Odour of Chrysanthemums Study Guide

Odour of Chrysanthemums by D. H. Lawrence

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

"Odour of Chrysanthemums," regarded as one of D. H. Lawrence's most accomplished stories, was written in 1909 and published in Ford Madox Hueffer's *English Review* in June, 1911. A different version, which transformed and expanded the concluding section in which Elizabeth Bates reflects on her married life in the presence of the body of her husband, was published in 1914 in *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories.* The story's controlled analysis of the harsh industrial setting and of Eliza-beth Bates's psychological transformation has been widely admired. H. E. Bates has even argued that Lawrence's greatest achievement is his short fiction.

The story's evolution in its three major versions has been examined by a number of critics. The final version's unsentimental and highly judgmental condemnation of Elizabeth Bates for the failure of her marriage has been related to Lawrence's liberation from the influence of his beloved mother upon her death in 1910. The story is frequently compared to *Sons and Lovers,* a largely autobiographical novel, in which Lawrence explores his parents' conflicted relationship. As in "Odour of Chrysanthemums," an inarticulate, drink-obsessed miner in *Sons and Lovers* is disparaged by his wife who longs for a more genteel life. The harsh, bleak mining villages of Nottinghamshire, which Lawrence knew so well, are powerfully evoked in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" and contrasted with the unfettered beauties of the natural world.

When Lawrence's editor at the *English Review,* Ford Madox Hueffer, first read "Odour of Chrysanthemums," he considered it a work of genius, but it did not prevent him from demanding a cut of five pages. The story was one of Lawrence's first and it underwent two major revisions before it appeared in its final form in *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories.*

Hueffer (a distinguished author in his own right, who is better known as Ford Madox Ford) was immediately struck by Lawrence's title, which he describes as "at once a challenge and an indication. The author seems to say: Take it or leave it. You know at once that you are not going to read a comic story about someone's butler's omniscience. The man who sent you this has, then, character, the courage of his convictions, a power of observation. All these presumptions flit through your mind."

Author Biography

The fourth child of Arthur John Lawrence, an illiterate coal miner, and Lydia Beardsall Lawrence, a former school teacher, David Herbert Lawrence was born in 1885 and raised in the mining village of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire. From boyhood he shared a close relationship with his mother and grew to hate the debilitating mine work he considered responsible for his father's debased condition. Later in his life, however, he acquired a genuine sympathy for his father's plight. Lawrence attended local grammar and secondary schools and later, from 1906 to 1908, studied at Nottingham University College, where he began writing short stories. In 1908, he moved to Croyden, just south of London, to teach school. While there he discovered the works of such writers as Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad. He also came to the attention of novelist Ford Madox Hueffer (later known as Ford Madox Ford), who was editor of the *English Review.* Hueffer published some of Lawrence's early poetry and stories, including an early version of "Odour of Chrysanthemums," which was written in 1909 and published in 1911—the same year that the onset of tuberculosis forced Lawrence to resign from teaching. Also in 1911, Lawrence published his first novel, *The White Peacock,* which was well received by critics. When he was twenty-seven, Lawrence eloped to Germany with Frieda von Richthofen Weekley, the wife of one of his college professors, and the two were married in 1914.

In 1913, Lawrence published his first major work, the largely autobiographical novel *Sons and Lovers,* and also wrote "The Prussian Officer," the title story in a volume which also contained a substantially revised version of "Odour of Chrysanthemums." Just before the outbreak of World War I, Lawrence returned to England, where he and Frieda endured continual harassment by the English government because of her German ancestry and his objections to the war. Lawrence's next novel, *The Rainbow* (1915), a complex narrative focusing on relationships between men and women and particularly on the nature of marriage, was judged obscene for its explicit discussion of sexuality and was suppressed in England. These events intensified Lawrence's bitter struggle with social orthodoxy and the forces of modern civilization, which he came to believe were arrayed against him and most certainly influenced his decision to leave England. "The Rocking-Horse Winner," a short story written in 1926, also deals with a strained marriage and the dangers of materialism. Lawrence's last major novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), met with similar resistance and was available only in an expurgated version until 1959 in the United States, and 1960 in England, when a landmark obscenity trial vindicated the book as a work of literature. After the war, the Lawrences lived briefly in Ger-many, Austria, Italy, Sicily, England, France, Aus-tralia, Mexico, and in the southwestern United States, where Lawrence hoped someday to establish a utopian community. These varied locales provided settings for many of the novels and stories Lawrence wrote during the 1920s and also inspired four books of admired travel sketches. In 1930 Lawrence entered a sanatorium in Vence, France, in an attempt to cure the tuberculosis that afflicted him throughout his life. He died that same year.

Plot Summary

Part I—Waiting

The story begins with a description of the sights and sounds of a bleak mining village at the end of the mine's afternoon shift. Mrs. Bates calls her son, John, in for the evening meal and provides a light snack for her father, a train driver, while chiding her daughter, Annie, about being late from school. She is also upset because her husband is not home from work yet, and she has a feeling he is drunk at the pub again. Mrs. Bates's daughter directs her to begin the evening meal without their father and appreciates the flowers her mother wears in her apron. Mrs. Bates can only criticize her husband before her children and lament the misery and neglect in her life. She is a fretful, nagging mother, but clearly one who wants a better life for her children, and she doesn't hide her outrage at her husband's recklessness.

Part II—The Search

In the second part of the story, Mrs. Bates, now worried and no longer angry, goes out to search for her husband. Tension builds as she asks her neighbors for news about Walter's whereabouts, and Mr. Riley goes in search of his missing partner. Everyone knows that while Mr. Bates may simply be drunk in one of the village's many pubs, he may also be seriously injured, though their fears are unspoken. When Walter's mother arrives to comfort Eliza-beth, at Mr. Rigby's suggestion, we know something is amiss and rapidly the disaster is revealed, but not until the two women display their very different views of Walter. The elder Mrs. Bates recalls a lively boy and suggests his wife should be more forgiving and generous to him. Elizabeth muses to herself that if her husband is merely wounded, she may be able to nurse him to better physical and moral health. She quickly realizes how sentimental these thoughts are, indicating, along with her memory of Walter's gifts of flowers, and Mrs. Bates's memories of his youthful liveliness, the mixture of fond delusion and unspoken sexual desire which first made Walter attractive to her.

Part III—Death

The story's pace accelerates with the speed of disaster. The men from the mine arrive with Wal-ter's body, and now Elizabeth knows for certain that he has died. She shows almost more concern for her carpet and a smashed vase than she does for the body of her husband, but she goes and kindly comforts her daughter woken by the sounds in the house. After the men leave, depositing the body in the parlor, but safely away from the carpet, Eliza-beth Bates and her mother-in-law begin to wash the body. Rinsing the dirt from the unmarked body, Elizabeth comes to reevaluate her husband's worth and their life together, realizing that they never really knew each other and that she might have been to blame for the failure their marriage had become.

Characters

Annie Bates

Annie Bates is the daughter of Elizabeth and Walter Bates and the sister of John Bates. She is a schoolgirl with curly hair that is changing from her father's blonde color. Annie is chided by her mother for returning late from school, an assessment Annie disputes. The mother and daughter consider Walter Bates's late arrival, and they both understand the signs which indicate that he may have stopped at a pub on his way home. Annie feels pity for her mother and at Annie's suggestion they all begin supper without her father. Annie is sensitive to her surroundings and speaks imaginatively of the caves she sees within the fire, though she is chided by her brother for playing with and inadvertently suppressing the fire. After supper, Annie enters an imaginative "play-world" with her brother. Annie clearly loves her mother and wants to comfort and delight her, and she shares in her mother's concerns for Walter Bates, though she perhaps is more prepared to distance herself from her father's bad habits and lack of consideration. She admires the scent of the chrysanthemums in her mother's apron and tries to make her mother keep the flowers there. She awakens when the men bring in the body of the dead Walter Bates, but she takes comfort in the soothing words of her mother.

Elizabeth Bates

Elizabeth Bates is the wife of Walter Bates, a miner, and the mother of two children, John and Annie. The story's central character, Elizabeth is shown awaiting the arrival of her husband, who may have stopped off at a pub on his way home. She calls in her young son, who is playing outside and gives tea to her father, the driver of a mine train, who briefly drops in to see his daughter and tell her of his upcoming marriage. When her daughter arrives, Elizabeth scolds her for being late. After Elizabeth and her children eat their supper, she searches for her husband. A neighbor sends her mother-in-law, Mrs. Bates, to comfort her when it appears that Walter Bates has been injured in the mine. After the men from the mine bring home the body of Walter Bates, the two women lay out the corpse.

