Redemption Study Guide

Redemption by John Gardner

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Introduction

John Gardner's story, "Redemption," was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May, 1977. Gardner later included the story in his collection of short stories, *The Art of Living*, published by Knopf in 1981. "Redemption" chronicles the story of a young man named Jack Hawthorne who accidentally kills his seven-year-old brother in a farming accident. The accident takes place in the first paragraph, and the rest of the story reveals how Jack and the members of his family deal with the loss.

The central event in the story is autobiographical. As a young man, Gardner accidentally killed his younger brother; the circumstances of that tragic event are nearly identical to those described in the story. Gardner's recurring themes are present in this piece of short fiction: the relationship between art and experience, the consequences of death for survivors, the redemption from guilt, and the struggle between the forces of order and disorder.

Author Biography

The son of farmer John Champlin Gardner and his wife Priscilla Jones Gardner, John Gardner was born on July 21, 1933, and grew up on a farm. His mother had been an English teacher, and his father, like the father in "Redemption" was an avid reader of poetry, Shakespeare, and the Bible. As a result, Gardner was exposed to a myriad of literature and popular culture during his childhood. When Gardner was in early adolescence, he was responsible for the accidental death of his brother, Gilbert, who was crushed beneath a cultipacker young Gardner was driving home. The tragedy became an important motivation for Gardner's writing in later years.

After graduating from high school, Gardner attended De Pauw University. When he was nineteen, he married Joan Patterson. Gardner finished his undergraduate career at Washington University in St. Louis in 1955, before earning an M.A. and a Ph. D. at the State University of Iowa. In addition to creative writing, Gardner studied medieval literature. After completing his Ph.D., Gardner taught at a number of colleges and universities. From 1959 to 1962, he taught at Chico State University in California; one of his students during this time was Raymond Carver, the short story writer.

Starting in the mid-1960s, Gardner published an enormous number of works, including critical essays, a biography of Chaucer, medieval studies, novels, short stories, plays, and poetry. In 1971, he published *Grendel*, the story of *Beowulf* told by the monster. In Gardner's version, the monster is depicted as an existentialist philosopher. In 1977, the year he first published "Redemption" , he won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction for *October Light*. During the same year he published *The Poetry of Chaucer* as well as *The Life and Times of Chaucer*, and underwent surgery for cancer.

In 1978, Gardner published his most controversial book, *On Moral Fiction*, a treatise in aesthetics and the purpose of fiction. He also married his second wife, Liz Rosenberg, whom he divorced in 1982. During the next few years following 1978, he traveled the country, debating the ideas introduced in the book. In 1981, he published a collection of short stories titled *The Art of Living and Other Stories*. The book includes the short story "Redemption."

In 1982, John Gardner died in a motorcycle accident, days before his planned marriage to Susan Thornton. The manuscripts he was working on at the time of his death were published in 1986 as *Stillness and Shadows*.

Plot Summary

"Redemption" is set in a small farming community in upstate New York. The story opens abruptly with the announcement that, "Jack Hawthorne ran over and killed his brother, David." Jack was driving a tractor and towing a cultipacker when his brother fell off the large machine. Jack is unable to act quickly enough to stop the accident, and David is crushed by the large machine.

The accident affects each member of the family in different ways, and the rest of the story is about how the family, especially Jack, finally come to terms with the death. Jack's father, Dale, takes the death very hard. A kind and genial man, Dale often recited poetry to groups at local churches and schools. After the accident, Dale begins to engage in a series of self-destructive actions, including riding his motorcycle at high speeds, smoking cigarettes, and engaging in a series of affairs with women. He vacillates between a hatred for God and despairing atheism.

Jack's mother, Betty, hides her grief from her children, crying only when she is alone. She concentrates on getting her two children through their grief. A religious woman, she has many friends who provide her with support. During this period, she also requires that her children take music lessons— Phoebe on the piano, and Jack on the French horn.

Although many people reach out to Jack, he withdraws from human contact. He isolates himself from family and friends, and even considers suicide. During the long hours he spends alone, the accident replays over and over again in his mind. He finds some solace doing his farm chores. One day, a year and a half after the accident, his sister brings him his lunch out in the field. When he did not say grace, she is distraught. Jack comforts her by lying, contending that he had said grace to himself earlier. This moment is an important one for the story, because for the first time since the accident, Jack shows concern for someone other than himself.

Meanwhile, Jack's father returns after three weeks away. When Jack comes into the house, he finds his father crying, asking his wife for forgiveness. Although Jack hugs his father, he is angry and resentful, presumably because after running away from his responsibilities to the family, his father can find solace when he returns.

Jack's father never leaves the family again. Jack, on the other hand, remains isolated, retreating into music. On Saturdays, he takes the bus to Rochester to take music lessons from an elderly Russian musician, Arcady Yegudkin, who had narrowly escaped the horrors of the Russian Revolution.

During one of Jack's lessons, Yegudkin plays a French horn, and Jack is transfixed. When he asks his teacher if he thinks that he will ever be able to play that well, Yegudkin laughs, clearly amazed that Jack would even think that such a thing were possible. Although Yegudkin's laughter moves Jack to tears, there is no indication that Jack will not continue with his lessons. Further, Yegudkin's response somehow provides

a release for Jack, an acknowledgment that he does not have to be perfect. The story closes with Jack rushing for his bus, starting for home. The implication is that, like his father before him, Jack is starting the long journey toward healing.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

The first paragraph begins "One day in April," and in the same breath, the protagonist, Jack Hawthorn, is introduced and the main event of the story is disclosed. Jack was directly involved in the accident that killed his brother David. Jack describes the accident as preventable; if his reaction had been to slam on the brakes of the tractor, his brother might have been saved, but all he could do was sit frozen as he watched his younger brother be crushed by the cultipacker. Jack, 12 at the time, was driving the tractor while his sister, then 5, was riding on the back fender. His brother David, 7, had been riding on the cultipacker, an enormously heavy piece of machinery used to level out newly ploughed ground.

Dale Hawthorn, Jack's father, was nearly destroyed by David's death. Dale is described as being a "sensitive, intelligent man," a "dreamer." Even though Dale consciously blamed himself and God for the accident, sometimes blame seemed to land on Jack. Dale's emotions swung violently, he began smoking and taking long drives on his motorcycle. Dale thought about suicide, but refrained because of his responsibility to his remaining children and his wife. A local poet, he began having torrid love affairs and would frequently be away from the farm for days at a time. Jack and his uncles picked up the slack.

