Jeffty Is Five Study Guide

Jeffty Is Five by Harlan Ellison

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Introduction

Harlan Ellison writes in his introduction to this short story that "Jeffty Is Five" is one of his "half dozen favorite stories." It is also an award-winning short story, having picked up both a Nebula Award in 1977, the year it was first published in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction,* and the Hugo Award in 1978. Ellison goes on to say that "Jeffty Is Five" "has become an image of reverence for the parts of my childhood that were joyous and free of pain."

Reading "Jeffty Is Five" makes one believe that childhood, especially that brief time after a child develops a grasp of language and imagination but before that imagination is cornered by the demands of a disciplined schooling, is a time of magic. This magic is so strong, Ellison believes, that it is sad that a person ever has to outgrow it. That is the premise of the story, as Jeffty, the main focus of the story, never grows past the age of five.

In some ways, Ellison admits that a large part of him, even as an adult, is Jeffty. Through his story, Ellison demonstrates and encourages adults to remember that five-year-old child within them, to remember the magic despite the fact that they have adult responsibilities and other distractions. His story encourages everyone to maintain, as much as possible, that sense of innocence and awe that a child naturally exhibits. The story also encourages the reader to keep the treasures of the past alive. "There are treasures of the Past," Ellison writes, "that we seem too quickly brutally [sic] ready to dump down the incinerator of Progress." In an exaggerated tone, "Jeffty Is Five" reminds everyone not to throw out their child-within in the name of progress.

Author Biography

Harlan Jay Ellison, who has also been published under the name Paul Merchant, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on May 27, 1934. His parents, Louis Ellison (a dentist and later a jewelry salesman) and Serita Rosenthal, had two children, Beverly and Harlan.

Ellison briefly attended Ohio State University in Columbus between 1951-1953. He left college and moved to New York City, where he spent ten weeks living on the streets of Brooklyn, an experience that would later be described in his book *Memos from Purgatory* (1961). He was then drafted into the U.S. Army in 1957, and wrote another book based on his military experiences called *Web of the City* (1975). After serving in the army, Ellison worked as an editor at *Rogue* magazine and then founded Regency Books Press in 1960.

Ellison has written seventy-three books (at last count) and numerous short stories, essays, articles, newspaper columns, teleplays, and screenplays. He has also created a computer game, "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream"— the same title of one of his better-known science fiction stories—and is currently involved in writing stories for the monthly comic book "Harlan Ellison's Dream Corridor."

His credits in television include serving as creative consultant on the revival of the CBS series *The Twilight Zone* (1985). He has also written scripts for *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* (1962), *Star Trek* (1967), and *The Outer Limits* (1964). Other television credits include: *Route 66* (1963), *Burke's Law* (1963-1964), and *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1964).

Some of Ellison's most famous short stories include: "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream" (1967), "Shatterday" (1982), and "Stalking the Nightmare" (1982). Comprehensive collections of Ellison's short stories can be found in *The Essential Ellison* (1987) and *The Harlan Ellison Hornbook* (1997). He has also published a collection of essays about television called *The Glass Teat: Essays of Opinion on the Subject of Television* (1970). One of his current projects is working as a consultant and host for the new radio series *Beyond 2000,* an adaptation of some of the more famous published science fiction stories.

Ellison has often been awarded for his hard work. He has won the Writers Guild of America award four times. He has also won the Mystery Writers of American Edgar Allan Poe award twice, the Horror Writers Association Bram Stoker award six times, the Nebula three times, the Hugo eight times, and has received the Silver Pen for Journalism from P. E. N. He has also been nominated for a Grammy award for his Spoken Word recordings.

Ellison has married several times. He married Charlotte Stein in 1956, Billie Joyce Sanders in 1961, Lory Patrick in 1965, and Lori Horowitz in 1976. Ellison lives with his current wife, Susan, in the Los Angeles area.

Plot Summary

Beginning

In the first few paragraphs of "Jeffty Is Five," the reader finds out that the narrator has a passion for the past. The narrator not only is lost in nostalgia, he also does not like his contemporary times. There are a few things about the modern world, the narrator confesses somewhat begrudgingly, that are good, but he concludes, "I still think we've lost a lot of good stuff."

The reason for this nostalgia could rest in the fact that the narrator feels that his childhood was stolen from him. He was sent away from his home twice: once when he was five years old and once when he was ten. He does not mention many details of this time of his life, except that he was sent away because his father was not doing well and because he (the narrator) could not stay out of trouble.

In the midst of this introduction of the narrator's brief past, the reader is introduced to Jeffty. Jeffty is the narrator's friend. They have known each other since they were both five. But the narrator is older now, and Jeffty is stuck at five.

It doesn't seem like a big deal for Jeffty to remain five all these years, even though the narrator, whose is eventually identified as Donald, is now twenty-two. Donald makes it sound like fun to remain five years old, to be stuck in a place where it seems possible that dreams still come true, a place where there is still magic. Donald, in contrast, is a businessman with responsibilities and when he looks back at his childhood, he senses a loss.

Donald is grown up, but he still likes going out with Jeffty. Part of Donald is envious of Jeffty's ability to remain in a child's world. But another part of Donald feels sorry for Jeffty, mostly because of Jeffty's parents. They are, he says, "awfully depressing." They resent not being able to watch Jeffty grow up into adulthood; they feel like they are living in a nightmare.

Jeffty's father, John Kinzer, is a small-built man who can't seem to carry on a conversation or look anyone in the eye. Donald thinks that John is somehow haunted. Jeffty's mother, Leona, seems to fear Jeffty. She thinks that if she keeps her house clean she will, in some way, "pay off her imagined sin: having given birth to this strange creature."

Middle

Donald's visits to Jeffty's house remain much the same. He goes over and tries to make conversation with Jeffty's dad. Jeffty's mom offers him food. Then Donald and Jeffty go out. But one day, when Donald comes by, Leona says, "I don't know what to do any more." Then she says that she wishes Jeffty "had been stillborn."

After this, Donald starts noticing changes in Jeffty. One day when Donald comes over to see Jeffty, he is hiding under the porch. It is then that Donald realizes that Jeffty is aware of at least some of his parents' tension. This is also the first time that Donald realizes that there is something very special about Jeffty. Time has not only stopped in reference to Jeffty, but it has also stopped in things that make up Jeffty's world. Time hasn't really stopped, but it definitely has warped in some ways. Donald discovers that Jeffty listens to old radio programs, for example, programs that are no longer on the air. Somehow Jeffty is able to pick up these programs on his radio, even though Donald cannot. Donald also discovers that not only does Jeffty listen to these old radio programs, but the programs include new stories.

Donald becomes even more intrigued with Jeffty. All Donald's childhood memories, especially the good ones, come rushing back to him. He not only enjoys listening to the radio shows, he is touched when Jeffty invites him into his room.

End

Donald realizes how thin the "membrane" between his world and Jeffty's world is. He cannot carry one thing from his world to Jeffty's without bringing an end to it all. Donald knows that he has to be very careful coming and going from his adult world to that of Jeffty's, and yet, he makes one very big mistake.

Jeffty and Donald have a date for a movie and Donald has to go into his office for a couple of minutes. Unfortunately, his store is swarming with customers, and Donald can't resist. He sits Jeffty down in front of a wall full of television sets. The over stimulation of present-day events is too much for Jeffty. He is thrown into a daze. Donald finally realizes that Jeffty is in trouble, but Donald is still torn between helping Jeffty and making money. He aims Jeffty toward the movie theater outside and tells that he will meet him later. But it is too late. Jeffty's time frame has been thrown off kilter.

Eventually Donald takes Jeffty home, but only after Jeffty has been beaten up by some teenagers. Jeffty's parents don't move until Donald shouts: "Jesus Christ . . . he's been beaten! He's your son! Don't you even want to touch him? What the hell kind of people are you?!" Leona finally takes Jeffty and carries him upstairs. In a little while, she returns and the sound of rock music is heard, coming from upstairs. When Donald hears the rock music playing, he rushes upstairs.

That is the last that the reader hears about Jeffty. There is no explanation of what has happened to him. It is left to the reader's imagination to figure it out. The story ends with Donald lamenting that he cannot find any of the old programs on his radio. He ends with a plea for someone to reassure him that there is something good about progress.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Jeffty is Five tells the story of a boy who never ages past five years old. The narrator, Donald Horton, can recall when he and Jeffty were five years old together, and he tells the story of Jeffty from that time to the time of his death many years later. He begins his narrative by describing the benefits of the past, when he was five years old in the 1940's. He recalls small luxuries, like candy, and describes how the quality of candy was better and the cost less in those times. Donald remembers meeting a boy named Jeffy Kinzer, whom everyone called "Jeffty" then. At five years old, though, Donald is sent to live with his Aunt Patricia in Buffalo for two years, because his father is going through hard times. Donald is seven when he returns, but Jeffty is still five years old. The two friends still play together, and at seven, Donald doesn't recognize a large difference between himself and Jeffty.

As a seven year old, the narrator loves to sit in front of his radio with his coloring book and box of Crayola crayons, listening to the NBC Red network. He comments that back then, the big box of Crayolas had sixteen colors. Donald lists favorite radio programs, most of which are radio serial dramas. The narrator contrasts this to current radio programming, saying that at present he can find nothing good on the radio. He hates the talk shows and the country and rock music that are played on modern radio stations.

