The Lady, or the Tiger? Study Guide

The Lady, or the Tiger? by Frank R. Stockton

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

When "The Lady, or the Tiger?" was first published in the popular magazine *Century* in 1882, it was a resounding success. Although Frank R. Stockton had already published a novel and some other stories and would continue to publish for many years, "The Lady, or the Tiger?"' remained his most famous story. Originally, he wrote the story, which he called "In the King's Arena," to provoke discussion at a literary party. The story sparked heated discussion, so Stockton expanded it and submitted it to *Century* magazine, where it was accepted and retitled by the editor.

"The Lady, or the Tiger?"' is a fantasy story that resembles a fairy tale. However, it is considered more whimsical and open-ended than most fairy tales. It involves a jealous princess, a vindictive king, and an ardent suitor-long the staple elements of fairy tales. In discussing romantic relationships, passion, self-interest, and reason, Stockton puts the princess at the center of a terrible conflict: whether she will send her lover to his death or let him live and marry another woman. Her decision is left unresolved at the story's conclusion. The story's power and popularity was gained by its abrupt ending, which leaves the reader to ponder the princess's decision, and her lover's fate.

Author Biography

Stockton was one of the most famous American writers of the 1880s and 1890s. Known for his fantastic settings, realistic characters, and sly humor, he has been compared to Mark Twain, Joel Chandler Harris, Edward Eggleston, and Bret Harte as an American humorist. Critically admired in his day, Stockton had many fans who were writers themselves, including Twain, Edmond Gosse, and Robert Louis Stevenson. In the twentieth century, Maurice Sendak, Edmund Wilson, and Gertrude Stein have admired and been influenced by his work.

Stockton was born into a large family in Philadelphia in 1834. After he finished high school, he was apprenticed to a wood-engraver, a position arranged for him by his father. Stockton soon turned to writing, and his first short story was published in 1855. In 1864 he started editing and writing for a newspaper, the Philadelphia *Press and Post,* where he remained for twenty years. Stockton enjoyed writing children's fantasy stories and saw his own first stories in that genre published in magazines during the 1860s. In 1873 he began editing a periodical for children, *St. Nicholas Magazine.* He also published stones, articles, and poetry in the magazine under his own name and under pseudonyms.

Stockton's eyesight and health began to fail in 1878. To accommodate this decline he took a part-time job at *Scribner's Magazine,* but eventually he was compelled to give up even limited editorial work completely. Because lus doctors told him not to avoid reading or writing, he dictated his stories to his family from then on.

Stockton's story "The Lady, or the Tiger?" appeared in the July, 1882, issue of the *Century* magazine. It had originally been written for a literary group to which he belonged, and the group's members discussed it so much that he decided to publish it. "The Lady, or the Tiger?" proved widely popular, *in* part because of the open-ended question around which the story is based. Initially, however, Stockton was to some extent oblivious to the story's success, because he and his wife went traveling in Europe in the autumn of 1882 and did not return until 1884. Upon his return he discovered that, in fact, he had succeeded almost too well with this story; magazine publishers now wanted nothing from him unless It was just as good as "The Lady, or the Tiger?" For years he had trouble finding publishers for his new works.

Despite ongoing health problems and the demands of publishers, Stockton continued to write and publish prolifically. By the end of his life he had published six collections of short stories, eight novels, and two collections of fairy tales. He died in 1902 in Washington D.C.

Plot Summary

"The Lady, or the Tiger?" begins with a description of a "semi-barbaric" king who rules his kingdom with a heavy hand. For punishing criminals, he has built an arena featuring two doors. The criminal must choose his own fate by selecting one of the two closed doors. Behind one door is a hungry tiger that will eat the prisoner alive. Behind the other door is a beautiful lady, hand-picked by the king, who will be married to the accused on the spot. The people of the kingdom like this system of justice, because the uncertainty of the situation is very entertaining.

The king has a beautiful daughter whom he adores. She secretly loves a young man who is a commoner. When the king discovers her illicit affair, he throws the young man in jail to await his judgment. For a commoner to love the king' s daughter is a crime, so the king searches for the most ferocious tiger and the most attractive lady (but not the princess, of course) for the young man's trial in the arena.

The day of the courtier's "trial" comes, and the young man walks into the arena, his eyes fixed on the princess. He looks to her for guidance, because he suspects that she has learned which door conceals the lady, and which the tiger. Indeed, the princess does know the identity of the young lady behind the door. She has been Jealous of her for some time, thinking that she has sought to steal her lover from her. The princess signals for him to choose the right-hand door. Without hesitation, he moves to open the right-hand door.

Stockton does not reveal what waits behind that door; he leaves readers to come to their own answer. As the narrator of the story explains, the answer involves a study of the human heart which leads us through devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

This story commences with the description of a king who lived in "very olden times." He is described as being "semi-barbaric" despite the slight influence of more progressive Latin neighbors. The barbaric side of him is described as being large and exuberant, and not reined in. Due to his unfettered authority and totalitarianism, his fancies become fact. He needed to consult only with himself, and when he and himself agreed, the thing was done. He had a calm, pleasant nature both when things went his way and when they did not. He was even calmer and more pleasant when things did not go his way, as he derived great pleasure from bending things to how he felt that they should be.

The physical embodiment of the king's will was a public arena. The purpose of this arena was poetic justice incarnate---where people earned their just punishment or reward by an "impartial and incorruptible chance." When a subject was accused of a crime that caught the king's interest, he gave public notice that the person's fate would be determined in this arena.

The king and his subjects would gather in the arena, where his "barbaric idealism" would be acted out. The accused person would stand in the arena in front of two doors, which were side by side. The accused person would choose which door he would open, and he was not given any direction by anyone. Behind one door was a tiger, which would tear him to bits, as punishment for his guilt. If this occurred, solemn iron bells would ring, mourners wailed, and the audience would vacate the arena with great sadness.

If the accused opened the other door, however, behind it was a beautiful lady. This lady, who was of a similar age and station as the accused, had been hand-selected by the king. The accused was thus exonerated and his reward for his innocence was the immediate marriage to this woman. It was irrelevant whether he had a wife or if his heart already belonged to someone else. The king paid no mind to such "subordinate arrangements" that would otherwise interfere with his "great scheme of retribution and reward." A priest, band and dancing maidens would emerge, and the wedding was held immediately. Then happy bells would be rung, and the audience shouted its approval. The exonerated subject and his new wife then went home, rose petals strewn in their path.

The appeal was supposedly based on the "perfect fairness," as the accused had no way of knowing which door the tiger would emerge from. Interest was piqued by this uncertainty, and it was asked, "Did not the accused have the whole matter in his own hands?"

The king had a daughter with a personality and energy similar to his own. He loved her above all else. Her lover was more handsome and braver than any other man in the

kingdom was, but he came from inferior blood and station. When the king learned of their affair, the lover was thrown in prison and scheduled for trial in the arena. Such a scandal had never occurred in the kingdom before. It was an irrefutable fact that the lover had been involved with the king's daughter. The king took joy in knowing that the lover would be disposed of either way, and took pleasure in finding out whether the young man "had done wrong in allowing himself to love the princess."

