living being to life and nature. The blackbird appears at three strategic pOS1tions in the story, indicating that Galsworthy meant for it to have a special function. It first appears shortly after Mr. Nilson enters the garden and begins his "promenade." After two revolutions of the circular path in the garden, he, again, feels the sensation of "some sweetish liquor in course w1thin him" and "a faint aching just above his heart." Although somewhat concerned about his condition, he is about to continue his "promenade," when "a blackbird close by [bursts] into song." Interestingly, though Mr. Nilson has seen the quince tree from his dressing room window, after going outside he does not notice the tree until the blackbird's call directs him to it. Seeing the tree's beauty, Mr. Nilson "smiles," probably for the first time that morning, and, instead of passing on, "[stays] there smiling at the tree." At tills point Mr. Nilson sees his neighbor, whose close resemblance to him suggests that Mr. Nilson for the first time confronts himself, realizes something is wrong in his life, and hears the call to a different life.

The blackbird calls the second time at the end of the short conversation between Mr. Nilson and Mr Tandram after Mr. Nilson thinks, "Nice fellow, this, I rather like him." At the moment when he is obviously about to drop his guard and offer Mr. Tandram his friendship, the blackbird, perched in the heart of the tree, "[gives] a loud, clear call" -a call to Mr. Nilson to respond from his heart; but Mr. Nilson rejects the call, drops his eyes, and suddenly sees Mr. Tandram as "a little foolish," as if "he [has] seen himself." A "shade" also [passes] over Mr Tandram's face. Even though the call to life is "loud" and "clear," when faced with the choice between their world and the world of freedom, the two men deliberately choose the smug, comfortable and ordered world with which they are familiar.

As the two men retreat to their homes, the blackbird appears the third time, "chanting out his heart," while Mr. Nilson pauses "on the top step" of his home, his song unsung, again feeling "that queer sensation, that choky feeling in his throat." It is clear that he will go inside, deliberately rejecting the call to live a more spontaneous life, even though his sigh and his peculiar feelings indicate that he is not happy with his life as it is.

It is of interest to note that Galsworthy himself would have identified with the two men in "The Japanese Quince," who were torn between conforming to their world or rebelling against it. Born in 1867 to a prosperous family in Surrey, England, Galsworthy grew up

in a home with many servants and gardeners, who tended the beautiful grounds where Galsworthy played cricket, croquet, and tennis with his friends, most of whom were as privileged as he While he was getting an education at Harrow and Oxford, his circle of friends included mostly others from his class. Always "elegant in the extreme," he has been described as "a sniffed shirt," who lived in a "stuffy, selfish world" governed by rules and concern for appearances. Galsworthy broke away from his conventional life briefly as a young man, when he met and fell in love with his cousin's wife, whom he later married. But, according to David Holloway's book on Galsworthy, "Galsworthy was too conventional a man ever to be able to break entirely free from his birth and upbringing," and was, in fact, "a prisoner of his class." Though he went on to become the foremost Critic of the smug, sniffy world he lived in, like Mr. Nilson and Mr. Tandram, he was unwilling or unable to forsake his comfortable world and give up its privileges, even for freedom and an unfettered and more Joyous life.

Source: Dons Lamer, "The Blackbird In John Galsworthy's 'The Japanese Quince'," In *English Language Notes,* Vol XXX, No 2, December, 1992, pp. 57-62

Critical Essay #3

Cervo is an educator at Franklin Pierce Col lege, in Rindge, New Hampshire. In the following essay, he delineates the similarities between Galsworthy's "The Japanese Quince" and the works of Sir Thomas' 1716 book Christian Morals.

John Galsworthy (1867-1933) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932. He had been educated at Harrow and Oxford. He graduated from Oxford with honors in law. It is therefore highly likely that he not only read Sir Thomas Browne, whose works were considered of crucial importance in the liberal arts program of that day, but brought a fine and attentive mind to his perusal of Sir Thomas's Writings. In what follows, I shall explicate the word "five," as it appears in Galsworthy's short story "The Japanese Quince" (first published in 1910), within the "Trismegistan" context of Sir Thomas's remarks on decussation and "the Quincunciall Ordination" that Slur Thomas perceives to pervade nature. The similarity between "quince" and "quincunciall" is immediately apparent.

