Resurrection of a Life Study Guide

Resurrection of a Life by William Saroyan

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Introduction

During William Saroyan's life as a writer, 1934 was an important year. His first collection of stories, *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze,* was met with popular and critical acclaim capped by the O. Henry Award for the title story, which also appeared in *Story* magazine in 1934. "Resurrection of a Life" was first published in *Story* magazine in 1935. It was such a strong story that Saroyan chose to include it in his much-anticipated second collection of short fiction, *Inhale & Exhale* (1936).

"Resurrection of a Life" is typical of Saroyan's short fiction in style and content. Stylistically, the story is representative of Saroyan's short stories in its first-person narration, rambling plot line, and ultimately optimistic outlook. The story's content is typical of Saroyan's work in its autobiographical elements, inclusion of the subject of death, and optimistic tone.

Author Biography

William Saroyan (who also wrote under the pseudonym Sirak Gory an) was the fourth child of Armenak and Takoohi Saroyan, who fled their native Armenia to escape ethnic persecution. They settled in Fresno, California, where Saroyan was born on August 31, 1908. Three years later, Armenak died. Impoverished, Takoohi sent the children to an orphanage, where they stayed for four years until she could provide for them.

Saroyan dropped out of high school and worked as a telegram messenger until 1926, when he moved to San Francisco to pursue a career in writing. After years of writing stories for magazines, Saroyan released his first collection in 1934 titled *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze.* It was a bestseller, and the title story, which was first published in *Story* magazine in 1934, won the prestigious O. Henry Award. "Resurrection of a Life" first appeared in *Story* magazine in 1935, and was included in Saroyan's second collection of fiction in 1936 titled *Inhale & Exhale.* A prolific writer, Saroyan had completed eight volumes of short fiction and five staged plays by 1941. He won the 1940 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *The Time of Your Life* but declined it on the grounds of commercialism. In 1943, Saroyan won an Academy Award for the screenplay *The Human Comedy.* He later adapted the screenplay as a novel.

In 1942, Saroyan was drafted to serve in World War II. He was stationed in New York before being sent to Europe in 1944. While in New York, he married a socialite named Carol Marcus. The couple had two children before divorcing in 1949; they remarried in 1951 and divorced again in 1952. During the 1940s Saroyan was embraced by the literary world and was often compared to Ernest Hemingway. By the 1950s, however, his reputation was in decline. Critics claim that Saroyan's light, optimistic fiction was well suited for depression-era audiences but was unappealing to cynical post-war readers. During the 1960s, Saroyan focused on autobiographical writing. These works reflect his aversion to authority and his belief in freedom, which made him influential to writers like Jack Kerouac and J. D. Salinger.

Saroyan died of cancer in Fresno, California on May 18, 1981. He was cremated, with half his ashes interred in Fresno and the other half in Armenia.

Plot Summary

"Resurrection of a Life" consists mainly of the narrator's recollections of his life as a ten-year-old paperboy in 1917. He sold newspapers by standing on busy public sidewalks and shouting the headlines to passersby. As a result of this work, he was faced daily with the events of World War I. In addition, he was from a poor family. These factors made the child cynical, and he sought stability and certainty in a difficult time.

The story opens with the narrator commenting that the events of the past have no death because they remain alive in his memories. He notes that he often wandered into saloons, whorehouses, and gambling establishments to watch people. He also watched rich people eating ice cream and enjoying electric fans, and silently rebuked them for ignoring the realities of the lives of the less fortunate. Another place he liked to go was the Crystal Bar, where men drank, played cards, and spat on the floor. He was disgusted by a fat man who came every day in the summer and slept. Finally, he describes going to the cinema and seeing the falseness of the films that somehow revealed the truth of his world.

Regarding himself as worldly and insightful, the boy had no use for school. He was not interested in listening to teachers, and he considered himself superior to the other children.

The boy often went to The San Joaquin Baking Company early in the morning to buy "chicken bread." This was bread that fell on the floor during the wrapping process, and people bought it to feed to their chickens. The narrator, however, bought it for his family. The man who sold him the bread knew why the boy bought it but preserved the boy's dignity by pretending to believe that he had chickens. The narrator remembers having noticed that this man always chose the best loaves of chicken bread for him.

The narrator also describes the house in which he and his family lived. The roof leaked, the floor sagged, and it was full of insects, but the family did not mind because they were together and had a place to live.

The narrator recalls a time when the headline he shouted was about ten thousand huns being killed. (During World War I, hun was a disparaging term used to describe a German soldier.) Although he liked that the news helped him sell newspapers, he was disgusted at how happy people were about so much death. He relates that he sees war differently than historians do. While historians often view war as a series of events accompanied by statistics, the narrator sees it one man at a time. He believes that death is a personal experience in which the universe ends for one man.

The narrator recalls accompanying his family to church. He dressed in his best clothes and loved the songs, but he doubted the existence of God in a world of hate, ugliness, death, suffering, and poverty. He saw too many places in the world where God seemed absent, but he could not bring himself to completely reject the idea of God's existence.

The narrator returns to the present as the story concludes; he is sitting in a room alone at night. He explains that he has learned that all people can do is keep breathing and carrying on with their lives in the face of pleasure and pain. He ends by declaring that he is glad to be alive, "glad to be of this ugliness and this glory," adding that he believes that there is no death and never will be.

Summary

"Resurrection of a Life" is William Saroyan's short story of individual human experience and the universal concept of the wish for immortality.

The story, which could almost be called an essay, addresses the author's life during the time he was a ten-year-old paperboy in California during World War I. The author serves as the narrator and begins by saying that "everything begins with inhale and exhale, and never ends..." Each moment of a human life is as natural as breathing in and breathing out until the moments add up and become the measure of a person's life.

