# The Rocking-Horse Winner Study Guide

## The Rocking-Horse Winner by D. H. Lawrence

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# Introduction

D. H. Lawrence's "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" was first published in 1926 in *Harper's Bazaar* magazine. It was published again that same year in a collection that was put together by Lady Cynthia Asquith, a friend of Lawrence's. Some critics have argued that the characters in the story are modeled after Asquith and her autistic son. Lawrence's works are known for their explorations of human nature through frank discussions of sex, psychology and religion. Lawrence's later short stories, such as "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*," display a movement toward tabulation and satire as opposed to his earlier short fiction, which reflected more the traditional nineteenth-century English short story— anecdotal, or tales of adventure. "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" is a sardonic tale employing devices of the fairy tale and a mockingly detached tone to moralize on the value of love and the dangers of money. In "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" and other later stories, Lawrence moved beyond the strictures of realism and encompassed a broader range of styles and subjects than in his earlier work. Critics view "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" as an example of Lawrence's most accomplished writing. Lawrence is considered a modernist, a member of a literary school opposed to the literary conventions of nineteenth-century morality, taste, and tradition. Evident in "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" is Lawrence's distain for conspicuous consumption, crass materialism, and an emotionally distant style of parenting popularly thought to exist in England during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus, the story is considered by many to be an example of modernist prose.

# Author Biography

David Herbert Lawrence was born September 11, 1885. His father was Arthur John Lawrence, an illiterate coal miner in the Nottinghamshire area of England; his mother was Lydia Beardsall Lawrence, a teacher. The fact that his mother had more education than his father caused friction in the Lawrence household. From boyhood, Lawrence was very close to his mother and, following his mother's encouragement, he studied at Nottingham University College, where he began writing short stories. In 1908, he moved to Croyden, just south of London, and began teaching. He never returned to his childhood home.

Lawrence began to publish poetry and, because he had developed tuberculosis, decided to quit teaching and write full time in 1911. That same year he published his first novel, *The White Peacock*, which was well received by critics. When he was twenty-seven years old, Lawrence eloped to Germany with Frieda von Richthofen Weekly, the wife of one of his college professors, and they were married in 1914. He and Frieda returned to Englandjust before the beginning of World War I, but they endured continual harassment from the English government due to Lawrence's objections to the war and Frieda's German ancestry.

Lawrence's next novel, *The Rainbow*, was judged obscene and was banned in England; many of his subsequent works incited similar controversy. This experience left Lawrence bitter and more convinced than ever that the forces of modern civilization were oppressive and unhealthy. After the war, the Lawrences lived an itinerant life in Germany, Austria, Italy, Sicily, England, France, Australia, and Mexico, before finally settling in Taos, New Mexico. All this travelling provided the settings for many of the stories and novels that Lawrence wrote in the 1920s and also inspired four books of travel sketches. In 1930, Lawrence entered a hospital in France in an attempt to cure the tuberculosis that had plagued him most of his life, but he died that same year. Although he was originally buried in Vence, France, his remains were later moved to Taos, New Mexico, and buried at Kiowa Ranch.

Although Lawrence's most famous work is his novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, many critics agree that his short stories, including "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" (1926) are better than his novels. His thematic focus on relationships between men and women, the destruction of relationships by the desire for wealth, and his explorations of psychological motivation in human behavior earned him an international reputation as an important twentieth-century author.

# Plot Summary

"*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" is the story of a boy's gift for picking the winners in horse races. An omniscient narrator relates the tale of a boy whose family is always short of money. His mother is incapable of showing love and is obsessed with the status that material wealth can provide. Her son is acutely aware of his mother's desire for money, and he is motivated to take action. He wants to help her, but he also wants to silence the voice that haunts him, the voice of the house itself whispering, "There must be more money! There must be more money!"

Paul questions his mother about the family's circumstances. When he asks her why they do not have a car and why they are the "poor members of the family," she responds "it's because your father has no luck." Dissatisfied with her answer, the boy presses her for an explanation of what makes one person lucky and another unlucky. Finally, he declares that he knows himself to be lucky because God told him so. With the help of Basset the gardener and his mother's brother Oscar, Paul sets out to prove his brazen assertion true by picking the winners in horse races. While riding on his rocking horse, Paul envisions the winners.

Paul proves to be unnaturally talented at divining the winners of the races, and before too long he has saved a considerable sum of money. When his uncle asks him what he plans to do with the money he reveals that he wants to give it to his mother. He hopes that his contribution will bring her luck and make the house stop whispering. Because Paul wants to keep his success at betting a secret, Paul arranges through his uncle to give his mother a anonymous gift of a thousand pounds each year for five years. His gift does not have the intended effect, however. Instead of being delighted when she opens the envelope on her birthday, Paul's mother is indifferent, "her voice cold and absent." Desperate to please her, the boy agrees to let his mother have the whole five thousand at once.

Instead of quieting the voices in house, Paul's generous gift causes the voices to go "mad, like a chorus of frogs on a spring evening." Although his mother finally can afford some of the fine things she has been craving, like fresh flowers and private school for Paul, the voices just "trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy." The more Paul gives, the more his mother and the voices in the house demand. Though his uncle tries to calm him, Paul becomes obsessed with picking the winner of the upcoming Derby, "his blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness" as he rides his rocking horse. The mother feels uncharacteristically sympathetic toward her son and urges him to join the family at seaside, but Paul insists on staying until after the Derby.

The reason that Paul needs to stay in the house until the Derby is that his "secret of secrets" is his childhood rocking horse. The secret that he has never revealed to Basset or Uncle Oscar is that he is able to ride the rocking horse, which he has long since outgrown, until the wooden horse reveals to him the name of the winner in the next race. With so much riding on the Derby and the house whispering more insistently than ever, Paul knows he must be prepared for the ride of his young life. In fact, Paul is so

anxious that even his mother feels the tension and suffers "sudden strange seizures of anxiety about him." Nevertheless, she decides to attend a big party two nights before the Derby, leaving Paul at home.

Throughout the evening the mother is distracted by worry about her son's well-being. When she and her husband come home around one o'clock, she rushes immediately to Paul's room. Standing outside his door, the mother is frozen in her tracks by a "strange, heavy, and yet not loud noise" coming from inside the room. When she finally gathers the courage to enter the room she sees her son "in his green pajamas, madly urging on the rocking-horse." She has arrived just in time to here him cry out "'It's Malabar!' ... in a powerful, strange voice." Then, "his eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second" and he crashes to the floor unconscious.

