My Kinsman, Major Molineux Study Guide

My Kinsman, Major Molineux by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Introduction

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" was first published in the 1832 issue of *The Token,* an annual collection of fiction, poetry, and essays generally bought as a Christmas present. It was one of four stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne in the issue, but like all of the pieces in the magazine, it did not carry the author's name. The story was not a favorite of the author's, and it drew no special attention from readers. It was not included in either of Hawthorne's first two collections of short stories, *Twice- Told Tales* (1842) and *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846). Finally in 1851 it was published in the collection *The Snow-Image and Other Twice-Told Tales.* The story was not especially popular during Hawthorne's lifetime, being greatly overshadowed by the novels that the writer produced in the 1850s.

In the second half of the twentieth century, however, the story took on a new life. Appreciated for its gentle irony and its glimpse at life in colonial New England, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" has been widely anthologized, and has become a staple of literature courses at the high school and college levels. The story of a young man from the country who goes to the city to find his relative is typical in many ways of early nineteenth century American literature. "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is held as an example of the themes, styles, and techniques of the period, and as a sample of the talents of one of America's most important writers.

Author Biography

When Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1804, the United States was new and unformed. In New England, where his family lived, the somber influence of the Puritan settlers was still strong, and Hawthorne's life and fiction were always marked by undertones of a brooding pessimism. His father was a sea captain who died in Dutch Guiana when his son was four years old. Nathaniel was raised by his eccentric mother in the homes of various relatives, and he spent most of his time alone.

After graduating from Bowdoin College in 1825, Nathaniel was determined to make his way as a writer. For ten years he lived with his family and devoted himself to reading, and to writing allegorical and historical tales of life in colonial New England. During this time, he changed the spelling of his family name from "Hathorne" to "Hawthorne" in an attempt to distance himself from an ancestor deeply involved in the prosecution of the Salem witch trials of the 1690s. His first publication was a novel, *Fanshawe* (1828), published anonymously at his own expense. It tells the story of a college student who falls in love, gives the young woman up to another man, and dies. As most first novels are, the work was semi-autobiographical and immature. When Hawthorne recognized the failings of his first novel, he bought up all the unsold copies and burned them.

He next turned his energies to short stories, exploring the nature of moral decay. Several were purchased, for a few dollars each, by S. G. Goodrich, the editor of an annual miscellany, *The Token.* The 1832 edition of *The Token* included four Hawthorne stories, including "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," although the author's name did not appear. Goodrich preferred to leave the stories unsigned so his readers would not know how much of his material had come from one writer. Several of the *Token* stories were later gathered into Hawthorne's collection *Twice- Told Tales* (1837), which proudly bore the author's name, but "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" was not published again until 1851, in a collection titled *The Snow Image.*

Hawthorne tried for twelve years to earn a living as a writer before he was forced to find other employment. He married in 1842, at the age of thirty-eight, worked as a surveyor at the Custom House in Salem, and continued to publish short stories. When he lost his job in 1849, he settled down to write what became his greatest work, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). This well-received novel was soon followed by *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *The Snow Image, and The Blithedale Romance* (1852). For the rest of his life, Hawthorne was free from worries about money, and he was able to concentrate on writing, traveling, family life, and his friendships with other writers of the day, including Herman Melville and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He died in his sleep on May 19, 1864.

Plot Summary

The story opens with the narrator addressing the reader directly, setting the scene. The story takes place in New England "not far from a hundred years ago," that is, approximately 1730. The colonies had not yet become independent of Great Britain, and passions were running high. At nine o'clock on a moonlit evening, a young man of eighteen lands by ferry at an unnamed city. His name is Robin, and, by the look of his clothes and manner, the ferryman can tell he has never been to the city before. Robin carries a "wallet," which is a small knapsack, and a cudgel, or a short club. Paying the ferryman with almost all of his money, he sets off eagerly toward town.

As he walks through the outskirts of the city, it occurs to Robin that he does not know where he is going. Apparently, he is seeking the home of a relative, but none of the houses he passes seems grand enough to be his kinsman's home. He continues walking, and gradually the houses become more elegant. Seeing a well-dressed man on the street, Robin grabs his coat and asks whether the man knows where "my kinsman, Major Molineux" makes his home. As soon as Robin asks this question, the barbers in a nearby shop stop their work, and the other man's expression turns angry. Robin does not notice these reactions, and when the man refuses to help him, Robin attributes the refusal to the man's country manners. Clearly this man is not well-bred enough to deal civilly with a stranger.

As Robin walks on, the smell of tar is in the air. He finds an inn full of people, and asks the crowd whether anyone can direct him to Major Molineux. When they also turn silent and angry, he attributes their reaction to the fact that he has no money. Returning to the streets, he finds them full of gaily dressed people, and looks at every face to see whether he can recognize his relative. A woman in a scarlet petticoat tries to lure Robin into her house, assuring him that she is the Major's housekeeper, but when a watchman passes by she runs into her house and shuts the door. As he wanders, Robin shows himself to be completely unprepared for the city and the city people, although he remains unaware of his naivety.

As he walks the streets with no plan, hoping to somehow stumble upon the Major's house, he grows hungry and desperate. He sees a large hurrying man covered with a cloak, and demands to be told where his kinsman is. This stranger stops, and tells Robin, "Watch here an hour, and Major Molineux will pass by." Taking off his cloak, he reveals his face, which is painted red on one side and black on the other. Robin is astonished, but asks no questions. Instead, he sits on the steps of a church, determined to wait for the Major.

As he waits, Robin is vaguely aware of a murmuring sound coming from far away. No more people pass by, and he grows melancholy thinking of his family back home. Finally another man passes by, and when Robin asks him for information he responds with genuine kindness and concern. He encourages Robin to tell him why he is looking for Major Molineux, a person this man knows something about. Robin explains that he is the secondoldest son in the family. His older brother is following their father in running

the farm, and Robin is expected to make his own way in the world. Some time before, Major Molineux visited the farm and showed an interest in the boys, promising to help them one day. Robin has come to the city to begin a career, hoping for the assistance of his wealthy relative.

The kind stranger is intrigued by the story, and sits down with Robin to wait. He agrees that Major Molineux will soon be passing by, and he is eager to see the reunion. The two chat for a short time, and then the murmuring turns into shouting. A crowd of people comes pouring down the street, some playing musical instruments, some carrying torches. A horseman leads them, waving a sword, with his face painted half red and half black. At the end of the procession is a cart bearing Major Molineux. He has been tarred and feathered, probably because he is a Major in the British military in a town that is moving toward independence.

Robin and his kinsman make eye contact, but do not speak. As the Major passes by, Robin seems to see every stranger he has encountered this night, and every one is laughing. The laughter is contagious, and Robin finds himself laughing more loudly than any of the others. When the procession has disappeared out of sight, Robin asks the kind stranger to show him back to the ferry. He has decided not to stay in the city after all. The stranger refuses, encouraging him to stay a few days. He believes that Robin will be able to make his own way in the city, even without the help of his kinsman.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

The last boat docks around 9 o'clock at the small New England colony, containing a lone traveler. This young man, Robin, has promised extra payment for the late service, and the ferryman has readily agreed to the arrangement. As Robin searches his pockets for the tip, the ferryman steals a glance at his face. The ferryman notes that the man is barely 18 and obviously from the country. The ferryman guesses correctly that this is the youth's first visit to town. His clothes are well worn, but still in good shape, and of good quality. He carries a heavy cudgel, or stick, and a wallet, and he has curly locks, well-shaped features and bright eyes.

As Robin eagerly steps off the boat and begins to walk, it occurs to him that he does not know where he is going. Robin stops to get his bearings, but he does not see a house in sight that would be worthy of Major Molineux, the wealthy relative he is seeking. Robin berates himself for not having asked directions of the ferryman, and he decides to ask someone else. The first person he sees is a distinguished, elderly gentleman, and Robin grabs the skirt of the gentleman's coat to get his attention. Robin asks politely if the man knows where Major Molineux lives. The man demands that Robin let go of his jacket, and he denies knowing Major Molineux. The man tells Robin that he holds an authoritative position in the colony, and he threatens to take Robin to be hung by his feet at the stocks the following day. Robin drops the old man's skirt and quickly walks away.

Robin walks through the town, coming shortly to the business center where he finds an inn. He is hungry and wants to sit down and eat, but he is out of money and knows that Major Molineux will give him food and lodging. Robin enters the inn boldly to ask his kinsman's whereabouts. He sees many strange and interesting faces before the innkeeper accosts him. Robin is met with the first kindness he has experienced since his arrival as the innkeeper, mistaking Robin for a country gentleman and a potential customer, is cloyingly civil towards him. Robin believes that he has seen a family resemblance between himself and his kinsman, and he becomes confident and haughty. However, he admits to having only a parchment threepence in his pocket and that he has entered the inn only to inquire after his relative.

