Wandering Willie's Tale Study Guide

Wandering Willie's Tale by Walter Scott

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Introduction

"Wandering Willie's Tale," by Sir Walter Scott, first appeared in Scott's 1824 novel, *Redgauntlet*. The tale is not directly part of the action of the novel; it is simply a story told by one of the characters to another, and in fact is merely the most developed of such stories contained in the novel. Several other times in *Redgauntlet* the action stops while one character tells another the story of his life or of one specific event. In this case, Wandering Willie, a blind fiddler, tells Darsie Latimer, a young man traveling in the Border region of Scotland, a cautionary tale to warn him to be wary of whose company he accepts on his travels, for even a friendly traveler may turn out to be the devil in disguise.

Later in the novel it is revealed that the story Willie told concerns some of Darsie's ancestors, but Darsie and the reader do not know this at the time, and so the story seems at first to be something almost entirely separate from the rest of the novel. Indeed, some early readers of the novel and some later commentators regarded the tale as being quite distinct from the larger work, sometimes praising it at the expense of the novel. Later commentators, however, have tended to see thematic connections between the two. Critics have noted that they both reflect Scott's ambivalent interest in Scottish traditions, and have drawn a parallel between the tale's account of a trip to hell and the novel's depiction of Darsie's encounter with his dark, mysterious uncle. Commentators new and old have praised Scott's handling of Scottish dialect in the tale, and in general have described the story as one of the best ever written.

Author Biography

Born in Edinburgh in 1771, Scott was interested all his life in Scottish history, folk tales, and the supernatural, three of the major components of "Wandering Willie's Tale." As a child, he listened to stories and songs about the Jacobite rebellions in which some of his distant relatives had fallen, and he developed a lifelong sympathy for the lost cause of Jacobitism, writing about it in several of his novels, including *Redgauntlet,* the novel in which "Wandering Willie's Tale" is found. However, his attitude to Jacobitism and the old feudal and heroic ways was ambivalent; he became a lawyer like his father, and was very much a part of the modern world of law and commerce, in opposition to the old feudal Scotland symbolized by the Jacobites.

In a sense, Scott took it upon himself to seek some sort of incorporation of the old Scotland into the new by writing extensively about Scottish history, notably in his Waverley novels, beginning in 1814 with Waverley itself, a story set at the time of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion. Other titles in the Waverley series include *Guy Mannering, The Heart of Midlothian, and Old Mortality*, the latter being set during the religious struggles involving the Presbyterian Covenanters in the late seventeenth century, the same setting found in "Wandering Willie's Tale." Scott's Waverley novels became very influential in the nineteenth century as a model and an inspiration for the historical novels of William Makepeace Thackeray, Robert Louis Stevenson, and others.

Scott's interest in folk traditions led him to make a series of expeditions to the Border country (where Scotland meets England) in the 1790s in search of folk songs and poems, many of which he eventually published in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* in 1802. His interest in such folk material, especially any such material with supernatural overtones, continued all his life; most of the incidents in "Wandering Willie's Tale" come from folk legends about ghosts, devils, and hell.

Scott's interest in the supernatural was also stimulated by the influence of German romantic writers and the English writer Matthew Lewis, known as Monk Lewis because of his popular Gothic novel of horror, *The Monk*. Scott made Lewis's acquaintance and contributed to his *Tales of Terror* in 1799. He later wrote about ghosts and demons in such ballads as "The Eve of St. John" and "The Gray Brother" and used supernatural elements in such stories as "The Tapestried Chamber," "My Aunt Margaret's Mirror," "The Highland Widow,", and "The Two Drovers." Supernatural elements can also be found in his novels, notably in *The Bride of Lammermoor*. In 1830, just two years before his death, he produced a nonfiction work on the supernatural, entitled *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*.

Plot Summary

"Wandering Willie's Tale" opens with an account of Sir Robert Redgauntlet and one of his tenants, narrated by a character, Wandering Willie, who does not appear in the tale himself. Sir Robert, a strong supporter of bishops, is much feared as a persecutor of Presbyterians during the political and religious struggles in Scotland after 1660. Sir Robert's tenant, Steenie Steenson, has no strong political or religious convictions himself, but he accompanies Sir Robert as a loyal follower on his persecuting expeditions. He also plays the bagpipes for him.

After the 1688 Revolution, Sir Robert's party loses power, and he cannot continue his persecutions. Although he is not punished by the new government, he loses the income he used to receive from the fines imposed on the Presbyterians. As a result, he becomes more strict about collecting his rent from tenants like Steenie, who falls two payments behind and is threatened with eviction.

By borrowing from his neighbors, Steenie is able to raise the rent money and brings it to Redgauntlet Castle, where he finds Sir Robert with his pet monkey, named Major Weir after a notorious wizard. Sir Robert is ill, in part because he has been fretting over having to evict his long-time tenant, and he looks ghastly. He sends Steenie off with the butler, Dougal MacCallum, to have a drink while he counts the money, but Steenie and the butler are hardly out of the room when they hear Sir Robert crying out in agony. Steenie takes fright and runs off, not waiting for a receipt, and word goes round that Sir Robert is dead.

Sir Robert's body is put in his old room in preparation for his funeral. Dougal the butler makes the arrangements, but looks like a corpse himself and finally confides in Hutcheon, another servant, that he has heard Sir Robert calling him on his whistle every night, just as he used to before he died. Dougal says that if he hears the whistle again he will answer the summons as long as Hutcheon goes with him. The whistle sounds that night, Hutcheon and Dougal go to Sir Robert's room, and Hutcheon faints when he sees the devil on Sir Robert's coffin. Dougal is later found dead beside the coffin.

After the funeral, Sir Robert's son and heir, Sir John Redgauntlet, calls Steenie in about the rent. Sir John, a lawyer, will not believe Steenie's claim to have delivered the rent money, since there is no evidence of payment. Steenie has no receipt, the payment is not recorded in the rent book, and the money itself has disappeared. The only witnesses to the payment, Sir Robert and Dougal, are both dead. Sir John accuses Steenie of trying to cheat him and demands to know where the money is. Desperate and angry, Steenie says the money must be in hell with Sir Robert, then runs out of the castle while Sir John calls out for someone to stop him.

Steenie rides off to see one of the men he borrowed money from, hoping he can get some more from him, but the two of them end up arguing, and Steenie rides off through a dark wood to an inn, where he has a drink, curses Sir Robert, and calls for the devil's assistance. On riding away from the inn, Steenie encounters a stranger who offers to

help him by taking him to Sir Robert. Steenie is frightened but follows the stranger to a place that looks like Redgauntlet Castle, but is ten miles away from where the real castle is. Dougal, the dead butler, opens the castle door and ushers Steenie into the parlor, where Sir Robert and numerous other dead men, all notorious persecutors of Presbyterians, are carousing. They seem to be enjoying themselves, but their contorted smiles and wild laughter frighten Steenie, who feels like a man in a dream. Sir Robert (or his ghost or a devil in his shape, as the narrator puts it) asks Steenie to play the pipes and offers him food and drink, but following the warnings of Dougal, Steenie refuses and simply insists on getting his receipt. Sir Robert finally gives it to him and tells him the missing money is in the Cat's Cradle. He then asks Steenie to return in a year to pay him homage, but Steenie says he serves God, not Sir Robert, at which point everything becomes dark and Steenie faints.

Steenie awakes in the parish churchyard, then goes to Sir John to present the receipt and his story. Sir John at first seems angry at the suggestion his father is in hell, but calms down and wants to look for the money. Hutcheon says that one of the castle's turrets is known as the Cat's Cradle, so Sir John climbs up there, pistol in hand, and shoots when attacked by something coming from the turret. The attacker turns out to be the pet monkey; Sir John flings its dead body aside and announces that the missing money is indeed there. He later apologizes to Steenie for doubting him and asks him to keep quiet about the whole incident, for although it shows Sir Robert to be concerned about justice even after death, it also suggests unpleasant things about where Sir Robert is now. Sir John even offers to reduce Steenie's rent and agrees to let Steenie tell the story to the parish minister, who says that though Steenie has gone far into dangerous matters, he should be safe as long as he lives a careful life from now on. Sir John tries to destroy the receipt, but when he tosses it in the fire it flies up the chimney without burning. He then circulates a story saying that the monkey was to blame for all the strange goings-on; he says the monkey stole the money and blew the whistle, and it was the monkey Hutcheon saw on the coffin. But Steenie insists on his own version, and the narrator says that Heaven knows the truth.