Neither the mother nor the father understand the significance of the word, but Uncle Oscar knows that it is one of the horses racing in the Derby. Oscar, "in spite of himself," places a bet on Malabar and passes on the tip to Basset. By the third day, the day of the Derby, the boy has still not regained consciousness and his condition appears to be worsening. Desperate for anything that might help her son, the mother allows Basset a short visit with Paul. Paul does regain consciousness, but just long enough to learn that Malabar had been the winner and that he has made over eighty thousand pounds for his mother. His mother still does not acknowledge that her son had been lucky or that she truly loves him. At the moment of Paul's death, Oscar chides his sister: "My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand pounds the to good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad."

# Detailed Summary & Analysis

## Summary

We are introduced to a woman who is beautiful and began life with wonderful advantages and then married for love. This, apparently, was her mistake for things did not go the way they were supposed to. She resented her children although she pretended that this tiny spot in her heart did not harden when they came into the room. Although neighbors and friends lauded her motherhood, the mother and her children knew she was a sham.

The mother, the father, the two girls and the boy lived together in a very nice neighborhood with a kind of style that floated somewhat above their actual means. The father had a job, but it depended on sales and his sales never materialized. Therefore, their social position like their assets floated above their ability to pay for them and there was a constant agony about money.

The house itself felt the strains of this agony and constantly whispered, "There must be more money!" The whisper rippled throughout the house and the children heard it, especially during Christmas where their wonderful presents, a tribute to the expensive tastes and style of their parents sunk gently under the weight of their cost and added to the tributary of whispering throughout the house.

One day, Paul, the little boy asked his mother why his parents don't have their own car? He is told that, unfortunately, they are the poorer members of the family. Why? – The boy asks. His beautiful mother then tells him it is because his father has no luck.

Luck is what causes money to happen, the boy thinks. Moreover, nobody knows what causes luck except maybe God, but He isn't telling anyone lately. That's what the boy heard, but that isn't what the boy believed. He believed that God ought to tell.

So, suddenly the boy declared to his mother. He was lucky. Yes, he was- because God told him he was. However, he could see that she did not think it was so and he became angry.

Therefore, Paul went on a quest for luck. He had to hunt it so he hunted it on the majestic rocking-horse in his nursery. He charged onto space on his magical steed and looked all over the universe for luck. Sometimes he would climb off of it, pause, and look into its big glass eye and demand, yes, demand- that it takes him to the place where luck could be found. He rode his horse vigorously, persistently, madly and did not stop even when his sister Joan and his nurse complained.

One day, his Uncle Oscar and his mother came into the room when he was riding. His uncle cried out to him- you, young jockey- are you riding a winner? When he was finished riding, he told them he got to the place all right. Moreover, what was his horse's name? Therefore, Paul told his uncle he had many names and one of them was

"Sansovino." Well, his Uncle recognized that name because that horse had won in the Ascot.

His mother told him that he knew that name because he was always talking to young Bassett, the gardener, about the races. Uncle Oscar then asked him if Paul ever wagered on the races. Bassett told him to ask Paul himself.

Later, Paul tells his Uncle that Daffodil, not a favorite of his Uncle, will win at the Lincoln, another horse race. Paul swears his uncle to secrecy and tells him that Bassett is his partner. When Bassett lent him his first money, he lost. However, when his uncle gave him ten shillings, he won. Therefore, he thought that his uncle might be lucky and could be included in the agreement. The boy told him he was betting three hundred and that Bassett was keeping it for him. Of course, he was keeping at least twenty pounds in reserve.

Therefore, his uncle took him to the race. He bet on another horse but put five on Daffodil for his nephew. Daffodil, indeed, wins and it looks as though he now has fifteen hundred and another twenty from his uncle. When he's sure, it's as if he "gets it from heaven."

The uncle takes both of them into the park so they could talk. Most of the time, if Paul is certain, they win. Bassett thinks the uncle should go in as partners. He isn't sure, yet, because first he must see the money. Bassett then brings him the fifteen hundred pounds from the garden house where he keeps it. The reserve is left with the Turf commission.

There isn't much left to say so Uncle Oscar becomes a full partner. When the Leger races came, Paul chose Lively Spark and, at ten-to-one, they all made a killing. This makes his uncle a bit nervous. He tells his uncle how he started this for his mother- and to keep the house from whispering. He wants to tell his mother, but he doesn't want her to know how lucky he is or she will stop him. Therefore, the uncle figures out a way for them to give money to the mother in secret- a thousand dollars a year for five years.

Meanwhile, his mother had been trying her hand at commercial art. By helping her friend she could make some money but not nearly as much as her friend to whom she was contracted. She was competitive with her friend and this took a lot of the joy out of it.

Finally, during breakfast, she reads the letter from the lawyer announcing the money. However, instead of being happy, she puts on a hard, cold look. It turns out she went to the lawyer and tried to bargain for all of the money. Paul concedes secretly to his mother's wishes. After all, there is some left to get a lot more.

Nevertheless, when the money was transferred, a funny thing happened. The house expanded its cries for money- as new furnishings appeared, a guaranteed attendance at Eton, flowers in the winter. It wanted more and more money and the cries frightened the small boy and he began to lose his certainty. He loses at the Grand National. He loses at the Lincoln. He has become stressed and anxious and is crying out to win at the

Derby. His mother begs him to go to the Seaside to rest. There has been a lot of gambling in their family and she is concerned about it. However, he doesn't want to leave the house until after the Derby.

She relents, thinking that he just loves the house. However, it is not the house he wants to stay for- it's his rocking-horse in his bedroom. His mother doesn't like it. She thinks he is too big for it. He insists he must have it until he can have a real horse.

As the Derby approaches, his mother grows nervous about him as she watches his mounting anxiety. She is scared for him. Once, she leaves a party to telephone home, to check on her children, particularly Paul.

When she and her husband go home, she goes upstairs. She hears a strange noise from the bedroom, one she cannot completely recognize. She then enters and sees Paul. He has been riding his rocking-horse in the dark. He screams out, "Malabar!"- In a strange voice, chilling her, scaring her, he falls off the horse, crashing to the ground.

He is fevered, in a delirium, crying out the name of "Malabar," one of the horses running in the Derby. His mother was frantic for him. His eyes became blue stones as he tossed back and forth in his bed. Bassett says he could come up. The mother, eager for someone to help, agrees. He leans besides the bed and tells Paul that he's made over seventy thousand pounds and he now has over eighty thousands. Paul, delirious, awakens. Am I not lucky mother? - He says. He never told her, but if he rides his horse, he gets to the lucky place. No, she was never told. Then the boy dies in the night.

