The Kugelmass Episode Study Guide

The Kugelmass Episode by Woody Allen

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

"The Kugelmass Episode," first published in the May 2, 1977, issue of *The New Yorker*, is Woody Allen's fantastic tale of a dissatisfied humanities professor who has himself transported into the fictional world of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Professor Kugelmass, unhappily married to his second wife, wants to have an affair, so he has a magician-entertainer named The Great Persky project him into Flaubert's novel, where he embarks on a passionate affair with the title character, the spoiled and beautiful Emma Bovary. Allen presents a hilarious look at what happens when living out one's fantasy becomes a reality and satirizes contemporary society in the process. The story's humor comes not only from its bizarre situation but from its broadly drawn characters, parody of the entertainment industry, spoof of the male midlife crisis, ironic look at literature and its study, and satirical depiction of Jewish culture and manners. Although the story is a farce and immensely funny from beginning to end, "The Kugelmass Episode" does tackle the serious question of the human condition in modern times. Kugelmass, like Allen's heroes in other stories and films, is a *schlemiel*, or hapless bungler who finds himself the victim of circumstances (often of his own making) in an absurd and confusing world. The story draws on Jewish humor and culture as well as classical and modern literature, using lowbrow humor to spoof high art. "The Kugelmass Episode," which was published the same year Allen won his first Academy Award for the movie *Annie Hall*, won an O. Henry award for best short story in 1978. The story was included in Allen's collection *Side Effects* in 1978, and has been widely anthologized. It appears in the 2003 collection, *Fierce Pajamas: An Anthology of Humor Writing from The New Yorker*.

Author Biography

Woody Allen was born Allen Stewart Konigsberg in Brooklyn, New York, in 1935. Allen decided when he was just a child that he wanted to write and make movies. At 15 he changed his name to Woody Allen, and at 16 was hired to write jokes for radio and television. In the early 1950s he first attended New York University, where he failed motion picture production and English, and then City College of New York, where he also flunked out. He wrote for television for five years, writing for Sid Caesar and winning an Emmy nomination, but found this career stifling and turned to standup comedy.

In 1965 Allen wrote and starred in his first film, *What's New, Pussycat?* The following year he made his directorial debut with *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* and wrote a Broadway play, *Don't Drink the Water*. Around this time he became a regular contributor of humorous fiction and essays to *The New Yorker* and other publications.

He rose to fame with the 1969 release of *Take the Money and Run*, a spoof of gangster movies that he wrote, starred in, and directed. His reputation as one of America's most gifted comic filmmakers solidified with *Bananas* (1971), *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid to Ask)* (1972), *Sleeper* (1973), and *Love and Death* (1975). Two collections of his prose writings, *Getting Even* (1971) and *Without Feathers* (1975) appeared during these years. In 1977, Allen won an Oscar for *Annie Hall*, which was hailed as one of the first truly intelligent and complex American comedies. That same year, "The Kugelmass Episode" appeared in the *The New Yorker*. The story won an O. Henry Award the following year and was published in his third and final prose collection, *Side Effects* (1980). Allen's 1978 *Interiors*, his first attempt at serious drama, met with mixed success, but 1979's *Manhattan*, an autobiographical work shot in black-and-white, was admired by critics and audiences. Allen continued to produce hit movies throughout the 1980s.

In 1992, he suffered a much-publicized break-up with his third wife, the actress Mia Farrow, after he admitted to an affair with Farrow's adopted daughter, Soon-Yi Previn. Caught in a bitter custody battle, his ex-wife alleging he had molested another of their children, Allen's reputation suffered considerably, but he continued to make movies, and he and Previn married in 1997.

In addition to making films at a rate of about one per year, Allen plays jazz clarinet with the New Orleans Funeral and Ragtime Orchestra. Over his career, he has received fourteen Academy Award nominations and three Oscars, eight British Academy of Film awards, and numerous prizes from the New York and Chicago Film Critics Circles, the Writers Guild of America, the Cesar Awards in France, and the Bodils in Denmark. In 2002, Allen received the *Palme des Palmes*, the Cannes Film Festival's lifetime achievement award. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife and two adopted children.

Plot Summary

"The Kugelmass Episode" opens with Kugelmass, a middle-aged, unhappily married humanities professor seeking the advice of his analyst, Dr. Mandel. He is bored with his life, and he needs to have an affair. His analyst disagrees, however, telling him "there is no overnight cure" for his troubles, adding that he is "an analyst, not a magician." Kugelmass then seeks out a magician to help him solve his problem.

A few weeks later, he gets a call from The Great Persky, a two-bit magician/entertainer who shows him a "cheap-looking Chinese cabinet, badly lacquered" that can transport the professor into any book, short story, play, or poem to meet the woman character of his choice. When he has had enough, Kugelmass just has to give a yell and he is back in New York. At first Kugelmass thinks it is a scam, then that Persky is crazy, but for $20, he gives it a try. He wants a French lover, so he chooses Emma Bovary. Persky tosses a paperback copy of Flaubert's novel into the cabinet with Kugelmass, taps it three times, and Kugelmass finds himself at the Bovary estate in Yonville in the French countryside.

Emma Bovary welcomes Kugelmass, flirting with him as she admires his modern dress. "It's called a leisure suit,'" he replies romantically, then adds, "It was marked down.'" They drink wine, take a stroll through the countryside, and whisper to each other as they recline under a tree. As they kiss and embrace, Kugelmass remembers that has a date to meet his wife, Daphne. He tells Emma he will return as soon as possible, calls for Persky, and is transported back to New York. His heart is light, and he thinks he is in love. What he doesn't know is that students across the country are asking their teachers about the strange appearance of a "bald Jew" kissing Madame Bovary on page 100.

The next day, Kugelmass returns to Persky, who transports him to Flaubert's novel to be with Emma. Their affair continues for some months. Kugelmass tells Persky to always get him into the book before page 120, when the character Rodolphe appears. During their time together, Emma complains about her husband, Charles, and her dull rural existence. Kugelmass tells her about life back in New York, with its nightlife, fast cars, and movie and TV stars. Emma wants to go to New York and become an actress. Kugelmass arranges it with Persky that the next liaison with Emma is in New York. He tells Daphne that he will be attending a symposium in Boston, and the next afternoon, Emma comes to New York. They spend a wonderfully romantic weekend together, and Emma has never been as happy. Meanwhile, a Stanford professor, reading Flaubert's book, cannot "get his mind around" the changes that have taken place to the novel: First a strange character named Kugelmass appears, and then the title character disappears.