As a paperboy in 1917, the narrator feels as if he is a vital part of life by shouting out the headlines to the people passing on the street. The paper route exposes the young boy to the unsavory side of life as his paper hawking takes him to saloons and whorehouses in addition to the respectable establishments frequented by the wealthy people who regularly buy his papers.

The boy thinks the city itself is ugly, but he revels in some of the people and in the fact that he is alive at this point in time and shares the planet with this particular collection of characters. One of the people the narrator sees frequently is an obese man who sleeps all the time at the Crystal Bar, and the boy cannot understand sleeping through a life. He wonders how that man can be considered alive just as he himself is alive.

The movie theater is another venue the boy frequents, where he can watch human nature both on the screen and off. The narrator muses about the fact that even when the boy he is today is no longer alive, his spirit will still walk these same streets, and he will live again in the shadows and sunlight. This advanced thinking renders school useless for the boy, who is bored with shallow dictates of formal education, preferring to receive his schooling on the streets.

Each morning before daybreak, the narrator visits the San Joaquin Baking Company to buy "chicken bread" for his large, poor family. Any bread that falls on the floor in the bakery cannot be sold in the store, so the owner sells it to customers as food for their chickens. The owner of the bakery is fully aware that the boy has no chickens and is taking the bread home to his family, but he never lets on that he knows the boy's secret. Now the narrator as a man wonders at the grace of this man who allowed the boy his dignity.

The boy's family makes what little money it has by selling newspapers, and they live in a dilapidated house with insects and mice. They do not mind because the family is together, and they have the chicken bread for nourishment.

There comes a day when the boy has mixed feelings between selling papers and preserving his humanity, when he must shout about ten thousand Huns being killed in the war. While the people in the streets revel in the news and buy the papers, the boy wonders about each individual person making up that number of ten thousand and all

the human desires, frailties and loves that ended on some obscure battlefields. The narrator remembers attending church as a boy and loving the music and the fine rhetoric but struggling with the existence of a God that would permit suffering, war and death.

At the end of the story, the narrator returns to the present day, and he concentrates on inhaling and exhaling, all a person can really do in life. The savoring of memories keeps a person alive, and the narrator remembers his days as a paperboy. He is glad to have been on the earth at the time that he was. In spite of all the pain, he says, "all I know is that I am alive and glad to be, glad to be of this ugliness and this glory..." The narrator concludes that he does not believe there is any true death and says that there never can be any true death because of his beliefs.

Analysis

The story is told from the first person narrative perspective, which means that the events, thoughts and feelings are all perceived from the narrator's point of view. The piece could easily be called an essay because there are no other characters, and the plot line is a re-telling of the author's personal experiences during his boyhood.

Saroyan is well known for a literary technique called the stream of consciousness style of writing, which means that the reader is privy to the author's thoughts as they flow from the source. This is particularly effective in this piece, which relies on memories interspersed with present day analysis. For example, when the narrator describes his inner turmoil about religion, he steps in and out of the beauty of the religious ceremony as contrasted with the ugliness of real life.

"There cannot be a God. But it is lovely, lovely, these songs we sing, *Saviour, breathe an evening blessing, sun of my soul, begin, my tongue, some heavenly theme, begin, my tongue, begin, begin.* Lovely, lovely, but I cannot believe. The poor and the rich, those who deserve life and those who deserve death, and the ugliness everywhere. Where is God?"

The end of the piece is one long passage of stream of consciousness with no sentences, as the thoughts spill out of the author's mind, mirroring the inhaling and exhaling of the physical self.

The author also uses the technique of irony throughout the story, most notably in the person of the fat man who sleeps his life away in the bar, a strong contrast to the boy who struggles to make money yet appreciates the education he receives on the streets.

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Characters

Baker

The baker saves the best "chicken bread" to sell to the child. He knows that the child's family doesn't own chickens and that the bread is really being used to feed the family. However, the baker never openly acknowledges this fact so as to allow the child to maintain some sense of dignity in front of the other customers.

Collette

As described in the narrator's childhood memories, Collette was a prostitute who ran her business, Collette's Rooms, over The Rex Drug Store. There is no direct interaction between the narrator and Colette, so the reader is given little insight into her character. Her character, however, shows that the narrator was not naïve as a child. He knew who she was and what her business was, and he spoke of her in a straightforward manner rather than in the awkward manner that might be expected of a ten-year-old boy.

Fat Man

As a child, the narrator was repulsed by a fat man who slept in the Crystal Bar saloon every day in the summer. The fat man slept there all day; he did not play card games such as poker with the other men. Although little is said about the fat man's character, his inactivity and heaviness disgusted the narrator, who imagined that this man had no dreams and assumed that he was not alive in the same way that the he himself was. Because the narrator was a paperboy who shouted headlines to sell newspapers, he spent every day submerged in the events of the war. The fat man's passiveness and apparent apathy were inconceivable to the boy.

Narrator

The story consists of the narrator's recollections of his childhood, specifically when he was a ten-year-old paperboy in 1917. He sold newspapers by standing on public sidewalks shouting the headlines to passersby. As a child, the narrator was cynical, self-confident, and curious about what went on in different establishments, such as the saloon and the cinema. He considered himself worldly and was, therefore, not interested in what the teachers at school tried to teach him. He felt like part of the city and was comfortable prowling around alone. The narrator says that he was "seeking the essential truth of the scene, seeking the static and precise beneath that which is in motion and which is imprecise."

The narrator grew up in a poor family. He remembers going to the bakery early in the morning to buy the bread that had fallen on the floor. He seems to have been a

perceptive child because he describes the man who sold him this bread (called "chicken bread" because most people bought it to feed their chickens) as knowing that the narrator had no chickens yet going along with the act and giving the child the best of the "chicken bread" loaves.

Growing up during World War I, the narrator sought order and stability. He attended church with his family and loved singing the songs, but he was unable to shake his uncertainty about the existence of God. He could not understand how God could allow afflictions such as poverty and war.