As Robin raises his voice, there is a general stir in the room. The innkeeper suddenly turns to a piece of paper that has been fixed to one of the walls. The innkeeper begins to read, looking pointedly at Robin. "Left the house of the subscriber, bounden servant, Hezekiah Mudge--had on, when he went away, gray coat, leather breeches, master's third best hat. One pound currency reward to whosoever shall lodge him in any jail of the province." The innkeeper notes the similarity to Robin's clothes and advises Robin mockingly, "Better trudge, boy, better trudge!"

Robin takes the innkeeper's advice, but he is bewildered that the mention of his kinsman's name does not immediately grant him respect and honor. Robin continues down the lane and on turning the corner finds a street that is much more populated. He decides that if Major Molineux is out and about, he would be on this street. Robin carefully examines every face he encounters, and he is rebuked several times for his intrusive glances.

Robin turns another corner and finds a woman peeping out from behind a partially closed door. He asks her if Major Molineux lives there. Seeing that Robin is young, harmless and attractive, the young maiden comes out of her house and replies coyly, "Major Molineux dwells here." Robin knows that she is not telling him the truth, but for a moment her sweet words and common prettiness overwhelm him. Robin recovers and cunningly asks if the Major would come to the door to speak to him before he enters. The girl, equally cunning, replies that the Major is in bed sleeping soundly from his evening draught. Robin sees the lie in her eyes, but she already has taken him by the hand and is leading him into the house when the sound an opening door startles her. She quickly vanishes into the house. The man who opened the door passes. Robin sees the woman winking at him from the window, but the spell is broken, temptation passes and he carries on his way.

Robin begins to roam the streets, desperately searching for his kinsman who will give him the food and lodging. The next person he asks answers rudely but then mysteriously tells Robin to wait in the same spot where they are standing for one hour, and he promises that Robin will then see Major Molineux. As he says this, Robin catches a glimpse of the speaker's face. The man is ugly, and one side of his face "blazed an intense red, while the other side was black as midnight."

As Robin waits, his thoughts turn to his loneliness and his family that is so far from him on this cold, tiring, confusing night. Robin calls out petulantly to a passerby who obviously is a gentleman. The man asks Robin if he needs help, and Robin asks if he knows Major Molineux. The gentleman inquires what the nature of Robin's business is with the Major. Robin tells him that his father is a clergyman in the country and that Major Molineux is his father's cousin. Major Molineux, a wealthy military man, had promised a year earlier to help Robin become established in the city. When Robin comes of age, his father sends him to find Major Molineux and take advantage of his kind offer.

The gentleman then assures Robin that the ugly man with the painted face was correct and that the Major would soon be passing by the very spot where they stood. The man is curious about how Robin will react to his relative, so he decides to wait with him.

Before long Robin and the gentleman hear shouts and the sounds of trumpets in the distance. The sounds become closer, and people begin to stream through the street. A single horseman clad in military attire rides toward them. His face is painted, and "the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning that attends them." The horseman, the leader of the

procession, looks strangely at Robin and signals for the procession to stop. Not far from Robin and the gentleman is a cart carrying Major Molineux "in tar-and-feather dignity."

Major Molineux is elderly and normally exudes a dignified, somber and unshakable calm. Tonight, however, his face is as pale as death and his eyebrows are knitted together in agony. For a moment his eyes meet Robin's, and there is a flicker of recognition followed by a look of defeated shame. Robin's knees knock together with a mixture of pity and terror, followed by a rush of excitement. Robin is intoxicated from his exhaustion, confusion and the contagious excitement of the crowd. He begins to pick out from the crowd all of the people he had asked about the whereabouts of his kinsman, and he sees that they are all laughing at him. Robin then laughs a loud, hysterical laugh, louder than any of the others. The horseman gives a signal, and the march begins again.

The gentleman touches Robin to shake him from his reverie, and Robin asks his new friend to show him the way to the ferry. "No, my good friend Robin, not to-night, at least," says the gentleman. "Some few days hence, if you continue to wish it, I will speed you on your journey. Or, if you prefer to remain with us, perhaps, as you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world, without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux."

Analysis

Hawthorne begins this short story with the narrator addressing the reader directly. Although the introduction is vague, we can garner several important facts: the story takes place in New England before independence from England and there is a feeling of unrest throughout the colony and a sense of rebellion against the colonial governors.

The main theme of this story is the coming of age. Robin reflects the coming of age of a new nation, rebellion, trial and error, mischief, adventures, feeling out the boundaries of new-found independence and tasting the sweetness of new-found freedom.

The first person Robin meets in his adventure is an elderly gentleman. When Robin impudently catches hold of the old man's jacket to get his attention, he is scolded severely and threatened with the stocks. The stocks is an instrument of punishment, generally in the town square. It consists of a wooden frame with holes for the hands and head where a person is locked to be exposed to public scorn. Robin is then laughed at by the men in the barber shop who have been watching the scene. Robin realizes his error in asking this old man anything and reprimands himself.

The next person Robin meets is the innkeeper, but he makes the same mistake. Robin asks the innkeeper about the whereabouts of his relative "with such an assumption of confidence as befitted the major's relative." The innkeeper and the inn's customers are immediately hostile. As Robin leaves he thinks to himself "with his usual shrewdness, 'is it not strange, that the confession of an empty pocket should outweigh the name of my kinsman, Major Molineux?'"

Irony is another major theme in this short story. When Hawthorne describes Robin as shrewd, he is in fact poking fun at Robin for his obvious lack of shrewdness.

After the inn, Robin meets a pretty young woman in a back alley. Readers can assume she is a prostitute from her sly but cautious advances toward Robin. The woman represents the freedom, recklessness and breaking of tradition that the young nation was known for. Robin himself nearly throws caution to the wind, and he is only stopped by a passerby who startles the young vixen back into her house.

The final irony of the story is that when Robin findsMajor Molineux, he realizes why his reception in the town has not been more hospitable. His kinsman would be publicly disgraced in the town streets that very night. The reader doesn't know what crime Major Molineux has committed, nor whether Robin stays in the town or returns to the country. The mystery merely adds intrigue to the bizarre, slightly surreal tone that pervades this realistic slice of colonial life.

Characters

Gentleman

The last person Robin meets during his night of encounters and misdirections is a gentleman of "open, cheerful, and altogether prepossessing" looks, who speaks the only kind words Robin hears in the city. Curious to see how Robin will react to seeing his relative in disgrace, he joins the young man on the church steps, and chats with him while they wait.

Major Molineux

Little is known about Major Molineux, the kinsman whom Robin is seeking. He never speaks a word in the story, and Robin's questions about him are met with stony silence. First cousin to Robin's father, and a man with wealth and no children, he has expressed a desire to help Robin establish himself in a career. Molineux is a major in the British military, serving in what is still a British colony. Although he is tarred and feathered at the end of the story, there is no hint of what he may have done wrong. Even in his disgrace, the narrator describes Molineux as "an elderly man, of large and majestic person, and strong, square features, betokening a steady soul."

Robin Molineux

Robin is the story's protagonist, a young man of nearly eighteen who has come from the country to find his relative, Major Molineux. Robin is the son of a country minister who maintains a small farm. Because the older brother will inherit the farm, Robin hopes Major Molineux can help him find another occupation. This is Robin's first trip to the city, and everything about him□his clothes, his way of speaking, and the club he carries□identifies him as a country boy out of his element. At home, Robin is considered a "shrewd youth," but in the city he misinterprets everything he sees. Time after time he asks people to help him find his relative, and they turn away or mutter angrily. Each time he attributes their unwillingness to help to their own ignorance, rudeness, or low status. Robin never understands, until he sees his relative in tar and feathers, that the people bear a grudge against Molineux. Realizing the depth of his ignorance, Robin decides that his best course of action might be to return home.

Themes

Coming of Age

Many critics have seen "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" as the story of Robin's passage from child to adult. Robin's journey follows the conventional pattern: he travels from his home to a distant land, where he meets strange people and has exciting adventures. Each encounter leaves him a little wiser than he was before. By the end of the story he has learned enough to survive on his own, or, in the words of the kind gentleman, to "rise in the world without the help of [his] kinsman, Major Molineux." Robin himself is not aware of his growth and development, but the gentleman is sure of it. The story, then, opens with the ferryman's view of Robin, as a rough and unready youth, and ends with the gentleman's view of Robin as a "shrewd youth."

Order and Disorder

The biggest problem facing Robin is that he cannot make sense of anything that is happening around him. He cannot find his way around the crooked and meandering streets; the architecture of the houses is "irregular"; the people behave strangely, dress alarmingly and say incomprehensible things; and the quality that he hoped would open doors for him—his relationship with Molineux— has the opposite effect. Where he expected to find order, a pattern for his life, he finds only disorder, chaos.