When Persky tries to return Emma to the novel, his cabinet malfunctions, and she is forced to stay in New York. Kugelmass finds himself running between Daphne and Emma, paying Emma's enormous hotel bills, and having to put up with his lover's pouting and despondence, and the stress begins to wear him out. He learns too that a colleague who is jealous of him, Fivish Kopkind, has spotted Kugelmass in the book and has threatened to reveal his secret to Daphne. He wants to commit suicide or run away.

But the machine is fixed at last, and Kugelmass rushes Emma to Persky's and eventually back to the novel. Kugelmass says he has learned his lesson and will never cheat again.

But Kugelmass is at Persky's door again three weeks later. He is bored and wants another affair. Persky warns him that the machine has not been in use since the earlier "unpleasantness," but Kugelmass says he wants to do it, and asks to enter *Portnoy's Complaint*. But the cabinet explodes, Persky is thrown back and has a fatal heart attack, and his house goes up in flames. Kugelmass is unaware of the catastrophe, but soon finds that the machine has not thrust him into *Portnoy's Complaint* at all but into a remedial Spanish textbook. The story ends with Kugelmass running for his life "over a barren, rocky terrain" as the "large and hairy" irregular verb *tener* ("to have") races after him on its spindly legs.

Summary

Professor Kugelmass teaches humanities at City College in New York City. Kugelmass is in the middle of his second unhappy marriage, to Daphne, and has two unremarkable children from his first marriage. The professor is also short of money as he pays his first wife a healthy alimony check along with child support. He had thought Daphne would be different than his first wife and that he would be happy, but Daphne nags him, and he is bored.

Kugelmass tells his therapist that he wants to have an affair. He wants romance and excitement not the continuation of this unhappiness. His therapist tells Kugelmass that having an affair would not solve his problems but Kugelmass continues his verbal train of thought musing about whom he would like to have an affair with and where the affair would take place. Finally the therapist interrupts Kugelmass's wondering thoughts and explains that they must get to the root of the professor's unhappiness by analyzing his feelings. The therapist tells him that he is not a magician and so he must expect it to take time. With that Kugelmass leaves his therapist and never returns.

A few weeks later a person identifying himself as The Great Persky, a magician, calls Kugelmass. He has heard that Kugelmass has been looking for a magician and tells him that he can help him with his problems. The next day Kugelmass meets The Great Persky against his better judgment at his apartment in Brooklyn. He tells Persky that he wants romance and excitement. Persky wheels a large Chinese cabinet into the room and tells Kugelmass to get in the cabinet. The magician tells Kugelmass that all he needs to do is add to the cabinet any written work, be it a novel, short story, or poem, and he will be transported into the story and able to have an exciting affair with any of the women in that written work. When Kugelmass is finished with his affair he only needs to call out for Persky and he will once again be in Brooklyn. Kugelmass is still skeptic but decides to give it a try and chooses to have an affair with Madame Bovary, as he feels like having an affair with a French woman.

Persky tosses the novel written by Flaubert into the cabinet with Kugelmass and knocks on it three times. Suddenly Kugelmass is in Yonville with the beautiful Emma Bovary. Emma is excited to meet this new stranger as her husband does not pay her much attention and they talk as they ramble about her property. The couple kisses and holds each other until Kugelmass realizes he has an appointment to meet his wife so he calls out to Persky and is once again in Brooklyn. He is late to meet his wife and she is suspicious. Kugelmass has no idea that as students across the country are reading the classic novel *Madame Bovary* they are wondering who the new professor character is.

Kugelmass goes to Persky's apartment in order to visit Emma Bovary again the next day. He and Emma talk about their romantic ideas and they make love, as they are doing so Kugelmass cannot believe that he is having sex with Madam Bovary. Kugelmass continues to visit her many times over the next few months and Emma is always excited to see him and hear about his world. She even likes his wardrobe and the new garment he wares called a leisure suit. She talks about becoming an actress as

she thinks she can win an Academy Award. Kugelmass asks Persky if he might bring Emma back with him next time. Persky agrees to try and figure out a way to bring the character back and sure enough by the next day he has it worked out.

Kugelmass once again visits with Emma and when he wishes to go back to Brooklyn he simply holds tight to her and calls out to Persky. One moment the couple is in a carriage in Yonville and the next they are in a carriage in front of the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan where Kugelmass has made reservations. He has already told his wife that he has a conference out of town and he and Emma spend an amazing weekend together doing the things that couples in New York City do. They tour the different neighborhoods, take walks in central park, and eat in fancy restaurants. As the weekend draws to a close the couple goes back to Persky's apartment so that he may send Emma back. However, when he tries to do so the cabinet malfunctions. Persky does not know how long it will take to fix the cabinet so Kugelmass takes Emma back to the Plaza and goes to work to teach a class. Meanwhile a Stanford professor who is reading the classic novel wonders why Emma is suddenly missing from the story.

As the days pass Kugelmass becomes increasingly tense, and he and Emma begin to fight. Their second weekend together is not nearly as magical as the first and Kugelmass has to tell his wife that he has another out of town conference causing her to suspect something. Emma is bored sitting at the Plaza all day long watching television and wishes to take acting classes as she has met a producer in central park who told her he could make her a star. The expense of keeping Emma at the Plaza is also beginning to add up building upon Kugelmass's stress. Moreover another professor at City College has identified the new character in Madame Bovary to be Kugelmass and is threatening to tell his wife. Kugelmass calls Persky daily to tell him the problems that are resulting from his affair with Emma only to be told that Persky is not a therapist.

Finally Persky calls with news that the cabinet is fixed and Kugelmass rushes Emma to Brooklyn. Once again Emma returns to Yonville and Kugelmass promises never to cheat on his wife. However, three short weeks later Kugelmass is back at Persky's apartment restless for another affair. This time he chooses to be transported into *Complaint* by Portnoy. Persky knocks on the cabinet three times but once again it malfunctions and a small explosion occurs. The shock causes Persky to have a heart attack and die as the Chinese cabinet bursts into flames. Meanwhile Kugelmass is not transported to *Complaint* instead he finds a Spanish textbook and the verb *tener* is chasing him.

