Marry the One Who Gets There First Study Guide

Marry the One Who Gets There First by Heidi Julavits

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

□Marry the One Who Gets There First□ subtitled, □Outtakes from the Sheidegger-Krupnik Wedding Album,□ by Heidi Julavits, was first published in *Esquire*, in 1998. It was also published in *The Best American Stories, 1999*. The story is set in Stanley, Idaho, at a mountain lodge where a wedding is about to take place. It is a darkly comic tale about love and betrayal structured around the descriptions of thirty-six photographs. Julavits got the idea for this photo-based structure from a photo essay which featured pictures that were not included in people's final wedding albums. At the time, Julavits was also preparing for her own wedding and was all too aware of how wedding albums capture the unwavering cheer of the day. The less glamorous, at times irreverent, photos that were not considered worthy of inclusion in the albums gave Julavits the idea for her satirical story, which takes aim at the myths associated with romantic love and exposes some of the darker secrets of the not-so-happy couple.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: American

Birthdate: 1968

Heidi Julavits was born in 1968, in Portland, Maine. Her mother taught English and her father was an attorney. As a child, Julavits excelled at mathematics but decided in ninth grade to concentrate instead on books and reading. She attended Deering High School in Portland and then Dartmouth College. After graduation from Dartmouth, she traveled in Asia, and on her return to the United States she settled in San Francisco, where she worked as a copywriter. During her twenties she worked at many jobs, including waitress, movie extra, fashion copywriter, and English teacher.

When Julavits entered Columbia University's graduate writing program, she began writing short stories in earnest. She found it was a real challenge and that her first stories were thirty-five to forty pages long. She gradually learned how to cut them down to more manageable length, and she honed her craft by attending the annual Bread Loaf Writers Conference for several summers.

Some of Julavits stories were published in periodicals such as *McSweeney's* and *Story*. □Marry the One Who Gets There First□ appeared in *Esquire* in April 1998 and was selected for the anthology, *The Best American Short Stories, 1999*. Julavits was also in that year named a Writer on the Verge by *Village Voice Literary Supplement*.

In 1998, on her thirtieth birthday, Julavits achieved sudden success when the publisher Putnam offered her a two-book deal for an advance that was reported to be in six figures. This money enabled her to give up working as a waitress and concentrate on her writing.

Julavits's first novel, *The Mineral Palace*, took her several years to write. It was published in 2000 to critical acclaim. Set in Pueblo, Colorado, in the Depression Era of the 1930s, the novel focuses on the troubles of a young wife and mother who must come to terms with her future.

Julavits's second novel, *The Effect of Living Backwards* (2003) tells the story of sisters Alice and Edith, whose plane is hijacked as they travel to Edith's wedding in Morocco. The novel had its origins in an incident that affected Julavits's family. In 1973, one of her father's cousins was killed on a plane that was blown up by Palestinian terrorists as it sat on a runway in Rome.

With her husband, Ben Marcus, who is a writer, editor, and professor, Julavits co-founded in 2000 *The Believer*, a literary magazine. She created a stir in the literary world by writing an essay in the magazine in which she criticized book reviewers for being too ready to write negative reviews and make attacks on authors.

As of 2005, Julavits and her husband live in Brooklyn, New York. They have one child.

Plot Summary

Photos 1-6

In Photo 1, June Sheidegger, who is the younger sister of the bride, Violet, leans on the porch railing of the lodge in her revealing bridesmaid's dress. In Photo 2, Violet, half-dressed, sits as her Grandma Rose pins hot rollers in her hair. She has been poring over maps during the week, hoping to find that the Lower Stanley Municipal Building where she is to be married is in fact part of an adjacent township called Diamond Heights. She does not like the idea of getting married in a place called Lower Stanley. However, Louis Krupnik, her fiancé, likes the name, seeing in it suggestions of building great things from humble beginnings. He looks through a manila file and comes across a wedding photo taken at the same lodge in 1953. On the back of the photo is an inscription, written by Stan, the groom, saying that he knew he would marry his bride Rhoda the first minute he saw her. Louis takes this as a sign relevant to his own situation.

In Photo 3, June sorts through a shoebox of letters in front of the fireplace at the lodge. She cuts the letters into strips and puts them back in the box. Photo 4 shows Violet flipping through a fashion magazine while receiving a pedicure. It transpires that Louis has a drawerful of T-shirts emblazoned with the names of women's fashion magazines. Violet has learned that Louis has slept with women from each of the magazines, a fact which bothers her only when she and Louis have sex.

In Photo 5, Louis' brother and June's brother Bart toss a football on the front lawn of the lodge. The text tells of Violet and Louis's first date, at a restaurant, which got off to a bad start but ended with the two kissing frantically in a park near the Hudson River in Manhattan, New York.

In Photo 6, a badly thrown football spooks a horse. Norton Black, the stable hand, is tossed from his horse. He dislikes the stupidity of the lodge guests, who are usually from the city.

Photos 7-14

In Photo 7, Grandma Rose knocks a glass vase to the floor. Grandma Rose believes in omens and has structured her life around them. She knew as soon as she met Joe Sheidegger that she would marry him. She is certain because after she knocked a flute to the floor, Joe quoted a Chinese proverb which her grandfather used to repeat. She saw this as an omen.

Photo 8 shows Louis, fresh from the shower and wrapped in a towel, snapping a self-portrait. The narrator tells of how Louis used to help his late father's photography business during summer vacations when he was at high school. He would look at all the customers' photos before slipping them into the yellow envelopes. His attention is

arrested by a photograph of a girl in a red dress in front of a Ferris wheel. He immediately falls for her, declaring her to be the girl of his dreams.

In Photo 9, Grandma Rose and Grandpa Joe's live-in caretaker, Margie Adams, licks the buttercream frosting off the feet of a plastic bride and groom. June has asked Margie to bake into the wedding cake a boxful of shredded blue paper.

Photo 10 shows Violet dancing in her panties holding a salad bowl over her bare breasts. She later reflects on unwanted wedding gifts received by her parents, such as a salad bowl and serving platters, which she regards as relics of her childhood.

Photo 11 shows Louis walking to his minivan and seeing June on the porch. He recalls when they first met. He was visiting San Francisco and was in a bookstore, when he saw her looking in the window. He thought she was looking at him, but in fact she was observing her own reflection in the window. He followed her, thinking she was the girl of his dreams. They did not waste any time in beginning to have sex, apparently during their first encounter.