But it is not just from his point of view that the world is in disorder. The narrator, too, describes a world gone mad, a mob carrying on "in senseless uproar, in frenzied merriment." The chaos is a "contagion" spreading through the crowd, and it reaches even Robin, who can know nothing of the politics that led the mob to their actions. Robin's experiences in the city are contrasted with his memories of home, and of an ordered life centered on "his father's custom" of daily worship. His challenge will be that of all young people who start out on a new life: to find a way to make sense of what is new and strange.

Politics

In the long paragraph that opens the story, Hawthorne's narrator introduces the historical setting: the story takes place in New England in or near the 1730s. Although the Revolutionary War is still some four decades in the future, the people of the Massachusetts Bay Colony have already begun to rebel against British rule. They have driven away or imprisoned four of the previous six appointed governors, and lower-ranking members of the "court party," or those loyal to the King, have also been tormented. Robin's kinsman, Major Molineux, is a part of the British forces maintaining rule in the colony, and it is in this role that he is tarred, feathered, and paraded through the town.

Writing in the early 1830s, Hawthorne was grateful for the results of the Revolution, but as John P. McWilliams, Jr., has explained in an article for *Studies in Romanticism,* he was not sympathetic to the kind of mob mentality that could inflict cruelty on individual loyalists. There is no mention in the story of any particular wrongs committed by Molineux. His only crime seems to be that of fulfilling his duty at a time of "temporary inflammation of the popular mind."

City versus Country

One of the most frequently seen themes in literature, particularly in the literature of the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is the conflict between the city and the country. Stories of young men from the city venturing out into the country and being confounded by the wilderness are as common as stories presenting the situation found in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," a young man from the country being overwhelmed by his first trip to the big city. Everything that happens to Robin happens because he is in a new place, because he does not know how to read the signs

Robin is so "evidently country-bred," the ferryman can tell it just by looking at him, and can tell that Robin has never been to town before. For one thing, Robin carries a club, which might be useful for confronting animals in the wilderness but is hardly the appropriate tool to have at hand in the city. Though he thinks of himself as "shrewd," Robin in fact does not understand anything he sees or hears, and just as a person from the city might become lost and confused on a winding path through the woods, Robin becomes "entangled in a succession of crooked and narrow streets." Looking into the church, in many ways the center of the town, he feels "a sensation of loneliness stronger than he had ever felt in the remotest depths of his native woods." His instinct is to go back home, feeling "weary of a town life."

Style

Irony

The term "irony" refers to a difference between appearance and reality, or between what someone says is true and what is actually true. The narrator in this story is being ironic when he continually refers to Robin as a "shrewd youth." Robin certainly believes himself to be shrewd, and tells the kind gentleman that he has a reputation at home for shrewdness, but the fact remains that Robin is remarkably *not* perceptive or intuitive. For example, when Robin meets his first town-dweller and asks about his kinsman, the man answers him rudely, and even threatens him. Robin ponders this response for a moment, and then, "being a shrewd youth," he guesses wrongly that the man must be a newcomer who is unacquainted with Molineux. As Robin passes through town he misinterprets everything he sees and hears, and the narrator greets every misinterpretation with an ironic comment about Robin's shrewdness.

The effect created by this irony is to add light humor. The narrator and the reader know more than Robin does, and poke fun at him for his inability to see what is before him. But the mocking is gentle. Robin is not stupid, or someone to despise because of his own inflated sense of self. Instead, the quiet irony demonstrates that Robin is a young man who might rightfully have expected to do well in the city, but who finds himself in over his head.

Setting

A story's setting is the background against which the action occurs, and is usually thought of as the time and place. In "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," the narrator outlines the setting in the opening chapter. The story takes place "not far from a hundred years ago," or around the late 1720s or early 1730s, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which encompassed most of what is today Massachusetts and New Hampshire. During that time, rural families like Robin's were relatively unaffected by politics, but colonists in the cities were beginning to rebel against British control. It would be four decades before the American Revolutionary War would begin, but minor acts of rebellion and civil disobedience, such as the tarring and feathering of Major Molineux, had begun to break out.

Romanticism

Hawthorne is generally considered one of the first and greatest writers of the romantic period in American literature, and "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" exhibits some of the characteristics of romanticism that Hawthorne would develop further in his novels. Romanticism was a movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries away from neoclassicism, the strictly formal kinds of literature and art that attempted to echo

classical Greek and Roman cultures. In American fiction, romantic writing reflected the bursting confidence and mystery surrounding the growth of a new nation.

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" demonstrates several elements of romanticism. European romantic writers often set their stories in medieval Europe, peopled with knights and kings, but Hawthorne and others found the same inspiration in the historical period before American Independence. The dreamlike atmosphere of the story, the somber tone, and the fact that the events occur in dim light are also romantic elements. Finally, the focus on Robin and his psychological state, rather than on action and physical conflict, was a new development of the romantic period.

Allegory

An allegory is a story in which the characters and actions can be thought of as standing for larger issues and ideas. Certain characters in an allegory might stand for abstract qualities, as in the story of the Grasshopper and the Ant in which one character stands for laziness and the other for hard work. In an article in *Sewanee Review*, Q. D. Leavis suggests that "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" should be read as an allegory, and that a proper subtitle for the story would be "America Comes of Age." According to her reading, Robin personifies "the young America," brought to the point of deciding how to set a course for the future. When Robin joins in the laughter at his uncle's expense, he represents America realizing that it must cast off British influence and strike out on its own.

Historical Context

Writing "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" in the late 1820s or early 1830s, Hawthorne looked primarily to European writers for his models. For readers and writers of the nineteenth century, the forms of writing called "the novel" and "the romance" were distinct in style and in theme. Hawthorne found that most readers and critics favored the novel, but that the romance suited his own artistic temperament better.

Romance did not have the meaning it came to have in the late twentieth century: a story mainly concerned with romantic love between a beautiful heroine and a dashing, heroic man. Instead, the word originally applied to the languages derived from Latin (the Romance languages), including Spanish, French, and Italian. The term was later applied to stories written in French, and later still to a specific type of French story dealing with knights and castles and adventures. Romances were popular in Europe through the nineteenth century, and often used medieval settings, royalty, and chivalry, and fantastic spirits and dragons.

For Hawthorne and others, the term *Romance* was used to distinguish more imaginative literature from the novel, which was considered more realistic. Hawthorne frequently wrote about these terms, especially in the prefaces to his longer works. In the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, he explained the difference as he saw it: "When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel." The writer of romance, if he wished, might "manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights and deepen and enrich the shadows of the pictures." It is in this spirit that Hawthorne set many of his tales, including "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," in darkness, twilight, and shadow.

Two difficulties presented themselves to the American writer of romance in the early part of the nineteenth century: there was little demand for this kind of imaginative literature, and America had no medieval past and no royalty to establish the proper atmosphere. This lack of demand caused reviewer Benjamin in 1836 to predict that if Hawthorne could collect his magazine stories into a book he could have a success "certainly in England, perhaps in this country." Hawthorne commented throughout his life that he felt burdened by the difficulty of creating romantic fiction in a country that had not yet developed a taste for it.

He dealt with the problem of having no medieval past by substituting the best American equivalent: the period from the original Puritan settlement to the time just before the Revolutionary War. Here he found heroes and enemies, grand issues and ideas. In the period just after Andrew Jackson was elected president of the United States, the country was energetically patriotic and celebratory. The decades before the Revolution, the historical setting of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," were far enough in the past to have acquired the patina of legend and mystery. The story's narrator establishes the setting in the first paragraph, and then begins the second with a line straight out of a medieval

tale: "It was near nine o'clock of a moonlight evening, when a boat crossed the ferry with a single passenger." Moonlight, Hawthorne writes in the "Custom House" section of *The Scarlet Letter,* "is a medium most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his illusive guests."

Roughly equivalent to the terms *romance* and *novel* as used to distinguish two types of long fiction are the terms *tale* and *short story,* used to distinguish two ways of thinking about short fiction. Tales are less bound by constraints of realism than are short stories. Hawthorne thought of his booklength works, including *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance* as romances. His shorter works were gathered into collections with titles including *Twice-Told Tales* and *Snow-Image, and Other Twice- Told Tales*. For Hawthorne, the terms were used carefully, to mark out what he describes in *The Scarlet Letter* as a "neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other."

Critical Overview

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" was first published in the 1832 edition of *The Token*, an annual book of essays, poetry, and short fiction to which Hawthorne contributed several pieces over the years. The story was published anonymously, and it was not until 1836, when journalist Park Benjamin wrote a review of that year's *Token*, that the reading public came to know Hawthorne's name. Having read "a sufficient number of his pieces to make the reputation of a dozen of our Yankee scribblers," he praises Hawthorne's style, and his modesty in remaining anonymous. "If Mr. Hawthorne would but collect his various tales and essays into one volume," Benjamin notes, "we can assure him that their success would be brilliant—certainly in England, perhaps in this country." Hawthorne did issue a collection the next year, and it did sell well, but it did not include "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." The story did not appear again until 1851, in the collection *Snow-Image.*

When *Snow-Image* appeared in 1851, it was quickly overshadowed by Hawthorne's great novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, published in the same year. By this time, Hawthorne was widely recognized as an important writer, both in the United States and in England, as Benjamin had predicted. Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville had reviewed his stories with approval. In what may be the first published overview of Hawthorne's work, Henry T. Tuckerman describes the stories in terms that seem especially appropriate for "My Kinsman, Major Molineux": "He always takes us below the surface and beyond the material; his most inartificial stories are eminently suggestive; he makes us breathe the air of contemplation, and turns our eyes inward. It is as if we went forth, in a dream." Tuckerman did not mention "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" specifi- cally in his article, nor did Henry James in his 1879 book-length study of Hawthorne.