Introduction

Introduction Summary

"Wandering Willie's Tale" is a short story written by Sir Walter Scott, which was included as a chapter in his later novel, Redgauntlet. The short story begins with the author introducing Wandering Willie, in an epistle to a friend. He says that the old man has an odd way of speaking. At times he uses colorful adjectives, and at others his words are stilted and common. If the narrator did not know better he would believe that the man was out of his mind. However, the man, who is blind, is well known as an excellent storyteller, and so the author believes his odd way of speech to be part of his storytelling skill and asks if he will tell him a tale. The old man agrees to do so and says that he will tell a true story about his grandfather.

Introduction Analysis

The exposition of "Wandering Willie's Tale" sets up the subject matter of the rest of the story. The "tale" mentioned in the title is that of the old man's grandfather, whose name is never mentioned. The author uses the title break "Wandering Willie's Tale" after the short introduction in order to delineate between the narration of the author and that of the old man.

Wandering Willie's Tale

Wandering Willie's Tale Summary

The second part of "Wandering Willie's Tale" is told by the old man. He begins by describing Sir Robert Redgauntlet, who is very rich and lives in a grand castle called Primose Knowe. Sir Robert is feared by many men and readily compared to the devil. Yet he is well liked by his tenants and his battle companions for he treats them better then most lairds, or lords, as he is lenient with rent.

The old man next introduces one of Sir Robert Redgauntlet's tenants, Steenie Steenson. Steenie is one of Sir Robert's favorite tenants since he is a talented pipe player. He is also a favorite of Dougal, Sir Robert's butler and confidant. All is well with the relationship between the two men until after the Revolution when Sir Robert Redgauntlet finds himself in need of money and thus becomes insistent that his tenants pay their rent on time. This is not good for Steenie because he does not make much money and is often late with his rent. Steenie convinces his neighbor to lend him the money and goes to Sir Robert's castle to pay his rent. He is happy to pay Sir Robert and return to his good graces. Once he arrives at the castle, Dougal ushers him into a room where Sir Robert and Major Weir, the laird's jackanapes (a monkey), wait. Steenie approaches the table and lays his small sack containing his rent money before Sir Robert, who is happy to see Steenie with the rent and tells Dougal to get a brandy for Steenie while he counts the money and writes out a receipt. However, before the men can leave the room Sir Robert cries out that he is burning, and although they try to help him, Sir Robert dies.

Dougal is greatly saddened by his master's sudden death but continues to plan the funeral arrangements. Dougal confesses to Hutcheon, his friend, that he has been hearing calls from Sir Robert's bedchamber where his body now lies. Dougal has yet to answer his master's calls but can ignore him no longer. He asks Hutcheon to accompany him next time the calls are heard. Sure enough, that night a call is heard coming from Sir Robert's chamber that causes Dougal and Hutcheon to go investigate the noise. When they arrive, they see Sir Robert sitting on top of his own coffin. Hutcheon calls out and flees the room while Dougal drops dead of shock.

Meanwhile, Sir Robert's son, Sir John, arrives from Edinburgh to see to his father's estate. He summons Steenie and tells him that he has yet to pay his rent due. Steenie tries to explain that he paid the rent, but Sir Robert died before he had a chance to write a proper receipt. Steenie explains that Dougal witnessed the transaction, but since Dougal suddenly died as well, Steenie has no proof. Sir John points out that the gold coins that Steenie used as payment are nowhere to be found. Steenie leaves the castle feeling defeated. He doesn't know what he will do to rectify the situation.

Night is falling as Steenie rides home through the woods where he comes upon a stranger also riding on horseback. Despite Steenie's rebuffs, the stranger will not leave

Steenie alone. Steenie tells him that he has no money, so if the stranger is a robber he is wasting his time. He also tells the stranger his plight concerning the missing rent money. The stranger sympathizes with Steenie and tells him that he thinks he can help.

Steenie thinks that the stranger means to lend him the rent money. However, the stranger explains to Steenie that Sir Robert is disturbed by the trouble he has caused, and if Steenie will follow him, he will get his receipt. Steenie is scared at the prospect of seeing his dead laird, but he follows the stranger until they came upon a clearing. In the clearing, Steenie is confronted with a replica of Redgauntlet Castle surrounded by merriment and dancing like the castle was when Sir Robert was alive. He knocks on the door, and Dougal answers it as he did when he was alive. Dougal ushers Steenie to where Sir Robert waits after warning him not to eat or drink anything while he is there.

Steenie finds Sir Robert holding court in the middle of a lively room just as he used to do. He bids Steenie to play a song on the pipes, but Steenie is afraid that by doing so he will be worshiping the devil. He is therefore relieved that he does not have his pipes with him. Much to Steenie's dismay, Sir Robert has a set of pipes brought out that he has been saving for Steenie. Steenie blanches at the thought of playing for Sir Robert in this strange place and says that he is too faint to play. At this statement, Sir Robert offers him food and drink so that he may regain his strength. Steenie refuses, though, remembering what Dougal told him.

Finally, after telling Steenie where he may find the bag of rent money, Sir Robert gives Steenie what he has come for, the receipt. However, he tells Steenie that he must come back and play for him once a month, for nothing is given in this place without due payment. Steenie denies Sir Robert this request, telling him that he only performs for God's pleasure, not Sir Robert's. As Steenie says the word God, the world around him darkens, and the next thing he knows, he is lying on the grass. At first he thinks the whole episode is a dream, but he still has the receipt that Sir Robert gave him.

Steenie picks himself up and goes to Redgauntlet Castle to show the receipt to Sir John. Sir John examines the receipt and notices that it is dated just yesterday, while his father has been dead for several days. Steenie confirms that he got the receipt from Sir Robert himself. Whether Sir Robert is in heaven or hell, he does not know. Steenie tells his story, including the fact that he was told that they could find the missing rent money in a place called the Cat's Cradle. Sir John decides that the only way to ascertain the truth of Steenie's story is to locate this place called the Cat's Cradle. The two decide to ask Hutcheon, who points them to a niche high in a corner near the ceiling. In this niche, they find the body of Sir Robert's jackanapes and the bag of money that the animal hid there. With that, Sir John agrees to accept the receipt and bag of money as proof that Steenie has paid the rent. As long as Steenie agrees to not tell anyone that he saw Sir Robert in that place, then Sir John will give him a reduced rent.

Relieved that the matter of the missing rent has been settled, Steenie goes to the village priest to seek his advice on whether or not he should heed Sir Robert's request of returning to play for him once per month. The priest tells him that by refusing the devil's food and drink and by also refusing to play homage to the devil by playing the pipes, he

has kept himself out of mortal trouble. He should not put himself back in danger by returning to that place. The story ends with the older man telling the author that strange things can happen when you choose to follow a stranger in your travels. The author agrees and thanks the old man for sharing his story with him.

Wandering Willie's Tale Analysis

The exposition of the old man's story introduces Sir Robert Redgauntlet to the reader. He is painted as a rather rude, brass, yet brave man. It is of particular note that Sir Robert is compared to the devil, since this sentiment foreshadows Sir Robert's fate in the afterlife. The next character to be introduced is Steenie Steenson, who plays the protagonist to Sir Robert's antagonist. Steenie is a good-natured man who is down on his luck financially, as opposed to Sir Robert who is basically an evil man with great riches. This changes, however, when Sir Robert gets a taste of financial difficulty, which forces him to be more forceful in the collection of rent monies. Not only does this present a crisis for Sir Robert, but for Steenie as well, since he has to borrow the money that he owes.