Jack's mother tried to comfort her remaining children, but she cried frequently, overwhelmed by grief. In an attempt to provide a more permanent distraction, she secured piano lessons for Phoebe and French horn lessons for Jack. She tried her best to keep her feelings a secret, coping with Dale's method of dealing with David's death.

Part 1 Analysis

By explaining the accident in an immediate, graphic and confessional way, the information is more emotionally disturbing. The narration of the story is established in the third person with an omniscient narrator that provides access to the character's minds without the limitations of the traditional first person perspective. Using this particular method allows insight into Dale's reaction to the accident, his feelings about the existence of God and his contemplation of suicide. "No one asked that, changed as he was, he do more, for the moment, than survive." (Quote from page 32.) Jack's father was allowed to be selfish and seek solace in cigarettes, women and long trips on his bike.

Jack's mother had to deal with her sorrow without dropping the beat. She had the responsibility of maintaining her house and the farm, comforting her children and looking after her grieving husband. She dealt with her grief in a different way, quite possibly the only way she was allowed. "In fact, except for the crying behind her closed

door, she kept her feelings strictly secret." (Quote from page 33.) For her to express her fear, anger or sorrow would have been selfish, going against her expected role as a mother.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Jack Hawthorn had a hard time healing from his brother's death. Working on the farm, he spent a lot of solitary time replaying the accident in his mind. His guilt consumed him and he felt shame at his anger that responded to the guilt. He blamed himself for his brother's death, loathed himself for it. Jack remained aloof from his family and close family friends. He spent long hours on the tractor telling stories, acting them out in the middle of the field where he had no possible audience. Even his stories and fantasies became self-sacrificing and tortuous. The pain sometimes completely overwhelmed him.

Part 2 Analysis

With all the time in the world, mind free, hands busy, Jack dwelled on the accident that killed his brother. He punished himself with the memories, relived it repeatedly. He took sole responsibility for his brother's death and because he could not reconcile a world where he could be capable of committing such an atrocious act and he could not blame God, he concluded that he himself must be bad, evil. The farm and its machinery were tools of life, they brought food and money that supported his family and essentially sustained the children. It was difficult for Jack to reconcile that such tools could also be "murderous" stealing back that life which they nurtured. Everything in Jack's life took on the sorrow that saturated his heart. Even his fantasies became nightmares. His pain was so sharp and acute that he contemplated suicide as a possible solution. In those moments, he gave in to the ache and withdrew inside himself.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Jack remained distant from his father and uncles as time passed. These were quiet men, lived there all their lives. Jack was comfortable in the world of the farm, in the barn with the cows or out in the pasture. In the early morning, everything seemed right, felt peaceful. However, the feeling never lasted and soon he would be reviewing the horror of his brother's death again.

Part 3 Analysis

Jack's father and uncles could not provide comfort for him, could not help to ease his pain. These men did not do a lot of talking, share personal or emotional experiences. They worked side by side silently. Jack was able to find some solace in his rituals around the farm, companionship with the animals. In the early morning, the day would appear pure and he could enjoy a few minutes of peacefulness before the images of the accident crept back into his mind and he broke down against the rage that welled inside him.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary

The fourth segment begins with a story. A year and a half had passed since the accident and Jack's father had been gone for three weeks. Jack had some help out in the field and his little sister, Phoebe, now seven, brought out their lunches. Jack sat apart from the other boys and Phoebe brought him his own thermos, acknowledging the fact that he liked to keep to himself. Though she was just a child, she took her responsibility seriously. She asked Jack if he wanted to say grace before eating and he responded that he did not. In her eyes, he could see the shock and fear and it hit him hard enough to lie and tell her that he had already said grace silently. At this she smiled, reassured. She packed up their dishes and headed back to the house, turning around to wave to Jack. He touched his hat in reply, feeling touched and a bit embarrassed by her affection.

Part 4 Analysis

A year and a half after the accident, everyone seemed to accept Jack's withdrawal. Phoebe, who also witnessed the accident, brought out his lunch, making a special effort to be caring toward Jack. As a girl, she most likely had been taught to be more comfortable with emotion and, despite her young age, had already learned to emulate the nurturing behavior of a mother. Her fear about Jack's refusal to say grace reflects a fear that he has turned his back on God, like their father, who also turned his back on his family in his grief. On some level, she was aware of this and did not want to lose Jack to his sorrow. Being the only other witness to the accident, she probably looked to Jack to learn how to deal with the pain and feared that if it was enough to destroy him and their father, that it might well destroy her too. She shared this burden with Jack and was his ally in survival.

Part 5

Part 5 Summary

This section begins with Jack's realization of about what his sister's fear was. The weight of this realization drained him. He envied his father's ability to be selfish, disappearing to cope on his own. Sitting in the barn, his uncle came to check on him and found him in tears. A few days later, he entered the house to find doors closed and an unusual hush. He discovered the family sitting around the living room. His father had his head in his mother's lap. Phoebe was there, hugging both of them. The three of them were all in tears. Jack's aunt announced that his father had come home and beckoned him over to the embrace. He was unable to move until his father lifted his head and called him over. He knelt down beside them, crying, and whispered, "I hate you" too quietly for anyone to hear.

Part 5 Analysis

Jack's initial comprehension of his sister's fear brought the pain that she shared to the forefront of his mind. "If he wouldn't say grace, then perhaps there was no heaven. Their father would never get well, and David was dead." (Quote from page 41.) He realized that the only thing keeping Phoebe together was her faith in god, heaven and the fact that things could change.

When he entered the silent living room to find his father on his knees, he was terrified. His Aunt announced his father's return and it hit Jack hard. He wanted his father to come home of course, but he also was angry with him for his selfishness, for leaving the family, for finding comfort and solace in other women's arms, for not being there to comfort him. He whispered his hatred to his father, needing to say it but saying it too quietly to be heard because he could not bear to add to the man's pain.

Part 6

Part 6 Summary

Jack's father stayed. He slowly returned to his usual routines and even began reciting poetry again, though without the energy he had before. Jack resented his father's poetry, resented the way that he appealed to each listener, charming them, wooing them, drawing them to tears. For him it felt false, illusory. He believed that his father would not stay.

As a way to escape from his own reality, Jack began to play the French horn increasingly. He earned himself a seat with the orchestra and traveled to Rochester on Saturdays to take lessons from a man named Arcady Yegudkin at the Eastman School of Music.