In an article published in 1957 in *Nineteenth- Century Fiction,* Seymour Gross observes, "It is one of the peculiarities of the study of American literature that, despite the abundance of critical effort expended on Hawthorne's fiction, what is perhaps his most powerful story, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," has been until only recently all but completely ignored." At the time, Gross was unable to identify a single anthology of American literature or of short stories that included "My Kinsman." But the 1950s saw the publication of several critical articles on the story, and although the number of publications has tapered off in the intervening decades, the story continues to be popular.

Most twentieth-century critics have read the story as a psychological examination of Robin, with the historical setting as mere background. Several have used Freudian psychology to examine Robin's search for a father figure, or for independence. In a 1959 article in *Criticism* tellingly titled "Robin Molineux on the Analyst's Couch," Roy Harvey Pearce explains that Robin gains freedom only by participating in the guilty act of mocking his father figure. Roy R. Male, in *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision* (1957), demonstrates that each man Robin meets in town is a distorted father-figure. He draws on "the Freudian theory of dream interpretation, which asserts that visions of the father figure may commonly be split into two or more images."

Other critics have read the story as primarily concerning history. For some, it is a historical allegory. Q. D. Leavis, in a 1951 article for *Sewanee Review*, proposes "America Comes of Age" as a suitable subtitle for the story, and suggests that the story is easiest to understand as a "poetic parable in dramatic form." In her reading, Robin represents young America, coming to adulthood by casting off dependence on the authority figure Molineux/Eng land. John P. McWilliams, Jr., agrees that history is at the center of the story, but disagrees with Leavis about the theme. He argues in a 1976 article in *Studies in Romanticism* that Robin does not in fact "come of age," nor show any signs of learning. McWilliams suggests that Hawthorne appreciated Independence but did not fully approve of all the means used to achieve it. Robin might stand for "those readers who, even when confronted with the violence and demagoguery of the Revolution, prove unwilling or unable to recognize them."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Bily has a master's degree in English literature and has written for a variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses Hawthorne's use of imagery of light and darkness.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" was one of his earliest publications, appearing anonymously in the 1832 edition of *The Token*. It waited more than one hundred years to gain its current position as one of the author's most widely anthologized and studied short stories, although it is built on many of the same themes and techniques as Hawthorne's better-known stories and novels. Images of light and darkness, for example, are used in this story to illuminate (pun intended) the theme, just as these images provide insight to "Young Goodman Brown," "The Birthmark," and other stories.

A central question for readers of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" has been whether or not Robin, the "shrewd youth," actually learns anything from his experiences in town and, if so, what might that new knowledge be. Seymour Gross is among those who see the story as one of growth and maturity. In an article for *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, he points out Hawthorne's "masterly manipulation of lights and darks" in this story and in others. He finds that "the light-dark device is more significant in this story because, where in the other stories it is used as a kind of thematic signpost, here the motif is the theme itself: the journey from dark innocence to painfully illuminated knowledge." But John P. McWilliams, Jr., is one of several critics who claim that "Hawthorne never confirms that Robin has changed or learned anything. . . . The ending of the tale, evidence of Robin's maturing to so many critics, can more plausibly be regarded as evidence of his persistent naiveté."

Has Robin learned and grown during his ordeal? Has he, as Gross claims, moved from darkness to light? Or has he remained in darkness, as McWilliams believes? I believe the truth is closer to McWilliams' reading than to Gross'. Robin has learned something, but he has learned to accept a falsehood. Educated under an artificial light, he has accepted an artificial truth.

When Robin Molineux steps off the ferry at the end of a five-day journey from his country home to the city, it is "near nine o'clock of a moonlight evening." The moon is bright enough to get around by, apparently, since Robin carries no light source with him and intends to find his way through town. The ferryman carries "a lantern, by the aid of which, and the newly risen moon, he took a very accurate survey" of Robin. Leaving the landing and approaching the town, Robin examines the first buildings he sees and he, too, makes an accurate survey by moonlight: "yonder old house, where the moonlight enters at the broken casement" cannot be his relative's house, for Molineux is a man of means and position. To this point, Robin's judgment is sound, with the notable exception that he did not think to ask the ferryman for directions. He has not made any missteps yet.

But something peculiar happens the first time Robin approaches a man to ask for help. As Gross points out, Robin sees the man of two successive hems from a small distance, and reaches him "just when the light from the open door and windows of a barber's shop fell upon both their figures." Now Robin makes his first mistake□not in asking about the Major, which is a reasonable thing for him to do, but in misinterpreting the man's refusal to help him as a sign of the man's backwardness. In the moonlight, Robin makes reasonable guesses, but in his first encounter under city lights he does not. Will the pattern hold?

Wandering further, Robin becomes "entangled in a succession of crooked and narrow streets." Above the rooftops "the masts of vessels pierced the moonlight" and Robin is able to read street signs and learn that he is near the business district. There is no reason to think that his efforts at reading street signs are misplaced. But soon he enters the brightly lit tavern, and again he misjudges. The tavern owner greets him courteously, with a low bow, and Robin concludes, "The man sees a family likeness!" When Robin mentions the Major's name, "there was a sudden and general movement in the room, which Robin interpreted as expressing the eagerness of each individual to become his guide." But things are not what they seem to be.

As Robin moves through town, he encounters more people in lighted places. By "the light of the moon, and the lamps from the numerous shopwindows" he sees well-dressed figures promenading on the streets. Turning down a side street, he comes to a row of houses, and "the moonlight fell upon no passenger along the whole extent," but he sees a woman's garment within a lighted entryway. When she steps "forth into the moonlight" Robin is able to see her for who she is. She would like to draw him into her lighted house, but Robin knows to avoid that temptation. Interestingly, Robin encounters a man with a painted face as he is passing through the shade of the church steeple. Neither in the light of the tavern nor in the shade of the steeple does Robin learn anything from this man, but when he steps "back into the moonlight" Robin learns that his relative will pass by in an hour.

Robin passes the next hour alone. First he examines the street, "and the moon, creating, like the imaginative power, a beautiful strangeness in familiar objects, gave something of romance to a scene that might not have possessed it in the light of day." After a while, Robin climbs to a window frame and looks into the church, where "the moonbeams came trembling in, and fell down upon the deserted pews, and extended along the quiet aisles. A fainter yet more awful radiance was hovering around the pulpit, and one solitary ray had dared to rest upon the open page of the great Bible." Hawthorne writes elsewhere of the imaginative powers of moonlight, as in the "Custom House" section of *Scarlet Letter.* Hawthorne, imagination is not the same thing as untruth. Instead, it can be the key to a greater truth. In Robin's case, it takes him home.

Under the influence of the unadulterated moonlight, Robin dreams of his family back in the country. He imagines the great tree where his father conducts worship services "at the going down of the summer sun . . . holding the Scriptures in the golden light that fell from the western clouds." Back home, God was worshiped in the open air, in natural light, but Robin can't go home again.

Now he meets the last stranger, the one who will treat him kindly. Significantly, he first becomes aware of this man by "the sound of footsteps along the opposite pavement." He cries out to the man, and the man responds "in a tone of real kindness." The light is dim, the shadows are oblique, and Robin must trust his ears instead of his eyes. By doing so, he wins the only friend he will find this night.

Now the procession begins, and it brings its own light. "A redder light disturbed the moonbeams" as torches pass by, "concealing, by their glare, whatever object they illuminated." As the painted man passes Robin and releases him from his gaze, there are more torches "close at hand; but the unsteady brightness of the latter formed a veil which he could not penetrate." Soon, "traces of a human form appeared at intervals, and then melted into the vivid light." Finally comes the sight Robin was meant to see: "There the torches blazed the brightest, there the moon shone out like day, and there, in tar-and-feathery dignity, sat his kinsman, Major Molineux!"

Robin is at a crossroads. What will he see? The torches compete with the moonlight as both shine on Molineux; there is a wrong way and a right way to look at him. Under the influence of the torches and the torchbearers, Robin could join in the "bewildering excitement" and contribute his "shout of laughter" to the "senseless uproar." Or he could see what the narrator sees, unaffected by the crowd: "an elderly man, of large and majestic person," with "a head grown gray in honor." He could see that he is part of a "frenzied merriment, trampling all on an old man's heart." We do not know what the kind gentleman sees, nor whether he joins in the laughter. But we know that Robin falls to the "contagion" of merriment.