At the end of the story, the narrator reveals that, as an adult, he is glad to be alive and part of the world. Despite his experiences and confusion as a child, he has made peace with the ugliness of the world.

Themes

Facing Reality

In "Resurrection of a Life," Saroyan explores the experiences of a ten-year-old boy facing the realities of life in a big city during World War I. Some of these experiences were quite harsh, while others were not as bad as they seemed to the boy at the time. In any case, this boy faced reality head-on, seeking to understand the world as it was rather than wishing it were different. It is likely that, as a boy, the narrator did not possess the insights described in the story but that, as an adult, the narrator infuses his memories with the wisdom that has come with age.

In some cases, reality is described as harsh and difficult to accept. When the boy shouted the news about the deaths of ten thousand German soldiers, he had mixed feelings. The narrator explains:

He himself appreciated the goodness of the news because it helped him sell his papers, but after the shouting was over and he was himself again, he used to think of ten thousand men smashed from life to violent death, one man at a time, each man himself as he, the boy, was himself, bleeding, screaming, weeping, remembering life as dying men remember it, wanting it, gasping for breath, to go on inhaling and exhaling, living and dying, but always living somehow, stunned, horrified, ten thousand faces suddenly amazed at the monstrousness of the war, the beastliness of man, who could be so godly.

In other cases, difficult realities are depicted somewhat optimistically. The episode in which the boy went to buy chicken bread for his family would sadden the reader were it not for the narrator's presentation. Rather than feeling ashamed or belittled, the boy saw the chicken bread as perfectly edible and very affordable. To him, the chicken bread was a source of food, not humiliation. Similarly, the boy did not feel deprived living in a dilapidated house. He saw how wealthier people lived, yet he perceived his own home as a place where his family could be together. The narrator's perceptions of his own life demonstrate that his cynicism about the world did not taint his satisfaction with his own situation, despite living in poverty.

Belonging

Most of the story shows the boy in the setting of the big city where he sells newspapers. The city is both a source of income for his family and the venue for his self-education. He wanders inconspicuously into places like saloons and gambling houses, observing people. His comfort level in the city gives him a strong sense of belonging. When he considers nature, he quickly resolves that his rightful place is in the city instead. The narrator recalls, "The fig tree he loved: of all graceful things it was the most graceful....

and he climbed the tree, eating the soft figs.... But always he returned to the city." In another passage, the narrator relates:

In the summer it would be very hot and his body would thirst for the sweet fluids of melons, and he would long for the shade of thick leaves and the coolness of a quiet stream, but always he would be in the city, shouting. It was his place and he was the guy, and he wanted the city to be the way it was, if that was the way.

Style

First-Person Narrator

"Resurrection of a Life" is told entirely in the first person. The narrator begins by musing about the nature of memories and then provides a detailed account of what he was like in 1917. In the end, he returns to the present, telling the reader what he has learned since those days as a ten-year-old boy.

The description of the narrator's childhood is deeply personal, and most of the memories center around his thoughts, feelings, and attitudes at the time rather than around interactions and events. The narrator's memories of his childhood personality are so detailed that the reader often wonders how much is an accurate account of the boy's psyche at the time, and how much is the adult narrator's present view. Saroyan gives readers a clue that the narrator is at least partially inserting his present thoughts into the past when he names the films the boy saw at the cinema. Two of the films, *Jean Valjean* (1909) and *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), could have been seen by the boy in 1917, but the other two, *While London Sleeps* (1926) and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1921), could only have been seen by the narrator as an adult. Ultimately, Saroyan succeeds in forcing the reader to consider the nature of memories, their accuracy, and their role in people's lives, by relating the past and present in the first person.

Stream of Consciousness

Saroyan's style in this story relies partly on stream of consciousness passages that provide insight into the narrator's way of thinking. This technique reveals a character's natural progression of thought, and, by making use of repetition and free association, Saroyan uses stream of consciousness successfully.

In most prose, repetition is avoided. Especially in the genre of the short story, writers generally favor a strict economy of words. In "Resurrection of a Life," however, Saroyan uses repetition to portray the way people think. Describing the man who sold him chicken bread, the narrator recalls:

The important man used to say, What kind of chickens you got at your house, kid? And the man would smile nicely so that there would be no insult, and he would never have to tell the man that he himself and his brother and sisters were eating the chicken bread. He would just stand by the bin, not saying anything, not asking for the best loaves, and the important man would understand, and he would pick out the best loaves and drop them into the sack the boy held open.... He was very funny, always asking about the chickens. He knew there were no chickens, and he always picked out the best loaves.

The other feature of Saroyan's stream-of-consciousness technique is free association, in which a person advances from one thought to another without regard for how they are related. Saroyan uses this technique to lend a sense of emotional realism to his

stream-of-consciousness passages, as when the boy shouted the headline about the death of the ten thousand German soldiers. The narrator recalls:

There he is suddenly in the street, running, and it is 1917, shouting the most recent crime of man, extra, extra, ten thousand huns killed, himself alive, inhaling, exhaling, *ten thousand, ten thousand,* all the ugly buildings solid, all the streets solid, the city unmoved by the crime, *ten thousand,* windows opening, doors opening, and the people of the city smiling about it, good, good, ten thousand of them killed, good, good. Johnny get your gun, and another trainload of boys in uniforms, going away, torn from home, from the roots of life, their tragic smiling, and the broken hearts, all things in the world broken.

Historical Context

The Great Depression

The Great Depression was the most devastating economic period in American history. It began in late 1929 and did not end until the early 1940s. Brought on by economic instability and uneven distribution of wealth in the 1920s followed by a major stock market crash, the depression affected not only the United States but most of the world's industrialized nations. It finally ended when the government spent massive amounts of money on the effort for World War II.