Part 6 Analysis

Despite his fears, Jack's father stayed and the family returned to their old routines. Jack observed that his father's eyes no longer sparkled the same way when he recited poetry. He resented his father's ability to appear so genuine when so much seemed falsified by silence. Jack continued to pull away from his family. He sought his escape in music; the French horn offered him refuge.

Part 7

Part 7 Summary

Jack's new teacher, Yegudkin, was an old man who had played principal horn in Czar Nikolai's orchestra and who with his wife had been captured and left for dead with the Bolsheviks. Both he and his wife survived, but she remained severely crippled. Though the teacher was now nearly deaf, he loved teaching his instrument. He talked to Jack about Russia and America, but really cared only for music.

Part 7 Analysis

This segment begins describing Jack's teacher, Yegudkin, in some detail. He was a man who had survived quite a bit in his lifetime and lived on for his crippled wife and his music.

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Part 8

Part 8 Summary

Yegudkin had ordered a new horn for one of his graduate students. When it arrived, he assembled it and played. Jack watched him in awe, the music seeming to have a life of its own. Yegudkin then handed the horn over to the student. In wonder, Jack asked him if he might ever play as well. The teacher bellowed a retort and closed himself off. The lesson finished and Jack headed home with tears running down his face.

Part 8 Analysis

The teacher assembled and played the beautiful new horn for the two students. They were utterly enthralled by the music. It moved them, and Jack spoke perhaps naively when he asked if he would ever be able to play so well. Yegudkin responded with coldness and anger, possibly because Jack's question reminded him that he was no longer a musician, but an old teacher. Jack felt injured by his response, but pushed homeward through his tears.

Characters

Betty Hawthorne

Betty Hawthorne is Jack's mother. She grieves for her son in secret; the outward manifestation of this grief is a significant weight gain. Betty struggles to keep her family together through a very difficult time. Fortunately she is comforted by her supportive friends and is able to find the strength she needs to keep going. Betty is the one who introduces the children to music, and her insistence on French horn lessons makes possible Jack's eventual recovery.

Dale Hawthorne

Dale Hawthorne is Jack's father. The death of his younger son nearly destroys him, and he struggles to deal with the tragedy. He leaves his family, has several love affairs, and generally shirks his responsibility. However, he comes home at last, asking for forgiveness and searching for his own redemption.

Jack Hawthorne

Only twelve years old, Jack accidentally kills his brother by rolling him over with a cultipacker, a large machine used for farming. He blames himself for the accident and isolates himself from his family. Jack reviews the incident over and over again. Concerned about his increasing isolation, his mother insists that he take French horn lessons. Surprisingly, it turns into an effective therapy for the young man. In fact, it is through the French horn that Jack eventually finds redemption.

Phoebe Hawthorne

Phoebe Hawthorne is Jack's younger sister, the baby of the family. Only five years of age at the time of the accident, she copes with the loss by making cakes, doing household chores, and taking food to the men in the field. She believes that her family will be reunited in heaven and that God will heal her father.

Arcady Yegudkin

Arcady Yegudkin is Jack's music teacher. Like Jack, he is a survivor of a traumatic incident. He and his wife escaped from Russia during the Revolution after being shot and left for dead by soldiers. In Europe, he became a famous musician, and coped with his bad memories by burying himself in his music.

Themes

God and Religion

Gardner chooses God and religion as one of his central themes in "Redemption." More specifically, Gardner chooses to explore theodicy, the defense of God's omnipotence and goodness in the face of evil. The central question of theodicy is, of course, if God is good and all-powerful, why does God allow evil in the world? How is it that a beneficent and omnipotent God would allow a small child to be crushed to death under the wheels of a cultipacker?

Dale Hawthorne represents the paradox of God's goodness and God's omnipotence in his response to David's death. His mind "swung violently at this time, reversing itself almost hour by hour, from desperate faith to the most savage, black-hearted atheism.... He was unable to d ecide, one moment full of rage at God's injustice, the next moment wracked by doubt of his existence." Often, when presented with unbearable pain, a human will either blame God or deny God's existence. Before the accident, Dale is "aloof from the timid-eyed flock, Christ's sheep." However, after returning to the family after an absence of three weeks, Dale begs for forgiveness. It is as if he finds redemption in bending to what he sees as God's will. Jack feels scorn for his father, now "some mere suffering sheep among sheep...."

Betty Hawthorne represents a different response to the tragedy. She neither blames nor questions God. Rather, it is through her religious faith as well as the support of her friends that she is able to survive the disaster. This is vitally important for the family, because ultimately, she is the one who "keep[s] her family from wreck."

The character of Phoebe Hawthorne provides another insight into God's role in disaster. When she brings the lunch to Jack and he refuses to say grace, she is upset. To placate her, Jack lies and tells her that he has already said grace. He realizes later that Phoebe must depend on her religious faith; her survival requires the belief that God will heal her father and her brother, and that her family will be reunited in heaven. Phoebe finds solace in serving others; in many ways she is reminiscent of the "suffering servant" of Christian iconography.

Art and Experience

Certainly the most important theme in this story is that of art and its role in understanding life's experiences. Kent Thompson in his review in *Books In Canada* writes that virtually "every story in the collection is equally concerned with the various relationships between life and art." Gardner often claimed that art "made my life, and it made my life when I was a kid, when I was incapable of finding any other sustenance, any other thing to lean on, any other comfort during times of great unhappiness."Art, for Gardner, had great redemptive powers. Indeed, only after writing the story did Gardner

stop having flashback memories of his brother's death. Likewise, the story ends with the hope that Jack has found redemption through his music.

Furthermore, Gardner maintains that art has an important role to play in human experience. Literature should be moral, providing models for the way life should be lived. For example, although the characters in the story contemplate suicide, they all reject it as an appropriate response to their grief. Rather, each character finds a way to redeem him or herself through God, through work, or through art. As Thompson writes, for Gardner, "art is first of all an act of love."

Style

Images/Imagery

Several images recur throughout "Redemption." Skulls, for example, appear three times to remind Jack of David's death. At one point, Jack is alone, driving the tractor in the fields, thinking about the accident and his own guilt, his "sore hands clamped tight to the steering wheel, his shoes unsteady on the bucking axlebeam—for stones lay everywhere, yellowed in the sunlight, a field of misshapen skulls." Jack's identification of the stones with skulls is connected to his memory of his brother's crushed skull in the field. He then recalls his father's story of Lord Byron and Shelley's skulls, another indirect reference to what he saw happen to his brother's head.