Elizabeth is a proud, even "imperious," woman. She resents her husband, who drinks irresponsibly. She feels that he undermines her efforts to provide a respectable home for their children. However, the sentimental musings she entertains about possible outcomes from the accident suggest that she had romantic illusions in the past about what marriage to the handsome and jolly Walter Bates might bring. She blames herself for her folly. She clearly considers herself to be in a higher social class than her neighbors, as indicated by her use of standard English and her disdain for any displays of impropriety, whether it be her father's hasty marriage, her son's dirty clothes, or her neighbor's unkempt household. At the end of the story, encountering the dead body of her husband, she recognizes that she has never really understood Walter Bates and has been largely responsible for the failure of her marriage.

John Bates

John Bates is the five-year-old son of Elizabeth and Walter Bates and the brother of Annie Bates. At the beginning of the story, he is called in from playing outside. He is resentful and defiant towards his mother, who wants to keep him from playing at the brook and from doing things that she considers "nasty," like destroying flowers. John wears a "cut down" version of men's clothes and his mother wishes to make him into a more respectable adult than his father. Inside the house John works at a piece of wood with a knife, and his mother "saw the father in her child's indifference to all but himself." Like his father, John is associated with darkness and shadow; moreover, the "invisible" John complains that his sister's handling of the fire has reduced his ability to see. His mother complains that he is "as bad as your father if it's a bit dusk!" She lights a lamp for him, and after supper he plays under the sofa "like a frog," emerging with a dirty shirt, after which he says his prayers and goes to bed. He does not wake up when the men bring home the body of his father.

Mrs. Bates

Mrs. Bates is the mother of Walter Bates, the miner whose death is at the heart of this story. A somewhat naive and irritable, self-pitying woman of about sixty, Mrs. Bates is asked by a neighbor to go and sit with her daughter-in-law when it is discovered that Walter has had an accident in the mine. She sits with Elizabeth, voicing her fears about the fate of her son and recalling memories of his early life. When Walter's dead body is brought into the house, she begins to weep and lament, and she has to be quieted so that she doesn't wake her grandchildren. She finally assists Elizabeth in washing and laying out the body of her beloved son, and she has vivid memories of his liveliness and beauty when he was a boy and a young man. In conversation with Elizabeth, she suggests that Elizabeth contributed to Walter's decline of recent years because of her critical attitude to his excesses. She says that Elizabeth should have made "allowances" for him. She laments and weeps for her son, her behavior contrasting with the seemingly cold effi-ciency of Elizabeth.

Walter Bates

Walter Bates, a miner, is the husband of Eliza-beth Bates and the father of John and Annie. He is probably dead from the time the story begins, and he is present in the story only in the words and thoughts of his wife, his children, his mother, and his neighbors. He is a handsome and energetic young man who it seems wooed Elizabeth with his charm. Even in death, he retains his "handsome body," "fine limbs," and blond good looks. The history of his marriage is a sad one; he has become increasingly reckless and irresponsible and is prone to heavy drinking and other forms of excess. He works in the mine and finds his joy in drinking in the genteel-sounding "Prince of Wales" pub. He is a man associated with the darkness and warmth of the mine and with the energy and vigor of attractive youth.

He dies at the end of his work shift in the mine when he decides to stay behind after the other miners have left the area. There is a rock fall and he is suffocated. His body, covered with the grime of the mine, is carried to Mrs. Bates's parlor by other miners, and his wife and mother wash and lay out his body, which, surprisingly, is still warm from the mine and, due to the circumstances of his death, unmarked on the surface by the fatal accident. His body, which retains its youthful beauty, shocks Elizabeth Bates and makes her realize that she has never really known her husband.

Mother

See Mrs. Bates

Themes

Light and Darkness

The theme of light and darkness is of signifi-cance since most of the story takes place late in the afternoon and at night, and the narrative focuses on the relationship of life and death. Elizabeth Bates awaits her husband as shadows lengthen, her son emerges from dark undergrowth, and her daughter returns late from school. The family huddles in the house where the light is insufficient for Elizabeth's son John, who, like his father, always craves more brightness and warmth than his home provides. The boy is even dissatisfied with his sister's tending of the fire as if he may lose that light. When Mrs. Bates goes out to her neighbors to seek her husband, "there was no trace of light," and even the helpful neighbors ominously suggest that their children, if unattended, may "set theirselves afire." Elizabeth has said earlier that her daughter's reaction to the chrysanthemums she wears in her apron is so extreme that "One would think the house was afire." Fire which should bring light and warmth, and which is trapped in the coal the workers seek in the mine, is here insufficiently bright and even conveys a sense of danger. Awaiting her husband back in her own home, Elizabeth is unable to make a fire in the parlor where there is no fireplace. When the men arrive with the body of Walter Bates, Elizabeth carries an unlighted candle, and after the men leave, Elizabeth and her mother-in-law clean the body in the dim light cast by a single candle.

Only when Elizabeth is confronted with the naked reality of her husband does she realize that she never knew him: "they had met in the dark and fought in the dark." The darkness signifies their inability to really comprehend and appreciate the separation. Now that she has gained an insight into this separation and now that the darkness of death, a death occurring in a mine's darkness, is plainly before her, she sees clearly. The unrecognized gulf between herself and her husband has been as wide as that between light and darkness, life and death, and now she is left to wonder if she and her husband were to meet in the "next world" whether he would recognize her.

Appearances and Reality

Just as the darkness has obscured her vision, so Elizabeth's anger has distorted her perception of her husband and she has failed to recognize the reality of his essential difference. Similarly, her sense of smell has been deluded by illusory associations. She has associated the odor of the beautiful, though disheveled, chrysanthemums, a sign of beauty even in the rat-infested, mining village, with the main stages of her life with her husband, in which, as she tells her children, she has been a "fool." Only after the breath of her husband is smothered in the mine does she recognize that the smell of the chrysanthemums is really the smell of death. She has been more concerned with maintaining respectable appearances, such as when she ignores the body of her husband to clean up the dropped vase of chrysanthemums, than with facing concrete realities. Finally, after she has cleared the dirt from her husband's body, she sees the

reality of his masculine beauty and his difference from herself, and the vast gap which has always existed between them.

Sex Roles

The story stresses the essential separation of all people, particularly the separation of men and women. This is indicated by Elizabeth Bates's emotional distance from all those around her, with the exception of her daughter, Annie, and with the way in which characters talk at, rather than engage in dialogue with, each other. Recognition of the separation of all people and particularly of men and women, for Lawrence, must take place in the dark, through the sensual channels of dimmed sight, muffled odors, and touch rather than through intellectual understanding. Elizabeth Bates recognizes the apartness of her husband by gazing on and touching his still-warm body. She recognizes that he is now apart from her in the world of death, just as during his life he was apart from her in his sexual difference, his masculinity. Similarly, his son John, who resembles his father, is described as being separate from his mother in his shadowy darkness and even in his "play-world." Finally aware of the "infinite" separation between herself and her husband whom "she had known falsely," Elizabeth will submit to life, her new "master," as she had not submitted to her husband by acknowledging his essential otherness.

Death

While the centrality of death in the story's conclusion is anticipated in its first paragraph, the arrival of Walter Bates's dead body at the Bates's home introduces the story's climactic final phase. This phase addresses the relationship between death and life, in light of a consideration of the relationship between men and women. From the beginning, darkness and gloom permeate the story's atmosphere, and a sense of dread oppresses Elizabeth Bates. In the story's first paragraph, the mine and its train are presented as life-destroying forces which startle animals, blight the natural setting, and cramp human lives. Given the dangers of underground work, Elizabeth Bates and her neighbors seem aware that Walter Bates may have died in the mine. In addition to the sense of melancholy fatalism which pervades the beginning of the story, readers learn that in the recent past, Elizabeth Bates's father has been widowed. These different elements foreshadow the focus on death at the conclusion of the story and the way it will inform the future life of Elizabeth Bates.

While Walter Bates has probably been dead for the first part of the story, a period coinciding with Elizabeth Bates's anxious anticipation of his arrival, the story shifts into a mythic dimension with the stark presence of his half-naked body. The two women kneeling by the miraculously untouched and still beautiful body conjure up images of the *pieta,* the scene of the Virgin Mary holding the body of the crucified Christ. In the story, however, there is another mythic dimension evoking the Egyptian story of Isis and Osiris. This mythic story concerns the care of Isis for her husband Osiris who becomes a lord in the realm of the dead. In Lawrence's story, Elizabeth Bates nearly worships her

husband's corpse and imagines a possible meeting with him in the afterlife. Encountering the dignity and finality of death, she realizes that she has been misguided in her futile attempts to criticize and change her husband. The story implies that she will spend the rest of her life attempting to incorporate this realization, achieved through an encounter with death, into her life. She will live, the story implies, anticipating a meeting with her husband in the realm of the dead.