On the day of the event, it was crowded with masses coming from everywhere, and many were denied entrance and forced to congregate by the outside walls. The signal was given and the lover emerged into the arena. The audience was awed by his handsome appearance and thought that it was horrible that he had to be there. He looked up at the princess, who sat to the right of her father. The princess had used her power, character and influence to discover the secret of the doors, which no person had done before. She knew not only which door the lady was behind, but also who the lady was. The princess hated this woman, who had admired her lover and spoken to him on several occasions.

The lover looked at the princess, and their eyes met. He knew instantly that she knew which door held the tiger and which held the lady, because he knew her personality so well. With his glance, he silently asked her, "which?" She raised her right arm; no one else saw because all were watching the lover. Without the slightest hesitation, he went to the right door and opened it.

The narrator does not tell the reader what lay behind the right door. Instead, the narrator states that the more one reflects on this question, the more difficult it is to understand the human heart. The narrator tells the reader that one should not dwell on what he/she would do, but rather to put themselves in the head of the princess. The narrator describes the princess as hot-blooded and "semi-barbaric," "her soul at a white heat beneath the combine fires of despair and jealousy." While she was horrified at the idea of her lover being torn to bits in her thoughts, she was also driven to distraction at the thought of seeing his joyous face upon watching the rival lady emerge, his life renewed, the glad shouts of the crowd, and the ringing of the bells. The narrator stated that she would ask herself whether it would be better for him to die now and wait for her in the afterlife. The narrator indicates that the princess had made her decision after days of anguished deliberation. On the day of reckoning, she was resolute and moved her hand without hesitation.

The narrator asserts that the question to be pondered is one not likely to be considered. The narrator states that it is not he to "presume" that he is the "one person able to answer it." Thus, the story is ended with an open question.

Analysis

Frank Stockton was an American writer who lived from 1834-1902. This short story is his most famous work. Much of his writing was fairy tales, geared towards children. He

was the editor of *St. Nicholas*, the first children's magazine that printed stories that were purely entertainment and did not include a moral bent to them.

This story, despite its age, has nonetheless stood the test of time due to the compelling question it poses regarding human nature and the puzzle left for the reader at the end. It has been discussed at dinner parties and in literature classes for years. Like fairy tales (and indeed this story has a fairy tale/fable like feel to it), this story does not feel at all dated.

Stockton's language is simplistic yet nonetheless draws an interesting character study and paints a picture. Interestingly, he paints passion as being barbaric, something that is dangerous if not reined in. The king is allowed to rule by passion, with somewhat dire effects on his subjects as a result. Likewise, it is the princess and her lover's passion that get them into trouble. The princess' passion as well, depending on which way she directs it at the conclusion of the story, could result in her lover suffering a horrible death.

Another interesting theme in this story is that of the existence of fate. Indeed, the "justice" of the arena hinges on fate meting out a just award or punishment. Is there a higher being up above directing the accused's choice?

If one believes in fate then, the princess was arguably taking on something much larger than herself by discovering the secret of the doors. Is her jealousy or love for the accused more compelling? The reader is forced to put him/herself in the head of a princess that they have learned very little about. She is a caricature, rather than a full-blown character. Discussions then, are more revolving around love pitted against jealousy in theory. The princess is an embodiment to give context for such conversations. Would not the cynic be certain that the princess chose the tiger, while the optimistic hope that the princess' passion guides her in the direction of love?

Also significant is the fact that the accused supposed knows the princess intimately then, enough so that he knew she would discover the secret of the doors. Would he not then, have some insights as to which door she would want him to go through? Armed with such knowledge, wouldn't the accused not be as utterly at the mercy of the princess at it appears upon first glance? Indeed, the brilliance of this story is despite its apparent simplicity, upon further reflection, it encompasses a multitude of layers.

The idea of a higher being watching over is also touched upon in the princess' ruminations as to whether her lover would not be better off being sent to the afterlife now, to await her later arrival. The fact that she would be the one sending him and the concept of sin escapes her. Likewise, the king similarly intercepts fate by choosing the lady that the exonerated will marry. No discussion of fate is complete without mention of the role that free will plays in it. Both the king and the princess play the role of a higher being by attempting to substitute their will for that of others.

This story has been called a psychological enigma and a timeless character study. Finally, it is a study of selflessness versus ego. One thing is certain---it will be fodder for critical discussion for years to come.

Characters

Courtier

The courtier is a young man whose love affair with the princess results in his imprisonment and trial. Though of lower birth than the princess, he is "handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom." He trusts absolutely in his power to charm the princess, and realizing that she knows what is behind each door, he opens the one she indicates "without the slightest hesitation."

King

The king is a "semi-barbaric" man with an implacable will. As pan of the system of justice he has established in his land, the king sets up a system of choice for criminals. They must enter an arena and pick a door; the door may lead to their freedom or to a terrible death.

Furious when he discovers his daughter's affair with a courtier, the king condemns the young man to the arena, taking great care to select the fiercest tiger to place behind one door and the most respectable marriage candidate from among the ladies of the court behind the other.

Lady

The lady is a young courtier, picked by the king to be the young man's bride, should he open the correct door. She is beautiful. charming, and known to both the courtier and the princess. The princess perceives the lady as a rival for the young man's love, and thus she is an object of the princess's hatred and jealousy.

Lover

See Courtier

Princess

The princess loves a young courtier "with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong." The couple is very happy together until the princess's father, the king, discovers the affair and imprisons the courtier. His punishment is to determine his own fate by selecting one of two doors in an arena. One leads to a hungry tiger, the other to a respectable young lady to whom he will be immediately wed should he open that door. The princess learns which door leads to which fate, and thus exercises godlike control over the courtier's fate.

The tension in the story centers around the choice made by "that hot-blooded, semi-barbaric princess, her soul at a white heat beneath the com bined fires of despair and jealousy." She knows that, whichever door her lover opens, he will never be hers again. She believes that the woman picked by the king to be the courtier's wife (if he chooses that door) has flirted with the courtier in the past. She also knows that the hungry tiger will rip him apart if he chooses the other door. After days of anguish, the princess decides which door to indicate. It is left to the reader to ponder which fate she has chosen for her lover.

Themes

Choices and Consequences

The "semi-barbaric" king has set up the arena in such a way that the prisoner's choice will determine his fate, regardless of his guilt or innocence. Either he will be eaten by a hungry tiger or he will instantly marry a beautiful girl. This element of choice absolves the king from any responsibility in the situation and intrigues the audience, who eagerly anticipate the prisoner's fate. Not knowing whether they will witness a bloody spectacle or a wedding puts them in a state of suspense. Because the young man is allowed to make his own choice, all others are absolved of guilt. Whether or not his choice and its consequence are just never occurs to them.

The king himself is described as one who likes "to make the crooked straight, and crush down uneven places." In the case of the young man, the king exercises an arbitrary judgement. Because the young man has chosen to fall in love With the princess, he must now face the consequence, which is to make another choice-one that means either life or death.