A few pages later, he has a flashback of his brother's death, and this time, he does not see stones that look like skulls, nor Shelley's skull, but rather the cultipacker "flattening the skull of his brother." Moreover, the adjective "yellowed" suggests the aging of the skulls, and the time passing since his brother's death. Ironically, when Jack climbs down from the tractor because his memories overwhelm him, he fixes his eyes on "some comforting object, for instance a dark, smooth stone." The stone becomes a comforting image that brings him momentary peace.

Images of birds also figure prominently in the story. Each time, they seem linked to Jack's feelings. When he is alone on the tractor, his emotions threaten to overwhelm to such an extent that he must get off the tractor and calm down. The "birds crazily wheeling" overhead suggest the painful emotions inside. Later, in a peaceful moment, he hears birdcalls, and a "cloud of sparrows . . . explode[s] into flight." These birds are in search of safety. Likewise, Jack is looking for a safe place to work through his emotions.

A final bird image occurs in the closing pages. When Yegudkin begins to play the French horn, "it was if, suddenly, a creature from some other universe had appeared, some realm where feelings become birds and dark sky and spirit is more solid than stone." The sound grows until Jack likens it to "an enormous trapped hawk hunting frantically for escape." The repressed feelings threaten to tear him up. Suddenly, it seems as if Jack understands that through his music, his feelings can take wing like birds.

Antithesis

Anther important narrative device used by Gardner in this story is antithesis, a word that means oppositions or contrasts. The story opens with the most striking antithesis of all. It is a beautiful spring day, a time of year associated with birth. On this lovely day, David dies. Thus, birth and death are juxtaposed in a paragraph that begins, "One day in April...." In so doing, Gardner associates the time of planting with death.

Midway through the story, Gardner opens another paragraph with the line, "One day in August, a year and a half after the accident, they were combining oats...." The sim ilarity between the two lines is striking and provides yet another antithesis. August is the time for harvesting. Harvest time is a time of death for crops, yet Jack begins to move away from his thoughts of death and toward his obligation to the living.

Historical Context

Post-War World

John Gardner, born during the Great Depression, reached adolescence in the years immediately following World War II. The accident that killed his brother took place in 1947, just two years after the end of the war. During this time, much of America was still rural and agricultural. With the advent of the nuclear age, American society began to change as they responded to the communist threat from Eastern Europe. The tension between the United States and the Soviet Union is known as the "Cold War."

In Europe, the aftermath of the World War II was very difficult. Much of Europe lay in ruins, the result of years of conflict. The realization of what happened at Nazi extermination camps shocked the public. In addition, the specter of Communism loomed as Eastern Europe found itself shrouded under what Winston Churchill called "The Iron Curtain."

Post-War Philosophy and Art

In 1947, Albert Camus published his book, *The Plague*. The horrors of the war had convinced many people that there was no God, for certainly God would not allow such evil to exist in the world. Existentialists such as Camus and John Paul Sartre believed that humans are alone in the world, that existence is unique and unrepeatable. In addition, they maintained that humans are free to choose their own path in the world. This freedom is both awesome and awful, in the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's terms. Pushed to the extreme, existentialism becomes nihilism, the belief that there is no meaning in the world.

In 1947, Alfred Whitehead, the English mathematician and philosopher died. Whitehead and his philosophy had a great impact on Gardner; in fact, it was through Whitehead's philosophy that he was able to reject the existential position taken by most philosophers of the day.

The Cold War

During the 1950s, the United States engaged in a serious cold war with the Soviet Union. The explosion of the atomic bomb made further "hot" war unthinkable; the annihilation of the entire planet was possible with the new weapons. Nevertheless, the major powers rushed to build nuclear arsenals, and the decade saw confrontation after confrontation, the world teetering on the edge of nuclear disaster. In a world such as this, Gardner looked to art to provide the moral foundation that seemed to be so lacking in the modern world.

During the 1960s, the Cold War continued. At the same time, the United States became involved in the Vietnam War, a conflict that many young people viewed as immoral and wrong. The assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr., along with increasing violence in the nation's cities, led many to question the future of the nation.

Experimentation in literature and art occurred during the 1950s and 1960s. Richard Brautigan, William Gass, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, and John Fowles experimented with fiction. Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida in France began examining language and culture, which led to the concept of deconstruction. John Gardner, while a literary experimenter himself, often found himself in opposition to the trends of his day. For these reasons, he felt compelled to detail his aesthetic and moral philosophy in a number of essays and interviews. By the 1970s, Gardner was well known as a cultural and literary commentator, contending that good art is also moral art.

Critical Overview

"Redemption" was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May, 1977. Gardner later included the story in his collection of short stories, *The Art of Living,* published by Knopf in 1981. Gardner was a writer who generated considerable critical controversy, in part from his prodigious writing output. Between the completion of his doctoral dissertation in 1958 and his death in 1982, according to Dean McWilliams in his book, *John Gardner*, the author produced "eight novels, two collections of short stories, an epic poem, a volume of lyric poetry, eight scholarly or critical books, five children's books, and five volumes of plays and opera libretti."

Although *The Art of Living* did not generate much critical commentary, the book was generally well-received. For example, Douglas Hill in *Maclean's Magazine* wrote, "Gardner is the master of the economical opening: he gives a reader just enough setting and background to slip him effortlessly into the world of each tale.... Th ere's humor in these stories, and a full measure of graceful, unstudied prose.... Th ere's considerable expertise in this book, and courage and joy."

Nevertheless, because the book followed Gardner's *On Moral Fiction*, a book-length essay discussing the role of fiction, reviewers noted that Gardner used the stories to illustrate the points he made in his earlier books. Kent Thompson, for example, wrote in *Books in Canada* in 1981, that the stories are "illustrations of ideas. Their consequent value is therefore not in what they are, but in what they lead us to talk about. They seem to be written for professors and students...."

It seems notable, however, that few of the early reviews singled out "Redemption" for comment. This may very well be, ironically, because the story demonstrates strong writing, filled with vivid image and compelling moments. Such writing does not square with critics who want only to see the book as an illustration of *On Moral Fiction*. Certainly, later scholars returned to the story, noting in it a number of important ideas, themes, and images for the understanding of the corpus of Gardner's work. These same scholars, however, while concentrating on the philosophical nature of the story, admired the strength of the writing as well.

In recent years, "Redemption" has appeared in several anthologies of short stories and has received notable attention from scholars, a sure indication that the story inspires debate and commentary. Ronald Grant Nutter in his 1997 book *A Dream of Peace: Art and Death in the Fiction of John Gardner*, for example, spends his first chapter establishing the importance of "Redemption" as part of Gardner's work. He discusses autobiographical aspects of the story, and relates it to the work of Robert Jay Lifton, a famous psychiatrist.