The next photo, number 12, shows Violet and her brother Bart playfully flogging their mother with napkins. After his own marriage, Bart makes a habit of visiting a dominatrix service (where women flog men, for a fee), and his wife discovers the charges on his credit card.

Photo 13 returns to Grandma Rose, who is crying at the prenuptial luncheon because her husband always makes her leave such occasions before she is ready. She complains to Margie that she married the wrong man.

In Photo 14, Louis cuts himself shaving as he notices June outside. When he started seeing June he did not at know that she was Violet's sister. He had only just begun dating Violet. He found out the truth when he went to the Sheideggers' summer house on Lake Sunapee for the Fourth of July weekend, and both June and Violet were in attendance.

Photos 15-21

Photo 15 shows June looking at a photograph of her and Louis, taken by themselves on a self-timer, at the guest shack in Lake Sunapee. They are naked under a blanket on a bunk bed. Violet was out at a party and had asked June to keep Louis entertained.

In Photo 16, Grandpa Joe starts the car, leaving his weeping wife behind. He is driving to a nearby Indian reservation, where he intends to gamble at the casino.

In Photo 17, Violet, in her bathrobe, makes a call from an outside pay phone. She can smell and hear the preparations for the wedding feast and considers buying the young staff some beer. But then she stops and reminds herself that her life is not about being generous but about knowing others' secrets and desires.

Photo 18 shows Louis pulling out an envelope from his backpack. Inside it are photos of his father's mistress, which Louis discovered after his father died. His father's mistress looks very like, and probably is, the girl in the red dress that Louis had decided, in his teens, was the girl of his dreams. He reflects on how his father's situation resembled his own.

June, in the lodge kitchen in Photo 19, contemplates a cockroach on the wall. Louis wrote to her asking her to get rid of all the letters he had written to her. June then looks at the wedding cake and smiles, knowing she has done what he asked her to do.

In Photo 20, Louis looks at his reflection in a mirror and fingers an antique watch which was given to his father by his mother, Ida, on their wedding day. But the watch gave his father a rash, so Ida wore it instead. Louis went to visit her as she was dying in hospital; she thought he was her dead husband and yelled at him. It appears that his parents, both now dead, were unhappily married.

In Photo 21, June talks to Susan Minturn, another bridesmaid. Susan lives in Atlanta and is to marry Bart. After their marriage, Susan uses Bart's sexual inadequacy as a reason to feel superior to him.

Photos 22-28

Photo 22 shows Violet at a payphone, wearing her wedding dress. It is revealed that Violet discovered June and Louis together and took revenge by taking a lover of her own named Shane. She would lie to Louis that she was taking tuition, and Shane would duly pay her to offset suspicions. Violet did not feel guilty. On the contrary, she was proud of the fact that she was now developing secrets and deceptions of her own.

In Photo 23, Louis and June are shown arguing behind the horse stables before the ceremony. It appears that Violet has discovered the photo of Louis and June in bed together. Louis rips the photo to pieces.

Photo 24 shows Violet again at the payphone. She is calling Shane, but he is not at home. She feels claustrophobic at the knowledge that her life is narrowing in possibilities as a result of her marriage to Louis.

A crying June, in Photo 25, digs a hole with the heel of her shoe and buries the pieces of the photo. She sees Louis leaning against the side wall of the stable, and they both watch through a hole in the wall as a man, probably Norton Black, is about to make love to a naked woman who is lying on a horse blanket. Louis starts to cry.

In Photo 26 Louis, hearing the strains of Mendelssohn's □Wedding March,□ stuffs the envelope containing photos of his father's mistress inside June's handbag by the fireplace.

In Photo 27, Violet enters the chapel. She sees Louis and she is immediately aware that he knows she has found out about his affair with June.

Photo 28 shows Hope, the young woman whom Norton Black has made love to, walking up from the stables. She is no longer a virgin and alternates between feeling lost and victorious.

Photos 29-36

In a scene that takes place after the wedding, Photo 29 shows the newlyweds being driven around the property in a chuck wagon. Violet's veil and fake blond braid lie on the road, having been snagged on a piece of fencing.

Photo 30 shows June in the wagon after Louis and Violet have left. She is undoing Violet's braid and weeping. But then she becomes aware of the ridiculous nature of her situation and laughs at herself.

In Photo 31, Grandma Rose is fast asleep at the reception while her husband thinks about what he will do when they get home. Perhaps he will read, play cribbage alone, or watch television while his wife sleeps.

In the next photo, Number 32, Louis and Violet cut the cake.

In Photo 33, June runs into the hills behind the lodge. She finds in her purse three photos that Louis placed there. Two of them are of Louis's father's mistress, and one is of the 1953 wedding at the lodge. They mean nothing to her, and she throws them away.

In Photo 34, Louis and Violet chew on the cake. Louis retrieves from his mouth a strip of paper, which contains a fragment of a letter he wrote to June, telling her that that she is the only one for him.

As Louis plunges his hand into the cake and comes up with little bits of blue paper (Photo 35), he realizes what has happened and wants to throttle June. He and Violet avoid each other's eyes. Then she pulls his hand to her mouth and eats madly□cake, frosting, and scraps of blue paper. At first he is horrified, but then he responds by doing the same. He feels he hardly knows the woman who is now his wife but believes he was fated to marry her.

In Photo 36, it is nearly dark, and June accepts a ride from Norton Black in a pickup truck. He is going to buy some beer. The narrator speculates that maybe, like the other lovers in the story, June and Norton will seize on some detail that seems significant to them and convince themselves they are made for each other and marry. Maybe they will tell the story of how they first met to their children and grandchildren and claim that they were simply destined to be together.

Characters

Margie Adams

Margie Adams is Grandma Rose and Grandpa Joe's live-in caretaker. She is also a pastry chef. At June's request, Margie bakes a boxful of shredded letters into the wedding cake.

Norton Black

Norton Black is the stable hand at the Rocky Mountain Lodge. He is unhappy in his job, but he is known by the summer lodge staff for his sexual prowess. At the end of the story he meets June for the first time and takes her for a beer.

Hope

Hope is a young woman who works at the lodge. The lodge staff calls her □Hope the Slut□ because they think she sleeps with Norton Black so that he will buy her a beer. But they also envy and admire her.