Finally, Steenie arrives at the castle to settle up with his landlord. However, right after he presents Sir Robert with the bag of coins, and immediately before he is able to collect his receipt, Sir Robert dies. This represents a major point of rising action in the plot structure. All of the characters are in crisis, and there is yet to be a movement toward resolution.

However, Steenie has only begun to feel the full force of his predicament. Soon he finds himself in the position of not being able to prove that he has paid his rent. After Dougal, his only witness, mysteriously dies, Steenie's situation seems hopeless. Also, it is important to note that Dougal dies after he sees the deceased Sir Robert's sitting on his own casket. This, combined with the fact that Sir Robert was compared to the devil, implies that there is supernatural - and evil - business afoot. The fact that Sir Robert yells that he is burning shows that Sir Robert's soul is destined for hell rather then heaven.

Sure enough, Steenie soon finds himself confronted by a stranger who offers to help him get a receipt for the rent that he paid. Although the idea of seeing Sir Robert again, after he has died, unnerves Steenie, he is not in a position to refuse help. After following the stranger, Steenie is led to a replica of Sir Robert's castle, complete with the same grounds and horse carriage. Dougal meets Steenie at the door, just as he had when he was alive, and leads him to see Sir Robert, who has been expecting his former tenant.

Dougal gives Steenie only one bit of advice, that he must not eat or drink anything while he is there. It is a common trope in literature that, in mysterious, supernatural lands, if you eat or drink while there, you must remain there. While the place that Steenie has found himself in is never identified by specific name, it is inferred that Sir Robert has ended up in hell. Dougal, whose demeanor was described as kind, most likely also ends up in hell because he chooses to continue serving his master, Sir Robert. Perhaps

Dougal makes this choice by responding to his master's call. It is also possible that, since Dougal warns Steenie about the food and drink, Dougal became trapped with his master by consuming food or drink with him.

Dougal's advice is put to good use, since Steenie is tempted with both food and drink while he is in the presence of Sir Robert. Sir Robert also demands that Steenie play the pipes for him as he did before, but Steenie refuses. His instinct tells him that it would be a bad idea to play in that place. Finally, Sir Robert gives Steenie the receipt he has come for, but only after he tells Steenie that he must return once a month to entertain him. This time Steenie, having gained a boldness that he previously lacked, announces that he will only play for the pleasure of God, and not for Sir Robert. At this moment, the world around Steenie goes dark, and he wakes in the real world. Steenie's verbal refusal to play for Sir Robert symbolizes his denial of his place in hell and his desire to serve only God, rather than Satan or any earthly lord. Since Sir Robert was a lord in life, he symbolizes an authoritarian force that competes with God. Just as Sir Robert and Steenie were opposites in life, so are they opposites in death. While Sir Robert goes to the devil, Steenie refuses the devil.

Even though Steenie has been magically transported to the real world, he still retains one piece of hell, the receipt that Sir Robert gave him. He goes to Redgauntlet Castle to present this receipt to Sir John and tell him location of the bag of rent money. Sir John is shocked at Steenie's tale, but he follows the directions to the Cat's Cradle and locates the money. Sir John has Steenie promise not to share the fact that Sir Robert has ended up in hell with anyone in exchange for a lower rent rate.

With that matter resolved, Steenie has a discussion with the local priest about Sir Robert's last demand of him that he return and entertain him once a month. The priest confirms Steenie's belief that he has done the right thing in not playing the pipes in that place since to do so would be akin to worshiping the devil. Partaking of the food or drink offered in that place would symbolize the acceptance of the devil. The priest believes that Steenie's soul is safe from Satan's grasp and will continue to be so if he does not revisit that place.

"Wandering Willie's Tale" concludes just as it began, in the author's voice. He thanks the old man for sharing his story with him. The old man tells the author that it just goes to show you how a chance meeting with a stranger can change the course of your life. This piece of advice can be extended to mean that the author's meeting with the old man and the story that he therefore heard may in fact change his view of life.

Characters

Tibbie Faw

The female innkeeper who serves Steenie a drink on his way into the dark wood.

Horseman

See Stranger

Hutcheon

A servant in the Redgauntlet household, Hutcheon loyally accompanies Dougal the butler when the latter answers the call of the dead Sir Robert. Later, because he knows the traditions of Redgauntlet Castle, he is able to explain what the Cat's Cradle is, which perhaps suggests the importance of preserving one's connections with the past.

Laurie Lapraik

Laurie Lapraik, a neighbor of Steenie's who lends him money for his rent, puts himself forward as a Presbyterian now that the Presbyterians are in power, but the narrator says he is actually a sly fox who adjusts his beliefs according to what is popular. He refuses to help Steenie a second time, instead unfairly blaming him for persecuting Presbyterians. Through him Scott may be suggesting disapproval of the Presbyterians and a preference for their opponents, the old rough knights like Sir Robert Redgauntlet.

Dougal MacCallum

Dougal is Sir Robert Redgauntlet's loyal butler, ready to follow him even into death. He is friendly to Steenie and gives him important advice in the haunted castle. His relationships with Steenie and Sir Robert suggest something of the close ties that could develop in the old feudal world, in contrast with the purely monetary relationships associated with new men like Sir Robert's son.

Minister

The minister disapprovingly tells Steenie that he was "tampering with dangerous matters" in his adventure, but adds that he will probably be in no further danger from Satan as long as he leads a prudent life from now on. He thus acts as a force for pulling Steenie back from the world of his adventure. On the other hand, he does help spread the story of the adventure by telling it to his wife, who repeats it after he dies.

Sir John Redgauntlet

Sir John is very different from his father. He carries a small rapier, unlike the huge broadsword Sir Robert used to wear, suggesting that violence is less important to him. He is a smooth-talking Edinburgh lawyer who will not believe Steenie about the rent without some supporting evidence for his story. He even accuses Steenie, falsely, of trying to cheat him, and unlike his father, he seems to have no qualms about pressing for his rent and threatening eviction. He is also very much concerned about his reputation, making sure that Steenie does not tell people that Sir Robert is in hell. He does resemble his father at times, for instance, when he swears at Steenie and when he shoots the monkey in the castle turret. But mostly he presents a contrast with his father, being concerned with law, money, and reputation in a way his father was not.

Sir Robert Redgauntlet

On the surface, Sir Robert Redgauntlet looks like the villain of the story. He is a violent persecutor of Presbyterians and is said to be in league with the devil. When his income is reduced, he squeezes his tenants and threatens to evict Steenie. However, he seems to be upset about the eviction threat, as if he would rather not be resorting to such measures; and before his income problems led him to become strict about the rent, he was kind to his tenants and his followers. He inspires loyalty in Steenie and in his butler, and when his son replaces him, the tenants think they would have been better off with Sir Robert. He does end up in hell, perhaps a fitting end for a "rough auld Knight," but he seems to be enjoying himself there in his revels with his companions, and even in hell he is honorable enough to give Steenie the receipt he asks for. He is representative of the good and bad of the old ways, both the violence and the loyalty. Money does not come first for him, as it seems to for his son.

Steenie Steenson

Steenie is the protagonist of the story, but in some ways is quite passive for a protagonist. In part, his social position as a tenant and follower of Sir Robert Redgauntlet creates this passivity. He is not a leader, that is not his role in life; it is his job to support his master even in doing such villainous things as persecuting Presbyterians. The story itself also puts Steenie in a passive position. He does not seek to do great deeds or to go out on adventures; he is pushed into action by external forces: the demand for rent payment and the urgings of the mysterious stranger. However, once embarked on his adventure, Steenie acts bravely and wisely, standing up to the ghost of Sir Robert and not letting himself be lured into taking part in hellish activities. Steenie is no saint—he argues, curses, and calls for the devil's help in the course of the story—but he has been a loyal follower, he has many friends, he ends up declaring his service to God, and overall he is the character with whom the reader is asked to identify.