At ten years old, Donald's grandfather dies of old age. Donald is a troublesome kid, and he is sent off to military school. When he comes back home at fourteen, Jeffty is still five. The narrator recalls going to matinees of movies for ten cents when he was fourteen and contrasts the kinds of movies shown in theatres in the past with those that are shown now. He says that present day movies are just Clint Eastwood blowing people up.

When Donald is eighteen, he leaves to go to college. Again, when he returns, Jeffty is still five. During college, Donald comes home on summer breaks to work at his uncle Joe's jewellery store. Jeffty has not changed. Donald knows there is something different about Jeffty but doesn't give it much thought. At twenty-two Donald comes home for good. He opens a Sony store, the first one in his hometown, and he still sees Jeffty from time to time. At this point, Donald admits that some things are better in the present. People don't die from some of the old diseases anymore. There are faster cars, better roads, silkier shirts, paperback books, and credit cards. He also says, though, that progress has caused people to lose a lot of good things. Real linoleum is no longer used in kitchens, furniture doesn't last as long, records are thinner, restaurants no longer serve real cream in pitchers, and cars can be dented with a sneaker. In the present, all the towns look the same. They have the same fast food restaurants, convenience stores, motels, and shopping centers.

The narrator is careful to explain that Jeffty is not mentally challenged; in fact he is smart for his age. He is, however, small for his age, measuring only three feet tall. He has the walk, the voice and the appearance of a five year old, and when he speaks, he reflects the concerns of a five year old as well. He often hangs around Donald's Sony store, and Donald sometimes takes Jeffty to the movies or the county fair. Five year olds are at a wonderful age, he notes. Their eyes are wide open, though they see no patterns yet. They are not yet familiar with feelings of hopelessness. There is so much to learn and do, and the world is full of mysteries. It is a time of wonderment and innocence.

For Jeffty's parents, though, their son's inability to age is a nightmare. No one can help them. Over the course of seventeen years, their sorrow grows in stages, from concern to worry, from fear to confusion, anger, dislike and hatred, until they finally reach a depressing acceptance. Jeffty's father, John Kinzer, is a small, haunted-looking man with pale eyes. He is a shift foreman at the Balder Tool and Die plant, where he has worked for thirty years, and to his coworkers, he seems to have an uneventful life. Donald describes how he often stares at a corner of the room as though something is there that only he can see. Jeffty's mother, Leona Kinzer, tries to compensate by offering food to guests and keeping her house in immaculate condition, as though to pay for the sin of having given birth to such a strange child. She is a tall woman, but the years have bent her, and she is always seeking a place to hide from the eyes of her son. She always has an apron tied around her waist and her hands are red from cleaning. The Kinzers' house is usually dark and silent, even in the middle of the day.

Jeffty is inoffensive and lives in the strange atmosphere of the house without compliant; he is used to it. He plays as children play and is generally happy. But even he must sense, in his five-year-old way, that there is something alien about him. Jeffty is not an alien, of course. He is human, but out of sync with the world around him. Other children do not play with him, for as they grew older, they grew past him, coming to find him childish and uninteresting. Eventually Jeffty's continued inability to age frightened them, and even the children his own age began to shy away. Donald is Jeffty's only friend, and Donald himself cannot explain why he likes Jeffty. Jeffty's parents are grateful for the time Donald spends with their son, since it gives them temporary relief from the chore of going out with him and having to pretend to be normal, loving parents. Donald feels sorry for the parents but at the same time despises them for their inability to love Jeffty. Consequently, Donald's visits to Jeffty's house are awkward, as he never knows what to say.

During one of Donald's visits, Leona begins to cry. She says she doesn't know what to do anymore. Her husband tries to soothe her. She says she wishes Jeffty had been stillborn. John looks around the corners of the room, as always, as if he is looking for something that isn't actually there. He tells his wife she doesn't mean what she said. Donald leaves, for he doesn't want to witness their shame. Afterward, Donald stays away form the Kinzer house for a week. One afternoon following the scene at the Kinzers' house, though, Jeffty calls Donald at the store to ask if he will take him to the rodeo. As they talk, Donald thinks about what binds them together: Jeffty is like a little brother except that Donald remembers being five years old with him.

One Saturday afternoon, Donald arrives at Jeffty's house to take him to a double feature. Suddenly he notices things he should have noticed before. He walks up to the house, expecting to see Jeffty on the porch, but he isn't there. Donald calls out to him and hears Jeffty's voice in the distance, calling from underneath the porch. This is Jeffty's secret hiding place, and Donald remembers it from when they were children. Under the porch, Jeffty has comics in orange crates, a little table, and some pillows. Donald crawls into the space and finds Jeffty holding something gold and round in his hand. Donald asks him what it is, and Jeffty replies that it is a Captain Midnight Secret Decoder Badge, that he had sent away for received in the mail that very day. Donald is shocked. The decoder badge looks new, but the company that made them stopped making the originals in 1949. Donald asks Jeffty if the badge cost a lot. Jeffty says it cost ten cents and two wax seals from Ovaltine jars. The badge was used to decode messages in the Captain Midnight radio program in the 1940's. Every year a new badge had been issued, and Donald had one in 1945. Captain Midnight went off the air in 1950, but Jeffty's badge was new, shiny, and had not rusted. Strangely, the date on the badge was for the current year. Jeffty explains that the badge he has is used to decode messages on the Captain Midnight show. Donald doesn't understand what is happening and asks Jeffty if he has been listening to records of the program. Jeffty says no, that the program is on the radio at 5:30 each night. Donald asks if they can listen to it that night, forgetting that the program only aired from Monday to Friday. When the two go to the movies, Donald feels distracted. He can't stop thinking about the Decoder Badge, though he believes there must be a simple explanation that he hasn't perceived yet.

For the next week, Donald does inventory at his shop, so he doesn't see Jeffty again for several days. On Thursday, however, he tells his employees that he has to run errands and then leaves the shop to go to the Kinzers' house. He arrives at 4:45, and Jeffty's mother tells Donald that Jeffty is upstairs listening to the radio. Donald considers it possible that Jeffty encounters different experiences from other people; he is after all another vessel of life. Donald sits at he top of the stairs, listening, and although the door to Jeffty's room is closed, Donald recognizes the program to be a western adventure serial called "Tennessee Jed" that he has not heard in twenty years. The show is not a rerun, and even the commercials in it are for new products. Donald runs down the stairs and out to his car and searches for the programs on his own radio; he finds only rock music. He goes back inside the house and sits at the top of the stairs again, listening to the whole program as well as the programs that follow. Donald begins to cry and can't stop, until finally Jeffty hears him and opens the door. He looks at Donald with childish confusion, then touches Donald's shoulder and smiles at him. He invites Donald to come listen to the radio with him.

Jeffty receives radio programs from a place that could not exist. He also receives mail order premiums from the forties, reads comic books that have not existed for decades, and sees movies that star actors who have been dead for over twenty years. Jeffty constantly experiences the endless joys of the past, and to him they are always new. He lets Donald into his world because he trusts him, and Donald and Jeffty begin reading novels and comics together. Donald attempts to do some reading that may give him insight into how all of this is possible, but he can't find anything that provides an explanation for the situation. Nevertheless, as he narrates these events, he states that

this time spent with Jeffty was the happiest time in his life,since it gave him access to two separate worlds. The first world was the real world of work, family, dating and business; the second world was the world of the past and was only accessible through Jeffty.

As time presses on, the membrane between the two worlds begins to grow thinner. Somehow, Donald knows that he can carry nothing from one world to the other. Eventually, though, Donald grows careless. One Sunday afternoon Donald arrives to take Jeffty to the movies. In the car, he asks Jeffty what will be playing that day and is told that it will be *Bullwhip Justice* and *The Demolished Man*. Donald is pleased, for *The Demolished Man* is one of his favorite books. Jeffty tells Donald all about the actors who will be in the movies and also reveals what cartoons will be playing.

As he drives, Donald looks down and notices a pad of purchase forms that he had forgotten to drop of at the store. He tells Jeffty that he has to stop and drop them off, but promises him that they will not be late for the movie. Jeffty decides to come in with Donald; There are only two theatres in town, and since they are going to the nearby Utopia, they will be able to walk over after Donald concludes his business. When they walk into the store, however, they encounter chaos. It is the first Sony promotional sale, and color televisions are finally being sold for a reasonable price. Donald tells Jeffty that he needs to help some customers for a couple of minutes but promises that he won't be long and they will not be late. He tells Jeffty to take a seat in a nearby chair as he envisions paying off his loan; as he sees it, good business comes first.