The uncle says a curious thing. He says to the mother that she's eighty thousand ahead and one son behind. Perhaps it is better, because the poor boy had to ride "a rocking-horse to find a winner."

## Analysis

"The Rocking-Horse Winner" is a fable as much as it is a short story. You could say it is a modern Aesop's fable about luck. There is even an Aesop-type animal. It is a charming, but largely silent, little animal- a rocking-horse. Unlike an Aesop tale, it is rather silent, almost like a totem of an animal rather than the animal itself. Embedded in this story is an uncanny but very reduced sense of the supernatural with an undercurrent of strange terror. Despite this, D. H. Lawrence's story is a kind of masterpiece of understatement with just the right amount of simmering confusion and fear to make the reader question the genre of literature he is reading and to drive him into almost philosophic inquiry without really knowing why. Is this really just a short story or something else?

Perhaps a fable, whose secret the reader needs to unravel. After all, Lawrence starts is story like a fable- "There was a woman who was beautiful."—Names are mentioned later, as the story progresses. It starts out as a generic description of the family and the primal problem- the lack of luck. Although later on, the beautiful, loveless mother blames

the lack of prosperity on the father, it is clear that the author credits her with lucklessness. After all, she originally married for love but then "the love turned to dust."

"The Rocking-Horse Winner" touches very basic and generally unmentioned subjects about life. For one thing, it unabashedly deals with the question of luck by bringing it down home to a simple family household that fails to quite prosper by it's own simple standards and by the standards of it's neighbors. It does not blame the fate of this family on unemployment or public policies or lack of ability or education. It blames the fate of this family on the absence of luck.

Whether the luck-less-ness is the fault of the mother or the father or perhaps both, there is no question that the child Paul eventually gets, without any question, that money is the problem and the reason it is not there is because of luck's sad absence.

In the metaphysics of the story, the house itself is affected. It whispers audibly so that the children can hear it, "There must be more money." This undercurrent fills the house and it is made to be tangible. The children stop and listen to it and look in each other's eyes as they hear it in their dolls and their puppies and, even, their rocking-horse. This audible whisper casts a ghostly surrealism on this magical, horror story.

When the boy succeeds in winning a lot of money, he secretly arranges to transfer it to his mother. He arranges for payment over a period of years. However, this isn't enough money for his mother. She bargains with the lawyer for all of it. The boy secretly concedes but then finds out that instead of calming the whispers of the house for more money, it agitates and amplifies the cries. What then is really driving this house? Why would more money just make the house hungrier?

Perhaps the forces in this house, the poverty, and the shame of failure- are driven by other things than the lack of luck. Perhaps they are driven by greed, unseemly competitiveness, and an unwanted elevation of their station. Did the story not say how they felt themselves better than anyone else in the neighborhood? Did the mother not give up her job because she could not be first, be ahead in the money game of her friend who was employing her? Did the family not always live, by choice, far above their needs? Were they not, to some extent, causing their poverty by their arrogance? Is luck the true solution to their condition, to keep the house from whispering.

The Uncle, who becomes a partner in the affair, has his own interpretation, following the poor boy's demise- is very insightful and strange. In the final sentence of the book, he sums up his thoughts, making the reader believe that he looked at the boy as leading an impoverished, abnormal life despite his wealth. This boy could not find happiness or love in a normal way. He had to go to his garret and ride his rocking-horse to his very death to find the place of luck. The boy was driven by his need for luck- and it brought him money, but it also brought him death. So his poor mother, with his death, was ahead in the game of money but behind in the game of life.

# Characters

## Bassett

Bassett is the family gardener who helps Paul place bets on horses. He used to work around horses and racing and he talks about racing all the time, so it seems reasonable that Paul would seek his advice. He takes the boy seriously and follows all the boy's instructions in placing the bets. He also keeps Paul's money safely hidden away, at least until Uncle Oscar gets involved. He is the only adult who treats Paul with a serious respect. It is Bassett's seriousness that convinces Uncle Oscar that Paul's gift for picking winners is real. He is trustworthy and kind, but he is also a servant, so once Uncle Oscar takes over, he respectfully withdraws from the action.

## Oscar Cresswell

Oscar Cresswell is Paul's uncle and Hester's brother. He is in a better financial position than Hester, since he owns his own car and a place in Hampshire. This is because he inherited the entire family fortune, leaving Hester to depend on her husband for support. It is Uncle Oscar who stumbles upon Paul's secret of earning money through gambling, but he does not at first believe in Paul's gift. He thinks that Paul is not serious and treats the boy as if he were merely playing a game. After Oscar realizes that Paul's tips are dependable, he encourages the gambling. Oscar arranges for a lawyer to funnel money to Hester. He also bets his own money, using Paul's tips for his own profit.

Although Uncle Oscar seems harmless at first, the reader becomes aware that he is using Paul for his own benefit. He makes no effort to teach Paul about being careful with money or the dangers of gambling. Oscar does nothing to help Hester and her family, neither by giving money nor by helping Hester budget what money she does have. Because Oscar only uses Paul for his own financial gain, he is revealed to be shallow and selfish.

## Hester

Hester is Paul's mother, who is incapable of loving others. She is not only obsessed with money, but she is also irresponsible with the money she does get. When Paul arranges through his attorney to give her a thousand pounds a month from his winnings, she immediately begs the attorney for the entire amount. However, instead of paying her debts, she spends the money on new things for the house. This results in an even greater need for more money. She also does not express any thanks for this sudden windfall, depriving Paul of the joy of providing the much-needed income for his family.

Although at the end of the story Hester becomes increasingly concerned about Paul's deteriorating health, she still does not love him, even when he dies. At the beginning of the story, it is stated that "at the center of her heart was a hard little place that could not

feel love, no, not for anybody." This image is repeated at the end of the story, when Hester sits by her son's bedside "feeling her heart had gone, turned actually into a stone." Before he dies Paul asks "Mother, did I ever tell you? I'm lucky," she responds, "No, you never did." However, the reader remembers that Paul did, indeed, tell her that he was lucky earlier in the story. Since she pays little attention to him, she does not remember this.

When Hester finally receives the financial fortune she has always wanted but loses her son in the process, the reader realizes that Hester will probably not feel the loss of her son and will probably waste all that money in record time. All of these details show Hester to be cold, unfeeling, wasteful, and shallow.