Willie Steenson

See Wandering Willie

Stephen Stevenson

See Steenie Steenson

Willie Stevenson

See Wandering Willie

Stranger

The mysterious stranger appears out of nowhere as Steenie rides through a dark wood. He has a strange effect on Steenie's horse and frightens Steenie by telling him he can take him to see the dead Sir Robert. Neal Frank Doubleday, in his book *Variety of Attempt*, suggests that the stranger is the devil in disguise, a suggestion also made by the narrator, Wandering Willie, in the passage in *Redgauntlet* preceding the tale. Supporting this view is the fact that the stranger appears just after Steenie calls for help from "Man's Enemy." If he is the devil, however, he is, as Doubleday suggests, in quite a helpful mood. He will not make Steenie bargain his soul away (he comments that Steenie might not like his terms if he gave him money), but he will help him with his financial difficulties.

Major Weir

Major Weir, Sir Robert's pet monkey, is cantankerous like Sir Robert and appears at one point wearing a coat and Sir Robert's own wig, as if he were Sir Robert's alter ego. On one level, his role in the story is to provide an alternative, non-supernatural explanation for some of the strange events at Redgauntlet Castle. He himself is associated with the supernatural, however, through his name, which is that of a famous wizard. And his resemblance to Sir Robert may be meant to suggest that Sir Robert has something of the animal about him: a wild naturalness, in contrast with his more civilized citydwelling son the lawyer.

Wandering Willie

The narrator reveals little about himself as he tells the tale, except that he is the grandson of Steenie Steenson, the protagonist. Elsewhere in *Redgauntlet*, however, the reader learns that Wandering Willie is a blind fiddler who travels around the country with his wife, playing his fiddle at dances. He is a wild-looking elderly man with a long gray beard, and he fascinates Darsie Latimer, a young man traveling in the Border region

who is seeking to discover his true identity. Though blind, Willie serves as Darsie's guide both literally and figuratively: he leads him to a cottage where a dance is taking place, and he gives him advice, in part through the story he tells him: "Wandering Willie's Tale."

Themes

The Clash of Old and New Worlds

One of the themes of "Wandering Willie's Tale" is the clash between the old and the new. The story begins with a description of the old rough ways of Sir Robert Redgauntlet, his violent attacks on Presbyterians combined with his kind treatment of his tenants and followers. Now, however, the world has changed; the persecutions have ended, and Sir Robert does not ride out on violent expeditions anymore. At the same time, he is forced to be more strict with his tenants about their rent. This upsets him—it may even be what kills him—but he does it, and his son has no qualms at all about continuing the process.

In days gone by, there was more than a monetary relationship between Sir Robert and his tenants; Steenie went out riding with him and played the bagpipes for him and in effect had a friendly relationship with him. The story suggests that Sir Robert's much more modern son will have no time for any of that and will look to his tenants solely for their rent. The feudal days of loyalty and service (and violence) are being replaced by a world focused much more on money and the law.

Nostalgia

Associated with the theme of the clash of old and new is the suggestion that something good has been lost with the passing away of the old world. Early in the story the narrator comments that his grandfather's house is deserted now and in a sorry state. Things have deteriorated; they are not what they were. He also notes that the tenants preferred their old landlord to their new one. In general the story suggests that there was something better about the days of old, despite all their violence: they were a time of fellowship and festivity that seems now to have been lost. Some of that festivity can be seen in the phantom castle, where there is much drinking and singing, but of course all the participants in those revels are dead. In effect, such festivities are dead too; they will not be seen in the real Redgauntlet Castle now that Sir John has replaced his father.

The Role of the Supernatural

One question the story raises is whether to believe in the existence of the supernatural. Did Steenie visit hell? Did the devil appear on Sir Robert's coffin? Did the dead Sir Robert first summon Dougal and then write out a receipt for Steenie? Sir John tries to provide rational explanations for all the events, blaming his father's pet monkey for some of them and suggesting that Steenie's visit to the phantom castle was a dream or the result of too much brandy. One thing Sir John cannot explain away, however, is the rent receipt signed by his dead father; perhaps that is why he tries to burn it. The story seems to suggest that even in a mundane everyday life focused on raising money to pay the rent, there is a place for mystery and the supernatural.

Ambiguity

The uncertainty over whether the supernatural is at work is just one example of ambiguity in the story. A minor example of the same thing is the narrator's statement that he does not know whether the firs in the wood are black, as everyone says, or white. Readers of the whole novel in which the story is found can understand the narrator on a literal level here: he is blind, so how can he tell what color the trees are? But the statement fits into the larger sense of uncertainty in the story, also reflected in uncertainty about the existence of the supernatural and about whether the old rough days were good or bad.

Trusting Strangers

Wandering Willie says the point of his story is not to trust strangers. He says as much when he finishes recounting his tale to Darsie Latimer, in the paragraph of *Redgauntlet* that immediately follows the story. Darsie, however, contests this interpretation, saying that it was because Steenie trusted the stranger in the dark wood that things turned out well for him.

Although Willie is the narrator—and therefore perhaps the one who should know—Darsie seems to be right. It is true that the stranger appears to have been the devil in disguise, but in this case the devil was trustworthy, and so the explanation that Wandering Willie proposes for his own story seems to be false.

Dealing with Dark Forces

Whereas Willie suggests that the theme of his story is that one should be wary of strangers, the story actually suggests that it is necessary to engage with the dangerous aspects of life. The mysterious stranger may have taken Steenie to hell, but that is where he has to go to solve his problem. He has to travel through the dark wood, enter the phantom castle, and confront the ghost or demon who looks like his dead master. At the same time, he must not be lured into staying in hell; he is not to join the devil's party. But he must confront the hellish company in the phantom castle in order to get the receipt that will save him from eviction back on earth.

This theme is a symbolic one having to do with the need to engage with the darker side of life in order to achieve one's ends. One must sometimes wrestle with demons, or at least make demands of them, while at the same time remembering that one's place is not with the demons but back at home. Another way of stating this theme is to say that it is sometimes necessary to go on a heroic quest, like Steenie's visit to his dead master, in order to complete a task in a strange environment and then return to the everyday world strengthened by one's accomplishment.

Style

Point of View and Narration

"Wandering Willie's Tale" has an unusual point of view that combines elements of first-person and third-person narration. On the one hand, the narrator is not a participant in the events; he is not telling his own story in the manner of Huckleberry Finn or one of Edgar Allan Poe's murderers. For the most part, he functions as an objective third-person narrator, recounting the actions of all the characters without entering the minds of any of them, except to comment occasionally that the protagonist is frightened.

On the other hand, the narrator does identify himself as the grandson of the protagonist and refers to his own activities at times. For instance, he tells of recently visiting his grandfather's house and mentions his own knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of the color of the trees in Pitmarkie wood. Readers of the novel in which the story appears know the narrator as a character in his own right (Wandering Willie) who takes part in the action of the novel. Still, this is primarily a story told from an objective third-person point of view, although clearly the narrator must be distinguished from the author; it is Wandering Willie, not Sir Walter Scott, who tells the story.

Folk Tradition, Dialect, and Setting

Wandering Willie mentions at one point that he has heard this story told many times, and the impression conveyed is that of a folk tale handed down through the generations. The story presents itself as part of an oral tradition among ordinary folk, not the work of an individual author. That the story is told in Scots-English dialect reinforces its folk nature and helps transport the reader from the modern rationalistic world to a world of legend in which mysterious, supernatural events can occur.

The story is set in the Border region of Scotland, away from any city, contributing to its folk quality. It is also set in the past; Willie is telling a story of days gone by, further distancing the events from modern rationalism and creating a setting in which the reader is more likely to accept supernatural events. The use of a historical setting, especially the historical overview that begins the story, also enables Scott to draw a contrast between past and present.