Over the course of the depression, businesses failed, people lost jobs and homes, a drought ravaged the Great Plains, and charities were overextended. By 1933, over nine thousand banks (almost 40 percent of the nation's total) had collapsed, taking millions in people's savings with them. Considered by many to be the worst year, 1933 also saw unemployment rise to 25 percent, accounting for over 15 million people.

While millions of people lost their jobs, others were forced to take reductions in pay. Desperate, some people resorted to digging through garbage dumps or eating weeds. Many men, unable to find other work, sold apples and provided shoe shines to make a little bit of money. Traditionally, men were responsible for supporting their families, but the depression forced other members of the family to seek work. Women, who were not hired for manufacturing jobs, were less likely to lose their jobs as clerks, teachers, and social workers. Children and teenagers often sought work to help provide income for the family, too.

Because of his refusal to pour government funds into social programs providing relief, President Herbert Hoover was defeated in the 1932 election. His successor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, quickly implemented a series of programs collectively known as the New Deal.

Despite the hardships, the depression was a time of creativity for many writers and artists. Painters like Norman Rockwell and novelists like John Steinbeck, Henry Miller, and William Faulkner created important works that would endure beyond the depression years. In poetry, writers like Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and e. e. cummings dominated the genre.

World War I

The United States entered World War I in 1917. Because this was the first major overseas war into which the United States entered, Americans were both apprehensive and hopeful about the war experience. Although the war ended only a year later, the social changes brought about by World War I were far-reaching. Many Americans felt that by participating in the war, the country had become a legitimate world leader. America's economic strength made it one of the world's leading creditors after the war,

which bolstered patriotism. Domestically, World War I represented an opportunity for women to enter the workplace in areas previously closed to them. With so many men gone to serve, women occupied the vacated jobs. Although men reclaimed their positions upon returning from the war, the effort put forth by women in their absence was a major factor in the success of the suffrage movement.

Critical Overview

Saroyan's short stories have received more critical acclaim than his plays or novels for their overall consistency and vision of life in America. Saroyan infused his short fiction with strong autobiographical elements that are manifest in themes, settings, and characters. Depression-era readers were particularly responsive to Saroyan's themes of isolation and hardship. His sense of nationalism and belonging also resonated with readers looking for something to lift their spirits and renew confidence in their shaken country. Saroyan's popularity declined with the onset of World War II, and critics believe this is because his optimistic, sentimental fiction no longer held the interest of cynical readers enduring the second world war in their generation. Still, Saroyan's contributions to the genre of the short story are considered important and enduring. He has been compared to such short story masters as O. Henry for making the short story accessible to a wide audience and Ernest Hemingway for stylistic strength. In the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Greg Keeler remarks that "the vitality of his early short fiction, with its passion and seemingly unfulfilled promise, continues to ensure his importance as an American writer." In *William Saroyan,* Howard R. Floan accounts for Saroyan's success by observing that

he learned to get into his story immediately; to fit character, setting, and mood to the action; to express with colloquial vigor what his people were capable of saying, and to imply much about what they were able to feel.

"Resurrection of a Life" appears in Saroyan's second collection of short stories, *Inhale & Exhale* (1936). In the wake of the critical and popular success of his first collection, *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze* (1934), this second volume was somewhat disappointing to critics. *Inhale & Exhale* contains stories about childhood, stories about young men, and stories about travel. Critics find that the stories about childhood best reflect the author's strengths and weaknesses. "The World and the Theater," a story very similar to "Resurrection of a Life," is criticized for portraying a young newspaper boy with too much emotion and sophistication, making the story less than believable. Another weakness critics cite in this collection is Saroyan's move away from independence and realism toward nostalgia and sentimentality.

At the same time, critics note that *Inhale & Exhale* demonstrates many of Saroyan's strengths as a short-story writer. Reviewers are especially taken with the stories told from a first-person perspective, such as "Resurrection of a Life." These stories strike critics as being strong narratives, full of emotions that take readers into the minds and experiences of their narrators. "Resurrection of a Life" also reflects the autobiographical tendencies in Saroyan's work to which depression-era readers were so responsive. In this case, Saroyan introduces the theme of death, a strong sense of belonging, the search for stability, and the necessity of perceiving hardship in as positive a light as possible. "Resurrection of a Life" reflects Saroyan's appreciation of America and its possibilities, weaknesses and all. Critics also comment that the themes and narrative style that would characterize his later work are solidified in this collection. *Inhale &*

Exhale provides a glimpse into the development of one of the era's strongest fiction writers.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Bussey holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, Bussey explores William Saroyan's use of contrast in his short story and how this contrast provided encouragement for his depression-era readers.

From the first sentence of "Resurrection of a Life" to the last, William Saroyan incorporates numerous contrasting images, ideas, and feelings. The story opens with the narrator stating:

Everything begins with inhale and exhale, and never ends, moment after moment, yourself inhaling, and exhaling, seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, moving, sleeping, waking, day after day and year after year, until it is now, this moment, the moment of your being, the last moment, which is saddest and most glorious.

This opening tells the reader that the story will be dynamic in its presentation of opposites, and that this presentation will serve a purpose beyond merely pointing out that everything has an opposite. In 1935, when "Resurrection of a Life" first appeared in *Story* magazine, these contrasting elements served as a reminder that although the country was in the depths of the Great Depression and suffering was abundant, every experience and event has a balancing force. In this way, Saroyan encouraged readers both in the short term, by showing that even in bleakness there are small joys, and, in the long term, by reminding them that the Depression would eventually pass and a new era would come.