Louis Krupnik

Louis Krupnik marries Violet Sheidigger. Both of Louis's parents are dead, and he runs the family business, Krupnik Bros. Photographic Supplies and Development, in Manhattan, New York City. Louis is a badly flawed character. He is described as □Orphan, Pessimist, Voyeur, Liar.□ He is also shallow, manipulative, and a womanizer. Soon after he begins dating Violet he begins an affair with June, Violet's sister, and writes letters to her saying that they are meant for each other. There is a streak of romanticism in his nature, and he tends to think of each woman he goes with as the embodiment of all his dreams.

Susan Minturn

Susan Minturn is a friend of Violet, and a bridesmaid at the wedding. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia, where she works as a buyer for a department-store chain. Later she marries Bart Sheidigger, whom she both loves and pities.

Shane

Shane is Violet's secret lover. Violet started to see him when she discovered that Louis was having an affair with June. Shane intrigues her because he possesses a □certain saintly quality . . . an excessive goodness always verging on perversity.□

Bart Sheidigger

Bart is the brother of Violet and June. He later marries Susan Minturn. Bart is sexually inadequate and deviant, spending thousands of dollars on a dominatrix service. Susan is aware of this, but she is tolerant of his behavior.

Grandpa Joe Sheidigger

Grandpa Joe Sheidigger is the grandfather of Violet and June. His wife is unhappy with his inconsiderate behavior, but in his own way he tries to be protective of her, even though he starts their quarrels intentionally. He seems happy in his solitary way.

June Sheidigger

June Sheidigger, Violet's younger sister, is rather manipulative and cunning, and she is quite happy to continue her affair with Louis behind her sister's back. When he breaks off with her she gets her revenge on him by putting the shredded letters he wrote to her in the wedding cake.

Grandma Rose Sheidigger

Grandma Rose Sheidigger is unhappily married to Joe. She married him because she believed that their union was fated, but she later came to regret her decision.

Violet Sheidigger

Violet Sheidigger marries Louis Krupnik. Violet is a student of psychology and has just written a paper entitled □Alleviate Chronic Depression Through Positive Word Usage.□ She tries always to be upbeat and is naïvely optimistic. Her character has a dark side, however. She has made a life out of knowing others' secrets and desires, and she is not known for her generosity. She likes to think that she can see through the hypocrisy and shallowness of others. When she discovers that Louis is having an affair with June, she gets her revenge by taking a lover, Shane. Through this choice, she learns the thrill of deception, and she feels no guilt in lying to Louis. Violet has no illusions about Louis's womanizing, and although she has doubts about the wisdom of her course; she tries to convince herself that she is doing the right thing in marrying him.

Themes

Although the occasion of the story is a wedding and thus a time of love and celebration, underlying it lie darker truths of deception, betrayal, lust, and folly. The deceptions practiced by Louis on Violet, and by Violet on Louis (not to mention June's deception of her sister) are gross and obvious, and knowing this, bride and groom do not exactly rush to the altar, aflame with love.

But perhaps more important than deceptions of others are the self-deceptions that are practiced in the name of love. Characters in this story choose their spouses for the wrong reasons, based on unrealistic, naïve ideas of romantic love as well as other superstitious ideas that they have inherited from their culture. For example, when she was a young woman, Grandma Rose believed in omens. She thought that because Joe, a young man she had only just met, happened to quote a Chinese proverb that her grandfather also used to quote, he must be the one for her. Thus, she ignored signs to the contrary (□he smelled foreign and always would□). It is later divulged that Joe had been coached regarding this proverb by Jimmy Wong, the Chinese boss of the mah-jongg parlor that he visited before he took Rose on their first date. Jimmy Wong had assured Joe that the proverb worked like a charm on the ladies□and he was right. Misled by her belief that she was fated to be with Joe, Grandma Rose set herself up for a lifetime of regret.

As a result of this belief in fate and destiny as the determining factors in love and marriage, characters in the story get carried away by their romantic desires and read into coincidences more than the situation really warrants. They adopt a kind of optimistic fatalism. Naïvely, they accept the idea that there is only one special person with whom they are destined to share their lives. This is what happened to Louis's mother. When Louis visits her on her dying day in hospital, she mistakes him for her dead husband and reproaches him with scorn: □The one, the one, you were *the one*. Bah!□ Like Grandma Rose, it appears that she made a hasty decision and has spent many years regretting it, indeed until her dying day.

Louis himself falls into the same trap of illusions. He holds a romantic idea about meeting the □Girl of his Dreams,□ just as his mother thought that her husband Saul was □THE ONE OF MY DREAMS.□ Louis has held this idea since he was a teenager, when he thought that the girl in the red dress in the photograph was the girl. He has carried the photo around with him ever since. Later, he convinces himself that June is the only one in the world who is meant for him (at least that is what he tells June). Then when he finally gets to the altar with Violet, he convinces himself that he is fated to marry her, even though he feels he does not know her very well. He sees in the idea of fate an explanation of the mystery of why his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents married as they did, □their loves as fated as they are accidental.□

The theme of the story is brought home finally in the narrator's speculations about how Norton Black and June, who have just met, will probably seize on some irrelevant coincidence that will convince them□blinded as people are by their longings for true

love and union with another person□that the other is the special one marked out by destiny to be their beloved: □Maybe Norton will see in June a strange resemblance to his dead sister and June will admire the way he wears a pocket watch in his jeans like her Grandpa Joe.□ But, the narrator warns, they are as likely as not to end up in a lonely marriage, even though□the human capacity for self-deceit being so great□they may believe all their lives that a special fate united them and that there was nothing they could do to alter or question it.