Social Class

"Odour of Chrysanthemums" is set in a rural mining village, and there are strong indications that Elizabeth Bates considers herself socially superior to her husband and his fellow working-class colleagues who labor underground; however, by the end of the story, through her mythic encounter with his dead body, she comes to value her husband, and by implication, to ignore his class position. Eliza-beth Bates is described as a woman of "imperious mien," who chides her son's destruction of flowers because it looks "nasty" and appears to censure her father's decision to remarry soon after being widowed because it violates social propriety. Unlike her neighbors, she does not use the local dialect, an indication of class position, but she is not above criticizing one neighbor's unkempt house. Unlike other miners' wives in the community, she refuses to demean herself by entering the local pubs to entice her husband home. She is distressed when her children mimic their father's habits and preferences.

Most significantly, however, Elizabeth Bates indicates her disdain for the social position of her community by fighting against her husband and his values. Probably lulled into marrying him by his good looks and his lust for life, she now resents him for making her feel like a "fool" living in "this dirty hole." She seems to despise the manual nature of her husband's work, indicated by her unwillingness to wash the residue of pit-dirt from his body when he emerges from his shift in the mine. Awaiting his return, she angrily says she will force him to sleep on the floor. However, her attitude dramatically shifts when she learns about the accident. She even entertains a fleeting, deluded notion that she may transform her husband morally while nursing him back to health, but her illusions disappear when the dead body of her husband is carried into her home by miners supervised by the pit manager. Viewing the body "lying in the naive dignity of death," she is appalled and humbled at what appears to be her husband's new distance from her, but she slowly comprehends that their former connection was based solely on an unnamed attraction above and beyond the conditioning of social class, and the lure of compatible personality, common interest, or shared experience. She now acknowledges that their relationship was part of a different order of experience, which belonged to a mythic dimension. It is a dimension which includes the physical work of the dark mine, the sexual attraction of the body, and the mysterious world of the dead. The story ends with the laws of this new mythic dimension overriding Elizabeth Bates's former concerns about social class.

Style

Setting

"Odour of Chrysanthemums" is a story about Elizabeth Bates and the recognition she gains, upon her husband's death, concerning the gap between them. The style of "Odour of Chrysanthemums" is highly poetic and is characterized by a profusion of descriptive adjectives and adverbs. The story's first paragraph juxtaposes the hard, inhuman machine-world of the mine and the beautiful, vulnerable, natural world. This description introduces the gap between people and nature which will widen at the end of the story to reveal an absolute division between men and women, and life and death. In the story's first sentence, the mine's locomotive engine startles a colt and traps a woman walking on the track, and its smoke coats the grass. The mine's pit-bank is powerfully described as having "flames like red sores licking its ashy sides," as if the slag heap is a wounded animal. In this setting where the oak is "withered," the cabbages "ragged," and the chrysanthemums "dishevelled," the miners pass "like shadows" and even Elizabeth Bates's son is associated with the darkness. The "invisible" John is "almost hidden in the shadow" and "almost lost in the darkness." This is a world where neglected dinners get heated "to a cinder" and women fear their children being burned in house fires. The flames which should bring light and comfort to the fearful dark world are insufficient or bring only a threat of danger.

Point of View

The point of view used in the story is third-person omniscient. The invisible narrator, however, stays very close to the central character, Elizabeth Bates, and readers are presented with her thoughts. She is revealed fully from without and within. She is the center of consciousness, and the narrative follows her movements, so that, for example, when she goes to search for her husband, the narrative focus shifts to the Riley's home and does not return to Elizabeth's children left behind. Readers are also given access to her thoughts, which are revealed in the form of free indirect speech in which a report is given of a character's thoughts. This bears a clear impression of the narrator's mediating involvement. For example, "What a fool she had been to imagine that anything had happened to him! He was merely drinking over there at the 'Prince of Wales.'" In this passage we are presented with Elizabeth's uncertain thoughts, but the third person pronoun "she" and not the first person "I" is used, indicating the omniscient narrator's invisible presence.

Imagery

The story contains patterns of imagery associated with darkness and fire, but its most obvious pattern relates to the flowers of its title. Elizabeth Bates is described, and the progress of her marriage is presented, in relation to chrysanthemums. She

unconsciously picks some of the flowers at the beginning of the story, placing them in her apron where they attract her daughter Annie's attention. The flowers represent Elizabeth's struggle to maintain a sense of grace and beauty amid the dreariness of her world. Later, she explains to her children the flowers' association with her wedding, the arrival of her children, and ominously with her first sight of her husband's drunkenness. Now her illusions are tarnished, just as the flowers fighting the mine dust outside the home are "dishevelled." Soon, while awaiting the arrival of her husband's body, she notices that the odor of the flowers she has picked is "cold" and "deathly." The men arriving with the corpse knock over a vase holding the chrysanthemums, signifying her smashed illusions concerning her marriage.

Historical Context

"Odour of Chrysanthemums" was written between the end of the Victorian period in 1901, and the beginning of World War I in 1914. It was a time when England was still a powerful international force, and the head of a huge empire that extended from India to Nigeria, which demonstrated England's political power and also provided a vast market for its manufactured goods. During the nineteenth century, England's industrial machine had developed the factory system, which produced surplus goods for export. The colonies provided a captive market for such products and the powerful factories, located mostly in England's north, distributed their goods through a complex transportation system of canals, railways, and ships.

One of the major sources for the energy which drove this industrial machine was coal. However, as Lawrence shows in this story, the sites where coal was extracted were dreary and the people involved in this labor often led bleak, despairing lives. Like their living quarters located near the coal pits, people's personal lives were coated with the dust and grime of mineral extraction. Human labor was needed for this work and the exhaustion it produced coupled with the anxiety of working in life-threatening conditions was often relieved in pubs, a type of working men's social club. Unfortunately, as Lawrence shows, the comforts of the pub were paid for at a high price in alcoholism and the disruption of home life.

The comforts of the pubs numbed the miners' awareness of the injustices of the laborers' lot, and their wives were burdened with the care of large, unregulated families on their husband's meager wages. At the same time, the writings of Karl Marx and the socialist Fabians were encouraging many to re-examine their political and social rights. In just eight years, such dissatisfactions with a much more oppressive imperial system would lead to violent revolution in Russia. Early twentieth-century class divisions were largely established in England as a result of the division of industrial labor during the Victorian period, and working-class men and women, such as the miners in "Odour of Chrysanthemums," were almost a different species from the manager Matthews who supervises the delivery of Walter's body. There are a number of hints in the story that Elizabeth Bates has reluctantly come into this working class world and regards herself as being more refined than her husband and her surroundings.

One of the solaces to many downtrodden people in circumstances like those of Elizabeth Bates was Christian faith, located for many in industrial England in denominations other than the national Church of England. However, the early twentieth century saw the results of the Victorian crisis of faith, which followed the mid-nineteenth-century religious revival. The crisis was caused in part by intellectual forces, such as the historical criticism of the Bible and the challenges of evolution, and partly by disillusionment with the conservatism and sometimes the corruption of the state Church. The widespread decline in Christian belief was noted by English chaplains during World War I. In intellectual circles in England, the questioning of Christian beliefs coincided with a fascination for non-Europe-an and non-Christian beliefs and myth systems.

This period in history was also a tumultuous one for relations between the sexes. Lawrence looked partly to non-European mythology for a new way of exploring the relationship between men and women. With the rejection of Victorian religious enthusiasm in this period, there was a more general rejection of patriarchal Victorian social norms and particularly a reevaluation of women's roles in society. What the Victorians called "The Woman Question," the consideration of women's social and political rights, became a more organized political force in the early twentieth century, though it would be some years before all women gained the right to vote (1928). Significantly, the Education Act of 1870, which provided education to all children up to the age of twelve, increased the need for teachers, and provided a career and independence for many working-class women. The revolution in women's social roles was influenced, especially in intellectual circles in this period, by the writings of Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud. Lawrence learned about Freudian notions from his German wife in the years before this story's final version was published (1914), and he was an advocate of distinct gender roles and male supremacy. These forces are present in "Odour of Chrysanthemums," though they are only distantly suggested rather than explicitly discussed. The very lack of awareness of the social and cultural contexts in which the story's characters are bound is one of its striking features. The story ends with Elizabeth Bates's realization about the nature of her husband and their relationship. It is a quasi-spiritual revelation about the nature of gender roles, which discounts the economic, social, and political forces which place such pressures on their lives.

Critical Overview

Early reviews of *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories,* R. P. Draper notes, while highly critical of the collection's title story, afforded "Odour of Chrysanthemums" high praise. More recent responses to the short story, such as those of Keith Cushman, Nora Foster Stovel, and John Worthen, have also stressed its technical brilliance, by examining the differences between its three versions, and the ways in which it slowly reveals its theme. Weldon Thornton, for example, writes that "What Lawrence wrestled with in his successive revisions of the story was not the philosophical/ideational challenge of what that situation means, but the exploratory/artistic challenge of how to be faithful to the powerful and complex emotional structure of such an experience as it unfolds for the character." The way the story skillfully conceals and yet also foreshadows its final revelation is examined in an essay by Michael Black, who notes that Elizabeth "is jolted out of that judgement [that Walter is away from the home getting drunk], and we are jolted with her." Comparative analyses of this story and Lawrence's other work have also been popular. Consideration of the relationship between Law-rence's handling of reactions to a beloved's death in texts such as *The White Peacock* and *The Rainbow* has revealed the way in which Lawrence works, reworks, and even worries a single theme again and again. The conflict between Elizabeth and Walter has also been regarded in terms of Lawrence's treatment of this relationship in *Sons and Lovers.*

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Lovesey currently teaches at Okanagan University College in Kelowna, British Columbia. In the following essay, he offers an in-depth analysis of the imagery in Lawrence's "Odour of Chrysanthemums."