Analysis

Through the exposition of The *Kugelmass Episode* the reader is introduced to the main character Professor Kugelmass. His life is the epitome of all that is dull and uneventful. He is an extremely unhappy person with not much going for him including children that do not interest him and a wife he does not love and fiscal difficulties.

Kugelmass first brings up his desire to have an affair with his therapist who does not approve of the idea and so Kugelmass stops seeing him. This act symbolizes both Kugelmass's need for instant gratification, which is also the theme of the story and his unwillingness to look inward for the source of the problem. Kugelmass would rather continue to blame others for his unhappiness such as his first wife, his children, and his current wife, than look within himself to see if he is the problem.

Just as Kugelmass has given up the idea of having a therapist analyze his problems a magician calls him. This is either a coincidence, as the magician mentioned that he was not a therapist or Kugelmass has actively been looking for a magician and it was not explained in the story. Either way Kugelmass eagerly travels to the magician's apartment, which is located in a shady area of Brooklyn. When Persky explains that he can have an affair with any woman in any written work, the temptation is too great for Kugelmass causing him to ignore his skepticism. The need he has for instant gratification is so great that he is willing to take the chance of climbing in a box of an unknown magician. He also ignores the fact that no one knows that he is in Brooklyn in The Great Persky's apartment. For all he knows, Persky could murder or abduct him.

Once inside the box with the novel *Madam Bovary*, Kugelmass is transported into the story of Emma Bovary, her lovers and her inattentive husband. Emma does not seem surprised to see this stranger as she is a character in the novel and thus reacts to each new situation as if it is happening for the first time. The character of Emma does not know that Kugelmass should not be a part of her life or is out of place in Yonville she just thinks of him as another potential lover. This is good for Kugelmass who is looking for romance and a self-contained affair. The two have a good time and Kugelmass experiences some of the excitement and romance that he is craving before he realizes that he must again return to the real world and deal with his real responsibilities his wife.

As Kugelmass reenters New York City and his real life he has no idea that he has affected the course of the famous novel *Madam Bovary*. This storyline reflects the classic plot of time machine travel tales in which the character goes back in history and alters the future by changing the past. In entering Emma Bovary's life Kugelmass has altered a classic novel and therefore has altered English courses, fiction analysis, and future writers who used Flaubert as inspiration.

Soon an affair in Yonville is not enough for either Kugelmass or Emma, and they become greedy leading him to bring Madam Bovary back to Manhattan. At first their affair continues as they do all the things that new couples do when they are dating. Kugelmass is experiencing the excitement and romance that he had craved and Emma is experiencing a whole new world. Their time in New York City is like a fairy tale until Persky is unable to put Emma back where she belongs in her novel.

The fact that Kugelmass is affecting the outcome of the novel *Madam Bovary*, is brought up two more times before the end of the story. First when he brings Emma back to Manhattan it is noticed by a Stanford professor that Emma is suddenly missing from the novel, which he has read many times over. The second time is when a colleague of

Kugelmass actually identifies the new character in *Madam Bovary* to be Kugelmass. It is not explained as to how this colleague rationalized his findings.

The fact that Emma cannot be sent back to Yonville and the confines of her novel presents Kugelmass with the first set of problems associated with his affair. The problems that follow are symbolic of his previous relationships with his ex-wife and his current relationship with his second wife. Emma is bored with being simply Kugelmass's mistress and wishes to make a life for herself. Additionally the expense of keeping Emma at the Plaza and in the lifestyle that she is now accustomed too is bleeding Kugelmass dry, the very same thing he was complaining about in the beginning of the story in reference to his alimony and child support payments. Kugelmass is now more unhappy and stressed than he was before he started his affair. It is ironic that Persky tells Kugelmass that he cannot solve his problems because he is not a therapist, since his therapist had told him that he could not solve Kugelmass's problem because he is not a magician.

Despite incurring difficulties with his affair with Emma Bovary and his promise never to cheat on his wife again, Kugelmass is weak and returns to Persky's apartment. Kugelmass has not learned his lesson that the answer to his problems is not a quick fix; rather he is still fixated on instant gratification instead of doing a comprehensive inventory of his life and the consequences of his actions.

In addition to being a quirky ending to the story in keeping with the author's style the introduction of a Spanish verb may also have other more symbolic meanings. The Spanish verb *tener* means, "to have," and thus may represent several feelings and circumstances relevant to the main character Kugelmass. For one *tener* is symbolic of all that Kugelmass had but did not appreciate. The fact that it is a physical thing chasing him may be symbolic of the fact that Kugelmass needs to realize what he had and what he gave up for an easy affair. The words "to have," may also have a more literal meaning, as they are part of the vows that couples take when they get married. Kugelmass ignored his vow and his promise to his wife by cheating on her; thus, the verb is chasing him as a physical reminder of his transgression.

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Characters

Charles Bovary

Emma Bovary's husband Charles is a doctor whom Kugelmass calls a "lacklustre little paramedic" who is "ready to go to sleep by ten" while Emma wants to go out dancing. Emma refers to her husband sarcastically as "Mr. Personality." He falls asleep during dinner as she is talking about the ballet.

Emma Bovary

Emma Bovary is the title character of Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*, into whose world Kugelmass gets transported by The Great Persky. In Allen's story she speaks in the "same fine translation as the paperback" version of the novel before she suddenly acquires a twentieth-century New York way of speaking. She is much like she is in the Flaubert novel: beautiful and spoiled, interested in material possessions, irresponsible, bored with her bourgeois existence, looking for love and excitement. She detests her marriage and life in the country and is enthralled by Kugelmass's stories of Broadway nightlife, fast cars, Hollywood, and TV. She and Kugelmass begin a torrid affair when he visits her in the pages of the novel, but she soon wants to visit New York and begin an acting career. In New York, she goes out on the town with Kugelmass and buys new clothes to take home, another sign of her shallowness and interest in material possessions. When she finds herself unable to get back to the novel, she complains to Kugelmass that watching TV all day is boring; she wants to take a class or get a job. She then locks herself in the bathroom and refuses to come out. Selfish and vapid, Emma Bovary is a parody of the demanding mistress as well as of the air-headed aspiring actress searching for fame and fortune.