Gregory L. Morris contends that "The theme of art as redemptive force comes through most clearly and most intensely in . . . "Redemption," which is Gardner's personal attempt to redefine a particularly painful part of his memory."

As an illustration of Garner's philosophy, as an autobiographical story providing insight into Gardner's life, or as a gripping and moving tale, "Redemption" is likely to garner study and critique in the coming years. Certainly, any student interested in the body of Gardner's work ought to carefully read the story for an exploration of what Morris calls "the magic of art."

Criticism

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

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Critical Essay #1

*Diane Andrews Henningfeld is an associate professor at Adrian College and has written extensively for a variety of educational and academic publishers. In the following essay she examines the autobiographical and thematic importance of "Redemption" and relates it to the rest of Gardner's w*ork.

At the time of his death in 1982, the result of a motorcycle accident, John Gardner was considered one of the most prolific, talented, and controversial writers of his generation. His output was prodigious, spanning genres and ideas with ease. Not content to write only fiction, he also produced literary criticism, children's books, plays, poetry,and biography. He was insistent on the role that fiction should play in the world, and made these claims explicit in books such as *On Moral Fiction, The Art of Fiction, and On Becoming a Novelist,* and in the scores of interviews he granted. By placing his assertions about fiction in front of academics and critics, in bold, vivid, and highly opinionated terms, he generated critical interest and controversy. Although most scholars agree that Gardner was not always successful in achieving the high goals he set for his fiction, most would also agree that his was an important literary and philosophical voice.

Put simply, as Julian Moynahan writes in *The New York Times Book Review*, Gardner steadfastly argued "that all good art, including prose fiction, should be moral. By this he means it should be lifeenhancing, protecting human existence from the dark forces of chaos . . . pressing in from all sides and coming up from below, seeking whom they may devour." This statement seems particularly apt for any discussion of "Redemption."

A number of writers have suggested that Gardner reached this philosophical understanding of art as the result of an accident that occurred in his childhood. In an incident nearly identical to the one described in "Redemption," Gardner was responsible for the death of his younger brother, Gilbert. Although Gardner did not write of the incident in the thirty years between the accident and the composition of the short story in 1977, it seems clear that the trauma was at the heart of his writing and aesthetic theory. Certainly, one can hear the echoes of this accident in some of Gardner's statements such as this from *The Art of Fiction*: "To write with taste, in the highest sense, is . . . to write so that no one commits suicide, no one despairs."

One scholar who makes much of the significance of the accident for Gardner's life and of "Redemption" for Gardner's writing is Ronald Grant Nutter. In his book, *A Dream of Peace: Art and Death in the Fiction of John Gardner*, Nutter summarizes the story and the actual event. He finds the story important for two reasons. First, of course, is the autobiographical element in the story. Second, the story presents themes of death, guilt, religion, community and the redemptive nature of art. To explore these themes, Nutter turns to the work of John Howell, who in an important essay, "The Wound and the Albatross," discusses the connection between the wound and the creation of art; and to the work of Robert Jay Lifton, a psychiatrist who has studied survivors and post-traumatic stress syndrome.

It is possible to expand Nutter's reading of "Redemption" by exploring an important critical approach, trauma theory. Although a complicated theory, it is possible to understand the basic principles. First, trauma theory hypothesizes that traumatic knowledge is a different kind of knowledge. As Geoffrey H. Hartman argues in *New Literary History*, traumatic knowledge is "one that cannot [be] made entirely conscious, in the sense of being fully retrieved or communicated without distortion." That is, traumatic knowledge enters the mind in different way from knowledge in general. It bypasses the conscious mind and embeds itself directly in the unconscious. There is a direct and swift inputting of information deep within the victim's mind. The knowledge itself cannot be recalled directly by the conscious mind. At the same time, as Hartman explains, the trauma creates a "kind of memory of the event, in the form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche." In other words, the memory of the event, deeply embedded in the subject's unconscious mind, continually replays itself in the subject's conscious mind. Thus, while the knowledge of the experience is hidden in the person's mind, the memory of the event replays itself in the form of dreams, flashbacks, and hallucinations.

There is a gap, then, between the experience of the event and an understanding of the event itself. Recovering from trauma requires that the victim of the trauma must somehow bridge this gap. For Gardner, literature and art offer the possibility of such healing. He writes, "Art begins in a wound, and is an attempt either to live with the wound or to heal it." Likewise, trauma theory, according to Hartman, "helps us to 'read the wound' with the aid of literature." Thus, the psychic wound caused by trauma can serve as the impetus for the creation of art or literature. Moreover, the act of creation of art or literature is a life-affirming process, bridging the gap between experience and understanding.

That Gardner himself was the victim of traumatic stress seems clear. Gregory L. Morris in his book *A World of Light and Orde*r cites an interview from *The Paris Review* in which Gardner states,

Before I wrote the story about the kid who runs over his younger brother . . . always, regularly, every day I used to have four or five flashes of that accident. I'd be driving down the highway and I couldn't see what was coming because I'd have a memory flash. I haven't had it once since I wrote the story. You really do ground your nightmares, you *name* them.

Obviously, Gardner and the characters he creates for his story all suffer from psychic wounds. Each character attempts to heal wounds in different ways, trying to fill the space that the loss of David creates. Dale Hawthorne, according to the story, was "as much Romantic poet-hero as his time and western New York State could afford." Before the accident he was known for his vivid recitations of lines from plays and poetry. It may be significant that Dale read the works of others, rather than creating works of his own. Before the accident, Dale had seemed above the crowd to his son Jack, somehow different from the "sheep" of his audience. With David's death, however, Dale found himself suddenly empty, and no longer above the crowd. Although he contemplates suicide, he understands that suicide would only make greater the gaping hole the rest of

his family is trying to fill. Thus, he turns to other women in his attempt to make himself whole again, as if by filling their sexual needs he could fill his own psychic gap. Only when he returns to his family and creates the tableau of penitence does he begin to heal. He returns to his recitations, but as a "mere suffering sheep among sheep."

Betty Hawthorne understands the need to hold her family together. To do so, she must repress her own grief. Although she has "considerable strength of character," she nonetheless turns to food, as if by filling her stomach, she can mend her heart. While the overeating does not lead to any healing, the act of writing does. Although she does not create art, so to speak, she connects her trauma to words in the letters she writes to her friends. The written dialogue that they establish moves her "step by step past disaster...."