Style

The unusual structure of the story, based on descriptions of thirty-six photographs, enables the author to switch scenes rapidly, alternating between present and past, and introduce a large number of characters and situations in a relatively brief story. The technique is as much cinematic as it is literary, with strong visual images and rapid changes of scene. The story's subtitle, Outtakes from the Sheidegger-Krupnik Wedding Album, provides a hint about what the author is trying to accomplish. These are photos that did not make it into the happy couple's album, no doubt considered unsuitable for such a dignified celebratory occasion. Like the story as a whole, the photos effectively deconstruct the familiar wedding photos, with everyone all smiles and dressed to the nines, that adorn a million mantels in homes the world over. They are candid, irreverent, risqué, not for the public eye. The very first photo sets the tone: June in her bridesmaid's dress, wearing no underwear that might impede the view of the unfettered swell of [her] behind. The photos reveal characters in undignified, unglamorous moments: Louis falling backward into a bramble bush; June and Susan applying lipstick in the washroom; June hiking her dress up to her thighs; Margie Adams licking the buttercream frosting off the cake. The bride and groom are sometimes shown semi-dressed, their physical nakedness a kind of visual metaphor of the stripping away of the masks through which they hide their real selves that occurs in the text. Louis, for example, is shown just out of the shower with only a towel around him and cutting himself shaving; Violet appears in nothing but her panties and also half-dressed with her hair in rollers. She is also shown in other unguarded and unflattering snaps: receiving a pedicure; in her bathrobe, hair wet, making a phone call; adjusting her garter just before she enters the chapel. It is as if the photos take the reader backstage at a theater. The characters are about to go onstage and play certain roles, but the reality of who they are outside the show is very different. The photos reveal life more as it really is, behind the staged glamour of the big wedding.

Historical Context

□Marry the One Who Gets There First□ depicts sex (including casual sex), infidelity in a committed relationship, sexual betrayal, lust, voyeurism, and sexual deviance. The sexual elements are presented explicitly, as in Violet's thoughts about the sex she engages in with Louis. In this uninhibited approach to her themes, Julavits was reflecting American popular culture of the late-1990s, in which such issues were presented in the media with an explicitness that would have been unthinkable to earlier generations, even during the period of sexual freedom in the 1960s. A typical example was *Sex and the City*, a cable television program which originally began broadcasting on the HBO network in 1998 and quickly attracted a large audience. Based on the 1997 book of the same title by the journalist Candace Bushnell, the show ran for six successful seasons until 2004. It focused on the sex lives of four women in their thirties and forties in New York City, and it was notable for the women's graphic language and ribald humor. The sexual topics that came up during the show included extramarital affairs, □threesomes,□ lesbianism, condoms, oral sex, and, repeatedly, the size of the male sexual organ.

During the same period of the late-1990s, television talk shows flourished in which invited guests would divulge the most intimate details of their personal lives. These confessional shows ranged from the sedate but extremely popular afternoon *Oprah Winfrey Show* to more raucous and tasteless productions such as *The Jerry Springer Show*. Springer would invite guests to talk about the problems in their lives, often concerning sex and sexual relationships, and ensure that they were confronted on camera by romantic rivals, cheating spouses, and anyone else whose presence could be guaranteed to arouse passions and lead to an unpleasant scene□unpleasant, that is, for everyone except the audience, both in the studio and in living rooms across the nation, for whom the most angry confrontations, sometimes involving fistfights and hair-pulling, made up the most entertaining shows. When in 1998 and again in 1999, Springer was ordered by Studio USA, who produced the show, to reduce the amount of foul language and the number of physical confrontations on the show, ratings fell dramatically.

While TV talk shows pushed the limits of what was acceptable on the air, the same trend occurred in radio. So-called shock jock Howard Stern, addressing a huge audience of commuters in the morning, brought new levels of obscenity to the airwaves, with jokes and stories about everything from bodily functions to sexual perversions. The more outrageous Stern became, the more his ratings soared, although many protested that he was bigoted and a racist and a misogynist. In the early 1990s, several stations were fined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for airing a Stern show that was deemed especially obscene. In 1995, the radio station operator Infinity Broadcasting Corporation was fined $1.7 million for Stern's excesses, but none of these measures put a dent in the shock jock's position as a cultural icon of 1990s America.

Discussions of sex also became more explicit in the news media during the 1990s, in part, due to a desire to report on and to stem the AIDS/HIV epidemic, which involved explaining how the virus could and could not be communicated.

In 1998, sexual morality in public life became the subject of national attention due to the scandal involving President Bill Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky, a young single woman who had worked as an intern at the White House. Clinton at first denied under oath that he had had an improper relationship with Lewinsky but later admitted the truth of the allegations. He was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives for perjury and obstruction of justice, and the case was sent to the Senate for trial. In February, 1999, Clinton was acquitted on both charges, and he remained in office until the end of his term.

For months as the scandal unfolded, the news media focused on explicit details of the president's sexual behavior with Lewinsky. Many parents were shocked at how talk about sexual terms and sexual acts were taking place on the evening news when their children were watching. However, the public as a whole was unwilling to condemn Clinton for what many saw as a private matter. In fact, Clinton's approval ratings, as measured by opinion polls, soared during the scandal and impeachment. Years of exposure through television and radio talk shows, as well as movies, to explicit discussions of sex, as well as stories of sexual infidelity, helped to create a cultural climate in which such acts were not considered especially shocking or reprehensible by the majority of Americans. Conservatives, however, took the Clinton scandal as an example of the moral decline of the country, and this was a factor in the victory of the Republican candidate, George W. Bush, in the presidential election of 2000.

Critical Overview

Short story writers usually only capture the attention of literary critics when they publish their first collection of stories in book form. Since Julavits has yet to publish a short-story collection, □Marry the One Who Comes First□ has so far not received any attention from reviewers or critics, although it did receive the distinction, after publication in *Esquire* magazine, of being included in *The Best American Short Stories, 1999*.

Julavits has expressed her preference for writing novels rather than short stories, and her two novels, *The Mineral Palace* (2000) and *The Effect of Living Backwards* (2003), are the works on which her growing literary reputation is based.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on literature. In this essay, he discusses how Julavits uses her characters, particularly Louis Krupnik, to satirize the idea of romantic love.

On the evidence of □Marry the One Who Gets There First,□ Julavits is a writer with a rich gift for satirizing deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about love and marriage. Against the background of an elaborate, traditional wedding in a splendid western setting, Julavits savagely scythes away at the shallow, one might even say half-baked, ideas that people employ to explain why they chose that particular person to be their spouse and torpedoes the □happy-ever-after□ cliché that supposedly describes married life with the person of one's dreams. Louis Krupnik and Violet Sheidegger are not even happy *before*, so their chances of being happy *after* seem unlikely, to say the least. Julavits's world as depicted in this story is shallow, sly, deceitful, and full of anguish, both potential and actual. It is not the world depicted in a million pulp romance novels or in umpteen Hollywood romantic comedies, in which true love always triumphs over all obstacles and setbacks. Such starry-eyed escapism is not for Julavits; in its satirical thrust □Marry the One Who Gets There First□ has more in common with *Seinfeld*, the mordantly funny 1990s television situation comedy in which love between the sexes, whilst earnestly sought, is always superficial, brittle, and short-lived.