Early criticism of Lawrence's work focused on what was considered to be his sex-obsession. His novels, stories, poems, and paintings were all subjected to various degrees of censorship. While his novels have attracted the lion's share of critical interest, Lawrence was one of the twentieth century's most accomplished poets and short story writers. Most critical material on "Odour of Chrysanthemums" concerns either its relationship to other writings by Lawrence, such as *Sons and Lovers,* or the revisions of the story, made between 1909 and 1914. Mired in "this dirty hole, rats and all," of a rough mining village, Elizabeth Bates has perhaps begun to regard her husband as just another of the area's rodents. Even the doctor refers to the method of Walter Bates's accidental death, a rock fall in the mine tunnel which cuts off his air supply, as being like the action of a mousetrap. However, by the end of the story, when the grime and dirt from the mine are washed off Walter Bates's handsome body, his natural beauty emerges and he is again the innocent "lamb" his mother remembers from his boyhood. The story concerns his transformation from an irresponsible, hurtful, and selfish man into a symbol of masculine beauty and life itself. More importantly, it concerns the metamorphosis of Elizabeth Bates. By the end of the story, she has recognized the true, abstract worth of her husband, and the "otherness" of another world, which he represents. She is humbled by this revelation and will be a chastened and more reverential woman in future. The story accomplishes the transformation of the two characters through the manipulation of a variety of symbols, and through the representation of Elizabeth Bates as an intrusive reader and interpreter of grand symbolic occurrences in her own life.

The story uses a variety of symbols and achieves its effects through suggestion and nuance. First, the story employs a traditional catalogue of symbolic contrasts, such as the natural world's separation from the dark, satanic mine. Second, the story employs biblical symbolism, particularly associated with Walter's dead body. Third, the closure of the story implies a parallel with the Egyptian myth of Osiris and Isis, and fourth, the story draws on the symbolism in Lawrence's personal mytho-poetic philosophy, associated with the relationship of the sexes.

The story makes reference to a range of traditional symbols. Like much of Lawrence's work, it draws extensively on nature imagery. In this way, Lawrence belongs to a line of prose writers in the pastoral narrative tradition of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, who celebrated rural life, discovering in nature something of profound spiritual significance. Their sympathy with nature also indicates a nostalgia for a mythic Eng-lish past, which probably never existed in the idealized form they presented. Certainly, however, the rural environment was being transformed from the mid-eighteenth century up to the time of Lawrence by industrialization, which blights the environment of the Bates's family home at the beginning of "Odour of

Chrysanthemums." The story opens with the image of an awkward, stumbling train startling a young colt, which can still outrun it, and frightening away birds. The engine's smoke clings to the grass just as the effects of the mine's pollution have caused the oak tree to wither. Unlike many Victorian novels, such as George Eliot's *Felix Holt,* in which the train represents progress, here it merely destroys. In this environment, a vine clutches at a cottage as if it wants to pull the structure down, and even the chrysanthemums are "dishevelled." The war between the organic world and the hard, machine world of the mine reflects the conflict between the characters in the story. Walter is associated until the end with the murderous, mechanical domain of the mine, and Elizabeth with the chrysanthemums, now disheveled, which have appeared at significant moments of her life, and which she now views with disillusionment.

Another natural image is introduced in the story's first paragraph when the burning pit-bank is described as having "flames like red sores licking its ashy sides." Fire and flame, which can both purify and destroy, are here linked with disease. The Bates's kitchen, however, has the warmth and comfort of a coal fire, and its light illuminates the cups prepared for tea, an occasion for communal sharing. The kitchen's warmth forms a stark contrast with the bleak, cold world outside the home, though Elizabeth knows that the local pub attracts her husband not just with its fellowship, but its physical warmth. She soon learns that her husband was smothered, like a flame, in the mine. When his body, still warm, arrives, it must be set down on the floor, though covered with a red tablecloth, in a cold and damp room without a fireplace. Even the pink chrysanthemums in the room have a cold, deathly smell now. The reddish color of the chrysanthemums and the cloth, like the "smoky burning" of Walter's life, are both now cold. The story takes place during late afternoon and night, and all of its events are illuminated faintly by fire light. As such, Elizabeth's world comes more and more to resemble the underground mine world of her husband, a place of male comradery and sweaty physical work, symbolically associated with dark passions, and possibly, the demonic. The darkness, associated with Walter Bates in his underground work and in what his mother calls "his hateful ways," also belongs to his son who is hidden in shadow, lost in darkness, and even invisible in the dark family room. The dark also represents the mysterious and the unnameable, which Elizabeth finally confronts in the form of her husband's corpse which she gazes at and interprets, acknowledging the hidden, dark forces she has ignored.

The story's use of darkness in light may also be interpreted as belonging to its Christian frame of reference. This is an implied level of meaning indicated by various references: darkness and light; women weeping over a man's body, which one refers to as a "lamb"; a projected meeting in the "next world" after death; and the opening words of the final paragraph, "At last it was finished," recalling Christ's last words on the cross. These references immediately suggest biblical parallels, which would have been obvious to most English readers of Lawrence's day. Significantly, however, Lawrence transforms these biblical references to make them part of his own mythological system. Though raised in a Christian home, and though his writing is suffused with Christian imagery, Law-rence felt that Christianity was partially responsible for much of the hypocrisy and superficiality he despised in England. As a result, while the story incorporates a Christian range of reference, it does so in a way which partly reverses the usually

understood meaning of certain symbols. For example, in the story, darkness is associated with blindness, human separation, and perhaps even the demonic, but it is also linked with passion and with access to a deeper, mysterious, more meaningful life. Moreover, the body of Walter Bates has, like the body of Christ, been wept over by the women surrounding him. However, here, the wife of the dead man weeps from shame that she has "denied" her husband. Elizabeth recognizes in his dead body something powerful and essential, which is both the masculine principle and the concentration of dark, passionate forces, as well as all which is "other." The beauty of the body and what she feels to be her husband's absolute integrity makes Elizabeth conscious of a gap between herself and him, life and death, male and female, and between the forces of conventional, middle-class respectability which she aspires to, and the dark, physical, working-class values he symbolically embodies.

The third major symbolic frame of reference belongs to the pre-Christian myth of Osiris and Isis. This Egyptian myth allows "Odour of Chrysanthemums" to deal with the forces of darkness, death, and renewal in a positive way, and it also intermingles with the Christian frame of reference. Osiris is the Egyptian god of vegetation, but he is dead and reigns over the realm of the dead, though he is green and lifelike. The myth of Osiris and Isis is the story of the jealousy of Osiris's brother over his goodness as a sovereign god. Osiris's brother plots to kill Osiris, by making a wooden chest the precise size of Osiris's body, which Osiris enters in response to a challenge. Once inside, Osiris is imprisoned and the chest dropped into the ocean, from where it is later recovered after an extended search by Isis. The corpse is then abducted by Osiris's brother, dismembered and scattered over Egypt. Once again Isis recovers the sections of the body, washing and embalming the body so artfully that it looks as if it were alive. Isis even conceives a child, Horus, with the body of Osiris. The cult of Osiris is associated with fertility, the rotation of the seasons, and with the preservation of the ruling monarch. Some of the parallels with Lawrence's story are obvious. The body of Walter Bates is recovered from the mine, as Osiris's body is dredged up from the ocean. The miracle of the body's being intact and unmarked by the calamity is noted by everyone, and is almost as magical as the assembling of the dispersed body of Osiris. Similarly, once the dirt which covers Walter's body is washed off, he looks as if he is living again, and his body is even warm and his face flushed. Furthermore, Elizabeth is pregnant with Walter's child. Seeing his dead body, she is overwhelmed with her husband's apartness, his detachment from herself which she never recognized before. The implication is that her life will be transformed by her awareness of the infinite gap which separates, and always has separated, them. This knowledge will probably now influence her raising of her children, particularly her male children, representatives of the separateness of her husband.