Jack, however, grows increasingly more isolated. As the central figure in the family tragedy, the one who created the moment after which all existence changed, he finds it hard to bridge the gap between his knowledge of the event and his understanding of it. He behaves as a survivor of trauma, the memory of the event replaying itself during every waking hour. He attempts to fill the gap first by creating dramas while riding the tractor, imagining himself as an actor on a stage. Eventually he turns to his French horn and his music for solace. It is when he begins taking lessons in Rochester from Arcady Yegudkin, however, that the healing begins.

Yegudkin, like Jack, has survived a trauma. With his wife, he had been shot at and left for dead by soldiers during the Russian Revolution. Yegudkin, a brilliant musician, fills the loss of his country and of his youth with music. For the purpose of the story, Yegudkin is more than a teacher of music, however. He models for Jack one way one can survive trauma. When he plays the new horn that he has ordered for a graduate student, the music completely fills the room. When Jack asks Yegudkin if he thinks that Jack might someday be able to play like him, the teacher laughs, causing an important moment in the story: "Jack blinked, startled by the bluntness of the thing, the terrible lack of malice, and the truth of it. His face tingled and his legs went weak, as if the life were rushing out of them." This description brings the reader back to the first paragraph of the story, when the life rushed out of David's legs. For Jack, this moment serves as a symbolic death, and a rebirth. When he leaves the studio, his horn and music under his arm, the crowd parts for him, receives him, and he begins his return to home. It is as if he understands that music must join him with his family, not separate him from them. Through his art, he is redeemed, the guilt over his brother's death washed clean by his own symbolic death. There is not a conclusive ending to the story, just the suggestion that Jack is beginning to bridge the gap between the knowledge of the experience and the understanding of it.

Finally, while "Redemption" seems to make clear that suicide is not an appropriate response to trauma, and that trauma can be survived, it does not suggest that this is an easy, or quick process, nor does it suggest that there can ever be a return to the days before the trauma. Indeed, each of the characters of the story are markedly changed and transformed by the experience. Likewise, although Gardner survived his childhood and moved into adulthood, using his art to help bridge his own gap, he was a

transformed individual. That he once again returned to the story of the accident and included it in a novel he was working on at the time of his death suggests that the wound could never be wholly healed. Nevertheless, Gardner devoted himself to the creation of a kind of art that he believed would persuade people to go on living in spite of the horror of contemporary life. As Nutter quotes Gardner, "Good artists are the people who are, in one way or another, creating, out of deep and honest concern a vision of life-in-the-twentieth-century that is worth pursuing." For Gardner, good art leads to life, to healing of the wound.

Source: Diane Andrews Henningfeld, for *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Winther discusses reasons for reading "Redemption," including the forcefulness of Gardner's writing, the autobiographical nature of the writing, and the opportunity to see the effect of Gardner's personal tragedy on his writing.

"Redemption" also belongs to this group of stories which describe and explore the vulnerary function of art. The theme of this story differs somewhat from that of the other three, but the subject matter is the same: the protagonist seeks consolation in the world of music after the death of his brother. Jack Hawthorne, the protagonist, was driving a tractor when his younger brother, David, fell off and was run over and killed by the cultipacker the tractor was hauling. Driven by guilt and self-hatred, the young boy tries to deal with his confusion caused by the accident by perfecting his skills on the French horn; he uses the horn as a means of escape into selfimposed isolation, withdrawing from his family and any other company.

He is brought out of his isolation when he suddenly realizes that he will never reach the level of mastery of his teacher Yegudkin, a seventy-yearold Russian exile who has played with famous orchestras around the world. Yegudkin now teaches music but also has a set of arrogant values, constantly deriding "the herd" for failing to appreciate music at his own level. When Jack asks Yegudkin if he thinks that he, the student, will ever be able to play like the great master, the Russian scoffs at this foolish presumption. Thus, John Howell points out, Yegudkin, "'beatific and demonic at once,' has paradoxically saved [Jack] from the artistic selfabsorption and isolation he has chosen." After the crucial lesson in which he is forced to recognize his own limitations, Jack's reintegration into society is described in symbolic terms. Rushing to catch his bus back home, he finds that "the crowd opened for him and, with the horn cradled under his right arm, his music under his left, he plunged in, starting home." The young boy has to recognize his own limits; that is, he has to reconcile himself to the fact that the ideal (his aspirations of becoming a great musician) and the real do not always match up. Only by accepting his own fallibility and imperfections can he deal with his own guilt, become reintegrated into the community and be reunited with his family. Jack's clutching of the instrument and musical score in that symbolical final scene suggests that music will still be an important part of his life, but now more in the manner of the other three stories we have been discussing, and not as a means of alienating himself from the community.

"Redemption" warrants close attention for several reasons. The early pages in particular contain some of the most gripping lines that Gardner ever committed. The opening paragraph, describing the accident which killed Jack's brother, is unique in its control and vividness. The ensuing study of the boy's self-loathing and his estrangement from his family moves as if by its own momentum, wholly logical and with considerable intellectual and emotional authority. Part of the story's attraction, then, lies in the sheer force of the writing that went into it. But even more important are the ways in which it suggests a key to some of the chief motivating factors behind the thematic direction of Gardner's fiction. The story also helps to explain why art has become such an all-

encompassing concern for this writer. These points need to be elaborated on at some length.

The centrality of "Redemption" has to do with the fact that it is one of Gardner's most strongly autobiographical pieces of writing, exploring artistically an event which left an indelible mark on him as a person and as a writer. The key event—the accident—is lifted straight from Gardner's personal history, with only a few changes of incident and names. The scene was to play itself over and over again in his mind several times a day up to the writing of the story. (It was first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May 1977; the accident involving the death of Gardner's brother took place in 1947.) After he had written about the accident, Gardner stopped having the flashbacks, he says, confirming D. H. Lawrence's dictum that one sheds one's illnesses in art. The suicidal feelings Jack develops in the story are also true to Gardner's own experience, as witnessed, for instance, by the strongly autobiographical "Stillness" section of the posthumous work *Stillness and Shadows*, and the reason that the boy's father gives for not taking his own life—"the damage his suicide would do to his wife and the children remaining"—is the same one Gardner himself has offered for not giving in to his own suicidal inclinations. Like Jack, Gardner played the French horn, and the Eastman School of Music that Jack attends on Saturday afternoons is the one Gardner went to for his music lessons.