Jeffty sits down in front of the TV display wall. There are thirty-three sets in a range of sizes, some black and white, and some color; programs from thirteen channels are all playing at the same time. The narrator comments in hindsight that he should have understood that the present kills the past. Half an hour passes. Donald glances over at Jeffty, who looks like a different child. He is sweating, pale, and gripping his chair in terror. Donald runs over to him and pulls him out of the chair and toward the front door, while customers continue to yell to Donald for assistance. One customer pressures him, saying "you wanna sell me this thing or don't you." Donald looks at the customer and back at Jeffty, who is like a zombie. Donald pulls him up, but his legs are rubbery, and his feet drag as he is being pulled. Donald scrambles for money in his pocket, and hands it to Jeffty with instructions to go to the theater, buy the tickets, and wait for him there. Jeffty stumbles out the door and heads in the wrong direction and then stops to gather himself before he turns to head toward the movie theatre. Donald finishes his sale and then hears a terrible sound in the distance; he can't figure out which TV set it is coming from.

Donald arrives at the ticket booth of the theater twenty minutes later to discover that Jeffty has been beaten up. He is in the manager's office, where an usher watches over Jeffty and puts a cool cloth on his head. Donald orders her out of the office, then sits on the couch beside Jeffty and tries to swab the blood away from Jeffty's face. Jeffty's eyes are swollen shut, his mouth is ripped, and his hair is matted with dried blood. Donald learns that Jeffty had been standing in line behind two teenagers, who were listening to the radio. Jeffty had asked them if he could borrow the radio to hear a program for a

minute while their station was on a commercial break, and the teens had agreed. When he handed the radio back, though, they were unable to pick up the game they had been listening to; the radio was locked in the past. They beat Jeffty viciously and then ran away. Donald had left Jeffty with no weapons or protection and had betrayed him to make a sale.

Donald takes Jeffty home. He doesn't know why he goes there instead of to the hospital. When they arrive, Jeffty's parents stare at him without moving or speaking. Donald tells them what happened, and they still do not move. Donald yells, "He's your son," asking them what kind of people they are. Jeffty's mother wears an expression that says "I've been here too many times and done this before. I cannot bear to go through this again." Finally, she moves toward Donald and takes Jeffty from him, then carries him upstairs to bathe him. John and Donald stare at each other within the darkness of the room, and Donald falls into a chair, shaking, as the sound of bath water comes from upstairs. After a long time, Leona comes back downstairs, wiping her hands on her apron. Donald hears rock music playing upstairs. Leona calmly asks Donald if he would like some pound cake. Donald doesn't answer. He listens to the music coming from the upstairs radio and realizes what has happened. As he jumps up from his seat, the table lamp dims and flickers. He screams and runs for the stairs, but Jeffty's parents don't move. They sit with their hands folded, as they have for so many years. Donald falls twice as he runs up the stairs.

Donald brings the story back to the present day at this point. He says there isn't much on television that can keep his interest and that he has bought a radio at a second hand store and replaced its parts with originals. He sits in front of it for hours, turning the dial slowly, but he still can't find the old programs. Donald realizes now that Jeffty's mother did love her son, and he doesn't hate Jeffty's parents; they only wanted to live in the present world again. It isn't such a terrible thing to want, he muses, and Donald says it is a good world, all things considered, better than it used to be in many ways. People don't die from the old diseases anymore; instead they die from new ones. Donald ends his narration with the words "that's Progress, isn't it? Isn't it? Tell me. Somebody please tell me."

Analysis

Jeffty is Five is considered by many to be Harlan Ellison's best work of short science fiction, in spite of the extensive selection of alternatives. The story is founded on the friendship the protagonist, Donald, has with a boy named Jeffty, who never ages past five years old. Jeffty is not just stuck in the age of five; he is suspended in the past and experiences the 1940's as though that decade were actually the present day. When Donald discovers this secret he chooses to enter this world with Jeffty. The narrator describes the joys of being able to experience the best of two worlds, combining the modern advances of the present and the innocent pleasures of the past.

Donald is pleased with his newly found connection to the past, but the same cannot be said for Jeffty's parents, who fear their strange son. Jeffty's mother struggles with the

difficulty of raising a child of this age for what seems like an eternity, and at the end, when Donald brings the injured Jeffty home to his parents, they both react calmly. The narrator describes Leona's expression, saying that she looks like a woman who has done this too many times. Leona's character is expressed by the almost obsessive way she takes on the role of home keeper. Her longing to keep order in the house is a form of compensation, as if to pay for the sin of having given birth to such a strange child

The house itself presents a creepy atmosphere. It is always dead silent and kept dark. Jeffty's father often searches around corners of a room as though he sees ghosts. The darkness of the house extends this idea by creating a "haunted" environment. When Jeffty dies, Donald hears rock music playing from upstairs. As he jumps up to check on Jeffty, the table lamp dims and flickers, once again presenting an otherworldly atmosphere.

Jeffty's past world symbolises the protagonist trying to recapture his youth. In essence, it reflects a struggle to hold onto childhood, as he emerges further into the responsibilities of being an adult. Unfortunately, as Donald moves further into adulthood, represented by his growing business, his childhood wonderment disappears. That wonderment, in this case, takes on a physical form, which manifests itself in Jeffty. The day that Jeffty dies, Donald had made a choice, that business must come first. In recollection, he blames himself for Jeffty's death, claiming that he should have understood the way the present devours the past. The narrator's allusions to the fragile thread that exists between his two worlds, past and present, express the way in which all humans must let go of the past to progress in the future.

The narrator foreshadows Jeffty's death before it actually occurs. After Donald ushers the boy out of the electronics store, he hears a terrible sound in the distance. He assumes that it is coming from one of the television sets on display, but he can't decide which one. Interestingly, the chain of events that leads to Jeffty's demise suggests that television killed Jeffty, and when Donald later attempts to find the radio stations of the past he can never do so. There is a symbolic connection, which implies that television killed radio. Radio drama is often seen as representative of past culture, while television represents modernity. The author's reasons for choosing to use this specific metaphor are clear.

In this story, the narrator seeks to determine whether the progress of contemporary culture is in fact progress. While in one respect, this notion appears to take the form of an open ended question, it is clear that Donald has his doubts. He has made a choice, however, even if he has made it with regret; he chooses business over Jeffty because he imagines how it could affect his future to do so. Donald goes on to say that he can't blame Jeffty's parents for wanting to be part of the present world again. Perhaps the author's point in this story is that, in spite of the appeal of the past, we have no choice but to move forward. The movement of time and progress are inevitable, for human curiosity constantly leads us to seek out the future and envision our later lives with greater possibility.

Characters

Donny

Donald H. Horton is the narrator of the story. He is also Jeffty's only friend. Donald has had a rough childhood, one that possibly made him grow up too fast and lose too much of his childhood.

When he is five years old, Donald is sent to his aunt Patricia's house to live. At ten, Donald is sent away to a military school for four years. Donald is attracted to Jeffty, who has retained the innocence of childhood; all the things that Donald feels he has missed.

In his desire to recapture his childhood, Donald becomes absorbed in nostalgia. He loves things from the past that in his memory are far superior to his modern life. His strongest longing is for old radio programs, something that Jeffty seems to have a natural knack for recreating. It is through Jeffty's ability to mysteriously bring back the old radio programs that Donald fully understands just how different Jeffty really is.

Donald believes that to be five years old is to live in a world of magic. It is through his descriptions of what he thinks the five-year-old world is like, that the reader gets a glimpse into what Donald' s childhood might have been like. When Donald makes statements like: "Five is a special time before they take the questing, unquenchable, quixotic soul of the young dreamer and thrust it into dreary schoolroom boxes," it is easy to read between the lines and assume that this is exactly how Donald must define his experiences in school. To crave to return to the world of the five-year-old means more to Donald than returning to an age of innocence. It means being able to go back to a world of creative freedom, where thoughts were not confined by what is deemed socially acceptable.

But Donald is grown up. He lives in a grown-up world with grown-up friends. He has grown-up responsibilities. Although he is drawn to Jeffty's world, he knows that his grown-up world keeps him from completely entering Jeffty's. The difference between Donald and Jeffty is that whereas Donald would like to return to the past, Jeffty has never left it. Donald is aware of the delicate nature of his and Jeffty's relationship, one that is built on the innocence of a child's trust.

Being aware of something and taking good care of it are two different things. And Donald is a bit careless. He pushes the "thin membrane" between his world and that of Jeffty's, and Jeffty's world collapses.

After finding Jeffty, bleeding from the aftermath of an encounter with some rowdy teens, Donald says that he had left him alone "to fight off the present without sufficient weaponry." Although Donald's own childhood had been shortened by the circumstances of his youth, he at least had time to adjust to the changes. Unconsciously but

nonetheless carelessly, Donald had thrown Jeffty into the adult world of his peers without that advantage. And the consequences were devastating.

Donald H. Horton

See Donny

Jeffty

Jeffty is a boyhood friend of Donald Horton's. At one point in time (until Donald reached the age of five) both Jeffty and Donald were the same age. But Donald was sent away when he was five and when he returned, although he did not recognize the significance of it at first, Jeffty was still five, and Donald was seven.

As Donald grows older and realizes the drastic differences in their lives and ages, Jeffty begins to represent childhood, something that Donald craves. Jeffty represents innocence and happiness, things that Donald has lost. Jeffty lives in a world to which Donald wishes he could return.

Jeffty is free in thought, expression, and physical activity. He skips and hops. His thoughts are centered on fun things like comic books and games. Donald describes the age of five like living in a paradise. Or at least it could be if the child is given half a chance. It's a wonderful time, the narrator says. Being five means not having lost all hope, a time of magic. Jeffty lives in a world of mystery where his "hands can not do enough" and his "mind can not learn enough." Everything is open to him. His "world is infinite." His actions are not strapped by what society thinks he should be doing.