What has Robin learned? If he has learned that his relative deserves pain and humiliation, he has learned a cruel untruth. Molineux has been nothing but kind to Robin, a relative whom he barely knows. Robin knows nothing of the political situation that brought Molineux to such a bad end. "I have at last met my kinsman," Robin says, but in fact he knows nothing about the man. The vision of the prisoner on the cart amid the "unsteady brightness" of the torches is not a vision to be trusted.

Hawthorne was attracted to the idea that things seen by artificial light (and by twilight, another repeated theme of Hawthorne's) are not to be trusted. In "The Birthmark," Aylmer's gaze is drawn to Georgiana's birthmark under these conditions. "With the morning twilight Aylmer opened his eyes upon his wife's face and recognized the symbol of imperfection; and when they sat together at the evening hearth his eyes wandered stealthily to her cheek, and beheld, flickering with the blaze of the wood fire, the spectral hand that wrote mortality where he would fain have worshipped." Not until the end of the story, when he has administered the potion that will soon kill her, does Aylmer look at his wife in full light: "He drew aside the window curtain and suffered the light of natural day to fall into the room and rest upon her cheek." Under artificial light the birthmark appears large and important; under natural light, Aylmer sees how foolish he has been, and what damage he has caused.

In "Young Goodman Brown," the title character also sees strange things that trouble him. As he passes through the woods trying to escape the devil, he looks up to pray.

Suddenly the available natural light is blotted out: "a cloud, though no wind was stirring, hurried across the zenith and the brightening stars." Soon the only light is that cast by "four blazing pines, their tops aflame, their stems untouched, like candles at an evening meeting." Goodman Brown is not sure he should trust his own eyes as he gazes around at the people before him: "Either the sudden gleams of light flashing over the obscure field bedazzled Goodman Brown, or he recognized a score of the church members."

Robin, like young Goodman Brown, has been "bedazzled" by what the firelight has shown him; like Brown, he makes the mistake of trusting what he has seen. When the procession has passed by, Robin is ready to return home. He knows, or thinks he does, what his uncle really is, and he is "weary of a town life." The gentleman, however, knows that reality is more complicated than Robin thinks. He refuses to escort Robin back to the ferry, "not tonight at least," and encourages him to stay a few more days, to see what he can learn in the light.

A research study conducted in 1999 seemed to demonstrate that schoolchildren score higher on standardized tests when they are sitting in natural rather than artificial light. While Hawthorne cannot have anticipated electricity and fluorescent lighting, he did have a sense that to learn the truth about something, people need to examine it in the light of day.

Source: Cynthia Bily, in an essay for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Russell looks at Hawthorne's use of allegory within "My Kinsman, Major Molineux."

At five-year intervals, beginning in 1954, Professor Roy Harvey Pearce has encouraged Hawthorne critics to descend with the writer into history rather than pull away and judge his tales in psychological contexts where history is not given first importance. He has brought "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" forward as his chief example because of a recent, almost exclusive concentration on Robin, his dreamexperience, and the initiation rites the boy apparently goes through. One of the contributors to that criticism, Seymour Gross, later summed it up rather interestingly by referring to an *American Imago* article written by a psychiatrist. This specialist felt that Robin at the end of the story was about to regress□to return to his woods□and as Gross remarks, "The psychiatrist stands alone; in the dozen or so other interpretations of the story . . . all agree that some *rite de passage* has been effected." This is a temperate way of disagreeing, and ought to be, for readers will remember that Hawthorne left the outcome debatable. Robin did express a wish to go home, but Hawthorne let the last words lie with the old gentleman who seemed to be acting as the boy's mentor. "Some few days hence, if you wish it," the man had said, "I will speed you on your journey. Or, if you prefer to remain with us, perhaps . . . you may rise in the world without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux." The "if's" and "or's" show that neither regression nor psychological growth can be proved.

Proof is not necessary to criticism, and it is certainly true that the figure of young Robin is tremendously arresting. But the unresolved ending and other features of the story make me feel that its elemental quality owes much more to Hawthorne's art than to Robin's depth, and that Pearce's corrective is valid: the story ought to be looked at more intently as the illumination of an historical phenomenon.

Everyone agrees that the narrative, set firmly in pre-revolutionary days, has political relevance□ that the rebellion which ousts Major Molineux is a "type" of the American Revolution□but vagueness over the allegory after that has actually preempted much psychological criticism of the tale. Gross felt, for instance, that "If the sole explanation for the action is made in terms of the historical incident . . . then the great bulk of the tale, Robin's quest, remains sheer Gothic mystification." Not, however, if the first paragraph is kept carefully in mind; and memorable as the opening is, it requires partial quotation because of some details in the middle:

After the kings of Great Britain had assumed the right of appointing the colonial governors, the measures of the latter seldom met with the ready and general approbation which had been paid to those of their predecessors, under the original charters. . . . The annals of Massachusetts Bay will inform us, that of six governors in the space of about forty years from the surrender of the old charter, under James II, two were imprisoned by a popular insurrection; a third, as Hutchinson inclines to believe, was driven from the province by the whizzing of a musket-ball; a fourth, in the opinion of

the same historian, was hastened to his grave by continual bickerings with the House of Representatives; and the remaining two, as well as their successors, till the Revolution, were favored with few and brief intervals of peaceful sway. The inferior members of the court party, in times of high political excitement, led scarcely a more desirable life. These remarks may serve as a preface to the following adventures, which chanced upon a summer night, not far from a hundred years ago.

Why we should tend to "go vague," after a start as precise as this, happens I think because we are Americans and, identifying ourselves with Robin as we do, and with our own national origins, we tend to start off by assuming that Robin represents young America. More than one critic has done this, and I would hazard a guess that tens or hundreds of students have done it when asked in classrooms what Robin represents. If the answer that comes, "Young America," is not qualified, the fatal step will have been taken, and readers will have forced themselves into a psychological or mythic rather than historical interpretation of the allegory.

The easiest way to see why Robin cannot represent young America in general is to observe that all his *antagonists* perform this representation. Singly or in groups as they appear—and Hawthorne provides a great variety—they are a rough-andready lot, reeking of self-sufficiency and, though menial or of otherwise questionable breeding, obviously are not to be trifled with where their independence is concerned. The early description of the occupants of the tavern is one of the best places to catch overtones of the recent and muscular selfsufficiency of the colonies:

. . . the larger part . . . appeared to be mariners. . . . Three or four little groups were draining as many bowls of punch, which the West India trade had long since made a familiar drink in the colony. Others . . . had the appearance of men who lived by regular and laborious handicraft. . . . [Some] had gotten themselves into the darkest corner of the room, and heedless of the Nicotian atmosphere, were supping on the bread of their own ovens, and the bacon cured in their own chimney smoke.

The emphases here, on staples conspicuously "their own," and on the rum and tobacco, seem unmistakably to point out a raw but capable America. And it is *against* these types that Robin brushes. He is clearly not of them and must signify something Else—why this has not been emphasized seems to involve an elementary problem in reading allegory. For it is invariably concluded that because Robin is young, Hawthorne must be writing about youth in some definite respect. Yet it would take a rather infertile allegorist to devise a tale in which a young man represents youth. Almost in deference to Hawthorne, a reader ought not to stumble in haste and make a misidentification: I think it is made in fact because of the rush to bypass the historical *nature* of the story.

The question hanging now is, of course: What *does* Robin represent? The answer will be abrupt when it comes, yet there may be a way of gliding into it. This would involve deciding how readers actually feel toward the character Robin. Arresting as he is, I think readers are not essentially feeling *with* Robin and groping along as bewildered as he; rather, I feel they are like spectators at tragedy whose urgent question is not "What is going on here?" but rather, "Why don't you *see?"* This I feel to be true even after the

central transition, when, it will be remembered, Robin has asked for his kinsman Major Molineux and been rebuffed by a watchman and an elderly citizen, tricked by a courtesan, and turned out of doors by an innkeeper. "He now roamed desperately, and at random, through the town, almost ready to believe that a spell was on him. . . ." Even here, where commentators come down hard for a terrifying "dark night of the soul," I believe the reader is not so much caught up in this and is still saying, "Why don't you see that when you mention the Major's name they are turning on you?"

If this premise about the reader's attitude is valid—if one tends to feel like a spectator wishing a fatal obtuseness would be dispelled for the poor benighted "shrewd youth"—it becomes easier to say that in this allegory, specifically, Robin represents the six governors of Massachusetts Bay Colony between the years 1686 and 1729.

Perhaps, since the statement may seem startling or even high-handed in its limitation, I ought to say what indication in the text at least caused the first step to be taken toward this interpretation. It was the watchman saying to Robin, "'Home, or we'll set you in the stocks by peep of day!"' Earlier, the old citizen who made such a to-do about his "authority" had also threatened Robin with the stocks, and now Hawthorne underscored the point: "'This is the second hint of the kind,' thought Robin. 'I wish they would end my difficulties, by setting me there to-night."' Out of the opening paragraph about the governors came the echo—"two were imprisoned"— and a connection seemed intended.