The acknowledgment of an essential separation of men and women was one of the central tenets of Lawrence's philosophy, and its elucidation in his personal mythic system is the fourth main pattern of symbolism in the story. Lawrence developed an elaborate mythic view of history which held that in Europe and especially England, as the result of a variety of forces, men and women had lost the sense of their fundamental difference, and this loss unleashed a myriad of evils. Lawrence attempted to correct this imbalance by incorporating into his own personal mythology figures from various non-

Euro-pean myth systems such as Osiris. The characters in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" represent much larger unconscious forces. In a sense, Elizabeth and Walter represent all English men and women who have lost a sense of their deep differences and also a respect for one another's apartness. At the end of the story, there is a sense that Elizabeth is washing the body of a god of the underworld which she has no right to touch—an act which previously she refused to perform—and that in future she will be the guardian of this experience and a kind of priestess to her dead husband. Elizabeth, first introduced as "imperious," is at the conclusion of the story reduced and chastened. Walter's mother suggests that Elizabeth's failure to make allowances for the lively energy of her beloved son contributed to his decline into drink and dissipation. Elizabeth's recognition of her husband's separateness seems to acknowledge the correctness of this judgement. Like Walter's mother who is now jealous of her daughter-in-law's natural right to claim and wash the body, Elizabeth has been jealous, it is implied, of her husband's natural, masculine "mastery" and has tried to rule him.

The close of the story strongly suggests that Elizabeth will be ruled in the future by the mastery of life—represented symbolically by her son—and by the mastery of death—symbolically, her deceased husband. No real access to rebirth and renewal is offered Elizabeth at the end of the story, except through a kind of worship of the principles she has discovered embodied in her departed Osiris. Rebirth in the story is offered exclusively to Walter Bates, a common man, who carries within him a portion of the god Osiris, and who will be reborn in the realms of death. Often in Lawrence's work, renewal and rebirth are associated with either an impending departure or with religious eros, the investing of spiritual meaning in sex. Here, the renewed and youthful body of Walter Bates is re-sexualized in death, and like Osiris, associated with fertility. The dark world of the dead which Walter enters is the true place for sexual passion, which for Lawrence lies at the center of creation and ensures its fertility and renewal. Elizabeth will remain a chaste devotee of her husband's memory, with the possibility that if she perfects her recognition of his exclusive separation, he will not be a stranger to her in the next world.

"Lawrence spent his life writing guidebooks for women," noted Simone de Beauvoir, cited in Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics,* and again and again women in his fiction must become subject to men's views of their true nature, true sexuality, and true social role. In "Odour of Chrysanthemums," Eliza-beth learns to interpret the symbolism in the body of her husband, shorn of the distracting, seemingly familiar trappings of habit and personality. Washing his body, an act of love, devotion, and servitude, she sees its wondrous strangeness and its erotic power. This non-intellectual, almost reverential action of washing and weeping, a corollary to her previous, somewhat fretful action of sewing to distract herself, and her mother-in-law's keening and mindless rocking, is a tactile reading of the mysterious body of her husband. In this reading of the body, she unconsciously comes to recognize her much despised, degraded husband as a Christ-like figure, but transformed into a god of the underworld. The remainder of her life will be an extended interpretation of this encounter with the mythic unknown, and she will "submit" to her "masters," both in life and in death.

Source: Oliver Lovesey, Overview of "Odour of Chrysanthemums," for *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt from commentary on "Odour of Chrysanthemums," Black suggests some meanings that the reader may be intended to draw from the story's portrayal of Elizabeth Bates's series of thoughts, moods, and emotions as she first angrily, then fearfully, awaits her husband's return, and then strips, washes, and lays out his dead body.

The two great masterpieces among the stories begun in the period 1909-11 are "Daughters of the Vicar" and "Odour of Chrysanthemums." Neither reached its present version easily; it was in drastic revision in the period from 1911 until 1913 and 1914 that they reached the form in which we have them, and the changes that Lawrence made in revising them were crucial. Their completion takes us into the first period of his maturity, so that they represent a substantial advance on *Sons and Lovers*, in his own grasp of what he wanted to say, and his ability to express it. Yet they are related to the material of that novel, as well as to the stories already considered.

They do a final justice to the mining community of Eastwood, to the men and women of that life; and they provide a comment also on the relationship of Walter and Gertrude Morel. The dead miner in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" is called Walter; like Morel he is a drunkard, or in danger of becoming one; his wife Elizabeth is becoming estranged from him....

"Odour of Chrysanthemums" is widely accepted as among Lawrence's masterpieces. We are back in another cottage by the railway-side; the story is shorter, very concentrated, and "dramatic" in that the events take place in a few hours and have the weight and inevitability of those climactic moments in which a fate is worked out. There is a sense of years being summed up and given a meaning; but no eventful "plot," and only one central character—the miner's wife. All others are mere attendants. The mature embittered woman is shown awaiting her husband's return at the end of the day, at first in anger, then in dread. The anger is because she thinks he is getting drunk at the pub. But he is brought in dead, smothered by a fall of rock at the coal face. The wife and his mother lay out and wash the body in the greatest of all Lawrence's ritual lavings: and in the course of this Elizabeth . . . seeing the body before her, comes, too late, upon an essential truth, a revelation about the otherness of the man—what he was.

In the page or two in which the laying-out is described—like a Deposition or a Pietá by a great artist—the simple language is again both Biblical and peculiarly Lawrentian. These paragraphs are one of the great set-pieces in the language. The passage begins:

When they arose, saw him lying in the naive dignity of death, the women stood arrested in fear and respect. For a few moments they remained still, looking down, the old mother whimpering. Elizabeth felt countermanded. She saw him, how utterly inviolable he lay in himself. She had nothing to do with him. She could not accept it. Stooping, she laid her hands on him, in claim....

It is a movement of the ego, in response to a feared loss. That gesture of the woman "claiming" the man, as if she owned him, became peculiarly hateful to Lawrence, as we grasp from the poem "She said as well to me" in *Look! We Have Come Through*. So this is an initial hubris, provoked by the implicit denial the body seems to offer. But Elizabeth is embarked on the process which will lead her to "see," in the same way as Louisa comes to "see" Alfred, though the two situations are polar opposites, since in the one case Alfred is alive, and coming more alive, while Walter is dead, and even his life with Elizabeth is being denied its previous significance.

She continues her anxious exploration; pursuing her claim, but still refused:

. . . Elizabeth embraced the body of her husband, with cheek and lips. She seemed to be listening, inquiring, trying to get some connection. But she could not. She was driven away. He was impregnable.

Partly because she must do it anyway, and partly because it induces a different attitude to laying her hand on the body "in claim," she prepares to wash him. The Biblical element in the syntax and language ("When they arose. . . ," "She had nothing to do with him") begins to stir:

She rose, went into the kitchen, where she poured warm water into a bowl, brought soap and flannel and a soft towel.

"I must wash him," she said. Then the old mother rose stiffly, and watched Elizabeth as she carefully

washed his face, carefully brushing the big blonde moustache from his mouth with the flannel. She was afraid with a bottomless fear, so she ministered to him.

There is the word. The act is now one of service, performed in awe:

At last it was finished. He was a man of handsome body, and his face showed no traces of drink. He was blonde, full-fleshed, with fine limbs. But he was dead.

The word "fleshed" generates, a few lines later, sentences in which both the Biblical doctrine and the physical reality lie side by side: again her attempt to reach him is repulsed:

Elizabeth sank down again to the floor, and put her face against his neck, and trembled and shuddered. But she had to draw away again. He was dead, and her living flesh had no place against his.

The old mother breaks out into a lament, and her words remind us of Alfred Durant's living body, and of Miss Mary's baby son. Underneath the words (and she calls the man a lamb, twice) there may be a reference also to the other Mary's baby; immaculate:

"White as milk he is, clear as a twelve-month baby, bless him, the darling!" the old mother murmured to herself. "Not a mark on him, clear and clean and white, as beautiful as ever a child was made."

Elizabeth then has her tragic recognition, accepting the dead man as unreachably other, as unknown:

Life with its smoky burning gone from him, had left him apart and utterly alien to her. And she knew what a stranger he was to her. In her womb was ice of fear, because of this separate stranger with whom she had been living as one flesh. Was this what it all meant—utter, intact separateness, obscured by heat of living? In dread she turned her face away. The fact was too deadly. There had been nothing between them, and yet they had come together, exchanging their nakedness repeatedly. Each time he had taken her, they had been two isolated beings, far apart as now. He was no more responsible than she. The child was like ice in her womb. For as she looked at the dead man, her mind, cold and detached, said clearly: "Who am I? What have I been doing? I have been fighting a husband who did not exist. *He* existed all the time. What wrong have I done? What was that I have been living with? There lies the reality, this man."—And her soul died in her for fear: she knew she had never seen him, he had never seen her, they had met in the dark and had fought in the dark, not knowing whom they had met nor whom they fought. And now she saw, and turned silent in seeing. For she had been wrong. She had said he was something he was not; she had felt familiar with him. Whereas he was apart all the while, living as she never lived, feeling as she never felt.