The Great Persky

The Great Persky is the magician who transports Kugelmass into Emma Bovary's world using a badly lacquered, cheap-looking Chinese cabinet. Persky, an unsuccessful entertainer, is described as short, thin, and waxy-looking, and lives in a broken-down apartment house. The fact that he is a magician reinforces the theme of reality versus illusion in the story, and he also is a parody of a two-bit entertainer that used to be a staple on Vaudeville. Persky is also a satire of the quintessential New York Jew; he uses colorful colloquial expressions and has a pessimistic but relaxed outlook on life. When Kugelmass asks Persky if being transported in the cabinet is safe, he says, "Safe. Is anything safe in this crazy world?" When his cabinet malfunctions and Kugelmass is distressed, Persky is not overly worried and tells Kugelmass to relax and to get help for his personal anxiety. He can't help in that area, Persky says, because "I'm a magician, not an analyst."

Professor Fivish Kopkind

The professor is Kugelmass's colleague, a professor of comparative literature at the City College of New York. Kugelmass says Kopkind, who has always been jealous of him, has identified him as the sporadically appearing character in *Madame Bovary* and has threatened to tell everything to Kugelmass's wife.

Kugelmass

A humanities professor at the City College of New York, Kugelmass is bored with his humdrum life and is transported to the pages of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, where he has an affair with the title character. Kugelmass is described as aging and "bald and hairy as a bear," and he thinks, mistakenly, that he has "soul." He is distrustful, pessimistic city man who races around town trying to get what he wants; he is forever in pursuit of something better. He is drawn in the Jewish tradition of the *schlemiel*□a hapless bungler who gets caught up in an awful and absurd situation beyond his control, a powerless man at odds with his environment. But he is also an irresponsible, selfish, shallow man who wants a lot for very little□he wants to escape his humdrum life and unhappy marriage, but not at the expense of his career or marriage. After The Great Persky transports Kugelmass to Yonville, and he begins an affair with Emma Bovary, he can't believe his luck and is happy for a while; he has never been particularly successful (he failed Freshman English). He thinks that he deserves happiness after all his "suffering," and when he begins an affair with Emma thinks he "has the situation knocked." But when things start to go wrong and Persky cannot get Emma back to Yonville, Kugelmass starts to panic. He takes to drink and wants to escape again, this time either by suicide or moving to Europe. After Persky finally returns Emma to the Flaubert novel after her New York interlude, Kugelmass repents and says he has learned his lesson. But three weeks later he is asking Persky again to transport him into another fictional realm. Kugelmass is like many Allen heroes□a nervous, inept New York Jew who hopes for the best but also worries constantly, thinks he has a situation "knocked," then finds himself in trouble that he cannot handle. But he doesn't learn from his mistakes, because the call of flesh is more powerful than that of his head. Kugelmass is also very much like Emma of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in that he is dissatisfied, selfish, and irresponsible, and has a ridiculous idealized notion of love and romance.

Daphne Kugelmass

Daphne is Kugelmass's current, and second, wife. Kugelmass considers her an "oaf" and a "troglodyte" who had promise (and money) but has now grown fat. She is demanding and spends her time doing mundane tasks□looking for bathroom accessories, for example. She suspects that her husband has a "chippie" on the side, senses his tension, but never catches on to his affair.

Dr. Mandel

Dr. Mandel is Kugelmass's analyst. Kugelmass confides to Dr. Mandel that he needs to have an affair, but the doctor tells him his problems run much deeper and that what he needs is to express his feelings. He says he has no overnight cure for Kugelmass because "I'm an analyst, not a magician."

Rodolphe

Rodolphe is Emma Bovary's lover in the novel *Madame Bovary*. Kugelmass wants to get into the novel before Emma meets Rodolphe because he can't compete with him; he is fashion magazine material. Rodolphe is from the landed gentry, he says, and has nothing better to do than flirt and ride horses.

Themes

Literature and Literary Study

One of the principal targets of Allen's satire in "The Kugelmass Episode" is literature and its study. Kugelmass is a humanities professor at the City College of New York in Brooklyn, but, it turns out, he "failed Freshman English." (Allen himself attended CCNY and failed English at New York University.) He doesn't speak like an educated man at all, but uses colloquialisms and a very New York Jewish speech pattern; the only time he deviates from this is to call his wife a "troglodyte" (a cave dweller) and to whisper sweet nothings into Emma Bovary's ear. Kugelmass is dissatisfied with his life, and he yearns not for love but for a cheap idealization or glamorization of it that is the stuff of romance novels. He decides he wants to have an affair with Emma Bovary because she is French□"that sounds to me perfect," he says. But what he doesn't even consider is that Flaubert's novel is not about perfect love at all but the ridiculous idealization of it by the title character□which leads to her utter ruin. In fact Kugelmass is very much like Flaubert's Emma: dissatisfied and disillusioned by marriage, searching not for love but for shallow fulfillment that is mistaken for something much grander. But Kugelmass is also like Emma's husband, Charles, who is a bumbling, aging man who is really no good at his job. However, Kugelmass the literature professor does not realize these things at all.

Allen throws in a number of references in his story to classics of literature that reinforce the absurdity of Kugelmass's quest and resound with his general predicament. The Great Persky asks Kugelmass what his pleasure is in terms of female heroines to have an affair with. He suggests the social-climbing title character of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and the mad Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example. At the end of the novel, Kugelmass asks to be projected into Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, a book about a Jewish man who talks to his analyst about his sexual troubles. Throughout the story, Allen uses lowbrow humor to poke fun at serious, high art by combining it with absurd and farcical situations. The fact that a person can be projected at all into a work of fiction is ridiculously comic, and that it is Flaubert's serious naturalistic novel is even more incongruous.

Literary study is also satirized in the story as students and professors all over the country begin to wonder about what is happening as a "bald Jew" enters Flaubert's novel. Rather than thinking that something crazy is happening, the teachers think that their students are on pot or acid. A Stanford professor, unable to simply see the text for what it is, remarks that it shows that the mark of a classic is that "you can reread it a thousand times and always find something new."