## Uncle Oscar

*See* Oscar Cresswell

## Paul

Paul is the young boy in the story who tries desperately to find a way to have "luck," meaning money, for his mother. He begins to ride his rocking horse furiously, even though he has outgrown it, because when he does so, he somehow is given the name of the horse that will win the next race. He makes an astounding amount of money this way with the help of the gardener Bassett (who places his bets for him), and later with the help also of his Uncle Oscar. For the final big race, the Derby, he rides himself into a feverish delirium, but he is sure of the winner. His uncle places a large bet for him.

Just as his uncle arrives to tell him of the fortune he has made, he dies from the fever. Paul dies for the sake of making money for the family, particularly his mother, even though her "heart was a stone."

Paul seems completely unaware that he has overtaken responsibilities that are rightly his parents'. He seems only concerned with relieving the anxiety he perceives in the house caused by a lack of money. He tries to understand why there is not enough money by asking his mother, but she only says that his father "has no luck." He directly associates luck with money, so the gambling seems like a natural solution to the problem. He is so innocent in his enthusiasm for the game he begins playing with Bassett that even when his uncle discovers that he has been gambling, he does not stop Paul from gambling further. Even though Paul is still a child, all of the adults, Bassett, Uncle Oscar, and Paul's mother, seem to treat him like an adult. No one anticipates that Paul will pay a huge price for playing this game. No one even questions Paul's ability to pick the winners of the horse races, or wonders how in the world Paul is able to pick winners so accurately.

Throughout the story Paul remains innocent, as well as desperate, to help his mother, who seems oblivious to Paul's concerns. Although it is clear to the reader that Paul is

very intelligent and sensitive, no one in the story seems to notice or appreciate Paul's gifts until it is too late.

# Themes

## Responsibility

The obsession with wealth and material items is pitted against the responsibilities of parenting in "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*." It is the responsibility of the parents to provide for the children in a family. It is also the responsibility of the parents to spend money wisely and budget carefully, so that the bills are paid and no one goes without food, clothing, or shelter. However, in this story, Lawrence turns this on its ear, making the parents complete failures at financial dealings and their son Paul incredibly gifted at making money, albeit by gambling.

The parents in the story drift from one thing to another, never really finding anything they can do to provide for the family. The mother "tried this thing and the other, but could not find anything successful." The father, whose main talents are having expensive tastes and being handsome, "seemed as if he would never be able to do anything worth doing." When Paul gives his mother 5,000 pounds from his winnings, rather than paying off debts and saving for the future, she spends all of it on material things, causing an even more urgent need for more money.

## Generosity and Greed

The disparity between Paul's generosity and his mother's greed is another theme of "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*." Paul generously offers all his winnings to the family, in order to relieve the family's dire need for money. He seems to have no needs of his own and is motivated solely by the desire to help his mother. Paul's unselfish generosity is contrasted starkly with the mother's greed and selfishness. When the mother first receives the news from the lawyer that she has "inherited" 5,000 pounds from a long-lost relative which will be paid out to her in yearly increments of 1,000 pounds (a scheme dreamed up by Paul), she does not inform the family of their good fortune. Instead, she goes immediately to the lawyer and asks to receive the entire amount right away. Paul agrees, and the money is spent foolishly on more material things for the house. Instead of relieving the family's need for money, Paul's plan backfires and thus there is a need for even more money.

Paul and his mother are complete opposites. Paul, in his childish innocence, gives and gives to the family, without any desire for thanks and without any desire to keep any of the money for himself. He ultimately gives the most precious gift of all: his life. Hester, Paul's mother, has no idea where all this money is coming from and does not seem to care. Hester has become so obsessed with wealth that her heart turns completely to stone; she cannot even feel sad when her son dies.

## Oedipus Complex

Paul's desire to earn money for the family can be said to be an unconscious desire to take his father's place, a concept that psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud termed the "Oedipus complex." This is a reference to the story from ancient Greece in which Oedipus, who was raised away from his parents, accidently kills his father and marries his mother. Freud suggested that all boys go through a stage where they want to take their father's place, Paul's desire to take care of the family's needs is Oedipal. Since the main way of earning this money—the rocking horse—is also bound up in sexual imagery, it seems clear that Lawrence intentionally characterizes Paul this way.

# Style

The symbolism in this story is very sexually oriented. The rocking horse represents both Paul's desire to make money for his mother and his own sexuality. The rocking horse is his "mount" which is "forced" onwards in a "furious ride" towards "frenzy." These descriptions are very suggestive of sexual activity. However, this is disturbing because Paul is very young and he is participating in this act for the sake of his mother. The rocking horse can also represent the fact that the overwhelming desire for money is a road that leads to nowhere, since this is a rocking horse that does not actually travel anywhere. Also, the desire for wealth can be said to be extremely unhealthy as well, since it results in Hester's unhappiness and Paul's death.

# Historical Context

Lawrence was writing during the early part of the twentieth century, and he, like most writers of the day, was significantly influenced by World War I. He had read and loved the novels of nineteenth-century writers George Eliot, author of *Silas Marner*, and Thomas Hardy, author of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, but grew dissatisfied with the predictability pf such characters. After the war, many people began to] question the old ways of looking at the world. Lawrence joined in the questioning by making his characters less sure of themselves, less bound by the rules of polite society that dominated nineteeth-century fiction.

# Critical Overview

Many critics consider Lawrence's short stories his most artistically accomplished writing and have attributed much of their success to the constraints of the form, which forced Lawrence to deny himself the elaborations, diversions, and repetitions that are integral aspects of his longer works. Critics view "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" in this light, as an example of economical style and structure in Lawrence's short fiction. Lawrence's early short stories were written in a manner similar to that of Robert Louis Stevenson or Rudyard Kipling, whose anecdotes and tales of adventure epitomized the traditional nineteenth-century English short story. His later short stones, such as "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*," emphasize abstraction and argument. Critics argue that this story is an example of Lawrence moving away from realism and encompassing a broader range of styles and subjects. They view "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" as an example of Lawrence's later period, in which his keen insight and sturdy craft are the result of many years of experience.

Many of Lawrence's works were considered controversial, and "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" is no exception. The story has generated a large amount of scholarly debate and has been compared to a wide variety of other works, including classic myths, parables, and the writings of Charles Dickens, among others. Some critics focus on the socio-economic, religious, and sexual aspects of the story.