In *Christian Morals* (1716), "Part the Third," Sir Thomas speaks of Hermes Thrice-Great (Her mes Trismegistus) thus: *"Trismegistus* his Circle, whose center is everywhere, and circumference nowhere, was no hyperbole." In "The Japanese Quince," "Mr. Nilson, well known in the City, opened the window of his dressing room" and looked out at the Japanese quince. "Nilson" suggests nil, "nothing," and the name in this light ineans "son of nothing." Further, although on the literal level "the City" refers to the financial and commercial center of London, the English Wall Street, on the evocative level "the City" resonates Dante's Inferno, *"la citta dolente"* ("the doleful City of Dis"). In "The Japanese Quince," it is not Galsworthy who is "nihilistic" but Mr Nilson, for whom, as soulless capitalist-this is not to say that all capitalists are soulless-time is not the medium for the message of spiritual salvation but a mechanism for making money: time is money. Galsworthy regards this View, or obsession, as "cuckoo," no matter how unselfconscious or urbane it may seem to be. He thus tells us that "A cuckoo clock struck eight," whereupon Mr. Nilson leaves his mausoleum-like apartment "and proceeded to pace the circular path." He makes "two revolutions," the effect of which is to bear in upon him the fact that he is dead, although he is not aware of his demise. Earlier, scrutinizing his image in "an Ivory-backed handglass," he admires the "reassuring appearance of good health," the details of which, as the reader recognizes, constellate nothing more than the undertaker's cosmetic art and augment the morbid aura exhaled by the "peculiar sweetish sensation in the back of his throat, and a feeling of emptiness just under his fifth rib," details that translate to embalming fluid, the surfeiting scent of flowers of a distinctly mortuary cast, and to the fact that his heart has stopped beating. Ironically, Mr. Nilson's "meditations on the price of Tintos" is reprised in and given existential dimension by his mirror Image in "the ivory-backed" glass.

The "eight" that the cuckoo clock strikes and the "two revolutions" on "the circular path" that Mr. Nilson ("son of zero," so to speak) makes introduce and sustain, when taken in tandem with the mirror, Ideas concerning decussation and the quincunx presented and discussed by Sir Thomas Browne about two centuries earlier Decussation, derived from

the Latin *decem* ("ten"), means the crossing of lines in the form of the figure X (Roman sign for "ten"). Looking at X, we can see two V (Roman sign for "five") figures comprising it, one inverted, as if the mirror image of the top one. For Sir Thomas, it is highly significant that the ancient

Egyptians decussated the arms of their dead. A critical part of the undertaker's art was to arrange the arms of the corpse in a figure "ten" ("X"). In this figure, the ancient Egyptians perceived the meaning of the pyramid and its completed mirror image in eternity The line that divided (if division were possible in so spiritualized an ideogram) the tips of the pyramid signified death, or what passes for death in the world. Basically, one's earthly sojourn, considered solely as time, defined itself as nullity for the ancient Egyptians. The upper inverted pyramid signified omneity. As Sir Thomas puts it in *Reizgio Medici* (1643), in the completed decussation ideogram "Omneity informed Nullity into an Essence.'

In "The Japanese Quince," Mr. Nilson does not so much persevere in his nothingness as *perseverate* it. Another pun is possible, since the fruit of the Japanese quince is in the main considered ornamentable, that is, uneatable, though the quince may be used in preserves to delightful effect. The cuckoo's "eight" takes on the spectral character of the decussation motif, with the pyramids giving way to the two chambers of an hourglass. Mr. Nilson gives an edge to both hourglass chambers as symbols for time when he makes his "two revolutions" in "the Square Gardens." Like a necromancer tracing mystical signs in the dust or on the floor, his "two revolutions" draw Mr. Tandram toward him. Mr. Tandram, Nilson's mirror Image in every detail, joins Mr. Nilson. They contemplate the Japanese quince in tandem. Instead of allowing its supernal meaning to affect them, they resort to a label to reduce the peculiar fascination that the tree exercises over them to a "name." The name Tandram not only suggests "tan" (as in "I've been to Bermuda," so to speak) and "dram" (a small amount of liquor, as in a dram of brandy) but serves as an anagram (symbolic, in Christian terms, of the mutilated and jumbled Word) for damn rat, nard mat, mad rant, and man dart (this latter distinctly penile in its suggestiveness and explaining why Mr. Nilson uneasily "dropped his eyes" in the company of Mr. Tandram). It would appear that one may be in a maze when one's human nature is radically thwarted by routine (damn rat), that Mr. Nilson will always be coming out into "the Square Gardens" to meet Mr. Tandram uneasily (just as the phoenix, according to myth, was supposed to incinerate itself every five hundred years and rise renewed from it nard mat consisting of cinnamon, unguents, and other spices and ointments), and that when the calm jargon of "the City" is translated into human value, it amounts to nothing more than mad rant.