The notion of romantic love has had a grip on the Western imagination since the phenomenon of courtly love emerged in the twelfth century. In courtly love, a knight would worship and idealize an aristocratic lady in whom he saw the highest beauty and perfection. Erotic passion was felt but not acted upon. In contrast, worship of the lady became the means by which the knight proved himself to be both noble and selfless. Such love was not seen as being the basis for a marriage. The lady who was the object of the knight's devotion was usually married herself, and upper-class marriage in medieval times was not a matter of romantic love, but was usually arranged for purposes of familial or political advantage.

The belief that romantic love should be the basis of marriage did not appear until comparatively recently, in the Victorian age, and as of the early 2000s its grip has not relaxed. Nowadays, romantic love carries an astonishing burden of expectation for those who fall under its sway. It is not uncommon for men and women alike to invest all their hopes in meeting Mr. or Ms. Right, who will be the embodiment of all their dreams and the answer to all their prayers. When a suitable partner comes along and people □fall in love,□ they feel excited and elevated, as if they are more fully alive than ever before. They believe, often without question, that they have met the person who will somehow complete them and make them happy. It is a heady, exhilarating feeling, erotic and passionate yet somehow seeming spiritual and transcendental as well. For many people, cultivating this love of their lives then takes priority over everything else. As Robert A. Johnson puts it in *We: Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love*, his illuminating study of romantic love in the context of the Tristan and Iseult myth, □Romantic love is the single greatest energy system in the Western psyche. In our

culture it has supplanted religion as the arena in which men and women seek meaning, transcendence, wholeness, and ecstasy.□

In □Marry the One Who Gets There First,□ the primary carrier of this cultural myth about romantic love is Louis Krupnik. Louis may be a liar and a cheat, but he is also a romantic and a dreamer. His romantic ideals revealed themselves early in his life. When he was still at high school he was captivated by a photograph of a girl in a red dress that he found while working in his father's photography business. Convincing himself that she was the culmination of a □divine search,□ he promptly installed her as □the Girl of His Dreams.□ The capitalization well conveys the transcendental importance he ascribed to this mysterious, alluring female whom he had never met and whose identity he did not know. The cultural obsession with romantic love had already reached out and grabbed Louis and made him its prisoner. In that sense, he was unconscious of what he was doing; his thoughts and feelings about the opposite sex were prescribed for him before he was even born. He was pre-programmed to invent a Girl of His Dreams. As Robert Johnson explains:

Romantic love is not just a form of 'love,' it is a whole psychological package□a combination of beliefs, ideals, attitudes, and expectations. These often contradictory ideas coexist in our unconscious minds and dominate our reactions and behavior, without our being aware of them. We have automatic assumptions about what a relationship with another person is, what we should feel, and what we should 'get out of it.'

When Louis puts the photo □the Girl of His Dreams□ in his wallet and carries it around with him for many years, he is carrying a visual symbol of his psychological condition, his dependence on an invented, projected, unrealistic ideal. □The Girl of His Dreams,□ Louis no doubt imagines, will be the salve for all his pain, the precious One who will transmute his misery□for surely Louis, the son of unhappily married parents, did not have an enjoyable childhood□into the purest bliss.

Had Louis been content to live a quiet life and keep □the Girl of His Dreams□ only in his pocket, he might have avoided causing too much suffering for others, but when he meets June, who unlike the girl in the red dress is a real, flesh-and-blood woman, he immediately bestows on her the same exalted, dangerous title. He does not seem to know that dream girls appear only in dreams and can do no otherwise. Significantly, his very first sight of June is based on a misinterpretation and an illusion. Louis is in a bookstore in San Francisco and June is outside, examining her own reflection in the window. But instead of grasping this clue to June's vanity and self-absorption, Louis mistakenly thinks she is gazing directly at him. The relationship therefore begins with an illusion and continues with one, since no woman can long bear the burden of being the Girl of Louis's Dreams, or of any man's dreams, come to that. Louis simply projects onto June his ideal, which is unrelated to who she in reality is□the flirtatious, deceitful, cunning June would not seem to be the dream of any man in his right mind□and wildly overestimates what she is able to bring to him in the relationship. Since romantic love, as T.S. Eliot said of humanity, cannot bear too much reality, the course of the relationship between Louis and June is wholly predictable. Louis spends some time

telling her that she is the only woman in the world for him, but all too soon things end in bitterness and recrimination□and also June's revenge, as Louis's own words literally come back to haunt him in the wedding cake.

Having chosen, if that is the right word, Violet over June, Louis ends up believing that the marriage he has just that minute solemnized, to a woman□he suddenly realizes□he barely knows, is the result of a destiny that cannot be countermanded. The idea that there is an immutable destiny that leads two people to unite in love and marriage is often part of the □psychological package□ mentioned by Johnson that accompanies romantic love. Such beliefs go back a long way in the Western cultural tradition. In Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, one of the characters approvingly quotes an old proverb, □The ancient saying is no heresy / Hanging and wiving goes by destiny.□ This is of course a proposition that cannot be empirically tested. It might be argued that if two people married and spent their lives together, they were de facto destined to do so, but that says nothing about what might have happened had they made different choices earlier in their lives.

Curiously, Violet, the other main participant in this dark comedy, seems to believe in the power of choice. Unlike Louis, she appears not to labor so much under the illusions of romantic love. She knows Louis for who he is and even permits herself some doubts about her chosen course of action. Violet subscribes to, one might say, an alternative reality, in which people shape their own lives by the kind of language they choose to describe their experiences. It is a belief system Julavits treats satirically, describing Violet as a student of □language therapy□ and presenting her poring over a map, trying to establish that she is getting married not in a place with the negative-sounding name Lower Stanley but in the adjacent township that is happily named Diamond Heights. Julavits's target here may be the kind of popular psychology that appears in countless self-help books and magazines designed to empower people and allow them to take charge of their lives by positive thinking, the underlying premise being that reality is a result of the thoughts humans think and the words they use to express them.