Dramatic Form

Scott does something unusual partway into the story, abandoning the normal dialogue conventions of fiction to present the encounter between Steenie and Sir John in dramatic form, that is, with speech headings as if this were a play instead of a story. It is also this particular dialogue that Wandering Willie says he has heard so many times. That comment of his, along with the use of the unusual dramatic form, lets the reader

know that this encounter is a crucial one, representing the clash of worlds central to the story.

Flash Forward

Scott uses another unusual device at one point: a brief flash forward into the future, in which Wandering Willie mentions that Sir John in later years voted for the Union between Scotland and England, an action that would have horrified his father. This brief look ahead helps Scott draw the contrast between father and son and between the old ways and the new—between traditional Scotland as a separate country and modern Scotland as a part of the United Kingdom.

Gothic Elements

The story employs many of the techniques of Gothic fiction: supernatural elements including ghosts and demons, wine that turns to blood, and cold water that suddenly boils; Gothic settings such as an old castle and a journey through a dark wood; a mysterious stranger; and moments of terror. However, unlike the traditional Gothic story, the purpose here is not to create terror for its own sake, or to show characters succumbing to supernatural forces, but to show how the protagonist succeeds despite being in a frightening situation.

Symbols and Other Devices

Scott uses the different sort of swords carried by the two Redgauntlets (a small rapier for Sir John, a huge broadsword for his father) to symbolize the two men's different attitudes toward violence. The image of Sir Robert's rent book being propped open by a book of indecent songs also suggests something larger than itself: that Sir Robert is at least as interested in partying as in collecting his rents. And the decay of Steenie's house, as reported by his grandson, is another symbol, this time of how things have deteriorated in general over the years.

The anthropomorphic treatment of the pet monkey (dressed in human clothes, wearing Sir Robert's wig) is part of the eerie, Gothic nature of the story and also functions as a symbol of the eccentric, rough character of Sir Robert.

Historical Context

Scotland in the Late Seventeenth Century

The story begins with an account of Sir Robert Redgauntlet's involvement in actual historical events of the second half of the seventeenth century, including the mid-century civil wars and the persecution of the Covenanters after 1660. The Covenanters were the supporters of the Presbyterian National Covenant of 1638, which had aimed at abolishing bishops in the Church. During the civil wars of the 1640s, the Presbyterians succeeded in removing the bishops. After Charles II regained the throne in 1660, however, the bishops were restored, the Episcopalian opponents of the Presbyterians took over control of the national Church of Scotland, and many Presbyterian ministers lost their positions. Some of these ejected ministers took to preaching at open-air field-meetings, which the government tried to suppress. Open warfare broke out in 1679, resulting in the defeat of the Covenanters and the imposition of punitive measures on Presbyterians, such as fines, torture, and arbitrary trials and executions, especially during the "killing time" in the 1680s. However, the 1688 Revolution removed the Stuart king (then Charles's brother James II) from the throne and led to the restoration of Presbyterian control of the Church of Scotland. The Church has remained Presbyterian ever since.

In the story, Sir Robert is on the side of the Episcopalians and the Stuarts, both of whom lost in the long run. Similarly, he is associated with the oldfashioned feudal organization of the countryside, in which tenants and landlords had more than just a monetary connection: certain tenants held their land in return for military service and other service in addition to monetary payment. In return, the landlord owed them protection and served as their leader in military activity. This system was dying out in the seventeenth century and was finally abolished by legislation that took effect in 1748.

Scott was sympathetic to lost causes and traditions like those associated with Sir Robert Redgauntlet. In *Redgauntlet* and other novels in his Waverley series, he writes sympathetically of the Jacobites, who fought for the lost cause of restoring the deposed Stuart monarchy, and who were basically the eighteenth-century version of Sir Robert. As Wandering Willie says, Sir Robert was a "Tory, as they ca' it, which we now ca' Jacobites." For Scott, the Jacobites were associated with the past glories of Scotland, which fired his imagination, though at the same time he recognized that the passing away of those glories had been necessary to allow Scotland to develop into a modern, prosperous nation. This ambivalence towards the legacy of the past can be seen in the story: Sir Robert is dead and gone, and in any case was excessively violent, but there is a life to him even in hell which seems missing from his modern lawyer son.

Literary Influences

Colman Parsons, in his book *Witchcraft and Demonology in Scott's Fiction*, traces the sources that Scott drew on for "Wandering Willie's Tale," notably a folk legend published in an 1814 work called *Strains of the Mountain Muse* by Joseph Train. This legend includes many of the elements of Scott's story: a landlord's sudden death which prevents a tenant from getting a receipt for a late payment, the refusal of the landlord's son to believe the payment was made, a stranger who conducts the tenant on a trip to a phantom castle in a wood, the discovery of the dead landlord and other dead men in the castle, and the dead landlord's willingness to provide a receipt. Scott also drew on accounts of anti-Covenanters, which described them as being in league with the devil.

More generally, Scott had a lifelong interest in the supernatural, stimulated by his early reading of German romantic literature, some of which he translated, and by his association with the Gothic novelist Monk Lewis. He also read the Gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe, best known for the novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Scott criticized Radcliffe for providing non-supernatural explanations for the apparently supernatural occurrences in her fiction, something that he has Sir John Redgauntlet do (but not entirely unsuccessfully) in "Wandering Willie's Tale."

Critical Overview

*Redgauntle*t, the novel in which "Wandering Willie's Tale" first appeared, was not an immediate success when it came out in 1824. One reviewer complained that there were too many villains in the novel and that the heroes were too passive. Others complained that Scott was repeating himself by writing again about the eighteenth-century Jacobites (a group who wanted to return the throne of England to the heirs of James II). However, though the novel as a whole did not win praise, Wandering Willie's story within it did. The *Westminster Review* called Willie's tale the best thing in the book, and Scott's friend Lady Louisa Stuart (quoted in W.M. Parker's preface to the Everyman edition of the novel) wrote Scott to say that "the legend of Steenie Steenson . . . [was] in the author's very best manner." She added that she wished there had been more of Willie in the novel.

At times, the tale has been praised at the expense of the novel. In 1948, the noted critic F.R. Leavis wrote in his influential study *The Great Tradition* that Willie's tale was "the only live part" of *Redgauntlet*. However, critics in the last half of the twentieth century have had a more positive view of *Redgauntlet*. Although some have criticized its eclectic structure (its use of a variety of narrative techniques, including letters, a diary, and objective narration), most have seen it as Scott's last serious novel. They have also rejected the notion that the story is alien to the novel; even though the novel as a whole is realistic and the story is a fantasy, they see thematic connections between the two having to do with the importance of quests and master-servant relations in both. Critics have also noted that both the story and the novel deal with historical conflicts: the seventeenth-century Covenanter struggles (over the Scottish Presbyterian Covenants) in the story and the eighteenth-century Jacobite struggle in the novel.

Scott's overall reputation declined dramatically in the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, he was celebrated as the "Wizard of the North," and his Waverley novels helped create the genre of historical fiction, but beginning as early as the 1870s he began to fall out of favor and was seen as boring and lacking in seriousness. The last decades of the twentieth century have seen a revival of academic interest in him, but he still has not recaptured the preeminent rank he held during his lifetime. Yet although Scott's reputation and that of *Redgauntlet* have fluctuated over the years, "Wandering Willie's Tale" has always won praise. The Victorian poet D. G. Rossetti spoke highly of it, as did the twentieth-century writer John Buchan, who called it one of the best half-dozen stories ever written. Later writers have been somewhat more restrained, saying it is only one of the best 25 or 50, but there is general agreement that it is an excellent story, Scott's best in the supernatural short story genre. In the last two decades of the twentieth century alone, it has appeared in at least five anthologies of supernatural fiction.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Goldfarb has a Ph.D. in English and has published two books on the Victorian author William Makepeace Thackeray. In the following essay, Goldfarb discusses the interaction of the themes in "Wandering Willie's Tale" and the connection of the tale to the novel in which it appears.