The princess has made a major choice as well: whether to direct her now-unattainable young man to the tiger who will destroy him or to the lady she hates. She has agonized about her decision and imagined the consequences of both choices in vivid detail. Stockton leaves it to the reader to ponder which choice she makes for the young man, who trusts the princess completely.

Betrayal

The princess *may* betray the man in the arena because she is jealous of the young woman behind the door. Not only does she suspect that her lover may be interested in this attractive female courtier, but she is also deeply troubled by the certainty that their marriage will be compulsory if he chooses the "right" door. Whether she will be loyal to her lover or betray him and send him to his death is the main conflict of the story, and one that is not resolved.

Beauty

In typical fairy-tale terms, the young man is described as "of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens. . . he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom." The young woman chosen by the king as his potential bride is also" one of the fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court," someone the princess (who is not described physically) thinks he has noticed before. In mentioning the characters' physical characteristics, Stockton calls to mind familiar tales of beautiful princesses and handsome princes, evoking the fairy-tale tradition.

Love and Passion

Until the king discovers their affair, the young man and the princess love each other and are very happy-or so it seems. In reality, the princess is deeply Jealous of a young female courtier she perceives as being attracted to the young man. This perception arouses her passionate hatred for the young woman. In contrast, the young man places his fate in the princess's hands by unquestionably trusting her indication to choose the right-hand door. His love for her is unflinching, even though she may be sending him to his death. The narrator also relates that the king loves his daughter very much. But can this declaration be trusted? If the king truly loves his daughter, would he impose such a sentence on the man she loves?

Style

Point of View

The story is told in third-person omniscient point of view. This means that the narrator knows the thoughts and actions of all the characters. The narrator sets the story in fairy-tale mode- "In the very olden time"-and then addresses the reader directly, in the first-person mode, after the young man makes his choice. The narrator comments on the story, elaborating on the princess's role, and challenging the reader to consider wisely, because "it is not for me to presume to set myself up as the one person able to answer [the question of her decision]. And so I leave it with all of you." The purpose of this address is to place the responsibility for analyzing the story and answering the question posed in the story's title squarely upon the reader's shoulders.

Setting

The story is set in an imaginary time and place, in a kingdom whose king is "semi-barbaric." His autocratic style is described in detail, and the narrator comments at length on his splendid arena. It has tiers upon tiers, galleries, and doors at and below ground level, with curtains round them so that no hint of what is behind them is revealed. If the tiger eats the prisoner, mourners await, and if the lady marries the prisoner, priests are ready to perform the marriage ceremony. The setting bears many similarities to the Coliseum in Rome, which was the scene of elaborate and bloody gladiatorial games for centuries.

Structure

Written with many conventions of a fairy tale, "The Lady, or the Tiger?" is divided into three parts. The first part presents the background of the princess and the courtier's particular dilemma, describing the king's justice system and acclimating the reader to this odd kingdom. The second part of the story concerns the love affair, the king' s discovery of it, and the young man's sentencing to trial in the arena. In the third part, the narrator focuses on the princess's decision-making process and describes the moment of crisis in the arena, when the reader must decide what is behind the fateful right-hand door.

The obvious climax of the story should come after the lover opens the door indicated by the princess. But Stockton plays with the reader's expectations by refusing to tell what is behind that door. He directly challenges readers to make up their own minds based on their knowledge of the princess. In doing so, the story never reaches its climax and contains no resolution. By subverting the traditional story structure With this open ending, Stockton places responsibility for the story's interpretation completely with the reader.

Fairy Tale

In order to highlight their timeless messages, fairy tales usually take place in an indeterminate time and place. Such is the case with "The Lady, or the Tiger?," which takes place in a kingdom, though no country or year is specified Fairy tales also rely on stock characters, many of which are represented in Stockton's story, including the vengeful king, the beautiful princess, and the handsome suitor. A handsome but unworthy man falling in love with a vengeful king's daughter is a typical fairy-tale situation, and how their love will transcend the king's wrath is a typical fairy-tale conflict Unlike a traditional fairy tale, though, the story does not end "happily ever after," and it is the shock of its abrupt ending that jars readers who were expecting a more traditional outcome.

Historical Context

American Humorists in the Nineteenth Century

Popular American literature in the decades preceding the twentieth century included plenty of adventure novels, like those of Robert Louis Stevenson, and humorous works, like the novels of Mark Twain, which often parodied the emerging American culture. Another popular form was the simple short story with a trick ending, like O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi," In which a young couple's good intentions result in a debacle of Christmas gift-giving. Stockton was considered a humorist, and hIs stones often combined elements of humor with the trick ending. His children's collection, *Tin-a-ling,* was widely regarded to have brought children's literature into a new era, with his reliance on plots that did not have happy endings even though they were styled after Grimm's fairy tales and bore some similarity with Lewis Carroll's writings.

In his time, Stockton was hailed as the equal of Mark Twain; in 1899 he came in fifth in a poll listing the best living Amencan writers. He used humor for illustrative purposes: "Many of his stories virtually cry out in stifled screams against the cozy suffocation of civilized conduct," said Henry Golemba in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography.*

In the 1860s, Stockton's first published works appeared in *Punchinello, Hearth and Home,* and *Puck,* all humor magazines that had a wide following In an era before other forms of mass media became available. Writers often got their start in these magazines, or in newspapers, as Mark Twain did as a reporter. Magazines presented new stories every week or every month, and they often serialized novels, printing a chapter each issue to get readers hooked on the magazine. Such publications were important in a time before the establishment of public libraries or the proliferation of bookstores.

The Pre-Raphaelites Influence Literature

The Pre-Raphaelites were a group of British artists, led by Gabriel Dante Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, who gained influence during the 1850s. Their paintings were known for their fairy tale-like settings that were often influenced by literature-especially poetry-and music. The Pre-Raphaelites' name was intended to display their preference for the Idealized art reminiscent of the era before Raphael, an Italian master of the High Renaissance. Their paintings often depicted beautiful women in sweeping gowns, maidens courted by valiant knights, and damsels surrounded by overgrown English gardens. This artistic movement influenced writers as well. In literature, writers who were familiar with the Pre-Raphaelites gained popularity through works that had strong elements of fantasy to it, like Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland,* and J.IN. Barrie's *Peter Pan.*

Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?"_ can be seen as being a part of the Pre-Raphaelite tradition, with its fairy-tale overtones of a kingdom, a princess, and a valiant suitor.

Stockton's stories for children also fit this pattern. Unlike the Pre-Raphaelite's paintings, however, the fantasy literature of the day often included elements of absurdity or irony, as any reader of Lewis Carroll knows. Golemba summarized one of Stockton's children's stories: "after the heroine is beheaded inadvertently by the hero, her head is magically reattached to her body-but backwards." Such irreverence was typical of American humorists, whose displeasure of the modern, mechanized world was to resort to absurdity rather than evoke a long bygone era of art and literature, as was the practice of the Pre-Raphaelites.