Other critics have highlighted the Freudian aspects of the work or have interpreted it in terms of economic theories and spiritual allusions. "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" has been criticized for its didactic qualities; that is, some critics feel the story is too focused on teaching a lesson. Though the story continues to stimulate debate, most critics agree that the plot, description, dialogue, and symbolism of the story are presented with great skill.

# Criticism

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

# Critical Essay #1

*Piedmont-Morton is the coordinator of the Undergraduate Writing Center at the University of Texas at Austin. In the following essay, she discusses various aspects of "The Rocking-Horse Winner."*

"*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" belongs to the group of stories D. H. Lawrence wrote in the last years of his life. During this period, critics have noted, he abandoned the realism that characterizes his mid-career work, and turned toward a style of short story that more closely resembles the fable or folktale. In the words of Janice Hubbard Harris, in *The Short Fiction of D. H. Lawrence*, "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" and other stories of the period, represent the "desire of a fierce and dying man to prophesy, sum up, assess the world he is leaving rather than present or imitate it." The story also presents several themes that held Lawrence's attention throughout his career.

The style and tone of "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" reveal immediately that this story comes from the world of fable and legend. The distant, solemn tone of the narrator: "There was a woman who was beautiful," signals us that this is an old story. Quickly it becomes apparent that this is a quest narrative of some sort. The boy hero will try to win the love of the distant queen/mother. The object of the quest is to gain access to "the centre of her heart [that] was a hard place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody." The hero rides off, captures the treasure, and returns home to present the riches to his love. But the opening of the story is also foreboding, because "undercutting this fairy tale, however, is another, which forms a grotesque shadow, a nightmare counter to the wish-fulfillment narrative," in Harris's words. The quest is hopeless, Harris points out, because the mother can never be satisfied and "every success brings a new and greater trial."

Given the stylized characterization and the symbolic landscape that Lawrence creates in "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*," we can read the meaning of the story on several levels. In the first place, Lawrence seems to be offering a broad satire on rising consumerism in English culture. In particular, this story criticizes those who equate love with money, luck with happiness. The mother with her insatiable desire for material possessions believes that money will make her happy despite the obvious fact that so far it has not. For Lawrence she represents the futility of the new consumer culture in which *luck* and *lucre* mean the same thing. Paul, who learns from his mother to associate love with money, represents the desperate search for values in a cash culture. The force of Lawrence's satire is directed at a society that is dominated by a quest for cash, and at those who buy into the deadly equation of love equals money.

This fable about a boy's doomed attempts to satisfy his mother's desires and win her love also provides Lawrence the opportunity to work out one of the themes that dominate his entire body of work, the relationship between mothers and sons. Lawrence's theory, which is the central concern of one of his most famous novels, *Sons and Lovers*, is that mothers mold their sons into men who are the opposites of their undesirable husbands. Since mothers know that they cannot change their husbands,

they throw all their passion into creating desirable sons, whom, of course, they cannot possess. In "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*," the husband's inadequacy is explicit. The narrator describes him as 1 'one who was always very handsome and expensive in his tastes, [and] seemed as if he never would be able to do anything worth doing." Making her feelings very clear to her young son, the mother "bitterly" characterizes her husband as "very unlucky." When she confides in her son that she is dissatisfied with her husband, the mother sets in motion the boys futile quest to please her, to be the man she wants him/her husband to be. After this, the father is hardly mentioned in the story, let alone seen. The mother's desire to make and possess her son constitutes another dark counter-narrative to the story's wish-fulfillment theme.

Both Paul's desire to win his mother's love as well as her desire to make him into the image of an ideal husband are doomed to futility. This kind of misdirected and frustrated sexuality is a persistent theme in Lawrence's fiction and nonfiction writing, and the fable-like quality of "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" gives Lawrence an opportunity to dramatize some of theories about sexuality on a symbolic level. The course of Lawrence's career demonstrates the evolution of his theories on sexuality and gender. By the end of his life, when "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" was written, Lawrence's ideas had evolved into his theory of polarity, which is based on the premise that maleness and femaleness are absolute opposites and that men and women cannot have any attributes of the opposite sex. The theory of polarity, which is derived in part from Lawrence's acquaintance with Freudian psychology, asserts that an individual achieves wholeness by balancing his or her energy against another individual's. For Lawrence, this balance is achieved by a flow of energy, like an electric current, which is usually rendered as sexual desire in his fiction.

Critics have noted the connections between Lawrence's published ideas about sexuality, particularly in the essay "Pornography and Obscenity," and in "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*." In "A Rocking-Horse: The Symbol, the Pattern, the Way to Live," an influential article written in 1958, W. D. Snodgrass analyzed the psychosexual dimensions of the story through the lens of Lawrence's published writings. Snodgrass summarizes Lawrence's thesis as the argument that pornography is "art which contrives to make sex ugly ... and so leads the observer away from sexual intercourse and toward masturbation." Paul's rocking horse riding, then, represents masturbation, "the child's imitation of the sex act, for the riding which goes nowhere." Lawrence's point, however, is not that Paul's "secret of secrets" kills him. What is unnatural from Lawrence's point of view is that Paul and his mother are locked into a pattern of mutually frustrated desire. Neither one of them is directing their energy at an appropriate "polarity." Significantly, however, they do not share equal responsibility for their situation. Lawrence, through his narrator, places all the blame on the mother and martyrs the boy in one final self-sacrificing ride.

**Source:** Elisabeth Piedmont-Marton, for *Short Stories for Students*, Gale Research, 1997.

# Critical Essay #2

*In the following essay, Davies presents information about some of the possible real-life subjects for Lawrence's story "The Rocking-Horse Winner, " particularly Paul and his mother, who were patterned after friends of Lawrence's.*

D. H. Lawrence's habit of making identifiable use of his friends and acquaintances in his novels and short stories has been well documented, as has his lack of concern for the possible distress such portraits might cause. Lady Ottoline Morrell and Philip Heseltine were outraged by their appearance in *Women in Love* as Hermione and Halliday, and although Lawrence tried to assure his friend Mark Gertler that he was not the model for the rat-like Loerke in the same novel, it is generally agreed that he was. John Middleton Murry, despite his admiration for Lawrence, was never able to forgive him for the group of short stones in which Murry is made to look ridiculous, and Compton Mackenzie was annoyed at finding himself the protagonist in "The Man Who Loved Islands." "England, My England," with its satiric portraits of Percy Lucas and the Meynell family, was published shortly before Lucas' death in France, and has been called Lawrence's "cruelest story a clef." To these and other stories can be added another based upon a real-life situation, "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*."