The "smoky burning" we have met before. The word "womb," used several times, both of the mother and of Elizabeth, is distinctly Biblical. Here the striking phrase "in her womb was ice of fear" reminds us that Elizabeth is pregnant; so that her Annunciation, unlike Louisa's, is a negation of joyful prophecy. It is an annihilating negation that she faces; but her grief is not egoistic: she feels pity as well as awe and shame:

She looked at his naked body and was ashamed, as if she had denied it. After all, it was itself. It seemed awful to her. She looked at his face, and she turned her own face to the wall. For his look was other than hers, his way was not her way. She had denied him what he was—she saw it now. She had refused him as himself.—And this had been her life and his life.—She was grateful to death, which restored the truth. And she knew she was not dead.

And all the while her heart was bursting with grief and pity for him. What had he suffered? What stretch of horror for this helpless man! She was rigid with agony. She had not been able to help him. He had been cruelly injured, this naked man, this other being, and she could make no reparation. There were the children—but the children belonged to life. This dead man had nothing to do with them. He and she were only channels through which life had flowed to issue in the children. She was a mother —but how awful she knew it now to have been a wife. And he, dead now, how awful he must have felt it to be a husband. She felt that in the next world he would be a stranger to her. If they met there, in the beyond, they would only be ashamed of what had been before.

The children had come, for some mysterious reason, out of both of them. But the children did not unite them. Now he was dead, she knew how eternally he was apart from her, how eternally he had nothing more to do with her. She saw this episode of her life closed. They had denied each other in life. Now he had withdrawn. An anguish came over her. It was finished then....

The Biblical phrase hints a kinship with the dead Christ. And the phrase about this episode of her life being closed is a comment on Cyril Mersham's cheerful wish to be done with this part of his life in "A Modern Lover." Her earlier gesture is now corrected:

She was almost ashamed to handle him; what right had she or anyone to lay hands on him; but her touch was humble on his body.

The final sentences are again both Biblical (the repetition of "it was finished" is deliberate) and characteristically Lawrentian:

At last it was finished. They covered him with a sheet and left him lying, with his face bound. And she fastened the door of the little parlour, lest the children should see what was lying there. Then, with peace sunk heavy on her heart, she went about making tidy the kitchen. She knew she submitted to life, which was her immediate master. But from death, her ultimate master, she winced with fear and shame.

That last cryptic judgement yields its meaning slowly. It had been made more immediately comprehensible in the cancelled reading in the page-proofs: "For in death she would have no life, for she had never loved. She had life on earth with her children, that was all." But it is a niggling explanation, and Lawrence did well to take it out.

The story, first drafted in 1909, has its origins in the period of *The White Peacock*. But it was rewritten more than once, and there are two published versions—one in the *English Review* of June 1911 and one in the collection *The Prussian Officer* of 1914. These differ greatly from each other, and from the first manuscript versions. The most important changes come at the end, in the long sequence describing the washing of the body. Some decisive change took place in Lawrence between 1909 and 1914. His attitudes had changed, so that the story quite alters its point. In the very first version, when the two women strip the body, they feel an access of love, and it is comforting, almost euphoric. There is nothing of the later significance, the withering self-recognition which falls upon Elizabeth. It is hard to tell how much Lawrence himself in 1909 was feeling the warm gush that passes through the women. It is a maternal emotion: motherly pride and dominating complacency; and it leads the wife to handle the body in a spirit which later seemed sacrilegious to Lawrence:

When they rose and looked at him lying naked in the grandeur of death, the women experienced suddenly the same feeling: the sense of motherhood. Elizabeth knelt and put her cheek against him and put her arms around him; the mother took his hand . . . and held it, sobbing, whispering "My son!—Oh my son!" . . . Elizabeth kissed him again and again, and touched him with her hands and her face.

There is more to this effect, reinforcing the idea of the two women acting as if they shared a sleeping child. Elizabeth handles the body very freely, smoothing his yellow hair from his forehead, and kissing him "on the smooth clear ripples just below the breasts. She loved him very much now —and she was content. Her tears were all for the pity of it—and for the pity of him. Ah, the pity of it! . . . Ah, she loved him, how she loved him now!" The story ends "Poor dear, he was more helpless than a baby—and so beautiful."

All this easy emotion, and the easy manipulation of the body, might have been noted with savage irony: a satire on an assumed tendency of women to turn their loss into an indulgence of maternal self-satisfaction. It is hard to be sure; it seems possible that Lawrence is divided here: part of him is reacting against what in another part of him flows very freely. But his intelligence would not let him rest there, nor would his developing experience. Between 1909 and 1914 he rejected that reaching-out of the mother to claim her child, and the wife reaching out to claim her husband as if he too were a child. If we turn to the story as we now have it, certain key words have a new resonance. The corpse lies "inviolable." It is not open to claims for emotional satisfaction, still less dominance or possession. The wife still, at first, lays her hand on the body "in claim," but already she is "listening, inquiring. But she could not. She was driven away. He was impregnable." She is "unavailing" and "countermanded."

The sense that he is "apart and utterly alien" then leads to her bitter discovery about the meaninglessness of their life together: the futility, the error of their struggle. What she now feels is a just emotion, since it does retrospective justice to the man and is a judgement on herself. J. C. F. Littlewood has pointed out that it is very like a comment on the struggle between Gertrude and Walter Morel in *Sons and Lovers*, and therefore like a step towards a just account of Lawrence's father. That is true, but is not all: Lawrence is not only shifting his emotional balance away from his mother, but from all women who "claim" men—the betraying gesture is her laying her hand on his body in the wrong spirit.

Source: Michael Black, "Short Stories II," in *D. H. Law-rence: The Early Fiction,* Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 188-210.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Hudspeth discusses ways that Lawrence presents a history of the Bates's married life through depicting Elizabeth Bates's state of mind as she waits for her husband, not knowing he has been killed.

"Odour of Chrysanthemums" develops from an apparently simple, recurring conflict between a young collier and his wife, now pregnant with their third child. The husband is given to regular drunken sprees, which the wife bitterly resents. Through the narrative, Lawrence reveals the complexity in their lives: the husband's drunkenness is a result of intense frustrations that the wife has never understood; these frustrations emerge as basic, ineluctable human realities for Lawrence. The story is formally divided into two sections, each reinforcing and clarifying the other. The first section dramatizes the woman's anger and frustration as she waits for her husband to return from the mine. From her resentful anticipation of the evening's inevitable end, Lawrence creates the tension that has long existed between the two. Then, in part two, the dominant emotion shifts from anger to fear as the husband arrives home—dead, not drunk. Only with his death does the wife understand the meaning of isolation: pain and horror are life's defining characteristics.

The story opens with a precise evocation of an appropriate mood: "The fields were dreary and forsaken, and in the marshy strip that led to the whimsey, a reedy pit-pond, the fowls had already abandoned their run among the alders, to roost in the tarred fowl-house. The pit-bank loomed up beyond the pond, flames like red sores licking its ashy sides, in the afternoon's stagnant light." The dreary land, lit only by the demonic glare of the mine, is an embodiment of the psychic lives of the couple who stand at the center of the story. The grimness, the desolation, the connotations of waste and ruin are all appropriate to the lives of Walter and Elizabeth Bates. In the midst of this landscape is a richly symbolic image: a woman stands trapped between the evening ore train and the highway hedge. Caught by nature on one side and by man's machine on the other, the woman prefigures Elizabeth's isolation and Walter's suffocation in the mine. The wife has been trapped by nature's inescapable reality as surely as the husband has been trapped by the accident. The apparently minor detail of an ordinary scene creates more connotations of isolation and frustration for Lawrence to exploit.

From this general setting, the narration narrows to a specific figure in a specific yard. Lawrence retains the sombre connotations of the opening paragraph by the image of a "large bony vine [which] clutched at the house, as if to claw down the tiled roof." Dishevelled chrysanthemums, the central image of the story, adorn the bleak yard, adding not beauty but pathos to the scene by their bedraggled look and their incongruous presence in so blighted a place. All the forebodings inherent in the original description of the scene are implicit in Elizabeth's first speech. Her sharp words reveal her tension as she releases her exasperation on her son. Lawrence makes everything in the general atmosphere appropriate to Elizabeth's character. He quickly heightens the careful, muted introduction of conflict in the story by the encounter with her father, a widower, now planning remarriage. The older man's defensive question, "'Well, what's a

man to do? It's no sort of life for a man of my years, to sit at my own hearth like a stranger'," appropriately brings to the story the theme of isolation, for, as one critic accurately notes, "what becomes evident, through detail after detail, is that everyone in Mrs. Bates's household does sit by the hearth a stranger" [George H. Ford, *Double Measure: A Study of the Novels and Stories of D. H. Lawrence*, 1965].

One of Lawrence's brilliant accomplishments in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" is to create the crackling tension between husband and wife without the man appearing. First in her sharp words to her son, then in the father's sympathetic report of the husband's drunken bragging, Lawrence indirectly creates the antagonism that dominates Eliza-beth's life. The scene ends with the shrill wail of the winding-engine raising and lowering the elevator in the mine shaft. This mechanical chorus to the domestic tragedy reminds the reader of the mechanical rounds of work and frustration that have added to Elizabeth's anxiety. Like the image of the trapped woman, the recurring wail of the winding-engine contrasts the human and the mechanical worlds.