But the main impulse behind "Redemption" is not strictly autobiographical. We know that Gardner used writing much the same way that Jack Hawthorne used his horn, as a means of escape and as a way to combat confusion and despair. Art "made my life," Gardner has said, "and it made my life when I was a kid, when I was incapable of finding any other sustenance, any other thing to lean on, any other comfort during times of great unhappiness." It seems obvious, therefore, that when Gardner claims that art has the power to console, his prime authority is his own personal history; one of his chief purposes in writing these stories must clearly have been to awaken others to the potentially beneficial effects of art.

What is of greater interest to us here, however, is the extent to which the excruciating experience of accidentally killing his brother has affected his own writings. One should tread cautiously here and resist the temptation to establish the kind of relationship between Gardner's life and his art that Phillip Young sought to set up in the case of Hemingway, arguing that the direction of Hemingway's art, in terms of theme as well as of artistic technique, was determined by his continuous struggle to cope with the psychic effect of the physical wounds he received in the course of a turbulent personal history. Nevertheless, there is surely a large degree of truth to Edmund Wilson's claims about the relationship between the artist and his works:

The real elements, of course, of any work of fiction, are the elements of the author's personality: his imagination embodies in the images of characters, situations, and scenes the fundamental conflicts of his nature or the cycle of phases through which it habitually passes. His personages are personifications of the author's various impulses and emotions: and the relations between them in his stories are really the relations between these.

Gardner has himself insisted on the close relationship between the art product and the personality of the artist: "The tensions we find resolved or at least defined and dramatized in art are the objective release of tensions in the life of the artist." One is therefore perhaps justified in pursuing the Hemingway parallel at least part of the way. The tensions that his childhood experiences engendered in Gardner evidently never lost their grip on him. As late as 1979 he stated: "You keep violently fighting for life, for what you think is good and wholesome, but you lose a lot. I think all my struggles toward anything worthwhile are pretty much undermined by psychological doubts. But you keep trying." Thus Heraclitus's old maxim—"the way up is the way down"—truly holds for Gardner. This is a fact to bear in mind when assessing the existential seriousness of his life affirmation. There is nothing facile about the basic optimism that controls his books. Gardner was intimately acquainted with personal despair, and as we shall see, his affirmations take into account a number of the major arguments that are traditionally advanced to support a pessimistic view of reality.

The paradigmatic nature of "Redemption" can hardly be exaggerated. Jack Hawthorne's self-hatred is generalized into a hatred of the total creation, man and animal. This attraction toward an absurdist view of the world (the motivating force behind Jack Hawthorne's and—presumably—Gardner's suicidal inclinations) is explored again and again in Gardner's fiction. It is usually yoked with an absolutist approach to man and life, a failure to reconcile the discrepancy between the real and the ideal, and the failure to accept human fallibility, which characterizes Jack Hawthorne's initial response to the death of his brother. I am, of course, not suggesting that in everything Gardner writes lurk the shadows of his brother's death. But the frequency with which Gardner returns to situations and characters which allow him to explore this kind of tension attests to the biblio-therapeutical nature of his writings, as well as to the formative importance of the accident described in "Redemption." This is not to say that Gardner's fiction is narrowly confessional, representing a constant and obsessive picking of the scab over the wound caused by his brother's death; that would in the end have rendered his novels and stories trivial. What saves his fiction from triviality (in the sense of it being overly private) is the fact that in his personal traumas Gardner has discovered a paradigm, or a metaphor, for what he regards as the central illness of recent Western culture: the inclination to keep peering into the abyss, "counting skulls," losing oneself in a fashionable attraction toward despair.

In these four stories the answer offered to this type of dilemma is of a very general kind: art has the power to console provided one is receptive. It is probably no coincidence that for his exploration of this very general idea Gardner chose to focus on music, an art form which is almost totally abstract, speaking primarily to our emotions rather than to our intellect. But any art will not do for Gardner. When art moves into the sphere of ideas, for instance in the form of literature, it has to meet certain requirements in order to have the life-giving effect that Gardner thinks it can and ought to have. This is where his concept of moral fiction comes in, and a central axiom of this theory is the idea that *art instructs*....

Source: Per Winther, "Life Follows Fiction," in *The Art of John Gardner: Introduction and Exploration*, State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 9-30.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Morris recommends "Redemption" for its expression of Gardner's belief in the power of art to console, redeem, and transform.

This theme of art as redemptive force comes through most clearly and most intensely in the second story, "Redemption," which is Gardner's personal attempt to redefine a particularly painful part of his memory. The story is based on the tragic death of Gardner's younger brother Gilbert in a farming accident in the home-fields of Batavia, New York. Gardner talked of this memory in an interview in *The Paris Review*, and explained how the story served as a deliberate exorcism: "Before I wrote the story about the kid who runs over his younger brother . . . always, regularly, every day I used to have four or five flashes of that accident. I'd be driving down the highway and I couldn't see what was coming because I'd have a memory flash. I haven't had it once since I wrote the story. You really do ground your nightmares, you *name* them." Guilt, it should be clear by now, is an integral part of Gardner's universe, and in "Redemption" Gardner attempted a reconciliation with his own private nightmares and misplaced responsibilities.

Death is typically most brutal in its effect on the living, and the tragedy of David Hawthorne's death is felt most clearly by his family. Dale Hawthorne, the father, is profoundly affected, is in fact "nearly destroyed by it":

Sometimes Jack would find him lying on the cowbarn floor, crying, unable to stand up. Dale Hawthorne . . . was a sensitive, intelligent man, by nature a dreamer. . . . He loved all his children and would not consciously have been able to hate his son even if Jack had indeed been, as he thought himself, his brother's murderer. But he could not help sometimes seeming to blame his son, though consciously he blamed only his own unwisdom and—so far as his belief held firm—God. Dale Hawthorne's mind swung violently at this time, reversing itself almost hour by hour, from desperate faith to the most savage, black-hearted atheism. Every sickly calf, every sow that ate her litter, was a new, sure proof that the religion he'd followed all his life was a lie. Yet skeletons were orderly, as were, he thought, the stars. He was unable to decide, one moment full of rage at God's injustice, the next moment wracked by doubt of His existence.

This disparity, as Nimram calls it, between the real and the ideal hits at Hawthorne as it hits at every person blasted by tragedy and the world's illogic. His mind turns, at times, to suicide and a sort of metaphysical escape, but he ultimately settles on literal physical escape, becoming a fugitive from his family and home. He abandons responsibility, leaves his son, daughter, and wife to mourn their loss among themselves, to survive as *he* hopes to survive.