Unfortunately, this approach does not appear to be working very well for Violet. If the best that her vaunted power over language can manifest is a Louis Krupnik and a wedding cake full of shredded love letters addressed to her sister by her groom, she might perhaps be advised to return to the drawing board and start blaming fate instead.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on □Marry the One Who Gets There First,□ in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Critical Essay #2

Pryor has a bachelor of arts from University of Michigan and twenty years experience in professional and creative writing with special interest in fiction. In this essay, she examines how Heidi Julavits incorporates the theme of photography into the story of the Sheidegger-Krupnik wedding.

□The camera never lies,□ the old saying goes. In Heidi Julavits's □Marry the One Who Gets There First,□ the camera may not lie, but everyone else does. The wedding of June Sheidegger and Louis Krupnik is so framed in deceit on all sides that there are no innocent parties, only fellow liars. What many of the characters fail to realize, however, is that they have been lied to not only by their lovers, but also by their own misperceptions and distorted vision.

Julavits structures the story as a series of □outtakes□ from the Sheidegger-Krupnik wedding album, but it doesn't take long for the reader to realize that these are no ordinary wedding photographs. These are not the posed, smiling portraits people are accustomed to finding in wedding albums. In Julavits's □outtakes,□ the camera truly does not lie; what's more, the camera is everywhere. It's highly unlikely, for instance, that a photographer would be on hand to take a picture of Violet, the bride, calling her lover Shane from a pay phone or one of the lodge staff workers fastening her belt after a tryst with the stable hand, yet this photographer is omniscient, giving us brief instants of truth amidst the tangle of lies the characters tell each other and themselves.

The photography theme is woven throughout the story in both obvious and subtle ways. Louis the groom, who is cheating on his fiancé with her own sister June, runs the family business, Krupnik Bros. Photographic Supplies and Development, where he voyeuristically examines the photos of strangers. He and June take a self-timed photograph of themselves in bed together. When he finds a photograph of his father and another woman, he realizes his father cheated on his mother.

The characters view each other distortedly through the prisms of their own desires and prejudices, never truly seeing each other clearly. Louis, for instance, believes June to be the □Girl of his Dreams,□ because she resembles a photograph of a girl he saw while working at his father's business. Throughout the story, when Louis sees June, he sees her through various lenses; when he first meets her she is gazing at her own reflection in a bookstore window, and Louis sees her through the glass. He sees her again later, examining her reflection in the window of the lodge. When he is shaving in preparation for his wedding, he sees her reflection in the mirror, through the bathroom window□two more lenses. Only near the end of the story do the characters have moments of clarity in which they see themselves and others clearly. Here there are no mirrors or windows: □Suddenly, without the aid of any reflective surface, [June] catches a perfect and absurd image of herself□weeping in the back of a chuck wagon, clinging to a piece of fake hair with nails painted a deep, sad red because of its appropriate name (Other Woman)□and for the first time in a long time, she laughs at herself.□ When Louis cuts the cake with June, he looks around and discovers □he doesn't recognize a single one

of the guests . . . nor does he recognize the woman beside him with whom he grasps a knife handle.□ For the first time, he is seeing clearly.

Reflective surfaces, prisms□these surface again in the story of Violet's Grandma Rose and Grandpa Joe. Grandma Rose believes they are fated to be together because on their first date, when she nervously broke a champagne flute and Joe recited a poetic Chinese saying Rose's grandfather was fond of. Later, when arranging flowers, Grandma Rose shatters a glass vase. Then at the prenuptial luncheon, after a spat with Joe, Rose knocks her juice glass to the floor and breaks it. □I married the wrong man,□ she says and then grinds the broken glass to dust with her heel. This image brings to mind the Jewish wedding tradition in which the groom breaks a glass with his foot, which symbolizes (among many other things) the bride's loss of innocence. Rose has apparently abandoned the naive illusions she carried into her marriage, illusions based largely on a Chinese saying Joe picked up from the proprietor of a mah-jongg parlor who assured him it □Works ladies like charm.□ Similarly, Louis recalls a scene from his past in which his mother, near death, hurls his father's watch at him, believing in her delirium that Louis is actually her deceased husband. The watch's crystal breaks and his mother says, □The one, the one, you were *the one*. Bah!□ Like Grandma Rose, her illusions about her husband have finally been shattered.

Like a photographer, Julavits uses light and dark symbolically to tell her story. The bride and her sister are like negatives of each other; □Violet was as blond and stupid as June was dark and wise.□ Violet tries to use words to shed a positive light on situations, calling Louis's ordinary blue shirt □refreshingly insouciant□ and the cheap wine they drink with dinner □spirited□ and □tumescent.□ Later, however, after readers learn that she framed Louis and June and then had an affair with a man who paid her □to offset suspicions,□ it is clear that Violet is not as snow-white as she appears. □Rather, she reasoned she was developing her own secrets, her own desires, her own darknesses, that she was no longer the obvious blond optimist . . . the girl too stupid to know the thrill one can get from deception.□ As the story closes, June leaves behind Louis and the bride in white and walks barefoot along the road, where she meets Norton Black, and it is implied that this is the beginning of a new and lasting relationship. Despite the use of black and white, light and dark, one of the messages Julavits communicates is that in romantic relationships, there are no heroes and villains, and no relationship is without its flaws. At the outset of the story, Louis appears to be an irredeemable pervert and Violet sweet and trusting; by the conclusion, they have both moved from black and white to shades of grey.

Julavits's view on the long-term relationships in the story is often cynical. Most notably she pokes fun at the □signs□ and □omens□ that individuals cling to as evidence that their union is fated. When Louis finds an old photograph of a married couple at the municipal building, □he believed that this photograph . . . was meant as a sign to him.□ Grandma Rose believes that because Grandpa Joe uses the same Chinese saying as her grandfather, they are destined to be together. When Violet calls her lover Shane just before the wedding and he is not home, □a part of her believes she must find some meaning in the fact that Shane is not home to comfort her, that she has been pushed to do the right thing.□ Louis is initially attracted to June because she looks like the □Girl of

his Dreams,□ a stranger in a photograph he sees while working in his father's photo shop. Just as people attach sentimental importance to photographs, believing them to represent entire periods of their lives rather than the single, often staged, instant that they actually capture, they also attach meaning to minor incidents that may actually mean nothing. As Julavits writes about Grandma Rose and the Chinese proverb, □In a world full of empty coincidences and accidents, she read this as an omen of their fated union.□ Louis observes this in another way while working at the photo shop and peeking at the customers' pictures: □he became entranced by the odd pieces of the world people found worth preserving□a door with a brass street number, a tin of muffins, the mole on a woman's forearm.□ Ironically, while the characters focus on these tiny coincidences and omens, they ignore many far more obvious pieces of information about their relationships. For instance, Violet is well aware that Louis is a womanizer and a voyeur, but this information does not prevent her from becoming his wife.