This story was first published in the fall of 1926 in a collection called *The Ghost Book* assembled by Lawrence's longtime friend, Lady Cynthia Asquith. As I hope to show, the story was probably suggested by the tragic illness of Lady Cynthia's oldest son John and by the Asquith marriage itself. Although it is unlikely that Lady Cynthia recognized herself in the character Hester, or connected her son's tragedy—at its height almost ten years before the story was written—with Paul, biographical materials demonstrate that Lawrence found in the Asquith household the ingredients for his story on destructive materialism.

That Lawrence used these materials as he did is surprising because it is generally agreed that Lady Cynthia occupied a rather special place in his life. His biographer, Harry T. Moore, remarks that "Lawrence felt a respectful affection, if not love for her," and her *Diaries* show that she held the novelist in considerable esteem. In her memoir, written many years after Lawrence's death, she speaks very warmly of him, stressing his electric aliveness and gentleness. In other stories in which she is the model for the heroine, she is treated with tact and affection. An early sketch, "The Thimble," was intended as a "word-picture" of her, and was sent to her for her criticism. She was uneasy about its probable contents; having read *The Rainbow* in manuscript, she feared a "minute 'belly' analysis" of herself. But she was pleased by the story and found it "extremely well-written___I think some of his character hints are damnably good." Two later stories, *The Ladybird* and "Glad Ghosts," are also considered to contain heroines modeled on Lady Cynthia, both attractive figures.

Not only is Lady Cynthia pleasantly presented, but most stories in which she was the model for the heroine do not end unhappily. In "The Thimble" the couple is re-born, and becomes capable of growing into full maturity and love as a result. In *The Ladybird*,

Lady Daphne, unfulfilled by her adoring husband, reaches unity of being through her love affair with Count Dionys. In "Glad Ghosts" Carlotta's husband, stimulated by the advice of a Lawrence-like house guest, suddenly gains insight into the importance of the body. His marriage is revitalized, his bad luck overcome, and Carlotta gives birth to a charming blond boy "like a little crocus" nine months later. (Lawrence had nicknamed Lady Cynthia's son "Jonquil.") Rather ambiguously, the guest is visited at night by a feminine ghost, and he is uncertain in the morning whether it was a ghost or a living woman. It has been suggested that Lawrence decided against sending this story to Lady Cynthia because of the implications of its conclusion, and after considering it, submitted "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" instead. Biographical materials will show the striking similarities between the Asquith family and the family in the story. Lady Cynthia, like Carlotta and Hester, was visited by very bad luck indeed in her firstborn son. In his infancy he seemed normal, and his charm and sweet temper delighted everyone. Lawrence in letters written in 1913 inquired about "the fat and smiling John," and asked, "How is the jonquil with the golden smile." But by the time the boy was four years old, it had become obvious that something was seriously wrong with him. The editor of the Diaries labels his condition autism, a disorder still not well understood. And the Lawrences' close association with the Asquiths began just as the mother's fears were beginning to crystalize.

The Lawrences visited Lady Cynthia in Brighton in May 1915, and John had tea with them. She reports in her diary that "the Lawrences were riveted by the freakishness of John, about whom they showed extraordinary interest and sympathy ... he was in a wild, monkey mood—very challenging, just doing things for the sake of being told not to—impishly defiant and still his peculiar, indescribable detachment." The next day Lawrence and Lady Cynthia strolled to the cliffs overlooking Brighton and discussed John's condition for several hours. The mother, who elsewhere expresses her admiration for Lawrence's deep insight into character, received a long and depressing analysis. She was upset to learn that her friend believed she was responsible for her son's condition, that the boy was reacting to her scepticism and cynicism, to her lack of positive belief that made her appear, on the surface, charmingly tolerant and kind. Later he told her that her spirit was "hard and stoical," a judgment which she rejected, but which is parallel to Hester who "knew that at the center of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love___"

A few days later Lawrence wrote a long letter about John in which he argued that she and her husband lacked a living belief in anything, that the world in which she lived had stunted her soul, and she had not resisted. "Your own soul knew ... that it was itself bound in like a tree that grows under a low roof and can never break through, and which must be deformed, unfulfilled. Herbert Asquith must have known the same thing, in his soul." John had been born from the womb and loins of unbelief, distorted from his conception: "... the soul of John acts from your soul, even from the start: because he knows that you are Unbelief, and he reacts from your affirmation of belief always with hostility." He cautions her against trying to force her son's love: "That you fight is only a sign that you are wanting in yourself. The child knows that. Your own soul is deficient, so it fights for the love of the child."

A recent article on "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" reaches conclusions on the story itself that are very similar to Lawrence's analysis. Commenting on the wildness of Paul's obsession, Charles Koban says, "It is as if an alien spirit inhabited and drove him ... and the spirit is of course the spirit of the mother, the spirit of greed." It is Paul's "mystical openness to her that leaves him vulnerable to the terrible forces she unleashes in her own household." It must be made clear that there is little to suggest that Lady Cynthia or her husband were as obsessed with money and material things as the couple in the story. But from Lawrence's perspective, the Asquiths could not avoid obsessive concern for possessions, given their chosen style of life. Lady Cynthia describes Lawrence strolling about their living room after tea, and suddenly noticing a small Louis XV table. After he stared at it for a moment," 'Come away!' he shrilled out, looking at me as if I stood in immediate deadly peril. 'Come away. Free yourself at once, or before you know where you are, your furniture will be on top instead of under you.' This admonition gave me a nightmare in which I was trampled to death by the legs of my own tables and chairs." A harmless antique table became an instant symbol of the money-lie. Despite Lawrence's fondness for this couple, the link between possessions and the failure of human relationships seems clearly established.

Another letter concerned with Herbert Asquith also prefigures the story, as Lawrence tries to persuade Lady Cynthia not to push her husband into the money-making trap. The Asquiths were not rich, and lack of money was a constant concern. That Lawrence was well aware of this is shown in "The Thimble" where the heroine, left alone when her husband goes to war, cannot maintain the family town house, and takes a small flat which she furnishes with second-hand furniture bought from friends. Lady Cynthia herself spent the war years "cuckooing, "that is, living with friends and family to avoid the expense of her own establishment. She worked for some years as a secretary for Sir James Barrie, wrote and published books, and like Hester, once received a summons for debt, a "wretched fourteen-shillings bill." Like the couple in the story, the Asquiths were poor relations compared to the social set to which they belonged by birth. Lawrence, who was tortured by the money-hunger he saw everywhere, urged his friend to realize the connection between money-lust and war:

It doesn't matter whether you need money or not. You do need it. But the fact that you would ask him to

work, put his soul into getting it, makes him love better war and pure destruction. The thing is painfully irrational. How can a man be so developed to be able to devote himself to making money, and at the same time keep himself in utler antagonism to the whole system of money....