It is difficult to ignore the constant presentation of contrasts in "Resurrection of a Life." In various parts of the story, Saroyan writes of sleeping and waking, the falseness and the truth of the cinema, rich and poor, living and dying, the beastliness and the godliness of humankind, belief and disbelief, night and day, pleasure and pain, sanity and madness, war and peace, and ugliness and loveliness. Each of these words represents an essential part of the human experience, and, by pairing each with its opposite, Saroyan makes a strong statement about balance and impermanence. While this means that pleasurable experiences are fleeting, it was more important for Saroyan's readers in 1934 to understand that suffering is also fleeting. At the onset of the Great Depression, there was no precedent for such economic and social catastrophe. Saroyan, therefore, sought to encourage his readers and calm their uncertainty and their fear about the future. By saturating the story in contrasts, Saroyan evokes a mood of benign instability, saying in effect that hard times will not endure. He depicts this concept at every level, from the surface (as in night and day) to the deeply personal (as when the boy is in the basement of the church, "deep in the shadow of faith, and of no faith").

The one image that recurs throughout the story is that of inhaling and exhaling, a reference that appears ten times during the course of the narrative. This image of breathing is significant because it is something in which everyone participates, a commonality among readers of all kinds and at all times. The image conveys the sense

that just as people, nations, and the world take in experiences and events, they also release them at some point. Early in the story, Saroyan writes, "inhale and newness, exhale and new death," which adds another dimension to the contrast. With this comment, he presents death (everyone's fear in hard times) in a new, less threatening light. By comparing death to the simple act of exhaling, Saroyan expresses the idea that death is natural and cyclical and does not have be seen as traumatic. At the end of the story, the narrator builds on this metaphor with the claim that there is no true death.

Saroyan's setting provides the perfect complement to his presentation of contrasts. The content of the story carries the message that as difficult as times are, they will pass, and America will survive. Its setting in time offers proof of this. The narrator's memories are of 1917, the year America entered World War I. Many of Saroyan's readers had personal recollections of life during the war. By setting his story in this difficult, but now receding, period in America's history, Saroyan shows readers that America and its people are able to withstand hardship and overcome incredible adversity. He demonstrates that Americans are tough, adaptable, and able to draw on a strong sense of camaraderie. Although America's participation in World War I was relatively short-lived, Saroyan seems to assure his readers that they can endure the Great Depression just as they endured the Great War. In "Resurrection of a Life," he presents the ugliness of life in America but concludes that he is glad to be part of it because the ugliness is balanced by joy. The story ends with the narrator's comments:

[A]ll that I know is that I am alive and glad to be, glad to be of this ugliness and this glory, somehow glad that I can remember, somehow remember the boy climbing the fig tree, unpraying but religious with joy, somehow of the earth, of the time of earth, somehow everlastingly of life, nothingness, blessed or unblessed, somehow deathless like myself, timeless, glad, insanely glad to be here, and so it is true, there is no death, somehow there is no death, and can never be.

Source: Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on "Resurrection of a Life," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English. In this essay, Aubrey considers Saroyan's story in terms of his subjective approach to his craft, the criticism this approach has engendered, and the positive effects it achieved.

In "Psalms," a piece of short, lyrical reflections on life found in his book *Inhale & Exhale,* Saroyan wrote, ' T wish to speak of that which moves, begins and ends, yet endures forever. Man, and the river of his life." It is this river that he explores in "Resurrection of a Life," a story that leaves a strong impression of the continuity and permanence of human life even in the midst of all its fluctuations.

The river metaphor explains in part the free-flowing form of the story. Saroyan attempts to recreate in all its sensual fullness and emotional immediacy everything that the boy thought and felt as he sold newspapers in the city and explored its streets. The story is an "exhaling" (to use the story's metaphor, which Saroyan frequently used elsewhere) of what it feels or felt like to be alive at a certain moment in a certain place. This kind of subjectivity and self-expression, in which the emphasis is placed on the inner processes of the self rather than objective description and narration, were of paramount importance to Saroyan. As Edward Halsey Foster puts it in *William Saroyan: A Study of the Short Fiction,* "The world and its language were no more than material from which to evoke an image of his internal self."

It is this desire to convey the multifaceted, spontaneous responses of the "internal self" to Saroyan's experiences that drives some of the most striking stylistic elements of the story. Many of the sentences are long, with clause piled up on clause in varying rhythms. Often, the boy's thoughts, feelings, and sense impressions tumble along one after the other, producing single sentences that seem almost breathless in their desire not to leave anything out. One can almost hear the excited, sometimes uncomprehending reactions of the child for whom so many things are still new. The words just pour out.

Critics of Saroyan's early stories (and there were many) complained that he was narcissistic and self-dramatizing, that he wrote only about himself, that he had little to say, and that the stories lacked the formal structures that would raise them to the level of art. What the critics looked for was more evidence that the writer was carefully shaping and controlling his own creation. According to Philip Rahv in an influential critique, as quoted in Foster's book, Saroyan seemed to be "ad-libbing from start to finish."

Saroyan might well have regarded that remark as a compliment since he frequently emphasized the spontaneity of the creative act. He himself wrote very quickly, and he declares in his essay "Poem, Story, Novel," found in his book *Inhale & Exhale,* that a story "is of course not a labor: [it] is an effortless growth, as of a tree coming up from the earth." He often expressed contempt for the professors who were trying to lay down rules about what was acceptable in a work of literature. Saroyan prided himself on

ignoring the traditional "rules" of the short story (for example, "Resurrection of a Life" is not built out of the traditional elements of plot and character). Indeed, he denied that there were any rules.

Do the negative appraisals of Saroyan's work made by certain critics during the 1930s and 1940s have any validity with respect to "Resurrection of a Life" ? As far as the charge of not having anything to say is concerned, it is true that at first glance the themes in the story are straightforward and fairly simple. They do not seem to lend themselves to subtlety of interpretation. The child learns of the good and the bad in human nature. The good is conveyed by the kindness of the baker, who gives the boy chicken bread. He never discloses that he knows there are no chickens and that he is selling food to a family that can afford nothing better. The bad is the inescapable fact of war, with all its cruelty and barbarism, which so shocks the young boy and which the narrator denounces in solemn tones. The boy's exposure to the dichotomy between the nobility of man and the bestiality of some of his actions leads him to conclude that there can be no God. This is despite the beauty of the hymns he sings in church on Sundays, which seem to make a deep impression on him.