But Jeffty's world is not a paradise. His parents are fraught with despair because Jeffty is not developing in a normal manner. Jeffty lives mostly in his room with his kind of things: things that don't grow up either. Time has taken on a new dimension around Jeffty. It has not exactly come to a halt, but it definitely has warped in such a way that it does not match the time of the people around him.

Jeffty has a relationship only with Donald. He trusts him, eventually inviting him into his world. Jeffty's world is filled with the sounds of old radio programs, the taste of old-fashioned kinds of food, and the fascinating images of old black and white movies. It is a world that Donald likes to share with Jeffty.

The relationship between Donald's world and Jeffty's is fragile. Jeffty's world exists only inside his head. If Jeffty believes in it, it will flourish. But if something were to cast a doubt, his world would be destroyed. The doubt that eventually does destroy Jeffty's world begins with his parents. Then it progresses to the point where Donald exposes too much of the modern world to Jeffty, and all is lost.

Jeff Kinzer

See Jeffty

John Kinzer

John Kinzer is Jeffty's father. He is a rather stoic person who works as a shift foreman at the Balder Tool & Die. He is described as a "small man; soft with no sharp angles; with pale eyes that never seemed to hold mine [the narrator's] for longer than a few seconds." He is also referred to as haunted, and is locked in silence, never knowing what to say. The narrator feels anger toward Kinzer, because of his inability to love his son, Jeffty. Kinzer is incapable of feeling compassion.

Leona Kinzer

Leona Kinzer is Jeffty's mother. Overall, the narrator describes the Kinzers as depressing. Leona is depressed because she has been denied the joys of watching her child grow up. She feels as if she is taking care of a freak, or an alien. With her son, Jeffty, stuck in one age, Leona thinks she is living a nightmare. Leona's mood deteriorates from sorrow to confusion, from worry to fear, and finally ends in "deepest loathing and revulsion to a stolid, depressive acceptance" of her fate.

One day, as if she can no longer hold in her depression, she says, referring to her son, "Sometimes I wish he had been stillborn." The consequences of her actions at the end of the story are unclear, but she changes the station on Jeffty's radio from old-fashioned programming to modern-day rock and roll music.

Aunt Patricia

Patricia is Donald's aunt. It is to her house that Donald is sent when he is five years old. Later, Patricia loans Donald some money and becomes his silent business partner.

Themes

Loss

There is a lot of loss in "Jeffty Is Five" from the beginning to the end. The loss of childhood is developed in the history of Donald's life. Having been sent away from his home and parents when he was five must have been a traumatic experience for Donald. No matter how nice his aunt Patricia was, he did not live in his primary home. A child of five is well aware of the circumstances of his life even if he cannot comprehend the meaning behind the things that are imposed upon him. Having to deal with these issues at a young age robbed Donald of the innocence and freedom of living a childhood in an environment where he had room to dream about good things, and where magic and happiness are the dominant themes.

Jeffty experiences loss, also. The fact that he remains forever locked in his childhood means that he has lost the ability to grow up. Even though Donald, as the narrator, presents the grown up world and the modern world as something less than desirable, Jeffty will never fully realize thoughts beyond the childhood years. He will never go to school, never find love, never have children, and never fully realize his potential. And he will never be independent of his parents. Jeffty is imprisoned in his childhood and has lost his full freedom.

Jeffty's parents experience loss because they have a child whom they will never be able to watch grow up. They will never see Jeffty as a teenager, going through all the challenges of adolescence. They will never discover what Jeffty could master as an adult. They will never see him leave home, have children, or grow old. They also have lost their lives, in a sense. Jeffty's parents believe that Jeffty is a freak. They are embarrassed by his presence. They don't go out with him. They have lost their ability to think of retirement away from Jeffty.

The passion for things of the past also represents a loss. The narrator believes that the quality of the past has been sacrificed in the name of progress and material wealth. This loss of quality is evident in many different ways. Old-fashioned, slow-cooked food has been sacrificed for the sake of saving time. Radio programs have been changed from fascinating storylines to talk-show hosts who want to rant and rave about sex. Cars that once were protected by heavy metal bumpers are now built so lightweight that a sneaker can cause a permanent dent.

Nostalgia

Items of the past run like long lists in this story. There are the foods, the toys, the clothes, the furniture, and the movies. All of them seem more beautiful, more exciting, and more tasteful from the point of the present, looking back at the past. Most of all there are the radio programs. These include *Captain Midnight* and his Code-O-Graph

machine and Secret Decoder Badge. They also include comedy with *Jack Benny* and *Amos 'n' Andy;* thrillers include *The Shadow,* and *The Lone Ranger;* news with Walter Winchell. In the narrator's mind, these programs are irreplaceable. Nothing today comes near them.

Childhood

Childhood is described as a place that is capable of being a near-paradise, especially around the age of five. It is a place of magic, happiness, and freedom. In childhood there is no sense of responsibility, and kids talk about comic books and playing soldiers. It is a time of hope and colorful mysteries. "It is a time of delight, of wonder, of innocence." Childhood is seen as a place to return to, or in Jeffty's case, a place never to leave.

Style

Magic Realism

Magic Realism is a type of fantasy writing that comes across as realistic fiction. For example, in "Jeffty Is Five" the story revolves around a small boy who never grows up. The story is presented in a matter-of-fact style, proposing the oddity of this phenomenon but nonetheless telling the story as if it had actually occurred.

The term *magic realism* was first coined in the 1940s and usually referred to many Latin-American writers who used this dreamlike style in their writing. The most famous of these writers include Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, and Jorge Luis Borges. Ellison admits his admiration of Borges' writing, and critics have aligned some of Ellison's writing style with Borges'. Magic realism differs from science fiction (a genre in which most of Ellison's writing is placed) in that it is not focused on real or imagined scientific discoveries, futuristic settings, space ships and space travel, or alien invasions. There is usually nothing about science or the future mentioned as an overall theme. "Jeffty Is Five" fits into the genre of magic realism more closely than that of science fiction.

Narration

The entire story is narrated through the voice and point of view of Donald Horton, which lean toward a didactic, or a preaching tone. The narrator (or author) has a definite point that he wants to get across.

The message that is dictated through the narrator is that progress is eradicating the past. The past has better qualities than the present. Whether or not any of the other characters believe this to be true is not available to the reader, for the narrator's thoughts are the only thoughts that the reader has access to. There are slight deviations to this pattern when the narration includes short comments from one of the other characters, but even in the short dialogues, there is a sense that the words are not coming from the mouths of the other characters, but from the memories of the narrator. Everything in this story is tainted by the beliefs and the point of view of the narrator.

Because of this narrow perspective, the overall sense of the story is that the narrator wants to teach his audience a lesson. Through the use of an exaggerated metaphor (that of a child not growing past the age of five) and the long lists of things that were so much better in the 1940s than they are at the present time of the story, the narrator keeps honing in on that lesson. As early as the second paragraph of the story and as late as the last line of the story, the narrator remains true to his objective.

Historical Context

The 1940s

Ellison wrote "Jeffty Is Five" in the 1970s. This era is discussed below. But while his story was written in the 1970s and the setting of his story is also around the 1970s, the main thrust of his story is a nostalgia for the years of the narrator's childhood, the 1940s. Ellison paints a dreamlike picture of the 1940s, a focus that is taken from a child's point of view, which includes all the fun stuff. But other things were happening during this period. For instance, a world war was fought during the first half of the 1940s. The first atomic bomb was dropped, and Hitler led the Holocaust. Food supplies were rationed, and the House of Un-American Activities Committee, which caused communist paranoia to sweep across America, had just begun. These were also the years when Japanese Americans were sent, en masse, to internment camps in the United States. Not everything was as dreamlike as Ellison's narrator remembers.

From the perspective of a child, life in the 1940s might have looked sweet. Radio programming, something that Ellison elaborates on in "Jeffty Is Five," was at its height. Since television had yet to become available to every household, radio was the lifeline that connected American families as a nation. Besides the mystery shows that so fascinate Jeffty and Donald in Ellison's story, President Franklin D. Roosevelt used the radio to present his "Fireside Chats," helping to calm the war-ravaged nerves of the American people.

Movies are also mentioned in "Jeffty Is Five." During the 1940s, cowboy stars like Roy Rogers and Gene Autrey were as popular as stars in more dramatic roles. Walt Disney produced three of his classic cartoons during this period: *Fantasia, Bambi,* and *Dumbo.* In general, the movies that were produced during this era portrayed highly romanticized depictions of life, with no sexual content (other then subtle insinuation) and very little graphic display of violence. Hollywood, during this time, was the center of a strong media force and was also used by the U.S. Government to produce war propaganda films that were only slightly disguised as dramatic presentations.

The 1970s

One of the first things that Ellison complains about in regard to the 1970s is the loud music on the radio. This is the decade of acid rock—loud music played by artists like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Led Zeppelin.