As the twentieth-century dawned, and as Stockton feared, his work became a relic of a fast disappearing age new tensions that eventually erupted into World War I brought about new styles of literature-especially modernism-and new styles of art, such as cubism and expressions. The comical, slightly detached view of the world as exercised by Stockton, Twain, and other American humanists came to be seen as quaint and not relevant enough to people dealing with the tragedies of modern life.

Critical Overview

Shortly after Stockton published "The Lady, or the Tiger?," he and his wife left on an extended European vacation. Thus, he missed much of the initial debate that swirled around his story. Martin Griffin In his 1939 biography of Stockton said that "notices of the strange dilemma proposed by the story began to appear in newspapers and critical reviews." The poet Robert Browning believed the man chose the door with the tiger, and Griffin suggested that Stockton weighted the story towards that conclusion. Many other readers, famous and not-so famous, debated the ending in various public and literary forums. The controversy was so vibrant that when Stockton returned to the United States he was deluged with letters. In response to the story's popularity, he wrote a similar story with a trick ending called "The Discourager of Hesitancy." In another story, "His Wife's Deceased Sister," Stockton tells the story of a writer who writes a wildly popular story and is never able to achieve that level of success again.

Critic Henry Vedder wrote in his 1895 book, *American Fiction To-Day,* about how the story became a social fad and commended Stockton on his commercial shrewdness and his skill as a writer of short fiction. As tastes changed in the twentieth century and modermsm exerted its hold over literature, stories like Stockton's became antiquated and were considered relics of an earlier, less relevant time. Stockton had worried about this all along, yet the story itself has remained popular as an example of literature from an earlier era.

Fred Lewis Pattee in his 1923 book, *The Development of the American Short Story: An Historical Survey,* discussed Stockton's mastery of the marvelous, the way he posed his humor in brief, well-written stories that are not overburdened with explanations, and compared him to Lewis Carroll and Mark Twain. In 1925 Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch mentioned that although people had read "The Lady, or the Tiger?," few considered the story appropriate for serious criticism. As one of the first British critics to deal with Stockton, Pattee compared him to Daniel Defoe and wrote about his prominence as a writer of short fiction that is wholly American.

Proving the story's durability, Henry Golemba wrote about Stockton for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* in 1981, and suggested that "The Lady, or the Tiger?" was still worthy of extensive critical analysis. He analyzed Stockton's use of cosmic metaphors in the story: the hero represented an everyman figure and the arena was a symbol of life itself. This interpretation lends itself to more serious themes, an observation that led to Golemba's com ment that Stockton's "reputation as a widely popular author in the late nineteenth century has eclipsed the fact that he was also a serious writer, Just as Ins fame as a humorist has made people blind to his serious statements."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Gardiner-Scott is an associate professor of English at Mount Ida College in Newton, Massachusetts. Her areas of special academic Interest include fantasy and science fiction, the British novel, gothic and medieval literature, and women's fiction. In the following essay, she provides a general introduction to "The Lady, or the Tiger?"

When critics today think of American humorists of the nineteenth century, Mark Twain readily comes to mind. But one of his prolific contemporaries was Frank R. Stockton, a writer of fairy tales, children's books, science fictlon, and whimsIcal stories, such as the one which is Ins most famous, "The Lady, or the Tiger?" In an age in which realism, romantlcism, naturalism, and other literary styles were emerging in Western literature, he refused to be categorized in any particular literary group, leadmg to Ins reputation as a maverick writer. He consideredhimselfprimarily a humor writer, but believed, as he confided to a friend, that "the readers of today do not care for them [humorous stories]; the public taste has altered; humor is no longer fashionable." Although Stockton's style may be dated (havmg receIved much more praise from late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century critlcs than from later critics), "The Lady, or the Tiger?" remains a work with bite and wit, and the conundrum of the ending remains as fresh as ever.

In 1895 Henry C. Vedder wrote that Stockton's stories "violate certam conventions of literary art. They seldom have a plot; they frequently have no dialogue, consisting wholly or mainly of narrative or monologue, there is not much description, and no apparent attempt at effect." "The Lady, or the Tiger?" indeed has a slight plot, relatively little descnption, and is told through an ommscient third person narrator, who, in the marmer of early nineteenth-century fiction, addresses the audience directly at the end. Vedder fails to note that the human interest of Stockton's stories is strong, particularly in "The Lady, or the Tiger?" *because* of the epilogue, which directly engages the reader. Biographer Martin 1. J. Griffin has argued, "It is this. . . which raises the story above the level of the 'trick,' and invests it with the dignity of an exposition of human strength and human frailty. . . [in which] the conflicting fundamental motives of love and hate and self-preservation are given full play." The central question-what did the princess choose? was debated fiercely in Stockton's lifetime among thousands of readers, making the author extremely popular, so much so that editors refused to accept any other short fiction from him unless it came up to the same standards as "The Lady, or the Tiger?"

When we turn to the story itself, we may find the tone difficult and the language unfamiliar. It is written in a marmered style, and it seems from the very begimring to expect from the reader a certain knowledge of the Romantic genre, of the human condition, and of political satire. The kingdom setting could be anywhere and nowhere, and It is up to readers to make of this what they will. The king is depicted as whimsically godlike, not only through the biblical language he uses; for, as Henry Golemba has noted, the king is "a Chnstian god whose nature is 'bland and gemal'." This is an interesting interpretatlon in light of the fact that the king constructs an arena in which free choice detentions the young man's fate under certain preset conditions, a life-or death choice which brings to mind the ongoing debate concerning divine predestination

versus so-called free will. The young man carmot evade being put into the arena, and he knows the consequences of either choice, but he has to make the choice itself and then abide by the consequences.

If this interpretation is valid, then Stockton is indeed bankmg on a certam amount of religious sophistication on the part of the reader, and the implications of the story become more Jokingly cosmic. What is Stockton saying about human nature?Is he callmg It "semi-barbaric" in its responses to a transcendent order? Does he believe that we humans have moved very far at all from the animal kmgdom, "red in tooth and claw"? After all, the king expects that "by exhibitions of manly and beastly valor, the minds of his subjects were refined and cultured." Here Stockton seems to be suggesting-and these suggestive connotations are part of the power of the story-that we as humans have, in fact, not advanced far beyond barbarism.

Stockton presents his characters in shorthand descriptions. The young man falls within the general parameters of the handsome romantic hero who loves above his station in life, "a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens." On the other hand, the princess is a jealous, judgmental, mini-god figure who is described in emotional rather than physical terms, a position reinforced by the attitude of supplication the young man assumes as he looks to her for guidance as to which door to open: "He understood her nature, and his soul was assured that she would never rest until she had made plain to herself this thing, hidden to all other lookers-on, even to the lang. The only hope for the youth in which there was any element of certainty was based upon the success of the princess in discovering this mystery." For It is through her power and her money that she has found out even more than the king himself knows which door hides the lady, and which the tiger.

The beautiful young girl is not described in detail. Only the descriptions of the potential consequences have much detail-and the princess's imagination of the consequences:

"How often, in her waking hours and in her dreams, had she started in wild horror, and covered her face With her hands as she thought of her lover opening the door on the other side of which waited the cruel fangs of the tiger!