Now it is interesting that this country youth, "one of whose names was Robin," has six encounters during this telescoped evening, and asks of six people the haunting question as to the whereabouts of "my kinsman, Major Molineux." And it does turn out that the six encounters correspond to the fates of those royal appointees, the governors Hawthorne read about in Thomas Hutchinson's history. (Though none of them had a Robin to his name, Hutchinson does employ the phrase "round robin.") For instance, one, according to that author, "was driven from the province by the whizzing of a musket-ball." Military violence lowers here—or the next thing to it. And so, when Robin accosts the muffled-up man with the red and black face, demanding to hear of his kinsman, the man comes back with, "Let me pass, I say, or I'll strike you to the earth!" And then he reveals his features, which Hawthorne explains at the climax: "his fierce and variegated countenance, appeared like war personi- fied; the red of one cheek was an emblem of fire and sword; the blackness of the other betokened the mourning that attends them."

The most insidious of Robin's encounters are the two that correspond with the "brief intervals of peaceful sway" accorded two of the six governors. For the poignant problem of the loyalists as a Whole—which, I suppose, may be what the story is finally describing—was that none could profit by the experience of others before them. Consistently we run across, in Thomas Hutchinson, the description of the reception given by the Massachusetts Bay colonists to each new governor after these colonists had hounded out the preceding one. The descriptions are all the same. The story's widest application seems at last the sad one, showing that human beings, especially when persuaded they are in legitimate circumstances, cannot read the handwriting on

the wall no matter how imposing and fresh it may be. "Mr. Dudley was received with ceremony and marks of respect. . . ." "Mr. Burnet was received with unusual pomp." Twenty pages on: "The governor's friends observed the effect the controversy [with the House of Representatives] had upon his spirits. In a few days, he fell sick of a fever and died at Boston. . . ." "The beginning of an administration in the colonies is generally calm and without ruffle."

Now consider Robin's reception at the inn, and notice Hawthorne's care with language in the allegory:

. . . he was accosted by the innkeeper, a little man in a stained apron, who had come to pay his professional welcome to the stranger. . . ."From the country, I presume, sir?" said he, with a profound bow. "Beg leave to congratulate you on your arrival, and trust you intend a long stay with us. Fine town here, sir, beautiful buildings, and much that may interest a stranger. May I hope for the honor of your commands in respect to supper?"

Small wonder that Robin's response is, "The man sees a family likeness! the rogue has guessed that I am related to the major!"—shortly after which he is just about hurled out on his ear.

Of the other brief interval of peaceful sway, that with the prostitute, we may perhaps say that she also had profit in mind and let it go at that, for Hawthorne seems to have outdistanced his mentor Hutchinson here. That is, the historian gives only a few hints that the aristocratic governors or other members of the king's party lived more loosely than the new world Puritanical stock. But a touch of culpability is brought in by Hawthorne in this way. One may ponder also the phenomenon that mistresses and courtesans so often prove comforting to leaders whose empires are tottering—from Mark Antony to Mussolini.

By this time other counters in the allegory may have already seemed to fall in place. Major Molineux himself remains the symbol of British rule, of the efficacy of the crown. Thinking of Robin as the composite Old Whig-Tory, we can think of Molineux's name as the prerogative that ought to carry sway, from the newcomer's point of view. (Hutchinson speaks frequently of "prerogative men" in the various governors' entourages at Massachusetts Bay, and Robin has this sort of confidence in his uncle's name.) It also should be seen that the "country" Robin is from—significantly separated by water from the New England town—is England, and that Robin is not symbolic of a Yankee bumpkin. The excellence of Hawthorne's choice here is that the supposedly shrewd English gentry are found naíve in this crucial political respect. And so an assertive, sturdy, but finally dim *juvenile* is chosen to represent royalists; rather than youthfulness itself, it is the special youthful qualities— overconfidence, obstinacy, obtuseness—that go into the making of Robin. Think of the faith he has in his cudgel. Hutchinson describes the second governor, Sir William Phips, in a Robin-like action in this regard. Phips got cantankerous when a certain Captain Short seemed insubordinate: "and meeting Captain Short in the street, warm words passed, and at length the governor made use of his cane and broke Short's head."

That the cudgel was "formed of an oak sapling" from his native woods shows why Robin has faith in it. Woods represent England in the allegory. They come into play several times, the most interesting being in connection with the last of Robin's six encounters, at which point Hawthorne delivers his stroke of genius.

The allegory has not been diagrammatic; the fates of the governors have not been paraded in order. It does happen, though, that the last governor, Burnet the bishop's son, was the one "hastened to his grave by continual bickerings with the House of Representatives." Hawthorne allegorizes this controversy in a novel way by using in Robin's last encounter a house instead of a man. The episode occurs during the nightmare sequence when Robin pauses by a church across the street from a great house with balcony and imposing pillars. "Perhaps this is the very house I have been seeking," he thinks. He falls into a reverie now, in which the peaceful religious ways of his home are contrasted with the austere, grave-ringed New England church. "Am I here, or there?" he cries, coming out of the reverie and trying to fix his eyes on the house across the way:

But still his mind kept vibrating between fancy and reality; by turns, the pillars of the balcony lengthened into the tall, bare stems of pines, dwindled down to human figures, settled again into their true shape and size, and then commenced a new succession of changes. . . . A deeper sleep wrestled with and nearly overcame him, but fled at the sound of footsteps along the opposite pavement.

These are the footsteps of the kindly man who gives Robin a civil answer to his sixth and last enquiry about Major Molineux, and who then volunteers to wait with him for the Major's expected "arrival." He is the voice of reason and moderation, as opposed to that wild ringleader with the red and black face; he is also the one who reminds Robin, "You must not expect all the stillness of your native woods here in our streets," and then asks him, "May not a man have several voices, Robin, as well as two complexions?"

This ameliorating figure seems placed here to soften the jars, not only of insurrection madness, but even of the bickering of hot legislators—who make the house rock before Robin's eyes between loyalty ("the tall, bare stems of pines" indicate this) and the rights of man (the columns dwindle to human figures). As for the equation between the pines and loyalty, the native-forest symbolism would be enough to warrant it. It is worth adding, though—perhaps we have an insight here to Hawthorne's working methods—that Hutchinson actually reported one governor's fight with the house over the cutting of pine trees in Maine, the governor maintaining these were "his majesty's" trees, "reserved by the royal charter . . . for the royal navy."

Robin's mentor thus could foreshadow genuinely reasonable debate and the call for redress of grievances. Though Hawthorne's sympathies in the story are for the sadly unrooted Tory mind, he is of course partial to the final revolution and evolution of America. As Daniel Hoffman maintains, writing of this late-found friend of Robin, "The implication is that the forces of Order and Stability do in the end prove stronger than those of Destruction and Misrule which dethrone them."

We are, however, left in this tale with the terrible impression of the foaming Major Molineux, tarred and feathered. Hawthorne's famous ambiguity is much in evidence at the end. Even this, to my mind, becomes more richly appropriate when we look at the allegory of Robin as reflecting the predicament of the "composite" Tory. The young kinsman's laugh, for example, coming when he is surrounded by the jeering acquaintances of the earlier evening, as all watch Molineux pass□is it a curing, sanative laugh or an hysterical, traumatic laugh capping full despair? Both, I would answer: for different people in the predicament, the climax might have cured and might have killed. Robin is a composite person. Hence in the logic of the allegory we are not permitted to know whether Robin will stay in the town he says he is weary of, or whether he will make his way back across the water. Both alternatives were taken by those involved who were loyalists during and after the upheavals of our revolutionary times.

The magnificent thing is that Hawthorne could have fleshed out what might have been purely diagrammatic, could have felt so strongly as to have kept his attention (and consequently ours) drilled to one character put through a composite ordeal before our eyes. His art and sympathy and his clarity, more than any irresolute or Kafkaish ambiguity on his part, earn him plaudits in this early story. What terrible shortsightedness on the part of those eminent men and their retainers, succeeding one another because the colonists would not abide them— and still, each of them so confident on arrival of being able to administer affairs for his "loyal" fellowmen. But after all, each would have seen the equivalent of what Robin saw—for example, "the broad countenance of a British hero swinging before the door of an inn." Why shouldn't they expect coöperation? All this evokes more legitimate pathos, perhaps, than the pathos which I for one have a time responding to: that of some everyman cutting away from one or more father figures, undergoing assault from the "powers of darkness," emerging self-created, and all the rest.