From this careful introduction of mood, image, and character, the scene moves indoors to the darkened kitchen where the mother and children sit, appropriately shrouded in darkness, unable to see each other. They are present, yet separated; their lives seem defined by darkness. The growing sense of isolation reinforces Elizabeth's frustration at her husband's absence. At teatime, the hour of some family fellowship, he is (supposedly) drinking in the tavern. The scene continues the gloomy suggestions of the opening paragraph and the conversation between Elizabeth and her father. Whatever might be creative is blighted; whatever could exist has died of hostility and frustration. At this moment, Lawrence expands the flower imagery that he began in the description of the yard. Elizabeth has stuck a handful of the tattered chrysanthemums in her waistband. When the daughter remarks on their aroma, the mother replies, "It was chrysanthemums when I married him, and chrysanthemums when you were born, and the first time they ever brought him home drunk, he'd got brown chrysanthemums in his button-hole."

The flowers for her have marked moments of heightened passion: marriage, birth, outrage; tonight, they mark the moment of death. Both the title of the story and the girl's response emphasize the sensory quality of the flowers. The image conveys the *contact*, concrete and definite, with the moments of intense reality. Through the image, Lawrence attempts to circumvent the abstractions "birth," "anger," and "death," by closely associating these states with concrete, precise sensory data. The recurring use of the flowers also introduces a bitter irony into the story, for ordinarily they are delightful, beautiful objects. Here their beauty must exist with bitterness and hostility.

The first part of the story ends with a pair of grotesquely ironic statements that reinforce the reader's awareness of Elizabeth's isolation. In thinking of the impending drunken arrival of Walter, she says, "Eh, he'll not come now till they bring him. There he'll stick! But he needn't come rolling in here in his pit-dirt, for *I* won't wash him. He can lie on the floor." "They'll bring him when he does come—like a log.... And he may sleep on the floor till he wakes himself. I know he'll not go to work tomorrow after this!" These outbursts are chillingly fulfilled as townsmen bring Walter's body home like a log; he

does lie on the floor, but she *does* indeed wash him. The point of this ironic foreshadowing is not to make Elizabeth into an unwittingly callous woman but to emphasize the fact that Walter is no more removed from her in death than he was in life. He has not been a true part of her life any more than he will be from now on. The irony heightens the blindness; the horror of the accurate predictions reflects the lack of understanding between the husband and wife.

In this first part of "Odour of Chrysanthemums," Lawrence has relied on compression and indirection to convey the appropriate emotional reality in Elizabeth Bates. The desolate scenery, the anger, the frustration, the flowers combine with the symbolically arranged kitchen scene with its darkened faces and gloomy shade to convey the wasted life in Elizabeth's existence. As in Chekhov, whom Lawrence admired, we infer the quality of life from the quality of the scene. Lawrence has created the static reality of blight and futility that dominate Elizabeth's life. Unlike a longer narrative, which would focus on the growth of the crisis or probe the various reasons for the tension, this short story conveys an accomplished fact. "Odour of Chrysanthemums" does well what short fiction does best: it illuminates a moment of reality. To prepare for the coming understanding, Lawrence devotes the first part of the story to a careful presentation of Eliza-beth's ordinary life: everything in the scene and action persuades the reader that this night is quite like many in the past. Nothing seems unusual; the details are as ordinary as they are precise, but with the shift in part two from anger to fear, the story moves to a new level.

With increasing alarm, Elizabeth goes to the neighbors seeking news of her indifferent mate. The winding-engine, previously only a detail of the familiar background, becomes more ominous, "She was startled by the rapid chuff of the winding-engine at the pit, and the sharp whirr of the brake on the rope as it descended." Her turbulent emotions come to an awful pitch as the miners bring her husband in—dead of suffocation, a victim of an all-too-common industrial accident. In a chilly room, pervaded with the odour of chrysanthemums, Elizabeth and her mother prepare the body for burial.

Now anger has changed to horror; frustration has become despair. The ordinary, bitter wait for the drunken man has become an extraordinary facing of death. The whole fabric of desolate commonness Lawrence so carefully built in Part 1 now contrasts with a moment so powerfully charged that the old blinders of familiarity are lost; Elizabeth, for the first time, enters into a rich but devastating perceptiveness of her husband's world.

As she stands and looks at Walter's body, she sees the absolute separateness of their existence. He had a life; she has one, but the life of each has been foreign to the other. They are no more able to communicate now than they were when he lived. "Elizabeth felt countermanded. She saw him, how utterly inviolable he lay in himself. She had nothing to do with him. She could not accept it." ". . . She knew she had never seen him, he had never seen her, they had met in the dark and had fought in the dark, not knowing whom they met nor whom they fought. And now she saw, and turned silent in seeing. For she had been wrong. She had said he was something he was not; she had felt familiar with him. Whereas he was apart all the while, living as she never lived, feeling as she never felt." This sudden knowledge is a climactic moment. The tension so

precisely created earlier in the story now gains its *full* meaning. Lawrence brings to bear the careful details, the ordinariness of the evening on the truth of life for Elizabeth. Walter's action has incalculably deeper meaning than she had suspected. Lawrence has prepared her (and the reader) for this moment; the image that dominates the scene —darkness—is appropriate for the meaning and consistent with the connotations of the previous images.

Suddenly, painfully, she can feel awe, grief, and pity for Walter. "What had he suffered? What stretch of horror for this helpless man! She was rigid with agony. She had not been able to help him. He had been cruelly injured, this naked man, this other being, and she could make no reparation." With tragic irony, Lawrence shows the chasm separating his characters; only in death, only in the most traumatic moment does isolation give way to pity. "Life with its smoky burning gone from him, had left him apart and utterly alien to her. And she knew what a stranger he was to her. In her womb was ice of fear, because of this separate stranger with whom she had been living as one flesh. Was this what it all meant—utter, intact separateness, obscured by heat of living?"

To Lawrence, man is denied the luxury of having both comfort and knowledge. Like Emily Dickinson, who proclaimed "Success is counted sweetest / By those who ne'er succeed," Lawrence accepts the reality of deprivation: death and truth are grim partners.

From the pain of her ignorance, Elizabeth has come into the pain of understanding. For Lawrence, the absoluteness of their isolation is mirrored in technique of organization. He has emphasized her loneliness and pain by creating the tension between her and the absent husband. In the story, man and woman live without essential contact. The lurid light of the opening scene, the trapped woman, the darkened kitchen, the ironic foreshadowing all heighten the connotations of pain, loneliness, and despair. Lawrence embodies the thematic abstractions in the precise, concrete details of the narrative.

Both method and theme emphasize the disparity between the necessary human life force (copulation and procreation) and the equally necessary human psychic existence. To be a mother is necessary and good, but to be a wife is a terrible thing to Elizabeth (and to Lawrence). "He and she were only channels through which life had flowed to issue to the children. She was a mother—but how awful she knew it now to have been a wife. And he, dead now, how awful he must have felt it to be a husband." Using Elizabeth's pregnancy, Lawrence creates a tension between the static blight of their psychic lives and their parental fecundity. The cycle of birth and death is incompatible with the static hostility of their roles as husband and wife. Like the pain that must accompany Elizabeth's understanding of their isolation, the pain of her knowledge of this horrible paradox of human life is ineluctable. Merely to know, to rise above the daily blindness of life is not to free oneself from pain. Lawrence's vision is demanding, but he consistently refuses to sentimentalize his story.

The story focuses on the present state of pain and frustration by relying, in part, on the careful, precise evocation of the continuity of blight in the Bates's lives. Through the image of the chrysanthemums, the reader accepts the prior existence of a wasted life

and so is compelled to accept its extension into Elizabeth's future, because the aesthetic logic works for both past and future. Past and future collapse upon the present moment of pain to define life's salient qualities. Lawrence extends the incompatibility of male and female existence as Elizabeth envisions her life with her next two "husbands," life and death. "She knew she submitted to life, which was her immediate master. But from death, her ultimate master, she winced with fear and shame." Lawrence's use of *master*, the colloquial British term for husband, re-enforces the sense of paradox in Elizabeth's life. Just as she has been required to be both mother and wife, so is she required to be a consort to both life and death. The paradox of being a wife and mother is mirrored in this final image of life and death. We can escape neither paradox; the pain of frustration is a human curse. The clarification Lawrence achieves through Elizabeth Bates precisely reveals what isolation is: the inevitable expression of the paradoxical human necessity to surrender yet remain inviolable.

Source: Robert N. Hudspeth, "Lawrence's 'Odour of Chrysanthemums': Isolation and Paradox," in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. 6, No. 5, Fall, 1969, pp. 630-36.

Critical Essay #4

In the following excerpt, Amon briefly notes the principal themes and symbols in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" and comments on the story's characteristic autobiographical elements.