But how much oftener had she seen him at the other door! How in her grievous reveries had she gnashed her teeth, and tom her hair, when she saw his start of rapturous delight as he opened the door of the lady' How her soul had burned in agony when she had seen him rush to meet that woman, with her flushing cheek and sparkling eye of triumph, when she had seen him lead her forth, his whole frame kindled With the joy of recovered life, when she had heard the glad shouts from the multitude, and the wild ringing of the happy bells; when she had seen the priest, With his joyous followers, advance to the couple, and make them man and wife before her very eyes; and when she had seen them walk away together upon their path of flowers, followed by the tremendous shouts of the hilarious multitude, in which her one despairing shriek was lost and drowned!"

Our narrator is reliable, and we trust his voice, but he puts us on our guard through his portrayal of he princess as a compromised heroine, a jealous object of adoration. The narrator makes much of her similarities to her father in her strong feelings and vivid imagination. Much is also made of her directing her lover to the right-hand door. The phrase "without the slightest hesitation" is repeated to describe the actions of both lovers at the moment of choice. But while It is not surprising that the earnest young man trusts the princess, It is surprising that the princess does not trust him equally, whatever her jealous feelings are for the lady behind the door. Her perceptions of the other young lady, and of his possible interest in her, color her entire decision making process, and, as Griffin points out, Stockton seems to be giving us an underlying pointer as to the tiger-ward direction her thoughts are taking.

An interesting sidelight on this point is that the story was originally titled "In the King's Arena." Stockton allowed an editor to change the title to "The Lady, or the Tiger?" This shifted the focus from the king, controller of the man's fate, to the princess, the story's romantic interest. In this editorial decision, as Golemba has commented, Stockton "was treated as whimsically as he trapped his blameless, foolish, anonymous hero."

As readers, then, we are placed in the position of the audience, unsure whether to grieve or rejoice until the door opens and the consequences of the choice are clear. The fact that Stockton does not tell us outright what the princess chooses for her lover has for years "stung its reader and then injected an irritating drop that lingered," as Fred Lewis Pattee put it. That Stockton put the burden of interpretation on us, inviting us into the princess's thought processes, "the study of the human heart which leads us through devious mazes of passion," makes us examine our relationship to reading and interpretation and our analysis of what It means to be human. But this seems too heavy an interpretation for the story to bear. Yet, the interpretation is suggested, showing Stockton's power as an American humorist who can pack his slight story with meaning far beyond its seeming bounds.

Source: Tanya Gardiner-Scott, "Overview of 'The Lady, or the Tiger?'," in *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

Madsen Hardy has a doctorate in English literature. In the following essay, she discusses Stockton's satirical revision of the traditional fairytale form as a rebellion against the cultural dominance of European literature in the turn-of-the century United States.

One of the most useful questions that a student reader can ask is: "What kind of expectations do I have for this work?" When one starts to read, one cannot help but bring certain assumptions and expectations to the experience. Authors count on readers for this and often help them along, leading them to believe that their stories will follow a certain course and obey certain rules about how a story works. Upon picking up Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?," readers will probably have general expectations something along these lines: This will be a short story. It will introduce its characters, place them in a situation of conflict, describe how the conflict changes the characters, and come to a resolution. Immediately upon reading the first line of the story- "In the very olden times, there lived a semi -barbaric king" -readers will spontaneously refine that Initial expectation to one that is much more specific. Merely knowing that the story takes place in "the very olden times" and concerns a king will lead readers to expect that "The Lady, or the Tiger?" will be similar to a fairy tale, a kind of story that is familiar to most of us Since childhood. That is, this single line generates expectations that the story will have traditional fairy'-tale characters like just kings and demure princesses. The conflicted situations in which they are placed may involve magic or violence, and the outcome will bring complete resolution and impart a universal lesson or moral.

But wait a minute, right away something seems wrong. The king is "serm-barbaric" and his ideas, "though somewhat polished and sharpened by the progressiveness of distant Latin neighbors, were still large, florid, and untrammeled, as became the half of him which was barbaric." This language sounds different from that of a fairy tale. In tradi tional fairy tales, characters are not described in such a strange and complicated way. Fairy-tale kings are never "semi-barbaric," let alone "florid and untrammeled." They tend to be simple types and to directly represent abstract qualities, such as civilization, justice, and authority.

Thus, it is very important to follow up that first question with another one that is just as useful: How did the story fulfill *or change* my expectations as I read along? Sometimes, as in the case of a traditional fairy tale, a reader's expectations are completely fulfilled (the Same thing goes for conventional romantic comedies, horror films, and action movies). But sometimes, as in the case of "The Lady or the Tiger?" a reader's expectations are challenged when the author breaks the rules he or she seemed to have set up. While there is a certain kind of gratification that comes with having one's expectations fulfilled, rule-breaking narratives have their own pleasures. While traditional stories tend to offer conventional morals or views of society, stories that challenge literary conventions often also challenge conventional views. There is something daring and original about Stockton's story. One gets only a hint of this when reading the first lines, but by the "trick" ending, it is clear that Stockton is a literary rebel.

Authors may break with storytelling conventions to create a humorous effect and/or a satirical one. While Stockton was best known as a humorist, reading "The Lady, or the Tiger?" as a satire-an indirect attack on folly, vice, or corruption through irony and wit--offers the best avenue for exploring the cultural context of Stockton's "rebellion" against fairy-tale conventions. While it takes place "in the very olden time," the story reflects issues that were current and pressing in 1882. The United States had gained its political independence from Britain more than a century earlier, but Americans were still insecure about their *cultural* independence-their ability to create their own art in their own style. British writers of the period objected to Americans' use of the English language, claming that Americans took a civilized language and made it barbaric. Many American artists agreed, believing that Europe represented all that was finest in culture and arts, and trying in their own work to imitate European traditions. While at first Stockton appears to be imitating a traditional form, by the end it is clear that he is really interested in inventing something brand new.

In 1871, eleven years before "The Lady or the Tiger?"_ was published, Walt Whitman (an Ameri can poet who rebelled against traditional forms of poetry wrote a book of prose called *Democratic Vistas.* In it, Whitman calls American writers to action, asking them to leave European art behind and to invent new forms that reflect the best and most unique aspects of American democratic society. America has as yet morally and artistically originated nothing. She [America] seems singularly unaware that the models of persons, books, manners, etc, appropriate for former conditions and for European lands, are but exiles and exotics here.

Whitman is saying that imitating European artistic conventions-say, by writing stories about kings does not allow Americans to express their own unique ways of living and thinking. While in a European fairy tale a king fits in perfectly, in the context of the United States-which never had kings, being formed as a republic as opposed to a monarchy-a character like a king would be an "exile," and "exotic," or perhaps "semi-barbaric." In "The Lady, or the Tiger?" Stockton makes fun of the idea of trying to use European conventions to express American values and experiences. Answering Whitman's call to action, Stockton shows the absurdity of American Writers slavishly depending on European literary traditions.