Julavits's cynicism is lightened by some tender moments. Grandpa Joe goes to sleep with □one protective hand on the upturned hip of his sleeping wife□; Louis realizes that Violet □knows and loves him for all the ways that he has always been unknowable.□ The very fact that these flawed characters choose to marry at all, despite obvious arguments against it, is in itself an act of great optimism. Just as the wedding camera captures the posed, smiling faces of the bride and groom□and none of their anxieties□the mind romances reality into something a little easier to swallow. In the final analysis, the need for a partner is so great that we decide it is better to believe our romantic version of a relationship and stay together than to see it clearly and end up alone. Julavits ends the story with a scene from Norton and June's future relationship: □And maybe on certain evenings□when they're looking at their carefully posed wedding photographs, and the sun is setting, and the air is like it was the night Norton found June barefoot by the road□they'll believe their own tales about how love is a fixed, unquestionable thing, written in stars and in stones.□

Source: Laura Pryor, Critical Essay on □Marry the One Who Gets There First,□ in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Critical Essay #3

Bonnie Weinreich has a B.A. in English and is a freelance writer and former reporter for a daily newspaper. In this essay on Heidi Julavits's short story Marry the One Who Gets Their First Weinreich observes the way the author uses photographs as a vehicle to tell a story of love and betrayal.

Why do people choose the spouses they do? Is it fate, preordained by a cupid no one sees until some set of circumstances coalesce into a wedding in which everyone wonders what on earth they are doing? Or is it a well-considered decision, coupled with love and lust, in which two people realize they are really meeting each other for the first time as the bride walks down the aisle toward the groom? According to Heidi Julavits's short story, Marry the One Who Gets There First, it is both and more. Julavits uses the camera lens as a magnifying glass to expose the frailties and failures of the members of the wedding.

Julavits polishes into a shiny gem the time-honored process of using pictures as inspiration for writing. She both frames the story in photographs and uses pictures within the narrative to move the action forward. While she designates the sections as a series of photos numbered 1 through 36, they might be considered the pauses in a videotape to capture the actions of her characters. In addition, she casts the captions to these pictures in the active voice and present tense, giving these freeze frames a real time feeling. These captions also guide the reader through shifts of point of view by showing the reader a picture first. (Point of view is the angle of vision from which the author tells the story.) The subtitle, Outtakes from the Sheidegger-Krupnik wedding album, further substantiates the notion that these segments are a chronicle of the real story, the one left on the cutting room floor.

Although it is a cliché to say a picture is worth a thousand words, this story is remarkable in its ability to carry several subplots in the short story form, which typically confines itself to one tightly-woven plot line, but here the author juggles the stories of the bride, groom, sister, friend, and parents with agility and style, all expertly written in fifteen pages. Her ability to fit so much in her story is facilitated by the framework and the use of photographs as pegs to hang the action on. Pictures of the wedding party, parents, and strangers take readers on a sight-seeing tour that is sometimes confusing and often brutally honest.

The 1990s witnessed changes in visual media. Indeed, over the second half of the twentieth century, the television evolved from a small, moon-shaped screen peering out of large wooden cabinet into the so-called big screen and back again into a miniature screen that can be worn on the wrist. By the early 2000s people own digital cameras, throw-away cameras, and cell phones with cameras. Cars have visual displays. Music is visual, thanks to videos and television stations that play them. Julavits is attuned to contemporary readers' conditioning to the visual, and the form of the story and her diction create vivid pictures in the mind's eye, the most visual of all appliances.

With economy of language, the bride, Violet, and the bride's sister, June, are introduced in the first sentence, and conflict immediately is conveyed by the fact June refuses to wear a slip under her sheer bridesmaid's dress. In addition, the sexual overtones in June's description hint at the trouble to come. In the space of one two-sentence paragraph, the author gives readers two main characters□the sisters, the personality and attitude of June, and the setting, the Sawtooth Mountains, and she does it with sass and clarity: □The startling views of the Sawtooth Mountain Range serve as only a momentary distraction from the unfettered swell of June's behind inside the peach fabric, indicating June also decided to forgo underwear.□ Clearly, June is mooning her sister and the wedding, and as the story unfolds readers come to understand why: she has been having an affair with the groom.

The groom, Louis, runs the family photography business, and in his voyeuristic snooping through his customers' photos he has discovered a picture of a woman he considers to be his Dream Girl. When he meets June, her resemblance to his picture hits him like a thunderbolt, but he is already involved with her sister. He embarks on an affair with June, convinced Violet is in the dark. However, Violet is on to them and sets a trap into which they fall, while she carries on with a man who pays her for her favors. In addition, Louis has discovered a picture that reveals his father had a mistress. In the course of all these assignations, readers must wonder if a sympathetic character can be found. Presented with fathers who have cheated on their mothers, to the friend whose love □is inextricably linked with pity, as well as a heady feeling of superiority□ for her fiancé, the bride's brother, to the groom and the bride and her sister who are betraying each other in a number of ways, readers have to stretch to find sympathy for any of the them. In addition, one wonders why these characters have come to a lodge in the Sawtooth Mountains of Idaho from Manhattan for their wedding. Perhaps it is the jagged-edged backdrop which accentuates the raggedness of their relationships.

None of these characters seems too much in love, although June might have been with Louis before he dumped her and decided to stick with her sister, who got to him first. In fact, these relationships appear to be exercises in one-upmanship, particularly from the point of view of the main female characters, who believe they have beaten their lovers at their own game. The author seems to be saying that no one wins in the midst of all this double dealing.