Another of Ellison's pet peeves about the seventies is the choice of movies. Some of the more memorable movies of that decade include some that were still romantic, including *Saturday Night Fever* and *American Graffiti.* But the 1970s also included some very realistic cowboy movies starring Clint Eastwood. These movies were nothing like the movies that Donald and Jeffty were seeing from the 1940s. The *Exorcist, The Texas*

Chainsaw Massacre, and *Alien* displayed more blood and guts than Jeffty could have handled. And *Apocalypse Now* and the *Deer Hunter* dealt with war themes, this time the Vietnam War, without any romanticizing filters.

Something interesting to note is that around this same time, in the mid-1970s, Ellison's own award-winning story *A Boy and His Dog* was made into a movie. The story takes place in a post-apocalyptic wasteland that is ruled by gangs and scavengers. The protagonist has a dog named Blood who seeks out women for his owner, Vic. Vic is eventually lured into an underground world and used, by strapping him into a sexual milking machine, as a stud. This movie stands in contrast to the longing of Ellison's narrator in "Jeffty Is Five" to return to the wholesome, romantic films of the 1940s.

New Wave

The sexual and violent themes of Ellison's work began to appear, most notably, with the publication of his anthologized collection of stories in *Dangerous Visions* (1967). Ellison was seen until then mostly as a science fiction writer, although the science fiction he wrote was seldom typical to the genre. But in 1967, some critics claim that he became a sort of spokesman for what was being called the New Wave in science fiction writing. This new type of science fiction moved away from the formulaic writing of that time to writing that had more of a psychological edge. New Wave writing uses literary experimentation and includes social issues like drug use, natural disasters, violence, and sex. Some critics claim that New Wave writing also engages more political issues than the typical science fiction literature of the 1950s and 1960s.

Critical Overview

In 1981, write Laurie Johnston and Robert Thomas Jr. in their article "Notes on People; A Short Story Is Born on Fifth Avenue," Ellison "brought his portable typewriter to the B. Dalton book store on Fifth Avenue and spent the day writing a short story in the front window." Apparently Ellison had done this before, in other bookstores in other cities. Some people thought it was a ploy to grab attention for the release of his collection of short stories *Shatterday* (1980), in which his story "Jeffty Is Five" was first collected. The *New York Times* book reporters claim that Ellison denied that this was a publicity stunt, but rather that he just wanted to "take some of the mystery out of what he insists is just 'a piece of work.'" From this public display, one can see that Ellison is not only a writer but also something of an entertainer.

That is exactly what Dorman T. Shindler says in his article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch.* "Ellison entertains, enlightens and emboldens." This comment refers to Ellison's most recent collection of short stories titled *The Essential Ellison* (1991) in which "Jeffty Is Five" again appears.

Although there are not many specific reviews of "Jeffty Is Five," in general reviewers like Eric P. Nash, writing in the *New York Times* in 1997, say that Ellison is "the reigning bad boy of science fiction." Nash states that Ellison "writes with a relish for gutter slang, veins-in-the-teeth violence and brand-name pop culture, and his work hums with a relentless narrative drive." Robert F. Moss, also writing for the *New York Times,* states that "Mr. Ellison has some of the spellbinding quality of a great nonstop talker, with a cultural warehouse for a mind."

C. W. Sullivan, writing on Ellison in *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers,* claims that "it cannot be denied that Harlan Ellison is a good writer who has had a significant impact on contemporary science fiction." He goes on to say that Ellison's writing might even be said to have changed "science fiction considerably." Often criticized for his use of what some call offensive language, Ellison not only justifies the vocabulary that he uses, he also encourages other writers to do the same. Sullivan says that Ellison encourages other writers to send him stories that other publishers have refused. "He encourages not only "experiments with language, but experiments in subject matter and in style as well."

In the introduction to *The Essential Ellison,* Terry Dowling describes Ellison as a rebel. He says that Ellison "deals in ideas, sometimes so full of love and compassion that they stun with their simple honesty; sometimes set with barbs and hooks that catch and tear and make us gasp and make us feel." In his role as rebel, Dowling says, Ellison must use the following tools to "accomplish his task: shock, surprise and grotesquerie, violence and suffering, hard language, hard knocks and even harder emotions of fear, anger, guilt, pain and love." Dowling continues that Ellison "has become, too, a tester of civilization, a quality control, a challenger . . . a fixer, determined not to let humanity ignore the abyss that produces Third Reichs and Vietnams." Dowling concludes that civilization is better off because of rebels like Ellison.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Hart is a freelance writer and former editor of a literary magazine. In the following essay, she examines the didactic characteristics of Ellison's writing and the shortcomings in his arguments in his short story.

Harlan Ellison, in his introduction to his collection of short stories *Shatterday,* states that his writing is all about telling people that they are not alone in their suffering of the "mortal dreads" of living on this earth. "That's my job," he writes. "To stir the soup, to bite your thigh, to get you angry so you keep the conversation going. . . . Then I can translate it into the mortal dreads we all share and fire them back at you transmogrified, reshaped as amusing or frightening fables." Ellison has a vision, and he wants to share that vision as passionately as a revivalist preacher wants to share his vision of salvation. And because of this, Ellison's writing takes on a didactic tone. He believes that his vision is true. And if it is true for Ellison, it is true for everyone, because he believes that "we are all the same, all in this fragile skin, suffering the ugliness of simply being human, all prey to the same mortal dreads." And his job is to make sure that everyone gets his message.

In his story "Jeffty Is Five," Ellison's vision spotlights the message that the people of this world should not eradicate the past in the name of progress. Ellison wants to hold onto the past to such an extent that he creates a child who will not age. In order to convince his readers that there is a good reason to prevent the aging of this child, Ellison makes lists of all the good things from his past. Once he lists the good things, he then contrasts them with the things of the present, which are all cast in the shadows of the glorious past. Candy tasted better in the past. Not only did it taste better, it was wrapped in better paper. And not only did it taste better and was wrapped better, it cost less and was bigger in size. Candy of the present is worse than tasteless. It has also been deceptively shrunk in size and is soggy in the middle. Lest the reader not get his message, Ellison adds that it is "not worth a penny much less fifteen or twenty cents."

It is this overindulgent, hit-them-on-the-head type of writing that brings out the negative aspects that the term *didactic* sometimes implies. In Ellison's story, for example, the past is good. The present, at best, is questionably passable. And Ellison keeps repeating this same message.

Ellison continues in his story with his narrator reminiscing about when he was a child. The radio programs were "swell" (he later compares them to the present status of radio, being filled with loud, awful music and "banal housewives and insipid truckers discussing their kinky sex lives with arrogant talk show hosts"). His simple box of sixteen crayons is so much better than the complex color schemes that children of today have to deal with. This sounds like a bit of contradiction, doesn't it? Whereas more chocolate is better on one hand, on the other hand, it is better if there are fewer crayons. In other words, whatever was in the past is better, whether it was less or more. For Ellison, it seems that just the fact that it is something that no longer exists makes it better. Ellison appears to go out of his way to make this point. Surely there were things

about the old radio programs, for instance, that were not very attractive. They were heavily commercialized, for one thing, with the commercials being cleverly interwoven into the script so that it was hard for a child to know when the programming stopped and the commercials began. And to make the comparison fair, shouldn't it be added that there is more to radio in the present than just loud music and discussions about sex? But Ellison makes no mention of this.

Ellison also discusses the old cowboy movies. He seems to revere stars like Roy Rogers, Lash LaRue, and Red Ryder. What he does not mention, however, is the fact that the cowboys were always seen as the heroes of these movies. The Native Americans, on the other hand, were typically shown as savages. They were usually the most aggressive of the two groups, were typically less intelligent, and typically in the wrong. Also, good cowboys almost always wore white. And bad cowboys wore black. The question that sociologists might ask today is: What kind of message did that send to African-American or other dark-skinned children? But of course, African-American children, in those times in the past, probably weren't even allowed in the movie theater. But, again, Ellison makes no mention of this.

And the lists go on. Grandmothers' kitchens don't smell like oilcloth. Restaurants don't serve real cream with their coffee. Every town has fast-food restaurants, and cars can be dented with a sneaker. But grandmothers live longer now. And they have the right to vote, too. And it kind of depends on which restaurant people want to eat at; many restaurants still serve cream and better tasting, organic coffee that was not grown on plantations that used slave labor. As for the cars, he might have a point, but because of the lightweight metal that they use, at least the newer cars get better gas mileage.

Ellison makes big mention of Captain Midnight and all the decoding gadgets and badges that went along with that radio program. When the *Captain Midnight* program was first broadcast, it was sponsored by an oil company. In order for the children, who listened to the program, to receive special gadgets like membership cards, medals, and magic weather forecasting widgets, their parents had to go to a specific gas station and pick up special premiums. While there, of course, it was convenient for them to fill up their tanks with gas. Ovaltine (a company that produced a chocolate drink) took over the sponsorship of the program later, and this was the time when all the decoder badges and rings were produced. And each year after, the decoders were upgraded to better styles and all new manuals, which children were coerced into buying. In order to receive this gadgetry, kids had to coax their parents to buy Ovaltine, because each purchase required two inner seals from its jars. From this example, readers can see that commercialization remains the same. These same kinds of commercial ploys are going on today. So what is Ellison complaining about?