Pursuit and Possession

Perhaps Allen's most serious target of satire in "The Kugelmass Episode" is modern humans' pursuit of satisfaction. Kugelmass is dissatisfied and undergoing a midlife crisis, but rather than seek meaning, he looks for romance and glamour to relieve the boredom in his life. When things go wrong and Emma can't get back to the Flaubert novel, he tells Persky that all he is prepared for at this point in his life "a cautious affair." He is prepared to lie and cheat on his wife but he doesn't want to work too hard or to give up the other things in his life□his job, his comfortable existence□to get what he wants. The irony at the end of the story is that Kugelmass, who has been in the pursuit of things that he thinks he must have, is himself pursued by "having," as the "large, hairy" irregular verb "tener" chases him over a rocky landscape. Emma is also in pursuit of shallow and meaningless things□idealized romance and fame□that she thinks can make her happy.

Art and Life/Fantasy and Reality

A recurring theme in Allen's fiction and films is the line between art and life, between fantasy and reality. Fantasy in the story is seen on two levels. On the one hand, there are straightforward fantasies, for example Kugelmass's wish have a beautiful woman by his side and Emma Bovary's desire for an acting career and fame. But Allen plays on that idea and Kugelmass's fantasy becomes, literally, a fantastic journey into another dimension.

In the story, Kugelmass is bored and seeks a release from his dull, humdrum existence. He wants to escape from the reality of his oaf-like wife Daphne and have an affair. He doesn't want an ordinary dalliance, a "chippie" on the side as his wife says, but excitement, softness, glamour; he wants to "exchange coy glances over red wine and candlelight." He turns to Persky to help him, and even though it should be apparent that things will probably not work out (the unsuccessful magician lives in a run-down apartment building and uses a cheap-looking Chinese cabinet as his transporter), he willingly suspends his disbelief and hopes for the best. As a sign of his desperation to escape his reality, Kugelmass the distrusting city man accepts that Persky knows what he is doing. His fantasy comes to life when he is thrust into the world of Flaubert's novel and begins his affair with Emma Bovary, but Kugelmass soon finds that living with one's fantasy poses many hazards. Once again, Kugelmass wants to escape□this time his fantasy-turned-reality□either by committing suicide or running away to Europe. He is relieved when Emma is finally transported back to Yonville. Art in the story is an escape from real life, with its fat and dull people and mundane situations. But even though it is a tempting escape, it is still an illusion, and illusions by definition are not all they seem to be.

New York Jewish Culture

"The Kugelmass Episode" is very much a story about a New York Jew, and Allen presents a number of details to emphasize the Jewishness of his principal characters. Kugelmass teaches at City College of New York The word "Kugel" in the title character's name refers to a sweet noodle dish that is served at Passover. In fact all the "real" characters in the story are Jewish□Kugelmass, Daphne, Dr. Mandel, Persky, and even Kugelmass's jealous colleague, Fivish Kopkind. Allen's characters have stereotypical Jewish traits, from Kugelmass's anxiety and concern about money to Persky's pessimism. The story uses elements of Jewish humor, with the main character cast as a *schlemiel*, or bungler. and the use of exaggeration for comic effect (Kugelmass notes, for example, that Emma's hotel tab reads "like the defense budget") and its concerns with the anxieties of urban life. But while Allen satirizes Jewish culture, speech, and manners, he never does so harshly, and his characters are crazy but ultimately likeable, and the colloquial speech they use in the face of such serious situations is perhaps the most humorous element in the story.

The Entertainment Industry

"The Kugelmass Episode" pokes fun at the entertainment industry, especially in its satirical portraits of Persky the Great and Emma Bovary. Persky is an unsuccessful entertainer who nonetheless continues at his trade and hustles to earn a living. He built his cabinet for a booking for the Knights of Pythias that "fell through," he tells Kugelmass, and he aims to make money from Kugelmass from his contraption. Emma, when she comes to New York, becomes a parody of an actress with aspirations to fame. She wants to dine at Elaine's, a landmark restaurant in New York that serves Italian-Jewish comfort food and which is the haunt of many celebrities (she wants to see and be seen). She thinks anyone can act and wants to be coached by the great Strasberg so she can win an Oscar. Both these characters show the most shallow side of the entertainment industry, that focuses not on art but on money and fame.

Style

Farce/Satire

"The Kugelmass Episode" uses humor and comic situations to poke fun at people and situations and to show the absurdity of human desires and pursuits. The humor in the story can be classified as *satire*, which is the ridicule of ideas, institutions, particular individuals, or humanity in general to lower the reader's esteem of them and make them laughable. The story may also be viewed as a *farce*, which is a comedy characterized by broad satire and improbable situations. Satire and farce are used by writers to different effects, sometimes reducing ideas or people to absurdity to proffer a moral criticism against injustice or social wrongs. Allen does not seem to offer heavy moral lessons in his story, but his humor does expose human foibles and critiques modern humanity's particularly crass pursuit of bodily satisfaction, material wealth, and fame. The story is a *parody* of a number of types of people and situations. The characters are broadly drawn and have stereotypical traits. Kugelmass is an ironical portrayal of a middle-aged Jewish man undergoing a sexual crisis; his wife Daphne is a satire of an over-the-hill, unrefined and materialistic Jewish wife; Emma is a spoof of shallow, celebrity-seeking, and untalented would-be actor; and Persky sends up Jewish speech and manners as well as cheap entertainers.

Using these characters, Allen also satirizes literature and high art, material pursuits, Jewish culture, and the entertainment industry. One of Allen's techniques in his satire is to present a serious situation or moment and then undercut its importance with an absurdity. The entire fantastic situation of being transported into a fictional realm is undercut by characterizing it in mundane terms. The cabinet Persky uses for Kugelmass's amazing journeys is cheap and "badly lacquered." When it malfunctions, Persky crawls under it and bangs it with a large wrench; the problem, he reveals, was with its transmission. Allen undercuts serious romantic moments often by using colloquial expressions and incongruities. Emma is dazzled by Kugelmass's modern dress, which he tells her he got on sale. She is enthralled by stories of New York, and he talks about O. J. Simpson's "rushing records." Throughout the story, situations and people are mocked, practically everything they say and do reduced to complete silliness.