Instead of just stating that a king has no place in American literature, or simply writing about some other kind of character, Stockton playfully shows what happens to a fairy-tale king when he is "exiled" to an American story:

When every member of his domestic and political systems moved smoothly in its appointed course, Ins nature was bland and genial, but whenever there was a little hitch, and some of Ins orbs got out of their orbits, he was blander and more genial still, for nothing pleased him so much as to make the crooked straight, and crush down uneven places

In European history and thus, fittingly, in European fairy tales, kings represent for their subjects the absolute power that establishes social order and holds them together as a people. Conventional fairytale kings act decisively in the face of trouble; they determine

ways to resolve conflict and bring about justice, even if that justice is sometimes harsh and violent. Stockton's king is instead "bland and genial," and, in the face of conflict, he becomes more bland and genial still. He completely lacks the authority and wisdom characteristic of fairy-tale kings and leaves judgment to the "decrees of an impartial and incorruptible chance," which bring about a 'justice' that is sometimes harsh and violent nevertheless-if one is so unlucky to choose the door behind which is a bloodthirsty tiger, instead of the one where a blushing bride awaits. This figure of supreme authority is shown as a man with little sense or strength. He is not a bad guy; he simply has too much power. Through this portrayal of a hapless king, Stockton expresses great doubt about the justice rendered through monarchy and, furthermore, shows that it is utterly out of keeping with the values of American culture.

As the story progresses, there is indeed a "little hitch" in the domestic and social system of our semi-barbaric king: his daughter falls in love with a "man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens." When her father punishes her suitor for his illicit love by presenting him with the choice between the two doors, the lovely young princess-who shared the king's tinge of barbarism-takes control of the judicial system, upsetting any remaining expectations a reader might have that "The Lady or the Tiger?" will follow the conventions of a fairy tale. She intervenes in her father's "decree of an impartial and incorruptible chance" and finds out the secret of the doors, which gives her the power to use a supposedly impartial system for her own personal ends. In a traditional tale, the king/father's authority is never interfered with and its ultimate justice renders a moral for the story that reinforces his authority. In Stockton's satirical revision, the king' s authority is unseated by his own daughter, anymore unconventional still-the question of what she chooses to do with her power is left unanswered. The princess gestures to her suitor to tell him what door to go through, and he strides to the door and opens It. Here the reader is left quite unexpectedly hanging, and the story ends without disclosing the hero's wonderful or terrible fate.

"The question of her decision is one not to be lightly considered," Stockton writes, suggesting that a moral is, in fact, crucial to the tale. But in providing no resolution, does he not leave his readers helpless to draw a lesson from the dramatic events? The authorial narrator then steps in to decline his control over the climactic resolution of his own story. "It is not for me to presume to set myself up as the one person able to answer it." Here Stockton (who-as author to story is like king to kingdom-would be expected to be a figure of absolute power) simply declines to assume authority. Why should one single person, the kingly author, decide how a story ends? The relinquishment of the author's power provides, perhaps, the moral that readers crave, if not the resolution, Why should readers not make up their own minds, based on their own experiences, beliefs, and knowledge? "And so I leave it all with you," Stockton writes, "Which came out of the door,-the lady, or the tiger?" In an individualist and democratic style, Stockton places the responsibility for this question squarely upon the shoulders of his readers, whose heated public discussions and debates about the answer made the story a brand new and distinctively American kind of literary phenomenon.

Source: Sarah Madsen Hardy, "Tradition or Rebellion?: 'The Lady, or the Tiger?' and American Culture," for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Griffin provides a plot synopsis of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" and an analysis of its central theme of choices and consequences.

The essence of the popularity of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" lay solely in the unanswered, perhaps unanswerable, human problem which Stockton propounded. In a semi-barbaric kingdom, in an unspecified olden time, a monarch of quixotic humor tries offenders against the royal dignity, or against the law, by chance. In a great arena, behind different doors through which no sound can travel, are placed a beautiful woman and a ferocious tiger. The offender is thrust alone into the arena, and permitted to choose which door he shall open. If, happily, the accused man chooses the door behind which the beautiful girl is concealed, then, amid pomp and flowery circumstance, he is promptly married to her, to the accompaniment of the cheers of the multitude. If, however, he opens the door behind which the tiger chafes, his execution is immediate, and the king's dignity is avenged.

In such an unhappy court a personable young member of the king's retinue was tried because he had had the impudence to fall in love with the king' s beautiful but Impulsive daughter. Since he was not of noble blood, there could be no question of marriage. But the pnncess loved the helpless young courtier, and by methods which are open only to princesses, she obtained the secret of the doors. The young lover, who was not as ignorant of the ways of maids as he appeared, mew that she would discover behind which door was the lady, and behind which door was the tiger. As he made the traditional salute to the king, who was seated in the royal box, the youth looked quickly to the princess for the signal he mew she would give. The princess motioned toward the right. Without hesitation, he turned, walked briskly across the arena, and opened the door on the right.

At this anxious moment the story ends. Stockton appends an epilogue which explains the dilemma which the princess had had to solve before she gave her signal. It is this epilogue which raises the story above the level of the "trick," and invests It with the dignity of an exposition of human strength and human frailty. It is in this epilogue that the conflicting fundamental motives of love and hate and self-preservation are given full play. The exposition is fair; the solution is left to the reader: The young lover opens the door on the right.

Now [Stockton says], the point of the story is this: Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady?

The more we reflect upon this question, the harder it is to answer. It involves a study of the human heart which leads us through devious mazes of passion, out of which it is difficult to find our way. Think of it, fair reader, not as if the decision of the question depended upon yourself, but upon that hot-blooded, semi-barbaric princess, her soul at a white heat beneath the combined fires of despair and Jealousy. She had lost him, but who should have him! .. .

The problem of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" as Stockton presented it, was so fundamentally human, so fine a representation of universal emotions and conflicting human desires that It was everywhere discussed. So many thousands of letters poured in to him demanding, beggmg the answer, that Stockton, who at first had stubbornly refused to give any answer, was forced to make a statement. His reply was no more satisfactory. He said, "If you decide which it was-the lady, or the tIger-you find out what kind of a person you are yourself." It is obvious that Stockton was wise in refusing to give his own solution to the problem, but, consciously or unconsciously, he seems to have given his solution-the tIger-in the story itself. In describing the princess, Stockton wntes [italics mine]:

This semi-barbaric king had a daughter as blooming as Ins most fiond fancies, and with a soul as *fervent and imperious* as his own.- Tins royal maiden was well satisfied With her lover, for he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in an this kingdom, and she *loved him with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong*

Stockton pictures an *Imperious, semi-barbaric* princess who is in love with a brave man, but who is *not* convinced that her love is fully returned. . . .

She had lost him, but who should have him?

The sentence seems to be the unconscious revelation of Stockton's own belief. The same notion in favor of the tiger was expressed by Robert Browning when the problem was presented to him. He replied:

According to your desire I read the story in question last evening, and have no hesitation in supposing that such a princess, under such circumstances would direct her lover to the tiger's door; mind, I emphasize *such* and *so* circumstanced a person.