The defeated, inarticulate husband in "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*," who goes "into town to some office," is foreshadowed here and in other letters. In one written in 1915, when the Lawrences were planning to leave England, he urged Lady Cynthia to consider leaving also. It was her duty, he felt, to remove her children from "this slow flux of destruction," and to seek a truer existence: "Your husband should have left this decomposing life. There was nowhere to go. Perhaps now he is beaten. Perhaps now

the true living is defeated in him. But it is not defeated in you.... So don't give John to this decline and fall. Give him to the *future, ..."*

The Lawrences did not leave England, however, until 1919, and during these years Lady Cynthia records her growing distress at her son's condition. She speaks of his "eerie Puck faces," of his sitting "silent and absorbed in his own thoughts" at a lively family tea party, and of the "strange completeness about him as he is...." After a dedicated governess managed to teach him to read and write, the mother comments sadly that his performance "gives you the impression of a *tour deforce* like a performing animal." Her growing inability to believe that the boy would ever be normal was becoming strong just as the Lawrences again entered her orbit. In April 1917 Lawrence visited her, and again insisted that the boy's condition was spiritual, not psychological. His mother had submitted to an unreal existence, "the result being that John is quite off the plane I have violated myself in order to remain on." Almost a year later, Lawrence again discussed John, still certain that he could be helped by "proper psychic influence," and offered to take him for a time to see if association with him and Frieda would help.

And finally Lady Cynthia lost her capacity to love her son, although she struggled not to do so. In a diary entry two days after the Lawrences had come to tea, she speaks of "the John tragedy," which blackened her life for her. It was a nightmare for her to be in the same room with him, and she was violently reproached by his governess for her apparent callousness. Her growing horror of the boy increased, no doubt because his affliction grew steadily more disturbing as he grew older, and in her diary she speaks of a visit to him as "an ordeal behind me." Since the Lawrences were seeing Lady Cynthia during this time period, it is quite likely that he at least was aware of the mother who could not love her son, and of the strong guilt feelings she experienced in consequence.

It is to be regretted that the editor of the Diaries felt it necessary to remove much of the material concerning John, since some of the omitted passages might have provided additional links with the story. But the descriptions of him that remain suggest Paul's behavior in the story: his wildness, his self-absorption, his uncanny faces, his non-human quality, and the sense of his isolation from other members of the household. And it is a matter of common knowledge that a behavior trait among children afflicted with autism is a forward-backward rocking motion of their bodies. It is likely that John would have had a rocking horse, and that he would have used it long after he outgrew it, given his condition. But about these possible, even probable, clues we can only speculate.

A small but significant hint in the story itself suggests that Lawrence had the Asquiths in mind, particularly since the phrasing seems to be a minor slip of the pen. Hester "was at a big party in town, when one of her rushes of anxiety about her boy, her first-born, gripped her heart until she could hardly speak." Not only does the sudden rush of concern describe what Lady Cynthia unquestionably must have experienced on many occasions, but the stipulation "first-born" is interesting. Earlier in the story we are told that Paul has an elder sister. Lawrence seems to have deliberately rearranged the ages and sexes of the children—Lady Cynthia had in fact three children, all boys—but unconsciously returned, as he wrote of the mother's anguish, to the original model for his character.

It would seem that in the Asquiths and in their eldest son Lawrence found ample background material for his story. Lady Cynthia was personally a charming and lovable woman, quite unlike the cold and selfish Hester. And yet Lawrence believed that basic deficiencies in her character had worked against her son's health and happiness. Her marriage had begun as a love match, opposed by her father because neither family could provide an adequate income for the couple. But Lawrence implied his belief that her relationship with her husband could not be satisfactory both in his direct comments in his letters and in the fact that he arranges a better marital relationship, a rebirth, for the heroines in three of his Asquith-inspired stories. The Asquiths' social position, well-connected but comparatively poor, parallels the one described in "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*." And concerning what was apparently his last visit to her in October 1925, a visit during which she probably asked him to write something for her anthology, he reported laconically to a friend, "Went to Cynthia Asquith's—more sense of failure." It was this sense of failure in her life, as well as in the lives of other friends and acquaintances whom Lawrence visited during his brief stay in England, that produced the bitterness and discouragement of "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*."

**Source:** Rosemary Reeves Davies, "Lawrence, Lady Cynthia Asquith, and '*The Rocking-Horse Winner*,'" in *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 20, No. 2-3, Spring-Summer, 1983, pp 121-6.

# Critical Essay #3

*Junkins is an American poet, educator, and critic. In the following short essay, Junkins theorizes that "The Rocking-Horse Winner" exhibits many attributes of a myth through its style and symbolism.*

A recent critical exchange has re-focused attention on the controversial "Rocking-Horse Winner" by D. H. Lawrence. Except for that of W. R. Martin, the general critical evaluation of the story has been unfavorable, and for the specific reason that critics have failed to perceive the story's essentially mythical quality. The story does precisely what Burroughs and other Lawrence critics (Leavis, Hough, Gordon, and Tate) feel that it fails to do: it presents life. Because of its mythical nature, Burroughs' criticism that the story "is limited by application of Lawrence's hackneyed didacticism to a pathetic plot of fantasy" is not relevant. It is a story of meaning, not morality, and the meaning depends precisely upon the organic relationship between the fantastic and the real.

"*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" dramatizes modern man's unsuccessful attempt to act out and emerge from his oedipal conflict with the woman-mother. Lawrence states here the same theme as that of the earlier *Sons and Lovers*. Here the boy Paul, whose name is also the same as that of the central character in *Sons and Lovers*, takes upon himself the intolerable burden of attempting to solve the mother's "problem," which is demonstrated in the unspoken overtones of the lack of money in the household. The mother attributes this to her lack of "luck"; therefore Paul summons all his energies in order to obtain this luck for his mother. His private incantations assume the form of frenzied riding of his hobbyhorse, which, as Paul points out to his Uncle Oscar, has no name. The fact that when the boy successfully divines in advance the winners of real horse races, and by doing so wins a great deal of "lucky" money which fails to make his mother happy, demonstrates that money is not the mother's central need. The money does not bring her "luck. *' The growing anguish and tormented frustration that Paul experiences come to a climax at the end of the story with his death as a result of riding his hobbyhorse too long and too hard in the dark of his room at night. He literally sacrifices himself, and the agent of his death is his hobbyhorse. Death is his only way out of his dilemma; Uncle Oscar says at the end of the story, "My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor, devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner."