At first glance, "Wandering Willie's Tale" seems like an odd combination of the supernatural and the mundane. On the one hand, it is the story of a visit to what seems like hell. On the other hand, the point of the visit is to obtain a rent receipt. This odd combination may be what led one commentator (A. O. J. Cockshut in his book *The Achievement of Walter Scott*) to deny that the story is a tale of the supernatural. And it may be what led another commentator, David Daiches, in his essay on *Redgauntlet* in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad*, to say that the supernatural elements are brought into the story simply to give the feel of a folk tale to what is actually a realistic story about master-servant relations.

However, as Colman Parsons points out in *Witchcraft and Demonology in Scott's Fiction* , Scott's story derives from a real folk tale about a visit to hell; that is, the supernatural elements are not some extra frills stuck on by Scott, but are embedded in the heart of the story. Moreover, the rent payment is also at the heart of the story. Both elements are there in the original folk tale, which in fact is the way with folk tales: they combine the otherworldly with the down-to-earth in an artless fashion, reflecting a time when there was a stronger sense of connection between everyday reality and the world of ghosts and demons.

Indeed, it may be that one of the reasons Scott sets this story, like so much of his fiction, back in the past is to get back to a time when ghosts and demons seemed more real, or at least a time when there were "rough auld Knights" like Sir Robert Redgauntlet, who were so terrifying that one might think they were the "deevil incarnate" or at least had a compact with him.

Sir Robert is a terrifying presence in the story, and yet also a compassionate and just one. He wreaks havoc against the Covenanters, but is kind to his own followers, at least until the changing times force him to start squeezing his tenants for the rent and threatening to evict them if they cannot pay. Similarly, in the novel outside the story, Hugh Redgauntlet, the grandson of Sir Robert, terrifies his nephew Darsie, and yet is a noble and inspiring presence even in defeat. What is more, he provides Darsie with the thing he is looking for: the key to his identity. In the same way, Sir Robert in the story provides Steenie with what he is looking for: his receipt.

There are multiple messages in all this. First, there is the traditional message of quest literature: the hero must confront dangerous forces to obtain what he is looking for. Wandering Willie is quite wrong to tell Darsie that the moral of his tale is that one should avoid strangers. On the contrary, the story suggests that it is important to follow strangers even to hell if one wants to achieve what is necessary. At the same time, it is

important not to get stuck in hell; in the traditional quest story, the hero must return from his journey with the magic potion or golden fleece or rent receipt, not stay with the sorcerers who gave it to him—or else all his efforts will be in vain. Thus Steenie has to avoid eating and drinking or playing the bagpipes in the haunted castle, and in the novel beyond the story, Darsie has to refrain from joining his uncle's Jacobite conspiracy.

On a less symbolic level, the reason Darsie has to hold back from the Jacobites is that they represent a lost and hopeless cause. They are representatives of a past that cannot return, of an older, more primitive Scotland that has given way to a more modern world. Similarly, in the story, the world of fighting associated with Sir Robert has passed away. He has hung up his pistols and sword, and no longer rides off to slaughter Covenanters. Of course, the violence associated with Sir Robert cannot really be approved; the peace that follows the Revolution is surely better in some ways. And yet there is an ambivalence in the story, as there is in the novel—as indeed there is in all of Scott, according to Daiches.

Scott, says Daiches, had a complex attitude towards tradition and progress. He recognized the benefits of living in a modern, commercial society free of the lawlessness of old Scotland; yet old Scotland, with its heroism and its national pride, had a great appeal for him. He knew the Jacobites had been doomed to lose, and that it was good that they lost, but he sighed for their cause and wrote about them repeatedly.

In the novel, modern society is not particularly appealing. It is represented by, among others, a Quaker named Joshua Geddes whose efficient modern fishing methods threaten the livelihoods of the old-fashioned spear-fishermen. It is also represented by Peter Peebles, who has foolishly pursued an incomprehensible law case for years, and who is also responsible for having evicted an old woman for not paying her rent, an action that leads indirectly to her death.

The threat of eviction for non-payment of rent is central to "Wandering Willie's Tale" as well. The threat begins when Sir Robert is still the landlord, but the story suggests that Sir Robert is reluctant to carry it out. This would be only natural, for Sir Robert is of the older, feudal world that placed less emphasis on money. In Sir Robert's world, status derived less from wealth than from the number of followers one had; it thus would be foolish to expel tenants. But the changing times have forced Sir Robert to change too; however, he does so with great reluctance. In fact, having to change seems to have made him ill, and symbolically one could say that the change kills him: the idea of evicting Steenie, or even pressing him for money, is too much for him. It is as if he cannot stand to adopt these new commercial ways; he will seek to stick to the old ways or die. Indeed, the next time we see him he is dead, in hell, but carousing and enjoying himself in his raucous old fashion, surrounded by companions.

The point is that the old feudal ways of protection and service can exist now only outside of this world. Thus when Dougal the butler seeks to follow Sir Robert and continue in service to him, he has to die too.

Sir John Redgauntlet, in contrast to his father and Dougal and Steenie, is a representative of the new world. He is a lawyer and has no qualms about pressing for his rent or threatening eviction. He comes across as cold and unfeeling, though no doubt he is less murderous than his father. Those impulses are still there, however, even in this Edinburgh lawyer; they can be seen when he erupts in anger at Steenie, "swearing blood and wounds behind him, as fast as ever did Sir Robert," and when he shoots the monkey.

The death of the monkey further demonstrates the end of the old ways. Named after a famous wizard, Sir Robert's pet seems eerily associated with the powers of darkness, all the wild, animallike forces that can no longer exist in Sir John's world of law and order. No wonder Sir John is the one who shoots him.

Scott of course is not recommending some sort of return to the violent feudal world of Sir Robert, nor to the world the Jacobites tried to bring back. But he does seem to be suggesting that for all its violence, there was something about the old Scotland that is worth remembering and preserving. There is life in Sir Robert even after death: even in the haunted castle he and his companions seem livelier than Sir John could ever be. And there is honor in Sir Robert too: he will give Steenie his receipt, unlike his legalistic son, who insists on proof from Steenie and will not accept his word.

The two major themes of the story are the need to confront dangerous, even hellish, forces if one wants to achieve one's ends and the appeal of the old dead Scotland. In a way they connect. The dangerous forces that used to ride abroad in Sir Robert's day, in the days of old Scotland, are dead and gone; if you would seek them now, you must go out of this world, to hell or to haunted castles. But you *should* seek them, Scott seems to say. You should not seek to live in some other, unearthly world, but you should journey to such a world, in some symbolic way, to gather some of the strength that is there, some of the strength that has gone out of this world. In "Wandering Willie's Tale" and in the novel in which it appears, Scott himself achieves this feat. In them Scott brings the old powerful world to life again, and he invites his readers to venture into that world for a while so that they may emerge reinvigorated and better able to deal with the more humdrum world in which they live, the world where they must cope with such mundane problems as having to pay the rent.

Source: Sheldon Goldfarb, for *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Kerschen has a master's degree in Creative Writing and a doctorate in literature and has taught English on the secondary and college levels as well as writing for a variety of media. In the following essay, she points out the sources for the storyline in "Wandering Willie's Tale."

During the early 19th century, Sir Walter Scott was considered the greatest European writer, first for his poetry and then for his novels. His income from writing and the anticipation with which the public awaited each new work is comparable to the stature of Stephen King or John Grisham today. Scott largely achieved his success by following the first basic rule of writing: Write what you know. Of course, part of what one knows is what one has read, and good writers draw upon this background. In Scott's case, "Wandering Willie's Tale" is an interesting blend of personal experience and literary study.

Scott spent a great deal of time as a child at his grandfather's home in the country. Away from his middle class life in the city, Scott was exposed to the common people of the Border lands. He saw how they lived, learned their vernacular, and listened to their stories. Eventually, Scott would become a serious collector of folk ballads and tales, not only for their historical value to the Scottish culture, but also as a source of material for his own writing. As if to prove his belief that writers are affected by their environment and the climate of their age, these influences can be seen over and over in a variety of the books that Scott produced.