It is, however, the sheer human interest of the problem that Stockton proposed which gives "The Lady, or the Tiger?" its valid claim as one of the world's great short stories.

Source: Martin I. J. Griffin, in *Frank R. Stockton: A Critical Biography,* University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939, PP 64--8.

Critical Essay #4

In the following excerpt, Vedder comments on Stockton's use of language and Wit in an analysis of the style of his short fiction.

American humor has now a world-wide repute, and is enjoyed if not appreciated by an international audience. The goddess of fame has been more lavish than discriminating in the distribution of her favors to American humorists. It is a single type of humor that has become known to foreign readers as distinctively American,-the type of which Artemus Ward and Mark Twain (in apart of his writings) are the best representatives. This humor is broad; it deals largely in exaggeration; it produces gales of merriment by a fortunate Jest; it lacks delicacy, constructive power, and literary form. Foreign critics, who are more distinguished for refined taste than for profound knowledge of things American, seldom speak with much respect of American humor. It may be well adapted, they concede, to tickle the ears of the groundlings, but it makes the judicious grieve. We who are to the manner born know the weak spot in this criticism. We know that America has produced another type of humor, and appreciate at its true value the courtly polish of Irving, the catholic and urbane manner of Lowell, the playful, half-bantering earnestness of Warner. To this school belongs the subject of this paper, and he alone would redeem our humorists from the charge of coarseness and want of literary charm. . . .

[In "The Lady or the Tiger?," the] artful way in which [Stockton] led his readers up to the crucial problem and then betrayed their confidence by refusing to solve It, cloaking this refusal under a pretext of inability to decide the question he had raised, was a stroke of humor that showed genius. It also showed commercial shrewdness, and had its reward. Curiosity was piqued, discussion was provoked, and debate on the merits of the question became quite a social "fad." When one thinks on what a slender basis literary fame is sometimes built, how fortuitous the gaining of it generally is, how frequently the public admires an author for that which is not best and most characteristic in his work, the stir that followed the publication of this story becomes more humorous than anything in the story itself Since that tune there has been not only a ready market, but an eager public, for whatever Mr. Stockton might write. He has not been tempted, however, to over-production. He has never shaken from the tree the unripe fruits of his imagination merely because they would sell, but has left them to grow and ripen and mellow.

As no reader will have failed to infer, Mr. Stockton is first of all a clever writer of short stories. Collections of his magazine stones have been made at various times since 1884: *The Lady or the Tiger?, The Christmas Wreck, The Bee Man of Om, Amos Kilbright, The Clocks of Rondaine,* and *The Watchmaker's Wife,--each* volume containing, besides the title story, several other tales. These volumes show Mr. Stockton's peculiar powers at their best, and they give him an unquestioned place in the front rank of American story-writers. It is true that these tales of his violate certain conventions of literary art. They seldom have a plot; they frequently have no dIalogue, consisting wholly or mainly of narrative or monologue; there is not much description, and no apparent attempt at effect. One would say that stories constructed on such a

plan could hardly fail to be tedious, however brief, since they lack so many of the things that other story-tellers rely upon for effects. Mr. Stockton's method is vindicated by its success, not by its *a priori* reasonableness. There is such a thing, no doubt, as "good form" in every performance that demands skill; but, after all, the main point is to do the thing. David's smooth stones from the brook seemed a very ineffective weapon with which to encounter a giant, and every military authority of the age would have pronounced his attempt hopeless; but Goliath found, to his cost, that the shepherd's sling was mightier than the warrior's sword and spear. The Western oarsmen who rowed by the light of nature, and nevertheless beat crews trained to row scientifically, explained that theirs was called the "git thar" stroke. Mr. Stockton's method of story-telling may be similarly defined; it succeeds with him, but in another's hands it would very likely be a failure.

It must not be Inferred that these stories lack literary merit The contrary is the fact, as a critical study of them discloses. . . . From one point of view Mr. Stockton may almost be said to have no style. There is nothing, one means, in the mere turn of his sentences, in his method of expression, that can be seized upon as characteristic, and laid away in memory as a sort of trademark by which the author's other work may be tested, judged, and identified. It is very plain, simple, flowing English, this style of Stockton's, the sort of writing that appears to the inexperienced the easiest thing in the world to do-until they have tried. The art that conceals art, until it can pass for nature itself,-that, we are continually told, is the highest type, and the secret of that Mr. Stockton has somehow caught.

These tales stamp their author as one of the most original of American writers. Though his style lacks mannerism or distinctive flavor, it is not so with the substance of his work. That has plenty of flavor, flavor of a kind so peculiar that his work could never by any accident be mistaken for that of any other writer. It might be not the easiest of tasks to tell whether an anonymous essay or story should be fathered upon Mr. Howells or Mr. Aldrich, but it requires no such nicety of literary taste to recognize a story of Mr. Stockton's. One who has sufficient accuracy of taste to distinguish between a slice of roast beef and a raw potato, so to speak, will know the savor of his work wherever it is met Other writers may be as original, in the strict sense of that term, but few, If any, are so individual, so unmistakably themselves and nobody else.

Source: Henry C. Vedder, "Francis Richard Stockton," in *American Writers of To-day,* Silver, Burdett, and Company, 1895, pp. *288-300*

Critical Essay #5

In the following excerpt, Howells examines the elements and style of Stockton's short stories, commenting particularly on Stockton's Wit and delineation of plot

Mr. Stockton's readers have a right to look a little askance at the title and general air of the two volumes, recently published, bearing his name. Is it intimated that this story-teller, having developed into a novelist, finds it a convenient time to bring together in a complete form all his short stories, and thus to take leave of the company? It is quite true that the short story is for most Writers a desirable trial flight before they essay the bolder excursion of the novel, and that many short stories are only imperfectly developed novels. It is also true that a prudent intellectual workman may well consider if he be studying a proper economy of his resources, when he uses a dozen different *motifs* in as many stories, instead of making one serve for a single story in a dozen chapters. But, after all, the short story *par excellence* has its own virtue, and is not itself an expanded anecdote any more than It is an arrested novel; and where a Writer like Mr. Stockton has shown that his genius has its capital exhibition in the short story, his readers justly take alarm when he makes sign of abandoning it for a form of literature which, though possessed of more circumstance and traditional dignity, is not intrinsically more honorable Or, rather, if we are comparing two cognate forms, It is correct to say that while larger powers may go into one than into the other, a unique excellence in the minor form justifies a claim to be a genuine artist, and comparisons in that respect are futile; the sphericity of a bubble does not quarrel With the sphericity of a dewdrop.