Colloquial Language

Much of the humor of "The Kugelmass Episode" comes from his characters' manner of speech, as they use slang and expressions that undercut the seriousness of the situations they are in. The tone of the language emphasizes the New York setting and Jewish characters. Persky in particular uses extremely colorful phrases and one can almost hear a Brooklyn Jewish accent. When Kugelmass is skeptical of his transporting cabinet, he tells Kugelmass "It's the emess," then asks for a "double sawbuck" to transport him to *Madame Bovary*. Kugelmass, a literature professor, uses colloquial

language most of the time, and when he an Emma become close begins to call her "sugar" and "cupcake." At first Emma speaks in the "same fine English translation as the paperback," but by the end of the story she is telling Kugelmass that "watching TV all day is the pits." Over and over, weighty and important matters are made absurd by the way the characters talk about them, bringing them into the realm of the ordinary and mundane.

Historical Context

The first Jews to settle in North America arrived New York City, then the Dutch port of New Amsterdam, in 1654. By the end of the century they had established synagogues, and by 1740 Jews were entitled to full citizenship. Jewish families settled all over New York and the community set up hospitals, businesses, and cultural organizations. Immigration to New York by European Jews continued in the nineteenth century, intensifying in the 1880s. Between 1880 and 1920, the Jewish population in New York City swelled from 60,000 to more than 1.5 million. Between the two world wars, the Jewish community in New York evolved from an immigrant community divided by language, politics, and culture into an English-speaking, upwardly mobile American citizenry. Jews began to play an increasingly significant role in the general cultural life of New York. Many of New York's leading entertainers, writers, artists and art patrons were of Jewish origin, and American intellectualism began to become closely associated with the New York Jewish community.

As Jewish immigrants began to assimilate, their humor began to integrate into mainstream American entertainment. Many Jews became successful Vaudeville acts, and future stars such as The Marx Brothers, Jack Benny, George Burns, Milton Berle, and The Three Stooges began their careers in Vaudeville. By the mid-1920s, a literary form of humor created by Jewish comics came out of Vaudeville: stand-up comedy. When Vaudeville theaters were replaced by nightclubs in the 1930s and 40s, comedy became less physical and began to focus on language and observations about the incongruities and anxieties of life. Jewish comedy began to reflect its intellectual tradition of exhaustive reasoning and questioning. Before the second world war, much Jewish humor relied on self-caricature, but after 1945 Jews ran into less discrimination and new possibilities opened up to them, and they began to get into radio and television. Television signaled a return to physical comedy, and in the early 1950s the Jewish comic Sid Caesar created *Your Show of Shows*, which used a combination of physical comedy, one-liners, and intellectual wit to offer social commentary and satirize highbrow culture. Among Caesar's writers were the Jewish comics Mel Brooks, Neil Simon, Carl Reiner and Allen. *Your Show of Shows* did not directly address Jewish issues, and in fact fearing the anti-Semitic sentiments of its audience pointedly avoided presenting any sense that it was created by Jews. However, it did make numerous Jewish references and used inside jokes, and the Jewish background of the writers helped to produce humor laced heavily with irony and caustic wit.

By the end of the '60s, the presence of Jews in the New York comedy scene had moved from vaudevillian acts to the forefront of radical social change. The brash humor of Lenny Bruce in that decade heralded an age of intelligent, sophisticated comedy that tackled important social issues and also spoke unashamedly and irreverently about the Jewish experience. In 1969, Allen's *Take the Money and Run* presented a Jewish protagonist who was no longer the Jewish vaudevillian clown of old but a neurotic, analytic, intellectual New York Jew, thoroughly urban and anxiety-ridden. This persona, taken from his standup routine, appropriated some of the techniques and types from the Jewish humorist tradition, for example casting the hero as a *schlemiel*, a bungler and

lovable failure who is to be pitied. But it was also much more clever and self-consciously reflective even while being self-deprecating and zany. In the 1970s, as the social climate in the country changed, Jewish comedy writers began more and more to emphasize their Jewishness, and Allen's string of hit movies is a testament to the increasing tolerance of Jewish culture and ideas in the mainstream. Like his story "The Kugelmass Episode," Allen's films poked fun at the Jewish American experience but never in mean-spirited way, offering rather a gentle look at what it means to be Jewish in America and paying tribute to the particularly Jewish ability to find humor in the most unlikely situations.

In 1975, the television comedy variety show *Saturday Night Live*, whose writers who were almost all Jewish, was launched in New York and televised nationwide. The program often parodied Jewish manners, people, and culture and encouraged performers to be open about their Jewish identities. Since then, the American comedy scene has embraced Jewish comics and Jewish humor. The synthesis of Jewish and mainstream comedy is seen in the work of Billy Crystal, Jerry Seinfeld, and Larry David, for example, whose verbal jabs and neurotic self-observations have popularized the sensibility of Jewish humor. But the work of these contemporary Jewish comics has also in some ways sublimated Jewish comedy's very Jewishness by making it "all-American." Thus, while New York Jewish humor defined comedy in twentieth-century America, in the twenty-first century, Jewish American humor and its particular fusion of intellectual and lowbrow satire has become assimilated to the degree that it is regarded as one of the defining elements of American humor.

Critical Overview

"The Kugelmass Episode" is generally acknowledged to be a classic short story and one of the finest pieces in Allen's relatively small output of prose fiction. It was well received critically when it first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1977, evidenced by it being short-listed for and then winning the first prize in the following year's O. Henry awards, the annual prizes given to short stories of exceptional merit. However, partly because of Allen's enormous popularity and success as a filmmaker, "The Kugelmass Episode" and his other prose works have received almost no sustained critical or scholarly attention. The short story is routinely cited by critics from all disciplines as a "classic" and a brilliantly funny example of a fantasy in which art and life intersect and frequently appears on college reading lists for modern and supernatural fiction and, ironically, Freshman English. Two short critical pieces on the story appeared in 1988 and 1992 issues of the *Explicator* discussing the work's Jewish references and relationship to reader-response theory and criticism. But otherwise, most critical commentary on Allen's work tends to focus on his films and, to a lesser extent, his plays. Nonetheless, "The Kugelmass Episode" continues to be read, being frequently anthologized in collections of American short stories, humor, and Jewish writing, and in 2003 was included in print and audio versions of an anthology of stories from *The New Yorker*. *Side Effects*, Allen's third prose collection in which the story was published in 1980, also continues to be in print, ensuring that the piece enjoys wide readership.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Kukathas is a freelance editor and writer. In this essay, Kukathas discusses how Allen explores the theme of art as an escape from reality in "The Kugelmass Episode" and in his film The Purple Rose of Cairo*.*