For example, "Wandering Willie's Tale" is a masterpiece in the use of the vernacular. Scott captures perfectly the language of the characters in his story, thus making the story more realistic and giving it the "local color" that would become such a popular literary device later in the century, especially in the stories of writers such as Bret Harte and Mark Twain who traveled the American West and South and lived among the people of these regions. By copying the vernacular and describing the style of dress and settings, they shared their experiences, just as Scott did by copying the speech and customs of the Scottish country folk in his story.

Scott's talent also involved his ability to retell an old story in his own creative way. The gist of "Wandering Willie's Tale" was published in 1810 in a version that was only a few pages long. Scott elaborated on the basic story and incorporated into it the above-mentioned elements of local characters and language. In addition, he gave the story familiarity to the reader by including common themes from mythology, devil lore, and fairy tales. Scott was heavily influenced by Germanic and Gothic literature, which was the most fashionable literary trend in Scotland when Scott was a young man studying the law. Germanic and Gothic literature are rife with fairy tales, fantasy adventures, and folk stories of the preternatural. In fact, Scott's first book was a verse translation of two German supernatural ballads.

It is not a big leap from the genre of Grimm's fairy tales and the literature that produced Faust to Willie's tale. The same elements of the dark, the mystical, and the "stranger in the forest" appear in both the fairy tales and Scott's story. The tragedy of Faust, the magician who enters into a contract with the devil, has been copied countless times. The present-day Broadway musical "Damn Yankees" is just another version of the same basic story. In Scott's fantasy tale, Steenie Steenson reports that Sir Robert was thought to have "a direct compact with Satan" and we are led to believe that he is condemned to live his same raucous life throughout eternity in hell as the price of his compact.

In "Wandering Willie's Tale," Steenie Steenson is well aware of the tricks of the devil and is careful not to get tricked into bargaining his soul. He is wary of everything that is offered to him because he has been taught that tasting any food in the underworld could lead to the spirits having a claim on you. These beliefs go as far back as the ancient Greeks and Romans whose mythology holds that Persephone had to stay in the land of the dead for six months of every year with her abductor, Pluto, because she swallowed six seeds from a pomegranate that she ate there. Similar injunctions can be found in Oriental religions and in Homer when Ulysses is warned about the Land of the Lotus Eaters.

One of the most common symbols for the devil or the preternatural in literature is that of the monkey. Various strange animals can be used, such as a glowing-eyed cat, a snake, or a raven, but an exotic creature like a monkey adds mystery to the story. Most students are familiar with the bizarre powers of "The Monkey's Paw." In keeping with this assumed relationship, Scott casts the monkey in "Wandering Willie's Tale" as the evil culprit and it is the monkey's image that is seen sitting on Sir Robert's casket. While the monkey and its image may have been borrowed from common superstition, the creature gets its name from a wizard executed at Edinburgh in 1670 for sorcery. Another of Scott's additions to the original 1810 tale was an element that he borrowed from himself. In his book *The Antiquary*, Scott described another servant who dies while trying to answer the call of the dead mistress that she thinks she hears calling to her. Furthermore, a note on that passage indicates that Scott got the idea of the scene from a report on the death of a servant to the Duke of Roxburghe. On the day of the Duke's burial, the servant thought he heard his summons bell and died trying to get out of bed to answer it.

In creating his description of Sir Robert Redgauntlet, Scott got the idea of the horseshoe mark on Sir Robert's forehead from a couple of sources. One was from a famous poem that referred to a lord having an image on his brow, and the other was from the legend that a certain notorious witch had a horseshoe mark on her forehead. Superstition has long held that a horseshoe mark is a sign of the devil because the devil has hooves. If Sir Robert has the devil's horseshoe mark on his forehead, that means he has been branded as the devil's property. The details about water seething when Sir Robert's gouty feet were plunged into it and wine turning into blood when Sir Robert takes the goblet are taken from published descriptions of two of the men who were condemned as political enemies by the Scottish society to which Scott belonged.

Further superstitions are woven into the story that may have been commonly known or were borrowed from fairy tales. The toasts that Steenie Steenson drinks to Sir Robert supposedly cause the subsequent events to happen. Such consequences remind one of the superstition: Be careful what you wish, for it may come true! The stranger's offer to buy Steenie's horse may be the devil's first attempt at a favor which must be repaid with Steenie's soul. The stranger seems to be helpful, though, when he advises Steenie not to eat, drink, or accept anything offered to him in Sir Robert's unearthly castle. The sympathetic stranger is a character found in fairy tales and is usually someone who has already fallen under an evil spell and is trying to spare a fellow human from the same fate.

Finally, Steenie's clever retort that he will return in a year as ordered only if it be "God's pleasure" is a well-known device for getting the devil to go away. Ever since Christ said "Begone, Satan," people have believed that invoking Christ's or God's name, or holding up a cross, will drive away the devil. A similar superstition believes that a cross will hold back a vampire. Having called upon God, the castle and its occupants vanish, and Steenie faints. In every such tale, the protagonist has to lose consciousness at a critical point so that everyone, including the protagonist, is left to wonder if anything he saw was real or just imagined in a dream. But there is usually some clue left as evidence that the event was real. In this case, Steenie has the receipt.

Just as Scott copied from his predecessors, others have copied from him. Several new forms of literature evolved from Scott's efforts. We study the author when we study a story because writers like Scott developed the genre of literary biography and established in the practice of criticism that one must understand the author to understand the work. Scott invented the ballad-epic form of poetry, caused the romantic novel to be considered a serious form of literature, and established the historical novel as the dominant narrative genre of nineteenth-century literature. In addition, Scott's use of the first person in "Wandering Willie's Tale" is an antecedent of the modern-day detective story—how I solved the mystery as told by Steenie Steenson or Sam Spade or any of a number of famous sleuths. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, the first-person narrator is his associate, Dr. Watson, but the effect is the same: disassociation of the author from the story. This way, the reader will focus on the tale and not the author. This is supposed to be Willie's tale, not Scott's, to the reader. Successfully achieving the illusion is a hallmark of good writing and Scott's mastery of the technique adds to his greatness.

Writing what you know is often autobiographical, and that is definitely true of Scott's works. He embedded into his stories his political leanings, his education, his morals, and his worries. The element of debt in Wandering Willie's Tale probably stems from the fact that Scott, despite his great wealth, was nonetheless heavily in debt for years. Like so many celebrities, he lavishly outspent his income and became involved in some bad business deals. But Scott's strong sense of honor caused him to work hard to pay his creditors. He churned out book after book not only from genius, but from necessity. Scott's courage and character in adversity evoked admiration even into the later years of the nineteenth century from the Victorian readers who were always looking for moral examples in their public figures and in their literature. There is a lesson in Willie's

experience—The reader knows that Willie has probably not been a stranger to the devil in his wayward life, and that may be why he suffers a trip to hell that teaches him to call upon God for salvation.

Scott wrote stories that would have popular appeal, and thus big sales, but still managed a remarkable quality. Part of the appeal and the quality comes from Scott's ability to share his Scottish world in a universal way. Scott may have been influenced by his country upbringing, by his associates, and by the literature and climate of his times, but like all great writers, he knew how to control these influences and use them to achieve his purpose as a writer of masterfully crafted tales.

Source: Lois Kerschen, for *Short Stories for Students* , Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

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, she examines Scott's presentation of the battle between good and evil on Earth in Wandering Willie's Tale.

Sir Walter Scott's short story *Wandering Willie's Tale* is considered his greatest achievement in supernatural writing. Although Scott's reputation rests on his novels, his few short stories are well respected, if often overlooked. *Wandering Willie's Tale* appears in the novel *Redgauntlet: A Tale of the Eighteenth Century*, a work of historical fiction that relates the stories of the Redgauntlet family. Set in Scotland, the story is told by a blind traveler to another person who is significant to the novel in its entirety, but not to this story as a freestanding piece of short fiction.