For a bit of comic relief, the author reveals that June has foregone wearing underwear to impress the cook, whom she believes to be a lesbian. (Comic relief is a humorous scene or incident in the course of serious drama to provide relief from the emotional intensity and, by contrast, heighten the seriousness of the story.) June wants the cook to bake Louis's love letters into the wedding cake since Louis demanded that June get rid of this incriminating evidence. Regardless of the cook's sexual proclivities, which the author leaves undetermined, she does cook the shredded letters into the cake because June tells her they are fortunes and a spin on the cliché, □eat your own words,□ ensues as the bride and groom find strips of Louis's love letters to June in their mouths as they eat their wedding cake. The scene is serious and amusing at the same time, and it is representative of the simultaneously funny and heartbreaking tenor of the story as a whole. Photo by photo, scene by scene, the author melds humor with betrayal,

creating of satire (a literary work in which vices, follies, stupidities, abuses, etc., are held up to ridicule and contempt) of modern-day relationships.

Louis's perspective shifts from a feeling that □he has arrived to be married at the wrong wedding,□ to an inexplicable sensation that □he is suddenly the man on the inside, slightly less bewildered, looking out.□ These feelings contrast with Violet's earlier resignation that □she has been pushed to do the right thing, despite the secret lives she and Louis lead.□

The introduction of Norton Black in Photo 6 seems peripheral, but in Photo 25, which suggests that Black has sex with one of the college women who works in the kitchen, Julavits foreshadows the ending in which he picks June up on the side of the road leading from the lodge. (Foreshadowing is the presentation of material to prepare the reader for action to come.) In addition, the author uses omens and signs seen by various characters to foreshadow coming events. For example, Rose Sheidegger believes she was fated to marry her husband when he used a quotation her grandfather used, although her husband received the saying from a mah-jongg parlor owner who told him it □works ladies like charm.□ Later in the story, Rose laments that she □married the wrong man.□

In the final frame the author summarizes the quandary of the members of the wedding, and concludes that □they'll believe their own tales about how love is a fixed, unquestionable thing, written in stars and in stones.□ In □they□ the author refers to the wedding party as well as Norton and June.

On the face of it, the author has spun a tale of superficial people trying to get the best of each other. But every family puts up a façade in an effort to disguise its flaws, hide the black sheep, obscure its scandals. Although the members of the wedding are trying desperately to pose their pictures, they are fooling neither themselves nor each other. Upon close observation, the reader □sees□ the many layers woven into the story: the eternal question of what is love, how one picks a mate, and what part fate plays in the process, and whether one person can truly know another.

The author leaves it to readers to decide, and the beautifully written ending confirms what readers sense all along□nobody knows the answers.

Source: Bonnie Weinreich, Critical Essay on □Marry the One Who Gets There First,□ in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Topics for Further Study

What qualities should a person look for in a spouse? Do men and women seek different qualities in their partner? What makes for a happy, long-lasting marriage? In answering these questions, interview several couples (they can be neighbors, older relatives, or friends of the family) who have been married for many years, and then make a class presentation in which you discuss your findings.

Why is the divorce rate so high in the United States? Why has the divorce rate increased since thirty or forty years ago? What are the effects of divorce on children? Write an essay that lays out the results of your research.

Form groups containing four students each. Each person writes a description of another photo to add to the story, and a paragraph of text to go with it. Try to write in a way that fits the themes of the story. These photo descriptions can be inserted at appropriate points in the story. Make a class presentation, entitled □Outtakes from the Outtakes from the Sheidegger-Krupnik Wedding Album,□ describing each photo, where it goes in the story, and why it was left out of both the album and the original outtakes.

Write a series of fictional diary entries, spread out over several weeks or months, describing the course of a romantic relationship that started in a blaze of glory and ended in heartbreak. Try to describe exactly how the diary writer feels on first falling in love, and have him/her pinpoint the moments of disillusionment and what he/she has learned (if anything) from the experience.

What Do I Read Next?

The Lighthouse Inkwell website contains an interview with Julavits. It can be found at http://www.lighthousewriters.com/newslett/gems.htm and in it Julavits talks about her writing process, mainly in connection with her first novel, *The Mineral Palace*.

In an interview with Ron Hogan that can be found online at http://www.beatrice.com/interviews/julavits/ Julavits talks to the online literary magazine *Beatrice* about her first novel.

When asked in an interview by the publisher Virago to name her favorite book by a female author, Julavits selected *Middlemarch* (1872-73) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), both by George Eliot. She admired both novels because they deal with issues of marriage and the constraints of both genders in way that feels uncannily contemporary.

The Mineral Palace (2000), Julavits's first novel, is set in Depression-Era Colorado, where Bena Jonssen moves because her physician husband is to take up a new job there. Much of the story focuses on Bena's difficulties, including her husband's alcoholism. Bena falls in love with a rancher and eventually faces up to the traumas she has suffered in her life. Reviewers praised Julavits's brilliance with language.

Sex in America (1995), by Gina Kolata, presents in popular format the results of an authoritative study, involving interviews with over three thousand Americans, of sexual behavior in the United States. The book covers information such as how people find sexual partners, how often they engage in sex, how common certain sexual practices are, what people think of erotica and how often they read it or look at it, and the extent of homosexual behavior and of sexually transmitted diseases.

Further Study

Jankowiak, William, ed., *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?* , Columbia University Press, 1995.

This book presents anthropological research that examines whether romantic love is a universal experience or, as some have argued, only a Western phenomenon. The research across 166 cultures shows that romantic love is known in at least 147, or 89 percent, of these cultures.

Singer, Irving, *The Nature of Love: The Modern World*, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

The third and final volume in Singer's study of the history of Western thought is about the nature of love. It covers twentieth-century psychologists, writers, and philosophers of love such as Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust, D. H. Lawrence, Bernard Shaw, and Jean-Paul Sartre, whose tendency was to question or deny the possibility of successful erotic love relationships between men and women.

Tennov, Dorothy, *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love*, second edition, Scarborough House, 1999.

Based on research conducted on college students, Tennov provides an engaging account of the psychology of romantic love. Tennov also discusses the different ways in which men and women experience romantic love and the biological basis of the phenomenon. She gives some advice about how to deal with it.

Welwood, John, ed., *Challenge of the Heart: Love, Sex, and Intimacy in Changing Times*, Shambhala, 1985.

This excellent anthology contains thirty-six essays on all aspects of love, culled from a wide variety of writers, including D. H. Lawrence, Robert Bly, Rainer Maria Rilke, Wendell Berry, and Alan Watts. The essays address the questions and difficulties that arise for people in intimate relationships.

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Shakespeare, William, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 2, scene 9, lines 82-83, The Arden Shakespeare, Methuen, 1979, p. 68.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Short Stories for Students

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

“Night.” Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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