However, there is perhaps more to the story than this list of themes might suggest. With his vivid catalog of experiences, his sensitivity to all the sights and sounds of the city and the country, Saroyan's boy protagonist, as well as the reflective adult narrator, puts in mind another American master of the internal self: Walt Whitman. Saroyan acknowledged the influence of Whitman on his work, and the celebration and affirmation of life that is at the heart of "Resurrection of a Life" is close to the mood of Whitman's "Song of Myself." Whitman's "I," the self that is the subject of his poem, is far more than a small individual occupying a certain point in time and space. The "self' of the poem extends to embrace everything in the universe, human and nonhuman, past, present, and future.

Like Whitman, Saroyan also creates this sense of largeness, of the total stream of life flowing through the boy's awareness, as well as that of the adult narrator. As Saroyan writes in "Poem, Story, Novel," an essay in which he explains his theories of writing:

A story is this earth magnified in one small space, suggesting the whole of this earth, the whole of this universe, and the whole of all things, but especially the whole of the thought of man.

Some might regard this statement as fanciful and imprecise (the sort of thing Rahv dismissed as "the poetry of ego and eternity"), but Saroyan's poetic formulation of what he considered the essence of a story accords well with the impressions left by "Resurrection of a Life." The boy sucks in the spirit of the city at all levels of his being, and he also feels a sense of deep connectedness to nature. The latter is illustrated in the lyrical passage about his climbing the fig tree. He longs to experience the essence of "treeness" and to be open to the part of himself that is also part of the tree. Somehow anchored to a deeper reality, the tree is infinitely suggestive to him, giving him visions of ancient times and ancient civilizations.

The central metaphor of inhaling and exhaling has a similarly expansive effect. It represents much more than one hostile critic, Christina Stead, was willing to allow. As quoted in Foster, she wrote a review of Saroyan's *Inhale & Exhale* for the *New Masses* stating, "[Saroyan's] attention has become fixed on bodily functions like a convalescent; and he is excited by inhaling and exhaling." Stead surely misses the point. The phrase refers not only to the breath of individual existence but suggests also the way nature draws generations of men and women into itself through death, and then "exhales" new generations—a vast process of in and out through which human life is perpetually renewed. At one point, also, inhaling and exhaling is likened to the rhythms of the sea, "waves coming and going," again suggesting the correspondence between microcosm (the individual) and the macrocosm (nature and the cosmos).

Moreover, Saroyan's device of using the memory of the narrator, looking back and "resurrecting" the past—the past that is paradoxically dead and not dead—also creates an impression in the reader's mind of the continuity of things, the interchange of present and past, the long stretch of time. It is these impressions that build up and make possible the concluding paragraph, a highly lyrical celebration of life in all its paradoxical mystery. This paean to life ends in a Whitman-like affirmation in which the adult narrator knows that he is glad to be

somehow of the earth, of the time of the earth, somehow everlastingly of life, nothingness, blessed or unblessed, somehow deathless like myself, timeless, glad, insanely glad to be here, and so it is true, there is no death, somehow there is no death, and can never be.

We might compare this to Whitman's similar affirmation of immortality in "Song of Myself": "I know I am deathless, / I know this orbit of mine cannot be swept by a carpenter's compass."

Critic Nona Balakian, writing in *The World of William Saroyan,* complains that the sentiments in Saroyan's long concluding paragraph are put "too bluntly and lyrically." Certainly it might be argued that the repeated "somehow" weakens the sentiments by making them sound vague or imprecise, something Whitman had the confidence and panache to avoid. But Saroyan well conveys that the narrator knows and feels something profound about life that is beyond his ability to justify intellectually. Such a "feeling" response to life, a belief that what the writer feels deeply must somehow be true, is of course what rouses the ire of his critics. Perhaps for Saroyan's advocates the best reply is to note that "Resurrection of a Life" has proved to be one of the more enduring of Saroyan's short stories. Still popular three generations after it was first published in 1935, it shows that for a writer, the best revenge is to be read.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on "Resurrection of a Life," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

Kerschen is a writer and public school district administrator. In this essay, Kerschen examines Saroyan's use of an autobiographical and free form style to express the continuum of life.

To understand "Resurrection of a Life" one has to be able to discern the message of the story as it is woven into Saroyan's unique narrative style. In addition, as is typical of Saroyan's writing, it is autobiography and commentary thinly disguised as fiction. As part of his collection of short stories entitled *Inhale & Exhale,* this story repeatedly used that phrase. These elements combine in the first paragraph that opens with "Everything begins with inhale and exhale" and ends with "myself, a small boy, crossing a street, alive somehow, going somewhere."

The boy in "Resurrection of a Life" is a newsboy just as Saroyan was during his childhood in Fresno, California. H. W. Matalene reports in his biographical essay on Saroyan for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* that, in this job, Saroyan says he learned "nonchalance, ease, poise, repartee, and the art of entrance and exit, particularly into and out of saloons and gambling joints." Similarly, the boy in this story "used to go through the city like an alley cat, prowling all over the place, into saloons, upstairs into whore houses, into gambling joints...."

The boy is fascinated with the mystery of being alive, and the fact that life involves death. Yet everyone shares in life, and although each death should affect everyone, death perhaps does not affect everyone because life goes on. Saroyan, describing the newsboy in the story from his adult perspective, refers to the boy as "he" when he wants to play the observer. But the boy is also referred to as "I." This pronoun indicates not only that the boy is himself, but also that Saroyan believes that even though the boy has "died," his life continues in adult form and in others, as when he writes:

I was this boy and he is dead now, but he will be prowling through the city when my body no longer makes a shadow upon the pavement, and if it is not this boy it will be another, myself again, another boy alive on earth, seeking the essential truth of the scene, seeking the static and precise beneath that which is in motion and which is imprecise.