His wife, Betty, survives in her changedness. She weeps alone at night, and embraces her children "whenever new waves of guilt swept in." She is the emotional center who through her strength of character and sense of love keeps "her family from wreck." Phoebe, the daughter, survives through an abiding child's belief in a God whose wisdom

outruns his logic and justice; she sticks unthinkingly, as a girl her age would do, to her faith, tested for the first time by the world's unpredictability.

Jack Hawthorne, too, survives, through a long ordeal of doubt and guilt and sorrow. He doubts his own ability to love and to feel for anyone or anything: "He'd never loved his brother, he raged out loud, never loved anyone as well as he should have. He was incapable of love, he told himself.... He was inherently bad, a spiritual defective. He was evil." Jack plummets to the depths of philosophical despair, damning himself for the accident of his brother's death. Like his father, Jack eventually comes to doubt the necessity of his existence, bemired as he is in the certainty of his own damnation: "The foulness of his nature became clearer and clearer in his mind until, like his father, he began to toy—dully but in morbid earnest now—with the idea of suicide." The facticity of death, as Gardner has illustrated before, is the ultimate moral test. It drives us down, sinks us, and challenges us to submit or to respond. If we submit, we become nihilists; if we respond heroically, we rise to love and to believe once again.

Dale Hawthorne responds by returning to his family, who surround him in a tableau of forgiveness: the prodigal father come home. He is a man much changed by his experience; the luster has left his eyes and his body seems empty of its old energy. There is a new sobriety about him that tells you he has faced down tragedy and survived—not necessarily prevailed, but survived. Jack does not immediately perceive the agony his father has suffered, and so rages at him with a censorious sort of hatred. He isolates himself from the family, refuses the consoling, healing influence of those who love him, and turns to his music and to his French horn for solace and some sort of intuitive philosophical comfort.

At the end of the story, Jack visits his horn teacher in Rochester, Arcady Yegudkin, "the General." Yegudkin is an old man, an artist and a sufferer and, with his misshapen wife, a survivor. He is pathetically human—"In his pockets, in scorn of the opinions of fools, he carried condoms, dirty pictures, and grimy, wadded-up dollar bills"—but when he plays the horn, he becomes a god, a transformer of matter into spirit:

In that large, cork-lined room, it was as if, suddenly, a creature from some other universe had appeared, some realm where feelings become birds and dark sky, and spirit is more solid than stone. The sound was not so much loud as large, too large for a hundred French horns, it seemed. . . . As if ch arged with life independent of the man, the horn sound fluttered and flew crazily like an enormous trapped hawk hunting frantically for escape. It flew to the bottom of the lower register, the foundation concert F, and crashed below it, and on down and down, as if the horn in Yegudkin's hand had no bottom, then suddenly changed its mind and flew upward in a split-second run to the horn's top E, dropped back to the middle and then ran once more, more fiercely at the E, and this time burst through it and fluttered, manic, in the trumpet range, then lightly dropped back into its own home range and, abruptly, in the middle of a note, stopped. The room still rang, shimmered like a vision. . . . Jack Hawthorne stared at the instrument suspended in space and at his teacher's hairy hands.

On the outer limits of art exists a transmogrified world, a world "suspended in space" and time, a world that Jack Hawthorne longs to know and to explore. For now, however, he can only cry, like Stephen Dedalus, at the beauty and the elusiveness of his vision, and fall once more into the arms of the world around him: his family, his art, his ability to love. There is much to suffer and to enjoy before he can transform the world as Yegudkin can, to take someone soaring and dipping as this artist has taken him. There is always the promise, though, that one's art can and will redeem, will erase the guilt and assuage the pain, will return one's faith and peacein-sleep. That is the magic of art....

Source: Gregory L. Morris, "The Art of Living and Other Stories," in *A World of Order and Light: The Fiction of John Gardner*, University of Georgia Press, 1984, pp. 184-205.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the number of farm accidents involving children in the 1940s and in the 1990s. What has happened to the number of reported accidents? To what can you attribute the change in the statistics?

Read portions of Gardner's *On Moral Fiction*. According to Gardner, what is the role of fiction? Describe his philosophy regarding fiction and morality. How do Gardner's stories fulfill his goals? In what ways are they lacking?

Listen to several recordings of French horn music. Reread the section of the story describing the music. How would *you* describe the music you hear? Try to be as creative as possible, using concrete images.

Compare and Contrast

1940s: Many families live on farms, providing food and dairy products for the nation. Farmers were excused from the draft because they were essential to the health of the nation.

1990s: Fewer and fewer families live on farms. Instead, most agriculture is conducted by largescale industrial farms.

1940s: Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States. In addition, many children who work on family farms suffer injury or death.

1990s: While fewer children work on farms, the occupation is still a dangerous one. Injuries still occur to children working on their family farms.

1940s: World War II draws to a close and veterans return home. Many attend college on the GI Bill. Women who have been filling factory jobs during the war are encouraged to return home to make room for returning soldiers.

1990s: American soldiers are called up to fight in the Gulf War, and then in the bombing of Serbia. The United States is blessed with a low unemployment rate and qualified men and women have little problem finding a job.

1940s: Existentialist philosophers such as John Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Soren Kierkegaard attempt to make sense out of the world devastated by the war. Sartre, a member of the French resistance, tries to recover from torture he suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

1990s: The work of postmodern philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault continue to influence the way that writers depict culture and reality.

1940s: The end of World War II marks the beginning of the powerful Soviet Bloc. America and the Soviet Union struggle to gain supremacy over the other.

1990s: The Soviet Bloc no longer exists, and communism is no longer considered the greatest threat to American security. However, the devolution of the Eastern Bloc leads to potentially dangerous situations in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

What Do I Read Next?

Grendel (1971) is perhaps Gardner's most famous novel. The story is a retelling of the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*, from the monster's perspective.

Beowulf is considered a masterpiece of medieval literature. It is a tale of heroes and monsters, life and death. Anyone reading *Grendel* should also read *Beowulf.*

Gardner's book of advice for young writers, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*, offers insight into his ideas about art and life. Also included are a number of exercises designed to motivate writers.

Further Study

Christian, Ed. "An Interview With John Gardner," in *Prairie Schooner*, Vol. 54, No. 4, Winter, 1980-81, pp. 70-93.

Important interview for any student interested in Gardner's fiction. The writer discusses his creative process and philosophy of fiction.

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Lists interviews, articles, reviews and criticism. Morace also offers helpful annotations to the sources.

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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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