The story is couched in the symbols of the ancient myths. The mother is the poor, unsatisfied fairy princess who yearns for happiness; Paul is the gallant knight on horseback who rides to her rescue.

But Paul's stallion, the traditional symbol of the self, or potency or masculinity, is only a wooden rocking horse. As such it denotes Paul's impotency, his pre-pubertal innocence, his unrealized manhood. He consequently has no self—the horse is both wooden and anonymous—because he has not emerged as a man. What prevents him from this emergence before death is the insatiable needs of the unsatisfied woman-mother. Although Hester, the mother, disguises her feminine needs of self-realization and

fulfillment (in the largest sense of the meaning of sexuality), and although Paul responds directly to the disguise, he is indirectly and unconsciously responding to her indirect and unconscious needs. For him as a self-less and unrealized man-boy, the task he sets for himself is impossible. He dies as a result of his quest; it is the relentlessly unsatisfied woman-mother which kills him. The ancient myth of the man-devouring woman is recreated in modern terms.

The mythical aspect of the story is evident in the style and the symbols. The opening lines, "There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck," contains both the ancient and the modern. The first seven words have a fable-like quality reminiscent of any number of fairy princess tales, yet the word advantages locates us in the atmosphere of the modern world; so does the word luck. The same juxtaposition of the mythical and the modern continues through the story; the same combination of the anonymous and the personal is repeated. Passages like the following demonstrate this juxtaposition of myth and modernity:

There were a boy and two little girls. They lived in a pleasant house, with a garden, and they had discreet servants and felt themselves superior to any one in the neighborhood. Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house___The child had never been to a race-meeting before, and his eyes were blue fire. He pursed his mouth tight, and watched. A Frenchman just in front had put his money on Lancelot. Wild with excitement, he flayed his arms up and down, yelling "Lancelot! Lancelot!" in his French accent..

The father in the story has no identity; he goes "into town to some office" and his "prospects never materialized," The central conflict is between the mother and the son, not between the man and his wife, even though the husband-man is responsible for the mother's plight. Where the man-husband fails, the son-boy tries to compensate; because it is the nature of the mother's needs that the boy cannot satisfy them, the boy is doomed from the beginning. The bizarre scene in which the bedeviled boy rides himself to death dramatizes Lawrence's idea that modern man is terrorized and finally engulfed by his incapacities to overcome his oedipal confrontation with the devouring woman-mother.

Source: Donald Junkins, "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*: A Modern Myth," in *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. II, No. 1, Fall, 1964, pp. 87-9.

# Adaptations

*The Rocking-Horse Winner* was filmed in 1950 by Two Cities Films and stars John Mills and Valerie Hobson. The adaptation was written and directed by Anthony Pelessier.

*The Rocking-Horse Winner* was filmed in 1977 starring Kenneth More, directed by Peter Medak, adapted by Julian Bond, distributed by Learning Corp.

# Topics for Further Study

Although the children's father is mentioned in "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*," he never actually appears. Why do you think the mother's brother, Uncle Oscar, has a larger role to play in this story? What do you think Lawrence was trying to say about the role of men in the raising of their sons?

How does "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" portray the desire for material wealth?

What were women's career options during the 1920s? How might this reality figure into the mother's lack of love for children? Explain your answer.

# Compare and Contrast

**Then:** The financial circumstances experienced by the family in "*The Rocking-Horse Winner*" are shared by many upper-class people in the years surrounding World War I. Great emphasis is placed on possessions and the appearance of wealth among the privileged, particularly in London.

**Now:** In 1996, Princess Diana officially divorces Prince Charles, receiving an estimated $26 million dollars to insure that her lifestyle remains secure.

**Then:** The English family undergoes a transformation with married couples having fewer children than previous generations. Of couples married in 1925, 16 percent have no children, 25 percent have one child, 25 percent have two, and only 14 percent have three or more children.

**Now:** From 1970-1995, the average number of children per family worldwide falls from six to three. The average size of a family in a developing country is 3.9.

**Then:** By 1928 in England, all women eighteen years or older can vote. Increasing numbers of women begin to seek out intellectual and economic opportunities for themselves.

**Now:** Opportunities for women are largely equal to those for men. In 1990, Margaret Thatcher steps down after 11 years as Great Britain's prime minister.

Lawrence became interested in the psychological motivations for why people do the things they do. Psychology as a science was in its infancy at this time. Sigmund Freud, the "father" of modern psychology, was formulating his theories regarding the unconscious through observing his patients at his practice in Vienna. Lawrence was also convinced that the modern way of life, long hours at cruel jobs for little pay, was dehumanizing. His characters were often failures in relationships who felt aliented in their misery. Furthermore, his writing was frequently embellished with themes about greed, materialism, and degrading work, which were issues of increasing concern to people at the time.

# What Do I Read Next?

*The Collected Short Stories of D. H. Lawrence* (1974) is the complete collection of Lawrence's short stories.

Lorenzo in Taos (1932) by Mabel Dodge Luhan, describes the time that Lawrence spent in Taos, New Mexico.

"King of the Bingo Game" by Ralph Ellison is a story that explores the role of fate in a black man's life at a moment he is in particular need of money to save his dying wife.

"Araby" by James Joyce, a contemporary of Lawrence, is a story about a boy's epiphany regarding his schoolboy crush on a playmate's sister.

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Snodgrass, W. D, "A Rocking-Horse: The Symbol, The Patterns, The Way to Live," in D. H. Lawrence.

A Collection Blanchard, Lydia "D. H. Lawrence," in Magill's Critical Survey of Short Fiction, edited by Frank N. Magill, Salem Press, 1981, pp 1788-94.

Provides an analysis of Lawrence's short stories.

Spilka, Mark. An introduction to D. H. Lawrence: A Collection of Critical Essays, Prentice-Hall, 1963, pp. 1-14.

Spilka gives an overview of Lawrence's career and works

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Stacy Melson



*For more information, contact*
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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:

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535