Time implies change. Some of the changes are good. Some of the losses are sad. But when Ellison writes with a closed mind about those changes, his message, even if it makes sense in part, gets buried under his preachy overtones. His overly didactic tone makes him sound like he's trying to convince his audience that he knows more than they know. If he were a little subtler and allowed his story to deliver the message instead of inserting such a strong and prejudiced narrative voice, his stories might be

both a little more entertaining and a little more enlightening. But in the typical Ellison style, he ends "Jeffty Is Five" with an overly pathetic voice. Progress is all right, isn't it, Ellison's narrator asks. "People don't die from old diseases any more. They die from new ones, but that's Progress, isn't it? Isn't it? Tell me. Somebody please tell me." These sentiments are typical of the tone throughout this story, and they might make some readers want to tell Ellison the same thing that someone should have told his character Jeffty: Grow up.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on "Jeffty Is Five," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Madsen Hardy has a doctorate in English and is a freelance writer and editor. In this essay she discusses the role of love and family in Ellison's short story, and his allegory about the power of fantasy.

"Jeffty has become an image of reverence for the parts of my childhood that were joyous and free of pain," Harlan Ellison writes in the introduction to his story "Jeffty Is Five" as it appears in the 1980 collection *Shatterday.* The author's comment is hard to reconcile with the events of the story's plot, in which a perpetual five-year-old lets an adult friend into his world of timeless wonder, only to be betrayed, beaten by strangers, and left to die if not outright killed by his own mother. Jeffty's parents don't love him and he is shunned by other children his own age because of his strange affliction—he never gets any older. Jeffty is profoundly isolated from other people and alienated from the culture in which those around him live. This does not sound like a life that is joyous and free of pain.

What, then, can Ellison mean by his comment? "I suppose what I'm saying is that a large part of myself as an adult is Jeffty," Ellison continues in his introductory comments, "They are parts of my nature I hold very dear. But, sadly, Donny is also a part of me. The part of me that grew up in order to deal with the Real World." In the story Jeffty and Donny, each in his own way, inhabits a childhood fantasy world. Jeffty is submerged completely in this world. In fact, rather than functioning as a three-dimensional character in the story, one with emotional depth and complex motives, Jeffty is instead a symbol of Ellison's ideas about fantasy.

Donny is somewhat more fleshed out as a character, but Ellison treats him, too, primarily as the symbol of an idea. Like the author himself, Donny lives life divided between a fantasy world of childhood (one that most adults, in Ellison's view, leave behind completely) and the demands of adulthood's realities. Stories where the characters and events represent abstract ideas in this way are known as allegories. "Jeffty Is Five" is an allegory about the power of childlike fantasy as it was manifested by a certain moment in American popular culture. For Ellison, Jeffty represents the purity and power of imagination in a world dominated by adults who do not appreciate it.

Thus the joy Ellison refers to exists through Jeffty's complete submersion in fantasy. He lives through fantasy, fueled by an obsolete popular culture, to such a degree that he is largely oblivious to the people around him and to the contemporary culture that Ellison believes reflects their impoverished imaginations. Because Jeffty is oblivious to reality (or, in Ellison's somewhat derogatory terms, to the "Real World") he is impervious to it. Thus the child comes across with a strange combination of vulnerability and invulnerability.

Ellison describes how Jeffty responds to the depressing and hostile atmosphere of his home and to his parents' lack of affection for him: "He never remarked in any way. He played, as a child plays, and seemed happy. But he must of [sic] sensed, in the way of a

five-year-old, just how alien he was in their presence. . . . Alien. No, that wasn't right. He was *too* human, if anything." Jeffty is "too human" in his openness and innocence, yet he is happy without his parents' love. This hardly makes for a believable representation of a five-year-old child.

As a fantasy writer, of course, Ellison is not interested in what is believable. What Ellison tries to evoke through his representation of Jeffty is not a realistic child, but a fantasy of childishness. Jeffty represents certain qualities of the mind at age five, before imagination is squelched, a "special time before they take the questing, unquenchable, quixotic soul of the young dreamer and thrust it into dreary schoolroom boxes."

Ellison describes five, the age at which Jeffty is arrested, as "a wonderful time of life for a little kid. . .or it *can* be, if the child is relatively free from the monstrous beastliness other children indulge in." Though the story purports to be about the friendship between Jeffty and Donny, its underlying message is that happiness is being alone. It is in the solitude of his room or his secret place under the porch that Jeffty can "tune in" to his wondrous world of fantasy. What is special about Jeffty is that he is *free* from any relationship, any tie to the network of family, community, or culture as they exist in the "Real"—that is, changing, compromised, and emotionally messy—world. The purity of his imagination is proportional to the degree of his isolation. He seems alien not only because of the uncanny fact that he is perpetually five years old, but because he is so radically *alienated.* He is "free of pain" because he is untouched by the people around him. In the absence of familial love, Jeffty thrives perfectly well on the emotional sustenance of radio serials and comic books.

Donny does not embody such a fantastic ideal. For Donny—the stand-in for Ellison—the golden age of five is the time before fantasy and reality are split, the time before the consciousness of loss, the time before disappointment and distrust begin to inhibit pure joy. Donny appreciates Jeffty's purity to such a degree that he gains entry into his timeless fantasy, but he is not pure—he also inhabits the temporal world of change. Donny grows up, gets beyond age five, and he does not, like Jeffty, remain unscathed by the breaking of family bonds. Not coincidentally, the very age of five is when Donny began to lose his own innocence. "When I was that age, five years old, I was sent away to my Aunt Patricia's home in Buffalo, New York, for two years. My father was going through 'bad times'."

It is notable that Donny does not even mention his mother in this autobiographical synopsis. If Jeffty appears impervious to being denied maternal love, Donny registers the trauma of being sent away by his parents for two years by failing to mention his mother. When he returns at age seven to a home that he can no longer innocently take for granted he finds comfort by submerging himself in radio dramas. This obsolete cultural form makes Donny feel less abandoned—it in some way fills in for what he has lost. Through these shows, his childhood fantasy of wholeness is reborn, but reality encroaches and he is aware that it is only a fantasy.

Ellison marks the next episode in Donny's brief life history with another familial loss. "When I was ten, my grandfather died of old age and I was 'a troublesome kid,' and they

sent me of to military school so I could be 'taken in hand.'" Though Ellison doesn't explain how his grandfather's death relates to Donny's behavior problems, the connection is implicit through the grammar of the sentence. Experiencing loss of a family bond leads to loss of innocence, which leads to trouble for Donny and rejection by his parents. He is again sent away. While the adult, parental solution to Donny's trouble is discipline—the doubtlessly "dreary schoolroom boxes" of military school—Donny's own solution is again to retreat into fantasy. When he comes home, he goes to movies—the innocent kind they made in the good old days. These movies, like Jeffty, remind him of his own innocence, before anyone died, before his family ever broke apart or sent him away.

While many authors either embrace or disparage popular culture, Ellison displays ambivalence toward the role of such mass media in the kind of pure imagination that Jeffty represents. On the one hand, Ellison posits the popular culture of the 1940s and 1950s as not only joyful but also nurturing. As far as he is concerned, radio, comic books, and movies from this era are a suitable substitute for love and friendship. The old-style movie house that Donny and Jeffty attend to see continually new "good old" movies is called the Utopia (a word meaning "perfect place," derived from roots meaning "no place").

On the other hand, the popular culture of the author's present—Clint Eastwood, rock music, and the domination of television—is crass and commercial, with none of the earlier era's power to sooth and satisfy. Not only does it fail to live up to the earlier era's charms, but Ellison represents it as actively destructive. It is the wall of thirty-three televisions that blare as Donny is sucked into the "Real World" prospect of selling and breaks his promise to Jeffty that allows the present to "kill the past." The vulgar present represented by television is also connected to Donny's own fall from innocence through the figure of Aunt Patricia, the wealthy relative who takes him in when his parents first send him away. It is she who lends him money to get started with his Sony television franchise, leading Donny into his role as a smarmy salesman, stressed-out boss, and pragmatic capitalist.

Jeffty is a fantasy—a child who is impervious to being unloved. Donny reflects the emotional reality that rejection and alienation hurt. While everyone else is spooked by Jeffty, he appeals to Donny because he can do what Donny tries and fails—he makes himself feel better by listening to radio shows; he inhabits a world of truly satisfying Clark Bars; he recaptures a sense of absolute wholeness that can only ever be a fantasy.

Source: Sarah Madsen Hardy, Critical Essay on "Jeffty is Five," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

Kim is an instructor of English literature in North Carolina. In this essay, she considers Ellison's critique of progress and conformity in modern society in his short story.

In Ovid's *Metamorphosis,* Aeneas encounters a decrepit Sibyl, or soothsayer, in Cumae who had once pointed to a mound of sand and wished for her life to be as long in years as the number of grains of sand in the pile. Apollo, trying to seduce her by granting her wishes, but unable to forgo the duplicity of his immortal kind, did not reveal her wish's fatal flaw: she had wished for eternal life, but not eternal youth. By the time she meets Aeneas, she has accepted that instead of prolonging her enviable beauty, she has unwittingly chosen for herself a protracted and painful senescence (the state of becoming old). As an old crone, she is no threat to the vain Olympians and becomes instead a cautionary tale on the folly of attempting to outwit the deceitful immortals. Her fate cautions other mortals about the risks of attempting to defy the progress and cycle of human life. In "Jeffty Is Five," Ellison recounts a similar cautionary tale, one which condemns both mortality and immortality and romantic notions of the past and vapid participation in the present. Through the story of never-aging Jeffty and never-thoughtful Donny, Ellison demonstrates the impossibility of revivifying and enjoying the past while committing to the inexorable movement of the present.