Lawrence, like Chekhov, stands for a distension in the form of the [short] story. Like Chekhov, he had the genius for portraying the intimate feeling of a place, a landscape, a conversation, or a character. Like Chekhov—but in a manner peculiar to his technique—he crystallized vacancy, frustration, inertia, and futile aspiration. We see that all of Lawrence's stories share one characteristic: all depend, as stories, upon subtle psychological changes of character.

With Lawrence's characters (as with Chekhov's) the subconscious seems to come to the surface and they communicate directly without the impediment of speech. Naturally the most interesting point for Lawrence is that at which the interplay of psychic forces is incomplete, where the adjustment is diffi-cult, where the emphasis is on discord rather than on harmony. Consequently, Lawrence focused his attention, as Frederick Hoffman has said, "on the subtle complexity of an emotional state which a character assumes in a crisis."

The significance of this is that Lawrence has accomplished a transfiguration of experience. He lifts his characters from the surface experience of the concrete world onto new and immediate levels of psychic consciousness, and then returns them, sanctified and altered, to the concrete world in which they must continue. Inevitably this is the symbolic *rites de passage*, the ceremony or initiation or baptism, which ushers an individual into a new way of life; and in this, too, it is the spiritual death and rebirth motif of Lawrence's chosen symbol, the Phoenix.

If we take, for example, "The Odour of Chrysanthemums," one of Lawrence's earliest stories, . . . this *rites de passage* aspect comes out quite clearly.

The autobiographical setting of Lawrence's youth—the lower-class colliery family—is of course common to many of his early stories and novels. But the theme, too, is central to Lawrence: the inviolable isolation of the individual psyche, the utter separateness of those with whom we share physical intimacy.

The revelation of the theme (of which for us the entire story is the qualifying and modifying symbol) comes to the wife through the death of her husband. Revelation through death then is the means of objectifying the theme. However, it is the *moment* of revelation with which we are concerned here and with the peculiar means of objectifying that moment.

Gradually, as the story unfolds, our interest in the chrysanthemums increases. At first, they hang dishevelled, "like pink cloths." A little later, Eliza-beth's small son tears at the "ragged wisps of chrysanthemums" and drops the petals in handfuls along the path:

"'Don't do that—it does look nasty,' said his mother. He refrained, and she, suddenly pitiful, broke off a twig with three or four wan flowers and held them against her face." . . . [Later] Elizabeth's daughter wants to smell the flowers:

"Don't they smell beautiful!"

Her mother gave a short laugh.

"No," she said, "not to me. It was chrysanthemums when I married him, and chrysanthemums when you were born, and the first time they ever brought him home drunk, he'd got brown chrysanthemums in his button-hole."

Here then is their significance: they are talismans of change, transition into a new way of life—a tragic way of life. They are markers of marriage, birth, and—inevitably—death. The chrysanthemums, we might say, are the omens, and it is through them that a great part of our interest is aroused and focalized; and it is through them (but not through them alone) that the father's death is foreshadowed.

[Lawrence was able to] thoroughly incorporate into his art the most appropriate action—literal and symbolic—to objectify his theme.

We find incipient in this story such other patterns and motifs as the *Mater Dolorata*, possessive motherhood, lack of rapport between the sexes, and father-hatred-envy, which were to occupy Law-rence the rest of his life....

Source: Frank Amon, "D. H. Lawrence and the Short Story," in *The Achievement of D. H. Lawrence,* edited by Frederick J. Hoffman and Harry T. Moore, University of Oklahoma Press, 1953, pp. 222-34.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the condition of mines in England at the turn of the century. To what extent does the mine in "Odour of Chrysanthemums" function as a silent but forceful character?

Research the position of women in England in the early twentieth century. Is Elizabeth Bates's life-style common to those of other women at that time?

What references to the effects of environmentally unfriendly industrial practices can you find in the story?

Elizabeth Bates thinks her husband drinks too much. What kind of medical, social, psychological, or economic effects of alcohol abuse are revealed in the story?

In what ways is the death of Walter Bates foreshadowed in the story? What are the indications that a disaster is looming?

Examine the portrayal of the two children, John and Annie, in the story. How are they psychologically affected by the family situation in which they are raised? To what extent do they reproduce their parents's attitudes? In what ways do you think Elizabeth Bates might treat the new child differently than she has treated her other two children up to this point?

Compare and Contrast

1911: Massive labor protests take place throughout England, with many turning violent. The British government stations more than 50,000 armed troops in London where the nationwide transportation workers' strike is threatening a nationwide famine.

1999: Labor disputes in the past year have crippled the economic gains of major corporations, including General Motors and Northwest Airlines.

1911: The National Insurance Bill, which provides for unemployment and sickness insurance, is passed in England.

1999: Many European nations utilize a system of socialized medicine. The United States continues to try to address the rising cost of healthcare through legislation aimed at reform.

1911: The first cable message is sent around the world by telegraph from New York City.

1999: Over 3.5 billion international telephone calls are made from the United States each year.

What Do I Read Next?

"The Woman Who Rode Away," D. H. Law-rence's short story from 1928, contains a mythological and apocalyptic conclusion which may be anticipated in "Odour of Chrysanthemums."

Sons and Lovers, D. H. Lawrence's autobiographical novel from 1913, involves a very similar relationship between a miner and his wife as that portrayed in "Odour of Chrysanthemums."

D. H. Lawrence's essay "Cocksure Women and Hensure Men," in *Phoenix II: Uncollected, Unpublished, and Other Prose Works by D. H. Lawrence,* published in 1968, is a brief and stark statement of Lawrence's view of problems in relations between the sexes.

Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of Eng-lish Modernity, edited by Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea and published in 1996, is a valuable introduction to many of the major social and cultural movements of the early twentieth century.

The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain, written by C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson and published in 1972. Volumes I and II provide a general introduction to the historical and cultural contexts in which Law-rence was writing.

Further Study

Boulton, James T. "D. H. Lawrence's Odour of Chrysanthemums: An Early Version," *Renaissance and Modern Studies,* Vol. 13, 1969, pp. 4-48.

An edition of the printer's proofs of the story, with editorial comment on variations between the proofs, Lawrence's revisions, and the published version of 1911.

Fernihough, Anne. *D. H. Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 211 p.

In this book, Fernihough discusses Lawrences use of aesthetics and ideology.

Ford, Ford Madox. "D. H. Lawrence." In *Portraits from Life*, pp. 70-89. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937.

Ford tells about his first reading of a D. H. Lawrence story, "Odour of Chrysanthemums," and lists some of the qualities that convinced him Lawrence was an author of genius.

Kinkead-Weekes, Mark. *D. H. Lawrence: Triumph To Exile, 1912-1922,* Cambridge University Press, 1996, 943 p.

In a comprehensive account of Lawrence's life, Kinkead-Weekes investigates many of the themes which arise in the story.

McCabe, T. H. "The Otherness of D. H. Lawrence's 'Odour of Chrysanthemums'." *The D. H. Lawrence Review,* Vol. 19, no. 2, Summer, 1987, pp. 149-56.

McCabe traces how an intuitive awareness of otherness in the story, associated with gender and death, leads to self-discovery.

Nash, Walter. "On a Passage from Lawrence's 'Odour of Chrysanthemums'." *Language and Literature: An Introductory Reader in Stylistics,* edited by Ronald Carter, George Allen and Unwin, 1982, pp. 101-20.

Nash provides a detailed stylistic analysis of the first paragraph of Lawrence's story, showing how it reveals the theme of alienation.

Schulz, Volker. "D. H. Lawrence's Early Masterpiece of Short Fiction: 'Odour of Chrysanthemums'." *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. 28, No. 3, Summer, 1991, pp. 363-70.

Schulz's general reading of the story explores its realistic setting and the progress to the final revelation.

Wulff, Ute-Christel. "Hebel, Hofmnannsthal and Lawrence's 'Odour of Chrysanthemums.'" *The D. H. Lawrence Review,* Vol. 20, No. 3, Fall, 1988, pp. 287-96.

Wulff explores Lawrence's knowledge of German literature and the parallels between this story and tales by Johann Peter Hebel and Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

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Draper, R. P. Introduction to his *D. H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage,* Barnes and Noble, 1970, pp. 1-29.

Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics,* New York: Doubleday, 1970, 393 p.

Stovel, Nora Foster. "D. H. Lawrence and 'The Dignity of Death': Tragic Recognition in 'Odour of Chrysanthemums,' 'The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd,' and *Sons and Lovers*." *The D. H. Lawrence Review,* Vol. 16, No. 1, Spring, 1983, pp. 59-82.

Thornton, Weldon. "Odour of Chrysanthemums." In his *D. H. Lawrence: A Study of the Short Fiction,* Twayne, 1993, pp. 29-35.

Worthen, John. *D. H. Lawrence*, London: Edward Arnold, 1991, 136 p.

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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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