In the *Centenary Essays* published in 1964 to commemorate Hawthorne's death, Lionel Trilling's essay, "Our Hawthorne," spoke of the admiration writers like Henry James had for Hawthorne's "surface aesthetic." Trilling grew nostalgic over the fact that this kind of interest has lapsed. "Of this surface aesthetic," he said, "the modern critics . . . say little. Their concern is with an aesthetic of depth. . . ." But honoring the surface of an allegory may be doing as much justice to Hawthorne's work as pouring deep into its sub-basements all that we have come to suppose goes into our own predicament (breaking from adolescence, for instance)— ours, and by extension, everyman's. Trilling's nostalgia seems an appropriate way for one to remember the artist Hawthorne, rather than displacing him with oneself, just as Hawthorne would remember people of the past rather than displacing them with himself.

Source: John Russell, "Allegory and 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" in *The New England Quarterly,* Vol. 40, No. 3, September, 1967, pp. 432-40.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Jones explores Hawthorne's vagueness surrounding his meaning of "shrewdness" in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux.'

Nathaniel Hawthorne's tale of mid-eighteenth century Massachusetts, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," is woven around an ambiguous use of the term "shrewd." Five sets of oppositions, or tensions, are established in the opening pages, developed throughout the narrative and contrasted in a climactic scene. Robin's shrewdness, if proven beyond reasonable doubt, resolves these tensions in his shout of laughter and brings the story to a successful conclusion. Recent criticism has stressed sub-conscious factors when explaining Robin's laugh. My analysis indicates that his motivation is primarily conscious, that his decision represents a complex historical development. As such the story assumes a new dimension, a biting commentary on a human nature too prone to choose the expedient.

The Colonial reaction against Royal officials and the court party in Massachusetts prior to the American Revolution is the tale's first opposition. A boy like Robin Molineux, coming into so charged a political atmosphere, must ultimately choose between the rival factions. Contrasting the country and the town, a second tension, is politically significant. The story is laid in Boston, cradle of Massachusetts insurgency. Historically, leaders like Sam Adams had to overcome the loyalist sentiment of the back country before plunging the Bay State into a fight for independence. A third opposition, rough clothing compared with fashionable attire, follows from Robin's country origin. His coarse coat, leather breeches, home knit stockings, cudgel and the wallet he carries on his back set him off from the townsmen. The "courteous" innkeeper sees that he is from the uncommitted back country before any words pass between them.

The theme of youth struggling against the world is quite evident in Robin's situation. His parchment three-penny is not enough to buy a meal at the inn. Robin's elder brother is to receive the family farm. The youth is seeking his affluent kinsman, Major Molineux, who has offered to aid one of his impoverished cousin's two sons. Finally, illegal personal force is pitted against socio-legal repression. When Robin grabs the skirt of the old man's coat, he is threatened with imprisonment in the stocks. The innkeeper sardonically reads descriptions of runaway bond servants and the reward for their recapture, before saying, "Better trudge, boy; better trudge." The night watchman frightens Robin's temptress, "the lady of the scarlet petticoat," back into her quarters and commands him to go home or face the stocks. Robin's cudgel becomes the recurring symbol for illegal, personal violence, just as the stocks represent social coercion Robin wants to smash the old man's nose and break the innkeeper's head. He longs to wreak vengeance on the men who laugh at him. Robin considers forcing someone to direct him to the Major by brandishing his cudgel and, later, he tries to intimidate a pedestrian in that fashion. He feels "an instinctive antipathy towards the guardian of midnight order." Growing desperate from fatigue and hunger, Robin thinks of personal retribution when faced with social repression. He is more analytic when

confronted with illegal, personal force—perhaps because he embodies it and familiarity has brought a measure of understanding.

The temptress nearly succeeds in luring Robin into her rooms before the appearance of the night watchman. Despite this narrow escape, Robin distrusts her at once. He doubts whether "that sweet voice spoke Gospel truth," and ultimately reads "in her eyes what he did not hear in her words." There is no question that the temptress represents an illegal force after her flight from the watchman. (Later, when law and order breakdown completely, she ventures into the street with impunity.) Before this encounter, Robin invariably draws the wrong conclusions each time he tries to interpret his experiences. Previous references to his shrewdness, when he mistakes the old man for a country representative and when he infers that his light purse outweighs the name of Major Molineux, seem clearly ironic. Hawthorne tells us that Robin replied "cunningly" to the temptress after she said that the Major was inside her house. Robin says, "But I prithee trouble him to step to the door; I will deliver him a message . . . and then go back to my lodgings at the inn." This reply is cunning. It contains a lie, for Robin has no lodgings; but it gives him a pretext for remaining outside and provides for the contingency that the Major is within. Robin is called "shrewd" when he flees from the temptress, after the watchman disappears. And this action is shrewd, since the "good youth" has already learned that he cannot resist the scarlet woman's gentle persuasion. Robin's conduct at this point is important; it foreshadows his climactic act.

In the middle of the story, between Robin's flight from the temptress and the appearance of the lynching mob, certain tensions are reinforced while others become blurred. Robin's loneliness and isolation from the rest of the world grow more intense before the appearance of the kindly gentleman, an urbane, detached observer who is never directly involved in the story. The contrast between town and rural life is heightened by the comparison of the town church with a country religious observance, as Robin remembers it. The gentleman, however, speaks to Robin "in a tone of real kindness," a conspicuous departure from the townsmen's previous practice. He also holds the skirt of Robin's coat, an act which seemed boorish when Robin detained the old man in that way. Still, the tension between the town and the country remains. When an uproar is heard in the distance, the gentleman says "You must not expect all the stillness of your native woods here in our streets." Robin predicts that the disturbers of the peace will be set in the stocks, thereby mentioning a symbol twice invoked against him. He seems, however grudgingly, to accept social repression as a necessity. The discrepancy between Robin's clothing and the townsmen's grows weak, partly because the gentleman's clothes are not described. The youth also meets individuals "in outlandish attire" and the man with the twofold complexion "muffled in a cloak." Just before the mob arrives, "Halfdressed men hurried towards the unknown commotion." An examination of the climactic scene and the denouement explains why Hawthorne made several oppositions less rigid.

The mob sweeps by and the cart carrying the Major, "in tar-and-feathery dignity," stops directly in front of Robin. "The double-faced fellow" and the Major, presumably a Royal official, have both stared at him. (These stares are significant because Robin had been able to read the truth in the eyes of his temptress and correct "what he did not hear in

her words.") Gripped by a feeling which Hawthorne describes as a "mixture of pity and terror," Robin is compelled to make a crucial decision. He still represents the country vs. the town; youth vs. the world; and, at least symbolically, loyalty to England vs. rebellion. As foreshadowed in the middle of the tale, however, Robin's position is now inverted with respect to the other oppositions. He now represents socio-legal repression opposing the personal violence of the townsmen. He could be a witness at their trial, for example. Also, his clothing is now relatively fashionable compared with that of certain townsmen. Some of the mob are described as "wild figures in the Indian dress, and many fantastic shapes without a model." The innkeeper has an apron over his head, while the old man whose fashionable appearance was contrasted with Robin's crudeness at the beginning of the story, has become a caricature. The old man is:

. . . wrapped in a wide gown, his gray periwig exchanged for a nightcap, which was thrust back from his forehead, and his silk stockings hanging about his legs. He supported himself on his polished cane in a fit of convulsive merriment, which manifested itself on his solemn old features like a funny inscription on a tombstone.

It is indisputable that Robin's immediate problems are allayed by his laugh, although his motivation is not simple. Previous scholarship has attributed his shout of laughter, "the loudest there," to many factors. Robin has been under a strain and needs an emotional outlet. As he says in the middle of the story, "I have laughed very little since I left home, sir, and should be sorry to lose an opportunity." He laughs because the crowd's laughter is contagious and because the scarlet woman's touch provokes, we may guess, tingling sensations of a pleasant yet unfamiliar nature. But his laugh is also prompted by shrewdness, expediency, the desire for self-preservation. Robin has seen many of the lynch mob at close range and is related to its victim. He must side with the mob or, at least, seem to applaud its work. Otherwise he might well be thrown into the cart and, perhaps, put to death. (Death is a reality to Robin, as revealed in his thoughts inspired by the graves around the town church.) If the element of conscious shrewdness partially explains Robin's laugh, the tensions are all resolved. Robin accepts the town, the ways of the world, and the spirit of colonial rebellion—with its illegal, personal force and the rough, outlandish clothing of its adherents. He has matured, or retrogressed—depending on the Viewpoint—enormously. The critic must reject Mark Van Doren's conception that Robin, at the end of the story, is "much as he had been, except that he knows he has no prospects."