Time exists in two paradigms in the story: linear "common time" and Great Time. The reader is asked to suspend logic in order to accept the "magic realism" of Ellison's narrative, a reality in which a parallel universe such as Jeffty's could exist, uninterrupted by the forces which change the known, linearly progressing universe. In *A Connecticut Yankee in the Twentieth Century: Travels to the Past in Science Fiction,* Bud Foote explains the notion of Great Time, a native Australian concept of time as a "still pool rather than a running river" when "things do not happen one-thing-after-the-other as they do in common time, but all things happen at once." Donny himself soon abandons his attempts to explain Jeffty's arrested development and simply decides to enjoy it.

Donny's world is agreeable but lacking in the authentic, layered joy he vividly remembers being an integral part of childhood. Donny's own youth had been interrupted soon enough by separation from his family, his father's financial troubles, the death of his grandfather, and his own turn as a "troublesome child," ending in his tenure at military school. As an adult, Donny resides in common time, and complies with the rituals of aging; he opens a store, dates women, and plays poker with friends. Simultaneously, in Jeffty's house, time is arrested in Jeffty's fifth year of life, but proceeds in a parallel universe, with new episodes of radio shows and commercials for updated products. Jeffty maintains authentic, unadulterated childhood joy, and Foote explains that for Donny, "as Eden disappears from the historical past, and the millennium (and Heaven) from the future, then travel to the past appears to fill the psychic void." Donny's willingness to suspend logic and join Jeffty's world is not only understandable but tragic.

Ellison's present is a frustrated one, not for lack of economic prosperity, security, and entertainment, but because it does not possess the soul and intrigue, the sheer ingenuous innocence and joy of any five-year-old's world. Donny's present is complacent and conformist, not apocalyptic, but insubstantial and spiritually shallow. The joys are not singular and individualized memorable experiences but manufactured and anonymous joys, and Donny clearly prefers the unadulterated joy of his time with Jeffty in the strange and magical world available only with his young friend, the embodiment of nostalgic impulse. Donny is so readily and utterly drawn into Jeffty's world because, as Foote describes it, "In the presence of the everyday and often frustrating present, the laundered and edited past takes on an awesome power." There is no moral anchor in Donny's world; a child's morality is structured and decisive although fragile. Donny's world has no lasting relationships, no permanent and consistent integrity. Nothing goes horribly awry, but neither is there anything worth savoring or remembering. His adult friends are nameless and his dates faceless, his employees steal from him as a matter of course, and his customers bark orders at him as if he were just another employee and not President and owner of the store. Life as an adult seems easier because it is more disposable, and Donny negotiates the pros and cons of his present warily.

Jeffty has managed to preserve all the ephemeral qualities of childhood, the wonder, discovery, sense of treasure and newness. He continues to send in for 1950s promotional toys, maintains his "secret place," and gamely asserts all other methods of making meaning and experiencing joy.

Jeffty's universe is parallel to Donny's, and its intersections with Donny's present are not fatal as long as they are guided and negotiated by what his five-year old mind can comprehend and accept. Commercial breaks in Jeffty's radio shows are for products current in Donny's world; the style of the commercials are familiar to Jeffty, so the products can evolve, since material goods are interchangeable. The rules are tacit (implied) but firm; Donny can enter Jeffty's world and move about it with artifacts and mannerisms familiar to Jeffty, but Jeffty cannot enter Donny's world since it contains unfamiliar objects that will fatally disrupt his understanding of the universe. Donny can take Jeffty out for a movie at the aptly named Utopia theater, and cheeseburgers, but they cannot spend an evening watching television eating Taco Bell.

Indeed, it is his first encounter with television that unravels Jeffty. After seeing it, and not able to reconcile it with his five-year old's understanding of the world, Jeffty goes into nervous shock. To reassure himself, he asks to borrow the radio of two boys in front of the Utopia and turns it to his station, playing a program that "didn't exist for anyone but Jeffty." The radio locks into place in Jeffty's alternate universe, and the two boys beat Jeffty while "everyone watched."

Here the lesson of the Sibyl returns: Jeffty's flouting of mortality in the face of condemned mortals could not be tolerated. The mortals in Donny's world have recast their inevitable deaths as a critical piece in the juggernaut of progress through which they believe they achieve immortality. Jeffty's enjoyment of the past defies not only their notions of progress but their notions of immortality by participating in "progress."

Ostensibly, the "everyone" who watched as Jeffty was beaten outside the Utopia theater witnesses and condones his punishment.

Jeffty is punished, essentially, for daring to defy mortality and for ignoring the spurious importance of progress. He is also punished for preserving and enjoying a time in everyone's lives that they, as the passage of time required, had been forced to leave behind, moving forward into times of work, financial struggles, heartbreak, ambiguity, aging, and death. Jeffty's immortality both insults and challenges the unquestioned merits of progress.

Jeffty, unlike the cursed Sibyl of Ovid's *Metamorphosis,* has flouted the immortality trap; he remains young while time moves on, and remains in a time of pure unadulterated joy and wonder. But his brand of nostalgia is selfish, and his parents are held hostage by Jeffty's refusal to surrender his childhood. Unfortunately, his parents must remain there with him, and their desire to move on, even into a present that is only different and not necessarily better, is the target of Ellison's pity and contempt; Donny feels "sorry for the poor devils," parents of a freakish child, but he also despises them for "their inability to love Jeffty, who was eminently loveable."

Jeffty's parents live, depressed and stunted, trapped by a magical circumstance not of their choosing, and their misery is evident in the appearance of the living room which is, ironically, where they spend most of their waking, but not living, hours: the room was "always dark or darkening, as if kept in shadow to hold back what the light might reveal to the world outside through the bright eyes of the house." When Leona, Jeffty' s mother, finally chooses to free herself from this circumstance, she must choose living in the present over being a mother, and she kills Jeffty with the very instrument through which childhood and immortality was fun-neled to him, and by extension, to Donny. Parental love, like childhood, appears to be finite and unable to withstand the pressures to conform and participate in progress.

Jeffty is blissfully oblivious of being different and freakish. His parents hesitate to articulate their judgments and resign themselves to a life of silent despair and seclusion. Jeffty is unaware that he will be labeled and then destroyed by a society that has defined utopia as any and all of its current circumstances. Hence he, with his actual immortality, is prevented from entering Utopia (theater), and is beaten outside of it. According to Thomas Dillingham in his article on Ellison in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography,* "the wish for immortality is the ultimate refusal of a label (human being/mortal being)." Jeffty escapes categorization as a mortal, but then dies at the hands of his moribund peers and parents.

Dillingham notes that Ellison sees modern society as "populated with fearful and quiescent blobs (consumers, television watchers) whose main function in the world is . . . to participate in the destruction of the few individuals who had achieved a sense of self." Donny is not only a consumer of propaganda about progress, but also the proprietor of its vehicle, and he not only watches TVs but sells them. He helps to create the world of deluded mortal malcontents who eventually beat and then kill Jeffty. Jeffty and Donny had seen movies at Utopia before, watching "new" movies with 1950s

actors; his beating there later implies that society will not stand for Jeffty defining what occurs in Utopia in his own terms, however innocuously, and he certainly will not enter it under that pretext.

Dillingham notes that "while individuality makes survival worth fighting for, it also makes the fight inevitable." Jeffty does fight for his survival; after seeing and being shocked by television, Jeffty turns the boys' radio to *his* station as a gesture of both reassurance and defiance of this other world which is now invading his known constructs. Like all children, when confronted by the shocking knowledge that his private world is alien and unacceptable to others, he turns to his familiar world, but it can no longer save him.

In his introduction to "Jeffty Is Five," Ellison wanted to clarify the difference between the present changing the past and eradicating it. He chastises that "there are treasures of the Past that we seem too quickly brutally ready to dump down the incinerator of Progress." It is not enough to leave Jeffty in his dark house with his depressed and resigned parents to continue his bizarre version of time; he must be annihilated to preserve the pretense that all others are made immortal by their participation and belief in the goodness and necessity of progress.

His mother, ultimately, chooses her role as a member of this society over her role as a mother, and kills him by electrocuting Jeffty in the bathtub with the radio, now blaring modern rock music. Despite living such quiet, uninterrupted lives, Leona bemoans that "there is not one day of peace," indicating that her inability to participate and to believe, fully, in progress is a great disruption to her sense of self. Jeffty's maintaining his sense of self has come at a great price to her, and she cannot tolerate its tragic, oppressive repercussions any longer. She wants the peace of conformity, of living a simple pretense, and of belonging to a group, however anonymous and misinformed.