In his 1985 film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, Allen tells the story f Cecelia, a lonely woman trapped in a bad marriage and dead-end job who escapes the misery of her existence by going to the movies. During one of Cecelia's daily visits to the (fictional) film *The Purple Rose of Cairo* to see her screen idol Gil Shepherd, the character Tom Baxter, played by Shepherd, turns to Cecelia and begins a conversation with her. He confesses he's been watching Cecelia while she has been watching him, and is falling in love with her. Much to the horror of the audience and other characters in the film, he decides to climb out of the movie and run off with her. He flees to the real world, where all he wants to do, he says, is lead a "normal" life, to "be real." Cecelia later enters Baxter's movie world with him, where she experiences for a time glamour, adventure, love, and hope. But both Baxter and Cecelia soon find that the fantasy worlds they have entered have their pitfalls. More importantly, reality begins to set in, and in the end both are forced to return to their old lives, the only places where, they realize, they can really belong.

Allen's romantic comedy has obvious parallels to his humorous short story "The Kugelmass Episode" in the way it explores the viewer/reader's relationship to art and art's relationship to reality. Indeed, the 1977 story can be viewed as a prototype for the film that appeared eight years later. Both of these works use similar methods to examine the line between fantasy and reality and to show how seductive fantasy can be. The treatment of the theme of art versus reality in "The Kugelmass Episode" is not as developed as it is in Allen's film, and the moral lessons it teaches are far less obvious. But it nevertheless delves into serious problems, forcing readers to think intelligently about the role of art in people's lives as well as their responsibility toward it. By comparing Allen's story with *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, the complexity of these themes becomes more obvious and the existential concerns and moral lessons, veiled in the story in screwball satire, become a little more clear.

In both "The Kugelmass Episode" and *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, Allen presents the allure of art and its power to offer solace and hope. In "The Kugelmass Episode," Allen pokes fun of people's impulse to find refuge in art and also in art's capacity to do provide relief from the dreariness of existence. Kugelmass seeks an escape from reality in art for the basest of reasons: he is having a mid-life crisis, feels that he is running out of "options," and thinks he'd better have an affair while he still can. He doesn't really turn to art for solace; rather, art happens to present itself as a means for him to satisfy his lust. Kugelmass is a literature professor, but art so far has done little to offer meaning to his weary soul. Only when The Great Persky suggests that he use his transporting cabinet to "meet any of the women created by the world's best writers" does he decide that this is the type of fantasy world he will escape to. He decides to go to the France of *Madame Bovary*, where he begins an affair with the title character. Once there, he is happy because he is "doing it with Madame Bovary" and thinks he has the "situation

knocked." Being in the French countryside is a nice touch, but the most important thing for Kugelmass is that he has fulfilled his very particular fantasy□of having an affair with a beautiful, sexy woman. Kugelmass is completely seduced by the world of art, but all that world is for him is a place where he can get what he wants without having to pay very much for it.

"The Kugelmass Episode" satirizes the entire notion of the seductiveness of art as it shows Kugelmass's desire for escape in crass terms. *The Purple Rose of Cairo* develops the idea of art's allure more fully and delicately, showing why humans choose to escape to it. For Cecelia, the world of the movies is a complete world, and she loves everything about it: the glamorous people, the adventure, the romance. She falls in love with Baxter because he is perfect; even after he has a fistfight with her husband, not a single hair is out of place and there is no blood no his face. Art for Cecelia offers an escape because it depicts a perfect world, one where there is no joblessness, no despair, no cruelty, and where there is the possibility of romance, love, and hope. It also offers a perfect morality, where good always triumphs and evil fails. Her real world, in comparison, is disappointing, deceitful, and the good guys never win. Cecelia turns to art to satisfy her desires, and the escape offered by art is magical and wonderful. The world of art is far superior to her real world, and it is no wonder that day after day Cecelia sits in front of the screen losing herself in its illusions of beauty and its perfect morality.

Allen is not saying that all art depicts a perfect world, but shows how audiences are seduced by it because of the alternative it offers to the complexity of the real world. Art may not portray life as being perfect, but it has a certain integrity and meaning that are missing from real life□or at least people think it has these qualities. The literary critics in "The Kugelmass Episode" don't know what to make of it when the text of *Madame Bovary* changes; the novel has an expected progression, unlike life, and the Stanford professor "cannot get his mind around" the fact that suddenly it does not. A member of the movie audience in the film says she wants "what happened in the movie last week to happen this week. Otherwise what's life all about anyway?" In both the story and the film, Allen shows how audiences' expectations of art are misguided in serious ways. They expect art to deliver certain truths when in fact it cannot. One of the things Allen does in both these works is use the genre of comedy, which is supposed to provide happy endings, and infuse it with the unexpected, with sadness and absurd tragedy. Cecelia is betrayed by the movies and doomed to return to her horrible life, and Kugelmass, not learning his lesson about the dangers of living an illusion, is projected finally into an absurdist oblivion Allen departs from the traditions of comedy to bring into focus the shifting boundaries of art and reality and to show how people's expectations of art influence their thinking not only about art but their lives as well.

Both Kugelmass and Cecelia are seduced by what art can offer them, but their mistake is in believing that art can offer a permanent escape. For Kugelmass, things start to go horribly wrong when Persky's transporter malfunctions and Emma Bovary is unable to return to her novel. Kugelmass finds very quickly that his fantasy-turned-reality is a liability, and he chooses to end it as soon as he can. But the allure of it is too strong, and three weeks later he is in Persky's apartment asking to be projected into *Portnoy's*

Complaint. There he meets with his hilariously bizarre ending□thrust by mistake into a remedial Spanish textbook and running for his life as he is chased by a large and hairy irregular verb. The ending to Cecelia's story is more tragic and more poignant. She believes at first that she can have a life with Baxter, leaving her husband for him. The movie studio then sends the actor Shepherd to convince his character to get back into the film, and Shepherd asks Cecelia to choose him over his screen persona, promising them a life together. Baxter goes back to his film, but then Cecelia is betrayed by Shepherd; after he gets Baxter back into the movie, he returns to Hollywood, and Cecelia is back to her dreary existence, her only respite once again the magic of the movies.