Two important clues suggest that expediency is one stimulus to Robin's climactic laugh. If Robin acts shrewdly when contending with the illegal force of the temptress, it is logical, in terms of his character development, that he will meet the overwhelming physical strength of the mob in the same way. Hawthorne refers back to the temptress when he plants the second clue. When Robin comments on the distant shouting, the gentleman says, "May not a man have several voices, Robin, as well as two complexions?" Then: "'Perhaps a man may; but Heaven forbid that a woman should!' responded the shrewd youth, thinking of the seductive tones of the Major's housekeeper." This exchange is apparently linked to Robin's climactic laugh through similarity of language and metaphor. (One indication is that the gentleman's question and Robin's answer are provoked by shouts, and Hawthorne twice calls Robin's laugh a

shout. Another indication concerns the attitude of "Heaven" toward deception through the voice. Immediately after Robin's laugh, Hawthorne depicts the indifference of the "cloud spirits" and the "Man in the Moon." This animism reflects ironically upon an activity divorced from Christian ethics. The Heaven, which is called upon to prohibit two-voiced women, is ambivalent.) In any case, Robin's admission that a man may have two voices is pertinent when discussing the reasonsfor his laugh. Like the mob's shout, a laugh may be deceptive. Full recognition that the voice may deceive, plus a strong motive for siding with the mob, suggests that Robin laughed, in part, to save himself. The other emotional factors contributed to his successful shout, "the loudest there."

Oversubtle interpretation is an obvious danger here. The youth's request to be shown the way back to the country implies that his future course is not fixed; but it should be noted that he does not protest when the gentleman orders him to remain in town for a few days. Robin goes so far as to call the mob and the onlookers "my other friends." Shrewdness does not connote clairvoyance, sophistication, worldly wisdom, will power or higher spiritual values; it is a quality men share with lower animal forms. Robin's bewilderment, false inferences, gaucheries and irresolution do not prevent him from acting shrewdly when the situation demands it. Hawthorne apparently provides sufficient clues to clarify the ambiguity surrounding the term. Formulating a final sentence which illuminates the meaning of an entire work is a recognized literary device. The last sentence of the story, in which the gentleman addresses Robin, reads:

Or, if you prefer to remain with us, perhaps, as you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux.

Earlier, when Robin said that he had a reputation for shrewdness, the kindly gentleman replied, "I doubt not that you deserve it." In context, the gentleman is taking a wait and see position. Now, he has observed Robin in the great crisis of his life. The most satisfactory dramatic reading of the last sentence demands heavy emphasis on the "are." This motivational pattern may be extended legitimately to rural Massachusetts, which finally chose a comparable solution to a dilemma like Robin's. Through him we see the back country join the drive for independence.

Source: Bartlett C. Jones, "The Ambiguity of Shrewdness in 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" in *Midcontinent American Studies Journal,* Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall, 1962, pp. 42-46.

Adaptations

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" was recorded on an audiocassette by Jimcin Records in 1983. The story is also included on Volume 7 of Jimcin's audio anthology *Great American Short Stories: A Collection* (1984).

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the political climate in the American colonies during the first half of the eighteenth century. When did the colonists start to talk and write publicly about seeking independence? How common were minor acts of rebellion like that committed against Major Molineux?

Find one or two descriptions of medieval religious pageants. How is the procession in the story like these pageants? What is the significance of the similarity?

Research the methods and materials used in tarring and feathering. Is the punishment physically harmful, or primarily humiliating? Where and when has it been used?

Make a list of stories in which a young man from the country comes to the city on a quest. How is this story like and unlike the others? In how many of the stories does the young man find what he has come for?

Compare and Contrast

1828: Andrew Jackson is elected president. His emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of the common man in governing a democratic nation help create an era of enthusiastic patriotism.

1990s: After decades of well-publicized scandals involving top government officials, public interest in national affairs is weak.

1830s and 1840s: Handsomely printed and bound annual collections of essays, short stories, and poems are popular Christmas gifts in England and the United States. They provide a strong market for short fiction. Although most pieces are published anonymously, the annuals enable several important writers, including Hawthorne, to establish a reputation with publishers.

1990s: Short fiction is published in popular and literary magazines, but does not sell as well in book form as the novel. Fiction writers frequently gain practice by writing short fiction, but build an audience through the publication of novels.

1700s: With no motorized vehicles and no paved roads, travel from country to town is slow. It has taken Robin five days to come from one part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to another, a distance of no more than one hundred ninety miles.

1990s: A car can cross Massachusetts in about three hours, traveling at normal highway speeds. The Concorde airliner travels faster than the speed of sound.

1700s: Boston is the largest settlement in New England, and is probably the town where Molineux lives. In 1790, the earliest year for which records are available, the population is 18,320.

1830: Boston is the largest city in New England. Its population is 61,392.

1990: Boston is still the largest city in New England. Its population is 574,283.

What Do I Read Next?

"Young Goodman Brown" (1835) is another Hawthorne short story of a young man on a journey. Brown leaves his wife and sets out through the forest, where he stumbles upon a witches' coven and finds his wife among them. He returns to Salem a gloomy man who has lost his faith in the goodness of humans.

Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (1843) is an allegorical tale in which a scientist marries a woman who is perfectly beautiful except for a tiny birthmark on her cheek. Determined to remove the mark, the scientist tries several methods, finally finding a potion that erases the birthmark and kills his wife.

The Scarlet Letter (1850) is Hawthorne's great novel about the suffocating influence of Puritanism. Hester Prynne is made to wear a scarlet letter "A" on her breast as punishment for adultery, while her lover keeps his sin a secret and suffers the torment of guilt.

"Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853) is Herman Melville's tale of a Wall Street attorney who cannot establish a connection with his new scribe. The young employee answers every request with "I should prefer not to."

Great Expectations (1860-61) is Charles Dickens' novel of the village boy Pip who goes to the city with the expectation of finding wealth and love.

Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" (1849) is an essay that asserts "that government is best which governs least." It is an individual's responsibility, Thoreau explains, to refuse to obey unjust laws.

Mason Weems's *History of the Life, Death, Virtues and Exploits of George Washington* (1800) is a fictionalized history of the Revolutionary period, popular in the nineteenth century and read by Hawthorne. The 1806 edition contains the first account of Washington and the cherry tree.

Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Critical Biography (1949), by Mark Van Doren, is a biography that frankly reveals the affection the author feels for Hawthorne, yet still presents an even-handed criticism of Hawthorne's work.

Further Study

Cohen, B. Bernard, ed., *The Recognition of Nathaniel Hawthorne: Selected Criticism since 1828,* University of Michigan Press, 1969.

Starting with an overview of trends in Hawthorne, this collection of forty-three reviews and critical articles includes reviews by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, William Dean Howells, and T. S. Eliot. "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is not specifically mentioned.

James, Henry, *Hawthorne,* 1879; reprinted, edited by Dan McCall, Cornell University Press, 1998.

This first book-length critical study of Hawthorne is still in print in several editions, and still highly regarded. James appreciates Hawthorne's genius, but he has been accused of overemphasizing the "provincial" qualities of American life and of Hawthorne's own life and outlook.

Male, Roy R., *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision,* Norton, 1957.

Male traces moral growth as the primary concern of all of Hawthorne's important works. "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," he finds, is the story of Robin's quest for a father. Only when he breaks free of his dependence on the illusory authority figure is Robin ready to be a man.

Martin, Terence, *Nathaniel Hawthorne,* Twayne, 1965.

This is an introduction to the life and work of Hawthorne for the general reader. Martin examines Haw thorne in the context of an early nineteenth-century culture that did not look favorably on imagination and had no great body of imaginative literature. He includes a chronology and annotated bibliography.

Mellow, James R., *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times,* Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Winner of the 1983 National Book Award, this is the standard biography of Hawthorne. At nearly seven hundred pages it is comprehensive but thoroughly readable by a general audience.

Pennell, Melissa McFarland, ed., *Student Companion to Nathaniel Hawthorne,* Greenwood Press, 1999.

This examination of Hawthorne is intended for students at the high school and college levels. The chapter on "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" includes material on the setting, plot, themes, and historical context.

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Hawthorne, Nathaniel, Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables,* 1851; reprinted, Norton, 1967, p. 1.

—, *The Scarlet Letter*, 1850; Bantam, 1965, pp. 34, 35.

Leavis, Q. D., "Hawthorne as Poet," part 1, in *Sewanee Review,* Vol. 59, Spring, 1951, pp. 179-205; reprinted in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales: A Norton Critical Edition,* edited by James McIntosh, Norton, 1987, p. 367.

Male, Roy R., *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision,* Norton, 1957, p. 49.

McWilliams, John P., Jr., "'Thorough-Going Democrat' and 'Modern Tory': Hawthorne and the Puritan Revolution of 1776," in *Studies in Romanticism,* Vol. 15, Fall, 1976, pp. 549-71; reprinted in *Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tales: A Norton Critical Edition,* edited by James McIntosh, Norton, 1987, pp. 377-78, 379.

Pearce, Roy Harvey, "Robin Molineux on the Analyst's Couch," in *Criticism,* Vol. 1, 1959, p. 87.

Tuckerman, Henry T., "Nathaniel Hawthorne," in *Southern Literary Messenger,* Vol. 17, June, 1851, 344-49; reprinted in *The Recognition of Nathaniel Hawthorne,* edited by B. Bernard Cohen, University of Michigan Press, 1969, pp. 56-57.

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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

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