After Jeffty's death, Donny tries in vain to recapture those stations on a reconstituted Philco radio, but is unsuccessful. His lesson is that he cannot live in both worlds; his unwillingness to choose his present, the present of "progress" over that of Jeffty's present, makes him a traitor to one world and an intruder in the other. Foote observed that "as belief in progress fades, the future is not only vast but distasteful; and the impulse to avoid it draws the unconsciousness to the past." In the end, Donny had evolved from an agreeable but unspectacular participant in Progress, one whose principal complaint about modernity was the decline in the quality of Clark Bars and records, to a cynical observer who notes that Progress is really trading one set of problems for another. Ellison notes in his introduction that he is both Jeffty and Donny, a nod to having both flouted convention and followed it, and he admits that heroic resistance sometimes gives way to the twin pressures of necessity and denial.

Source: Lydia Kim, Critical Essay on "Jeffty is Five," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Topics for Further Study

Ellison's short story ends without fully explaining what has happened to Jeffty. Write two or three possible conclusions, explaining in detail what has happened. Did Jeffty die? How did he die? What kind of funeral would he have had? Did he grow up? What would that mean for the narrator Donald? What would that mean for Jeffty's parents?

Research an old radio script from one of the 1940s programs that are mentioned in this short story. Then write a script of your own, mimicking the style of the program you have chosen.

The narrator in Ellison's story is very nostalgic about the 1940s, the time when he was five years old. What was happening in your life when you were five years old? What kind of programs did you listen to? What kind of movies do you remember? What were some of your favorite foods? What are some of your most memorable moments with a close friend? Write an essay about those times, as if you were Ellison, believing that those times were much better than today.

Do research into Ellison's childhood. Were there any traumatic events that might be similar to the ones that are mentioned in his short story? After researching Ellison's childhood, write an essay comparing his childhood to that of his narrator. How are they the same? How do they differ?

Research the following literary genres: Science Fiction, Magic Realism, Fantasy, and New Wave. Write a paper describing all four genres. What are their most distinguishing elements? How do these four different styles relate to one another? Into which category do you think Ellison's story fits?

Compare and Contrast

1940s: There is serious debate over the moral influence of comic books, fueled by the publication of Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* in which he blames the rise of juvenile delinquency on the bad influence of comic books.

1970s: Reports from the Annenberg School of Communications state that violence on television is having a bad influence on children.

1990s: After several shootings at various schools across the nation, Americans question the influence that video games may have on their children.

1940s: Cowboy stars like Roy Rogers and Gene Autry play in romanticized views of cowboy life. They not only act, they sing, and their records are almost as popular as their movies.

1970s: *Outlaw Josey Wales* is a popular cowboy movie that stars Clint Eastwood as a gunfighter, whose wife and child are brutally killed and whose motive throughout the movie is to seek revenge.

1990s: The movie *Toy Story* tells the tale of a wooden toy cowboy figure named Woody and a gadget-laden, spaceman action figure named Buzz Lightyear, who must befriend one another to avoid being destroyed by a cruel human named Sid, who does not like toys.

1940s: Ovaltine, a chocolate drink billed by "Captain Midnight" as the "heart of a hearty breakfast," offers a shake-up-mug and a Secret Squadron Code-O-Graph in exchange for the seal under the lid of its jar.

1970s: Instant Carnation Malted Milk comes with an offer of a special purchase price for a Barbie doll. Just send in $1.75 with the label from the jar.

1990s: One can buy a kid's Happy Meal at McDonalds and get a special deal on the latest action figures from the *Star Wars* movies.

1940s: This decade is considered the golden era of Hollywood-produced cartoons, with one of the best creators, Walt Disney, producing full length classics *like Bambi and Dumbo,* and Warner Brothers creating Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig shorts. Cartoons like these are shown before the main feature at a movie theater.

1970s: Kids get up early on Saturday mornings to watch cartoons on television like *Scooby Doo,* the *Flintstones,* the *Jetsons,* and the *Rocky and Bullwinkle Show.*

1990s: *The Simpsons* becomes a night-time favorite on television for children and adults. This animated show often features a parody of popular culture, including criticism of violence shown in other cartoons.

What Do I Read Next?

Mine Fields: The Art of Jacek Yerka, The Fiction of Harlan Ellison (1994) is a collection of Ellison's fantasy short fiction that is accompanied by surrealistic images from renowned Polish artist Jacek Yerka.

Repent, Harlequin! Said the Ticktockman: The Classic Story (1997) is an Ellison classic and tells the story of the war between Conformity and Rebellion. Some critics believe this story resembles George Orwell's *1984.*

Collected in *Over the Edge: An Edge in My Voice* (Edgeworks Series, Vol. 1) are stories and essays by Ellison. This is the beginning of a projected 20-volume series and it contains revisions of previously published material as well as extended introductions to each piece.

Isaac Asimov, who once praised Ellison as one of the greatest science fiction writers, was himself one of the most famous in that genre. His I, *Robot* is one of his many classics. It tells stories of all kinds of robots as well as some of their technical problems and idiosyncrasies.

Along the more traditional lines of science fiction writing is Stephen Baxter's book *The Time Ships* (1996), which tells the story of a time machine that falls into government hands. Baxter's book is strongly influenced by the writing of H. G. Wells.

One of the all-time classic writers of science fiction, Arthur C. Clarke, has written many short stories that are now collected in *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (2001). Clarke has been named a Science Fiction Writers of America Grand Master and has won numerous science fiction awards for his writing.

Further Study

Coontz, Stephanie, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap,* Basic Books, 2000.

A realistic look at American life at the end of the 1940s, a time of drastic social change. Coontz puts the myths up to a realistic light and shows the way it really was.

*Fictionwise,*http://www.fictionwise.com (2001).

Read a short biography and an annotated list of some of Ellison's works here.

García Márquez, Gabriel, *Collected Stories,* translated by Gregory Rabassa and J. S. Bernstein, Perennial Classics, HarperPerennial, 1999.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez is one of the best known writers of magic realism. His *Collected Stories* offers a good introduction to some of his more famous short stories, including "Eyes of a Blue Dog," "Big Mama's Funeral," and "The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Erendira and Her Heartless Grandmother."

Glass, Ira, and Jessica Abel, *Radio: An Illustrated Guide,* This American Life/WBEZ Alliance Inc., 1999.

Set in a comic book format, the producers of the popular radio program *This American Life,* heard on Public Radio International, explain how to make a public radio program. They illustrate how to find and write radio stories, and how radio stories differ from other kinds of stories.

Graebner, William, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s,* Waveland Press, 1998.

In this retrospective examination of the culture of the 1940s in America, Graebner covers everything from World War II and the subsequent Cold War to art, music, and pop culture in this well documented work.

"Harlan Ellison: Real Biographies," http://harlanellison.com (2001).

An interesting, if somewhat biased, biography of Ellison's professional career, written by his wife, Susan.

"Harlan Ellison: Stalking the Nightmare," http://www.is-lets.net/islets.html (2001).

This site has several essays and articles written about Ellison and his works.

*Latimes.com,*http://www.latimes.com (February 11, 2001).

There is an essay, "The Dream You Deserve," written by Ellison at this site. It gives the reader a sense of the Ellison voice.

Rainey, Buck, *The Reel Cowboy: Essays on the Myth in Movies and Literature,* McFarland & Company, 1996.

This collection of essay s offers a contrast between the stories offered in the make-believe world of Gene Autry, Buck Jones, and other Hollywood cowboys with stories about the real American West. Also included are discussions of Western movies based on the writing of Louis L'Amour, James Oliver Curwood, and Jack London.

Roosevelt, Franklin D., *The Essential Franklin Delano Roosevelt: FDR's Greatest Speeches, Fireside Chats Messages and Proclamations (Library of Freedom),* edited by John Gabriel Hunt and Greg Suriano, Grammercy, 1998.

A collection of important writings and speeches, this book includes Roosevelt's famous "Fireside Chats," which were broadcast over the radio in the 1940s.

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Dillingham, Thomas F., "Harlan Ellison," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Volume 8: *Twentieth Century American Science Fiction Writers,* edited by David Cowart and Thomas L. Wyner, Gale Research, 1981, pp. 161-169.

Ellison, Harlan, *The Essential Ellison,* with an Introduction by Terry Dowling, The Kilimanjaro Corporation, 1991, pp. 3-4.

—, Introduction to "Jeffty Is Five," in *Shatterday,* by Harlan Ellison, Houghton Mifflin, 1980, pp. 9-11.

—, *Shatterday,* Houghton Mifflin, 1980, pp. xix, xxi, 1—2.

Foote, Bud, *A Connecticut Yankee in the Twentieth Century: Travels to the Past in Science Fiction,* Greenwood Press, 1991, pp. 1-55.

Johnston, Laurie, and Robert Thomas Jr., "Notes on People; A Short Story is Born on Fifth Avenue," in *New York Times,* April 27, 1981.

Moss, Robert F., "A Critic at the Top of His Voice," *in New York Times,* September 17, 1989.

Nash, Eric P., Review, in *New York Times,* September 21, 1997.

Shindler, Dorman T., Review, in *St. Louis Post—Dispatch,* January 14, 2001, p. F8.

Sullivan, C. W., "Ellison, Harlan," in *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers,* St. James Press, 1986, pp. 225-226.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

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Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

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:

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535