Written in 1935, "Resurrection of a Life" was very appealing to its American audience. During the Great Depression, the people's faith in the government of the United States was badly shaken and unrest developed. Despite masses of impoverished people resulting from the 1929 stock market crash and the Dust Bowl, there were still those enjoying great wealth in this country. Their existence and perceived indifference to the suffering of their fellow citizens caused a resentment that fueled an interest in socialism and a literature of protest.

The boy described in this story exemplifies this resentment towards the rich when the reader is told:

He used to stare at the rich people sitting at tables in hightone restaurants eating dishes of ice cream, electric fans making breezes for them, and he used to watch them ignoring the city, not going out to it and being of it, and it used to make him mad. Pigs, he used to say, having everything you want, having everything. What do you know of this place?

Poverty's separation of the rich and poor is further illustrated by the chicken bread, "bread that had fallen from the wrapping machine and couldn't be sold to rich people." The boy says, "We can eat the bread that isn't good enough for the rich.... Sure we eat it. We're not ashamed."

Such words hit a chord with a proud but poor American public. Not only did Saroyan's words express the feelings of down-and-out Americans, but also his disregard for the traditional rules of style reflected a national willingness to experiment. There is no evidence that Saroyan chose to write in this manner simply as a gimmick to gain notice or to appeal to an audience in a contemptuous mood. In fact, Saroyan continued this style throughout his writing career, long past its unique freshness and popular appeal. He eschewed form. Writing in a free-flow manner allowed him to work almost automatically and from his own thoughts. It was this rapid-fire way to write that resulted in Saroyan producing over 500 stories between 1934 and 1940. The autobiographical element of his writing was a natural connection to his use of fiction to express his own opinions about life and society. It is Saroyan talking when the newsboy says he "wanted to do something ... about what was happening in the world ... to shout, to make people understand what was going on."

Saroyan was not the first person to use this stream of consciousness method. As explained in *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* William James coined the phrase in 1890 to "characterize the unbroken flow of thought and awareness in the waking mind." As it was refined after World War I, it became "a mode of narration that undertakes to capture the full spectrum and flow of a character's mental process in which sense perceptions mingled with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, feelings, and random associations." This definition is a perfect description of the style of "Resurrection of a Life." But "the full spectrum" can become confusing, even overwhelming, when it is thrown at the reader in a rapid mix such as the description of the newsboy in church. As he struggles with his lack of belief, he thinks about the ungodliness everywhere: in the bars, the brothels, and the battlefields. Saroyan skillfully repeats the word "Spat" in a staccato manner as if the sound of this vulgar act were the click of a switch changing the channels on the boy's mental screen.

Consequently, this is one of those stories that most likely has to be read more than once to be understood. On the first reading, one is likely to get so caught up in the stream of consciousness that one floats quickly past the words without time for comprehension. On the second reading, however, the reader is better able to get control of the flow and to grasp the various events in the story.

In art galleries, one often finds a bench in front of the great works to allow visitors to sit and contemplate the complexities of the painting. It takes time to examine and absorb

the depth and craft of the artist's techniques. In like manner, one can read a Shakespearean play over and over and discover something more each time because the language skills and themes are so rich. Earnest Hemingway said that he read *Huckleberry Finn* at least once a year because there was always something new to find.

So it is with "Resurrection of a Life." The story deserves a careful study. After all, John Updike included this story in *The Best American Short Stories of the Century* for a reason. Updike said that his first rule for choosing the stories for this anthology was that they must "reflect the century"; that is, they must provide a picture of America in a particular decade. He also declared that he tried not to select stories just "because they illustrated a theme or portion of the national experience but because they struck me as lively, beautiful, believable, and, in the human news they brought, important." Updike describes the human news in "Resurrection of a Life" by saying that "With an exuberant, cocky sweep William Saroyan sums up in a few headlong paragraphs a life and the religious mystery, 'somehow deathless,' of being alive."

In "William Saroyan: Romantic Existentialist," Thelma J. Shinn states:

Saroyan's philosophy is not a resolution of but a recognition and acceptance of the contradictions of life. He tells us that life is both funny and sad, both violent and tender, and that generally the contradictions are present in the same scene, the same person, at the same time.

Concerning a later work, Saroyan is quoted by Richard Lingeman in a review for the *New York Times Book Review* as affirming "the joyous sameness of death and life . . . what a thing it is to be alive, what a thing it is to remember death, to know it is there, man, and how it is there." Lingeman adds that Saroyan "abandons form to immerse himself in content, a flow of words, memories, pictures, a Joycean stream of consciousness, 'for that is the way we live, the way we stay alive.'" The stream of consciousness technique is therefore the perfect vehicle for expressing contradictions as the narrator's thoughts bounce from moment to moment, "inhaling and exhaling, seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, moving, sleeping, waking."

The point is to use all the senses to try to figure out life and to be as alive as possible. The fat man isn't alive; he is dead to the world around him. The boy, however, has been sensitized to life by his poverty, and the rage he feels at life's harshness causes him to empathize with the troubles of others around the world. So he continues to shout the news to try to make others aware, too. The Depression-era reader understood the boy's struggle to stay alive, and Saroyan was trying to get all readers to understand that everyone is in the same life and death conflict. Ten thousand huns may have died, but they died one at a time, as individuals who each possessed the sanctity of life. Even enemies have lives like everyone else, lives they wanted to keep on living, but now they are dead, and isn't that worthy of contemplation and respect?

Saroyan has been accused of being solipsistic (of believing that the self is the only reality that can be known and verified). That explains his almost exclusively autobiographical stories. However, Saroyan was also saying that, if all humans are

essentially the same, then knowing oneself leads to an understanding and kinship with all others. We all inhale and exhale from moment to moment. Saroyan wants us to be glad to be alive, "glad to be of this ugliness and this glory," because the continuum of life that is shared through the ages and from person to person makes life timeless and death meaningless. "Remembering the boy; resurrecting him" is a way to perpetuate the lifestream that sustains and resurrects us all.