Mr. Stockton, more, perhaps, than any recent writer, has helped to define the peculiar virtues of the short story. He has shown how possible it is to use surprise as an effective element, and to make the turn of a story rather than the crisis of a plot account for everything. In a well-constructed novel characters move forward to determination, and, whatever intricacy of movement there may be, it is the conclusion which Justifies the elaboration. We are constantly criticizing, either openly or unconsciously, a theory of novel-writing which makes any section of human life to constitute a proper field for a finished work; however many sequels may be linked on, we instinctively demand that a novel shall contain within itself a definite conclusion of the matter presented to view. But we do not exact this in a short story; we concede that space for development of character is wanting; we accept characters made to hand, and ask only that the occasion of the story shall be adequate . . . It may be said in general that Mr. Stockton does not often rely upon a sudden reversal at the end of a story, to capture the reader. . . , but gives him a whimsy or caprice to enjoy, while he works out the details in a succession of amusing turns. . . .

There is . . . in his stories a delicious mockery of current realistic fiction. He has an immense advantage over his brother realists. They are obliged to conform themselves to the reality which other people think they see, and they are constantly in danger of making some fatal blunder; making the sun, we will say, strike a looking-glass hung upon a wall in a house so topographically indicated as to be easily identified by the neighbors, who concur in testifying that the sun by no possibility could touch the glass,

day or night. Mr. Stockton, we repeat, has an immense advantage over other realists. His people are just as much alive as theirs, and they are all just as common-place; they talk just as slouchy English, and they are equally free from any romantic nonsense; but they are living in a world of Mr. Stockton's invention, which is provided with a few slight improvements, and they avail themselves of these with an unconcern which must fill with anguish those realistic novelists who permit their characters to break all the ten commandments in turn, but use their most strenuous endeavors to keep them from breaking the one imperious commandment, Thou shalt not transgress the law of average experience. Mr. Stockton's characters, on their part, never trouble themselves about the ten commandments,-morality is a sort of matter of course with them,-but they break the realist's great commandment in the most innocent and unconscious manner....

We may observe here that Mr. Stockton falls easily into the autobiographic form, and that his peculiar gift gains by this device. In actual life we listen to a man who can tell a wonderful story of his own experience, and our incredulity vanishes before the spectacle of his honest, transparent face and the sound of his tranquil, unaffected voice. Thus Mr. Stockton, in his ingenious assumptions, brings to bear upon the reader the weight of a peculiarly innocent, ingenuous nature, for the figures that relate the several stories carry conviction by the very frankness of their narratives. They come forward with so guileless a bearing that the reader would be ashamed of himself if he began by doubting, and the entire absence of extravagance in the manner of the story continues to keep his doubts out of the way.

This low key in which Mr. Stockton pitches his stories, this eminently reasonable and simple tone which he adopts, is the secret of much of his success. One discovers this especially by reading "A Piece of Red Calico," and then fancying how Mark Twain would have treated the same subject.

Both writers take on an air of sincerity, but one retains it throughout, and never seems to be assuming it; the other allows his drollery to sharpen, and before he is done his voice is at a very high pitch indeed. . . .

We began with the expression of a fear lest these two volumes were an informal announcement that their author had abandoned short stories for novels. A re-reading of the books and an inquiry into the secret of Mr. Stockton's well-won and honorable success reassure us. Whatever ventures he may make in the field of novel-writing, and however liberal may be his interpretation of the function of the novel, we cannot believe that he can escape the demands of his genius. The short story, either by itself or as an episode in a novel, so completely expresses his peculiar power, it makes such satisfactory use of his intellectual caprice, and it avoids so easily the perils which beset one who builds a novel upon a whim that, for his own pleasure, we are sure that Mr. Stockton will go on entertaining the public in a style where he is his only rival.

Source: William Dean Howells, "Stockton's Stories," in *The Atlantic Monthly,* Vol. LIX, No. CCCLI, January, 1887, pp. 130-32.

Adaptations

"The Lady, or the Tiger?" was adapted as a three-act operetta on May 7, 1888, in Wallack's Theatre, New York, with Stockton present in the opening-night audience. Another company in London opened the play that same night at the Elephant and Castle Theatre. Neither production lasted long, though the American version was revived for a short time during the 1890s.

. "The Lady, or the Tiger?" was adapted for film in 1970 by the Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation. The story was set in the space-age, and a separate II-minute discussion of the story by Clifton Fadiman was produced at the same time. Both short films are distributed on videotape by Britannica Films.

Topics for Further Study

Discuss the concept of religious predestination versus free will as it relates to the roles of the king and the princess in "The Lady, or the Tiger? "

In answer to queries about the ending of "The Lady, or the Tiger?," Stockton made the following comment: "If you decide which it was-the lady, or the tiger, you find out what kind of a person you are yourself." What do you think he meant by that?

How can a kingdom be "serm-barbaric"? What sort of practices would you consider barbaric? Are there instances in which it is okay to be barbaric?

Compare a short story by the American writer O. Henry, whose work is famous for trick endings, to "The Lady, or the Tiger?" Which story do you find more clever, and why?

Compare and Contrast

1881: Animals are not protected from human exploitation. P. T. Barnum and his partner, Jarnes Bailey, form the Barnum & Bailey Circus, whose main attraction is Jumbo, an African elephant they bought in London. Their traveling show delights thousands across the United States.

1990s: Tigers and other animals are protected as endangered species. Tigers are frequently raised in captivity and live in zoos or are trained as circus animals. Several breeds of tigers became extinct during the twentieth century. By 1996, there are only twenty to thirty remaining South China tigers.

1880s: Capital punishment is practiced throughout the world and in the United States, though

public executions are not as common as they once were. However, some efforts to abolish the death penalty have succeeded. By the 1880s, the state of Michigan and the countries of Venezuela and Portugal have outlawed capital punishment.

1990s: Many states have reinstated the death penalty. By 1997, it is allowed in all but thirteen states and the District of Columbia. Accepted methods for carrying out death sentences include hanging, electrocution, the gas chamber, the firing squad, and lethal injection. Capital punishment has been abolished in Europe and many other countries, with the United States, China, and Japan the world's most prominent death penalty proponents.

What Do I Read Next?

Stockton wrote "The Discourager of Hesitancy" in 1885, in response to questions about "The Lady, or the Tiger?" The story begins in the arena of the earlier story, with one of the audience members leaving just as the young man opens the right-hand door. The departing spectator then poses another open-ended question to the readers.

"The Knife That Killed Po Hancy" is a story published by Stockton in 1889 about a lawyer who cuts himself with a knife that had earlier killed a Burmese bandit. Once cut, the lawyer alternates between being mild-mannered and being daring and powerful.

"The Catbird Seat," published in 1945, is a humorous story by James Thurber about a man who plots the dismissal of a loud, overbearing woman in his workplace in such a way that nobody can believe that he has instigated her departure.

"The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" by Stockton's contemporary, Mark Twain, is the story of a gold miner who spins a fantastic tale of a jumping frog to an incredulous Northerner.

"The Most Dangerous Game," written by Richard Connell in 1924, has in common with Stockton's story that it was well-regarded when it was published, though most of the author's other works have Since been forgotten. An adventure tale that pits two men against each other in a hunt to the death, its sudden ending culminates its deft development of suspense.

Further Study

Goleinba, Henry L *Frank R. Stockton,* Twayne, 1981, pp 144-46.

Offers useful criticism on "The Lady, or tire Tiger?," including sections on its themes and techniques.

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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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