In *The Garden of Cyrus* (1658), Sir Thomas Browne, expatiating on the "Quincunciall order" that pervades the universe, writes:

Lastly, it is no wonder that this Quincunciall order was first and is still affected as grateful unto the eye
For all things are seen Quincuncially; for at the eye the Pyramidal rayes, from the object, receive a decussation, and so strike a second base upon the Retina or hinder coat, the proper organ of vision; wherein the pictures from objects are represented,

answerable to the paper, or wall in the dark chamber, after the decussation of the rayes at the hole of the horny-coat, and their refraction upon the Christalhne humour, answering *the foramen* of the window, and the *convex* or burning-glasses, which refract the rays that enter it

In "The Japanese Quince," just as the cuckoo's "eight" is tipped on its side by the emergence of another generic "son of nothing" (Mr. Tandram) and thus forms with Mr. Nilson the symbol of infinity, so Galsworthy tilts the X of the decussation of the ancient Egyptians over on its side. His finer optics thus reveal two V -figures facing each other in tandem. It is no longer a question of omneity and nullity but of two nullities. Time does not ascend to eternity in order that eternity may grace existence with essence. Time is curtailed as time, and this is the quality of Mr. Nilson's damnation. The "blackbird," which Mr. Tandram falls to recognize as a "thrush" (the English blackbird is every bit as much a thrush as is the nightingale), singing in the tree evokes the nursery rhyme:

Four and twenty blackbirds
Baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened,
The birds began to sing
Now wasn't that a dainty dish
To set before the King

The twenty-four blackbirds suggest the twenty-four hours that make up a day. Within a Christian context, the King would clearly refer to Christ, to Sir Thomas's "Christalline humour." In addition, the blackbird is a sociable bird In Galsworthy's story, a single blackbird sings amid fruit fit for marmalade, for preserves (symbolically, as in self-preservation and delimiting one's preserves, insisting upon them even to the pOint of war). The blackbird thus signifies Mr. Nilson's own isolation, which is only frustratingly and lubriciously tempered by the "shade" of an equally exploitive, autoerotic alter ego (Mr. Tandram). Soul functions as "hole" in this lateral or horizontal (time-oriented, time-saturated) mock-decussation of "Vision." The face-off of the two purely timeous halves of the knocked-over decussation are two horizontal five-figures or V's touching each other like the mirror image of the beak of a solitary "blackbird." Galsworthy calls attention to the crucial importance of the number five in his story thus: "Mr. Nilson saw at a distance of perhaps five yards a little tree"; and, upon the appearance of Mr. Tandram: "It was his next-door neighbor, Mr. Tandram, well known in the City, who had occupied the adjoining house for some five years."

Source: Nathan Cervo, "Galsworthy's, 'Japanese Quince'," in *The Explicator,* Vol. 47, No.2, Winter, 1989, pp. 38-41

Topics for Further Study

Galsworthy's story is, in part, a meditation on peoples' relationships to each other. What does he mean by saying that Mr. Nilson was "visited somehow by the feeling that he had been caught out"? Why is this statement important?

How does the author impart to readers that Mr. Nilson is a financially well-off man? Do you think that it is harder for wealthy people than others to appreciate beauty? What might some of Galsworthy's reasons be for suggesting so?

The story ends with Mr. Nilson "unaccountably upset." Speculate on the reasons for this feeling. Imagine the rest of Mr. Nilson's day-do you think he will give any more thought to the blackbird or the quince tree?

Consider the extent to which spontaneity is encouraged or valued in society. On what occasions might you have wished to give yourself over more fully to the beauty of the natural world? What prevented you?