Source: Lois Kerschen, Critical Essay on "Resurrection of a Life," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Topics for Further Study

Find a book of photographs taken during the Great Depression. See if you can find scenes and people resembling those described in "Resurrection of a Life." How do these photographs affect your reading of the story? How is photography unique as an art form in terms of preserving history?

The narrator is quite contemptuous of the fat man who sleeps in the saloon. As a result, the reader is never given an opportunity to consider what this man's life may be like. Write a short piece from the fat man's perspective in which you explain why he sleeps in the saloon all day and what sort of life he leads. You may portray him sympathetically or not, but your account must be consistent with the information provided by the narrator.

Trace the historical and economic events leading up to the Great Depression. Why did employment levels drop so low? What groups of people suffered most? Did anyone remain wealthy, and, if so, who and why? Create a multimedia (diagrams, photographs, text, etc.) presentation for your peers that makes the Great Depression easier to understand.

Many people who experienced the Great Depres -sion lived the rest of their lives very differently as a result. While some adopted life-long habits of saving and storing, others committed themselves to enjoying pleasure and luxuries that were not available during the depression. Talk to or read interviews with at least two people who lived during the Great Depression to see how their experiences molded the rest of their lives. Report about what you find.

Compare and Contrast

1917: As the United States enters World War I, many men leave to serve in the war effort. Women temporarily take their places in the workforce.

1935: Soaring unemployment creates extreme hardship during the Great Depression. The unemployment rate reaches a height of 25 percent in 1933, and is somewhat improved to 20 percent by 1935.

Today: The economy is strong, and unemployment levels in 2001 hover around 4.5 percent.

1917: To aid the war effort, many movie stars urge Americans to buy war bonds. Among the most popular actors and actresses of the day are Charlie Chaplin, Lillian Gish, Douglas Fairbanks, and Gloria Swanson.

1935: Child star Shirley Temple is the country's most popular movie star. Although Americans have little money, Temple's films are so successful that in 1935 she receives an honorary Academy Award for "outstanding contribution to screen entertainment during the year 1934." Her success is attributed to the charming, light-hearted films that provide moviegoers a much-needed temporary escape from the hardships of the Great Depression.

Today: Many celebrities are involved with charities and social and political causes. Celebrity activists include Susan Sarandon (who supports AIDS research, the homeless, abortion rights, and nuclear disarmament), Rosie O'Donnell (who supports child advocacy and gun control), Tom Hanks (the national spokesman of the World War II Memorial Campaign), Tom Cruise (who supports pediatric AIDS research), Christopher Reeve (the spokesman for those with spinal cord injuries), and Charlton Heston (the president of the National Rifle Association).

1917: Boys from poor families sell newspapers on city streets by shouting headlines to get the attention of potential customers. Their earnings are needed by families in which the father and/or older brothers have gone to fight in World War I.

1935: Boys sell newspapers on city streets to provide a little bit of money for their families. Times are tough in the midst of the Great Depression, and, in many families, all members do some type of work to generate income.

Today: Boys and girls often take newspaper routes to earn spending money. Rather than stand on street corners to sell newspapers, they deliver them to subscribers' doors. The money they earn is often spent on items like music compact discs, clothes, or video games.

What Do I Read Next?

Saroyan's first collection of short stories, *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories* (1934), not only established the author as a serious writer of his time but continues to be regarded as one of his most important collections. Written during the Great Depression, these stories continue to resonate with readers for their ability to capture an important historical period and for their universality in themes and characters.

Robert Allan Gates' s compilation *American Literary Humor during the Great Depression* (1999) demonstrates the ways in which American humorists addressed the Great Depression. Gates presents the works of authors such as Dorothy Parker, Zora Neale Hurston, H. L. Mencken, Will Rogers, and Ogden Nash to show the various ways in which humor was used to comment on hard times.

Perhaps Saroyan's best-known novel, *The Human Comedy* (1943) was adapted by the author from his Academy Award-winning screenplay. Set in California during World War II, it is the story of the Macauley family, particularly fourteen-year-old Homer, whose job as a telegram messenger brings him face to face with the joys and heartbreaks of the war.

Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* (1939) was chosen for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama, but Saroyan refused the award on the grounds that businesspeople should not be judges of art. The play is set in 1939 and takes place in Nick's Pacific Street Saloon, Restaurant and Entertainment Palace, where an assortment of patrons are trying to escape loneliness.

Further Study

Darwent, Brian, ed., *New Saroyan Reader: A Connoisseur's Anthology of the Writings of William Saroyan,* Creative Arts Book Company, 1988.

This anthology of Saroyan's writings includes selections of his fiction from his early works up to some of his last. In addition, Darwent includes excerpts from Saroyan's autobiographical writings.

Keyishian, Harry, ed., *Critical Essays on William Saroyan,* Critical Essays on American Literature series, G. K. Hall, 1995.

Keyishian compiles reviews of Saroyan's work ranging the span of his career. In addition, he provides numerous articles and essays exploring Saroyan's writing (short stories, novels, and plays) in terms of language, historical context, ethnicity, sentimentality, and themes.

Saroyan, Aram, *William Saroyan,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

Written by Saroyan's son, Aram, this biography chronicles Saroyan's life from the point of view of one who loved him. Aram includes important biographical information, accompanied by his personal reflections and memories of his father.

Saroyan, William, *Here Comes, There Goes, You Know Who,* Trident, 1962.

In this autobiography, Saroyan reflects on his life as the son of immigrants, a messenger, an aspiring writer, a successful writer, and a family man. Written during Saroyan's reflective period, this book is one of the first autobiographical works he completed.

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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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