Even to the end, Kugelmass believes that art can offer something more than a passing diversion to his life, that it can transform it in some way that will have permanent rewards. This leads to his downfall. Cecelia finally recognizes that perfection isn't a substitute for reality, and she chooses reality instead. But reality is as harsh as it had always been, with its imperfect morality, and she is once again alone and in a state of hopelessness and despair. The lesson that both characters learn, and which we can learn from their stories, is that painful though it is, humans must return to and live with reality, and reality has no happy ending. Art can offer some refuge from the harshness of reality, but we cannot stay there permanently. We might find, as Cecelia does, that the world of reality is amoral and unwelcoming, but it is the only place we have the freedom to choose our own way. The problem with both Kugelmass and Cecelia is that they are too weak to face up to this freedom and to accept responsibility for their own lives. They both look for an easy solution, thinking they can escape the responsibility of making their own meaningful lives. But to escape that responsibility, Allen shows, is to escape to an illusion, and that illusion, no matter how seductive, can never last very long.

Source: Uma Kukathas, Critical Essay on "The Kugelmass Episode," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

The Audio CD *Fierce Pajamas: Selections from an Anthology of Humor Writing from the New Yorker*, a recording of the collection edited by David Remnick and Henry Finder, includes a reading of "The Kugelmass Episode."

The Kugelmass Affair is Jonathan Karp's stage adaptation of Allen's story.

The web site http://www.woodyallen.com/ offers comprehensive information on Allen's life, movies, books, plays, and standup comedies. It also includes interviews with the author and links to other useful information.

Allen's film *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) uses a device similar to that found in "The Kugelmass Episode": a character from a movie steps off the screen, into the theater, and into the life of the moviegoer Cecilia.

Topics for Further Study

Research the terms *satire*, *farce*, *parody*, *irony*, *spoof*, and *send-up*. What are the differences between them? Where are these different elements found and how are they used in "The Kugelmass Episode?"

Write a short story that satirizes a situation of your choosing. Choose two or three characters that will be familiar to your readers, exaggerate their character traits, and put them into an absurd situation that emphasizes those traits.

One of the most famous discussions of the nature of reality is Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" in his philosophical treatise *The Republic*. Plato says that humans live in a state of ignorance and mistake the "false" images they see around them for the true reality of the world. Read the "Allegory" and write a short essay on how the "false images" Plato talks about can be construed as the images seen in art. Do you see any parallels between these "false images" and the images projected on a movie screen? Explain those differences.

Do a research project on the history of American Jewish humor and humorists, from Vaudeville through radio, television, stage, and screen. How have Jewish comics and comedians contributed to the understanding and appreciation of the American Jewish experience? In what unique ways do you think they have contributed to the understanding of the human condition?

Compare and Contrast

1970s: There are approximately 5.5 million Jews living in the United States, of which about 1.2 million live in New York City. Jews make up approximately 15 percent of the population of New York City.

Today: There are approximately 6 million Jews living in the United States, of which just under 1 million live in New York City. Jews make up 12 percent of the population of New York City.

1970s: While Jews account for less than 2 percent of the United States' population, approximately 80 percent of the country's comedians are Jewish. Most of them are from New York City.

Today: Jews make up 2.5 percent of the United States' population, while 70 percent of the country's comedians are of Jewish descent. Most of them are from New York City.

1970s: Lorne Michaels's television comedy program *Saturday Night Live* premieres. Nearly all the writers who work on the show are Jewish.

Today: *Saturday Night Live* continues its successful run. Only one of the writers on the show is Jewish.

What Do I Read Next?

Madame Bovary (1857), by Gustave Flaubert, the novel in which Kugelmass gets projected, is the story of a young wife of a country doctor who yearns for excitement in her boring rural existence and engages in several illicit affairs.

Philip Roth's comic novel *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), also mentioned in the story, is a continuous monologue as narrated by its eponymous speaker, Alexander Portnoy, to his psychoanalyst about his sexual frustrations and escapades. The novel is also a humorous exploration of the Jewish American experience.

The Big Book of Jewish Humor (1981), edited by William Novack, is a collection of Jewish and Jewish-inspired humor from contributors such as Woody Allen, Max Apple, Gary Epstein, Lenny Bruce, Joseph Heller, David Levine, Sam Levenson, G. B. Trudeau, Judith Viorst, S. Gross, Jules Feiffer, and others.

Allen's three collections of humorous prose are brought together in *The Complete Prose of Woody Allen* (1991).

Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair: A Novel* (2002) is a humorous mystery novel about a criminal who steals characters from English literary works and holds them for ransom.

"The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" (1939), American humorist James Thurber's best-known story, is about a middle-aged, middle-class man who escapes from the routine drudgery of his suburban life into fantasies of heroic conquest.

Further Study

Abramovitch, Ilana, and Sean Galvin, eds., *Jews of Brooklyn*, University Press of New England, 2001.

This is a kaleidoscopic look at the history, culture, and community of Brooklyn's Jews, from the first documented settlement of Jews in the borough in the 1830s to the present day Jewish presence.

Bakalar, Nick, and Stephen Kock, eds., *American Satire: An Anthology of Writings from Colonial Times to the Present*, Plume Books, 1997.

This collection brings together some of the best American satirical prose and poetry, from the 1800s to the late twentieth century.

Epstein, Lawrence, *The Haunted Smile: The Story of Jewish Comedians in America*, Public Affairs, 2002.

This history of how Jewish comedians changed the face of American entertainment, from vaudeville to the movies to television, includes anecdotes, personal stories, samples from comedians' stand-up material, immigrant sociology, and details tying the Yiddish language to Jewish American humor.

Lax, Eric, *Woody Allen: A Biography*, Da Capo Press, 2000.

Allen's friend Lax offers a lighthearted account that includes the filmmaker's own opinions about this life and art. This is a revised edition of a biography first published in 1991, with updates on Allen's break-up with Mia Farrow and the personal and professional changes that followed.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Short Stories for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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