Identify another work you have read that can be linked with the experience Galsworthy describes or the ideas he explores. How are the two works similar? How are they different? What can be learned by comparing them with one another?

Compare and Contrast

1910: On May 31, the Republic of South Africa is formed after the region gains independence from Great Britain.

1997: On July 1, Hong Kong is ceded back to China, ending over a hundred years' rule by Great Britain. In the handover, Great Britain relinquishes control of its last important colony. A rude jibe holds that Britain's influence has been reduced from an empire upon which the sun never set to a small island upon which the sun seldom shines.

1910s: With the advancement of modern medicine, people come to realize the link between exercise, diet, and good health. John Harvey Kellogg's Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan is a fashionable resort where wealthy patrons partake of the latest fitness and diet fads.

1990s: People are increasingly conscious about fitness and nutrition. Low-fat foods and exercise devices are a billion dollar industry. Still, over 25 percent of the U.S. population is overweight.

1910s: Britain's public schools, serving the empire's boys, place a heavy emphasis upon rough and-tumble games, especially rugby football and cricket. Boys who exhibit sensitivity, bookishness, or a contemplative nature are marked as contemptibly peculiar and frequently become the target of bullies.

1990s: British public schools still place a heavy premium upon sports. But the schools are now coeducational and a much greater emphasis is placed upon academic achievement across disciplines.

What Do I Read Next?

"The Apple Tree" (1934) is one of Galsworthy's most popular stories. A man returns to the moors of Devonshire, where many years before he had loved and abandoned a farm girl. He learns that she was so distraught at having been jilted by him that she drowned herself. He thus comes to resent his sterile and conventional life and evokes her as a figure of both Aphrodite and Eve, recalling their time together as having been Endemic in Its beauty and innocence.

"Miss Brill" (1922) by Katherine Mansfield is a story of an elderly woman who enjoys a crisp fall day in the park. Her contentment and illusions of community are shattered, however, when she becomes an object of derision by two young lovers.

"The Secret Sharer" *(1909)* by Joseph Conrad is the tale of a young ship's captain who harbors a stowaway. The stowaway is the captain's doppelganger, and the ship's journey becomes a journey toward self-knowledge and identity for the captain.

"The Door in the Wall" (1911) by H. G. Wells tells of a successful, busy English businessman who is fascinated by recurrent glimpses of a mysterious door he first saw and passed through in his childhood. After that Initial experience, as he grows to adulthood, he is always too busy to return to the door and pass through to the paradise-he supposes-he found as a child.

Further Study

Bradbury, Malcolm and James McFarlane, editors *Modernism' 1890-1930,* Penguin, 1991

A study considering the critical movement known as Modernism, which emerged in the years 1890-1930, providing a comprehensive survey of the various art forms expressive of Modernism, this study examines the defining features of the movement.

Cox, C B and Dyson, A E, editors, *The Twentieth-Century Mind' History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain,* Oxford University Press, 1972

This collection invites a number of well-known scholars to write about the climate of thought in the early twentieth-century in Britain. The essays address, among other things, the social, political, economic, and religious conditions of life m the first quarter of the twentieth century,

Dupre, Catherine *John Galsworthy' A Biography,* Collins, 1976.

An authoritative, thorough look at the events of Galsworthy's life.

"John Galsworthy," *in Short Story Criticism,* Vol 22,edited by Margaret Haerens, Gale, 1996, pp 55-103

Contains excerpts of previously published Criticism on Galsworthy's works Included are excerpts from critical works by Sheila Kaye-Smith, L. p, Hartley, Isabel Paterson, and Sanford Sternlicht, among many others.

Ginden, James *John Galsworthy's Life and Art,* University of Michigan Press, 1979.

Contextual zing its discussion through historical material, this study considers the ways in which the social and cultural conditions of Galsworthy's life came to influence his life's work.

Perrine, Laurence *Literature, Structure, Sound, and Sense,* 5th ed" Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1988, pp 61-4.

Argues that "The Japanese Quince" is a commentary upon social class, Perrine interprets the characters of Nilson and Tandram as men who are representatives of their social class, and the quince tree as "a radiant symbol for beauty, Joy, life, growth, freedom, ecstasy".

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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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