Although the eighteenth century was marked by a sharp turn away from the supernatural and divine, and toward the natural and rational, Scott had a lifelong love of the folk literature of his native Scotland. He wanted to preserve the folktales and legends that had been kept alive by oral tradition.He also understood that the allure of ghost stories is part of human nature, regardless of literary and intellectual movements of the period. As a result, he continued to write fiction such as this eerie, supernatural story-within-a-story, which contains many elements common in Scottish folk literature. These elements include a traveling storyteller; a visit to hell; and dark miracles such as wine turning to blood and water boiling upon contact with an evil person.

Wandering Willie's Tale is squarely within the tradition of ghost stories and tales of the supernatural in that the interaction between earthly and otherworldly characters is intentional. Ghost stories generally involve some motivation on the part of the ghost or supernatural figure (unfinished business, revenge, deep sorrow, etc.); or, in some cases, the person or place being haunted deserves or needs the ghostly intervention, as in Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol*. In this tale, Steenie Steenson, the story's protagonist (he is the grandfather of Willie, the storyteller) chooses to visit the dead Sir Robert Redgauntlet to obtain a much-needed rent receipt. On the other hand, the reader also is led to believe that Steenie is summoned by Redgauntlet, who wants to tempt Steenie into losing his soul to the devil. In this story, it seems, both parties desire a meeting; good and evil are equally drawn to the battlefield.

On the surface, *Wandering Willie's Tale* appears to be a simple story in the manner of a folktale about the eternal struggle between good and evil. To an extent, this is the case; but Scott creates a story that is more complex and fascinating than that. Certainly, Redgauntlet is depicted as a truly evil man with no apparent virtue. A fanatical Tory, he prowls the countryside in search of Whigs and Covenanters to kill them without mercy. Willie says that Redgauntlet's name was known all over the land for his harshness and coldness, and that he killed countless people. The very name Redgauntlet evokes a sense of what kind of man he was. A gauntlet was a piece of armor worn over the hands in battle, so the addition of "red" to "gauntlet" elicits an image of a bloody, armored hand

in combat. Describing the power of Redgauntlet's evil, Willie says, "Men thought he had a direct compact with Satan—that he was proof against steel—and that bullets happed aff his buff-coat like hailstanes from a hearth. . . .' ' After the revolution, Redgauntlet could no longer terrorize his enemies and was resigned to life as a landlord. In that position, he was strict and uncaring toward his tenants, interested only in acquiring money. Redgauntlet also had a jackanape, which is a type of monkey or ape. The jackanape's name was Major Weil (after a warlock), and he was a mischievous and disagreeable beast that ran around the castle screaming and biting people.

Redgauntlet's death is a horrible scene in which he has a seizure. When he yells for his feet to be placed in water, it boils, and when he demands a sip of wine, it turns to blood. His dramatic death and the ensuing ceremony show that Redgauntlet was a tortured and depraved person with no attachment to religion whatsoever. Willie gives the reader no reason to believe that there was any kindness or piety at all in him, so it is not surprising when Steenie later sees him in hell. In fact, Redgauntlet's presence as the host of a great banquet in hell, surrounded by profane and hedonistic figures, affirms that Redgauntlet has been in league with the devil all along. When he tempts Steenie three times, the reader knows that the stakes are very high for Steenie, and even when Redgauntlet agrees to write the rent receipt "for conscience-sake," it is clear that his agreeableness is a ruse.

Turning to Scott's portrait of good, we find it painted in strokes less bold. Although Steenie is basically good, he has a number of flaws that prevent him from appearing pure and angelic to Willie, his listener, or the reader. Willie describes Steenie as a carefree man who bears no grudge against anyone and who delights everyone with his skillful pipe-playing. When the great conflict between the Tories and the Whigs breaks out, he had no strong feelings one way or the other, but since he lived on Redgauntlet's land, he joined him. Willie says that Steenie wished no harm to anyone, but riding with Redgauntlet, "he saw muckle mischief, and maybe did some, that he couldna avoid." It is implied that, because Steenie was Willie's grandfather, the "mischief" Willie casually mentions may well be a euphemism for violence and even murder. The outlines of Steenie's sins begin to emerge on Scott's canvas.

Later, after the misunderstanding about Steenie's rent payment, he was angry and afraid, and made two sinister toasts when he stopped to rest in the woods. First he toasted Redgauntlet, saying, "and might he never lie quiet in his grave till he had righted his poor bond-tenant." Second, he toasted the devil, invoking him to return the missing rent money or reveal where it was. Finally, the stain of sin deepens when Steenie recalls learning a tune on his pipe from a warlock as they were worshipping the devil. These episodes make clear that Steenie is far from a heroic and innocent protagonist. On the contrary, the reader may wonder for a time exactly what Steenie's soul's orientation truly is. His ability, ultimately, to resist Redgauntlet's temptations indicates an untapped source of strength. When he is finally able to invoke God's name, the entire scene of hell drops away, leaving only the darkness of the woods. The scene is a powerful one that illustrates that even a sinner such as Steenie can access the power of God's grace—though not without a harrowing struggle. The gravity of Steenie's experience weighs heavily on him, and he agrees to give up some of his vices until one

year has passed and he is sure that Redgauntlet will not return to claim his soul for the devil—something Redgauntlet has given him reason to fear. In letting the reader know that Steenie is abandoning his vices only temporarily, until danger seems to be at bay, Scott no doubt makes reference to the fact that human attempts at virtue are often short-lived. Steenie, by this time, has been painted as everyman.

At the close of the tale, Willie claims that the moral of the story is that one must be careful about following strangers on unknown roads. The fact that a mysterious stranger led Steenie to the hellish version of Redgauntlet's Castle seems a minor point in the story, so the reader must wonder why Willie offers such an unusual moral. Critics debate over the identity of the stranger. Some maintain that he is the devil himself, offering Steenie over to Redgauntlet in the hope of claiming him for an eternity in hell. Other critics note that the stranger is amiable and does not conform to the popular notions of the devil at the time the story was written. Further, he turns away an opportunity to take advantage of Steenie's desperation for money and strike a deal for his soul. Scholars add that while Scott's presentation of hell is somewhat in line with that of Dante in *The Inferno* (where sins become their own punishments), it does not comply with the common perception of hell at the time. The unusual portrayal of hell, therefore, casts doubt on the idea that the stranger was the devil.

Whether or not the stranger was the devil, the story is clear about the facts that Redgauntlet is in hell and that he attempts to trick Steenie into surrendering his soul. The story is also clear that the role of the mysterious stranger is to meet Steenie in the woods and guide him to Redgauntlet, and then to vanish. Steenie's decision to go with the stranger, knowing that he is being taken to see the deceased Redgauntlet, is the turning point in the story. The story takes on its supernatural and menacing dimension at this moment, which explains why Willie tells his listener to beware of dark and unknown figures who approach when one is feeling lost, desperate, and alone. Steenie trusted the man and found himself led into a struggle for his very soul.

The fact that Willie is telling the tale about his grandfather gives the story a sense of history that would be absent if it were about Willie or a contemporary. By dipping into the past, Scott gives the story a universal flavor that suggests that the battle between good and evil is ever and always being waged.

In *Wandering Willie's Tale* Scott offers a frightening portrayal of the struggle between good and evil. It is frightening because Scott paints evil as truly, wholly evil. Although Redgauntlet is suffering in hell—his strained signature on the receipt is proof—he does not try to warn Steenie against such a fate, but instead embraces his own corruption and attempts to lure Steenie, too, into an eternity in hell. And it is frightening, too, because even good is impure and tainted with evil. Steenie's soul bears streaks of evil; the good in him is barely adequate to keep him out of hell. The reader can identify with Steenie, and can also imagine things having gone the other way. This reminds the reader that his own soul, undoubtedly, is painfully imperfect and faces tests it is not guaranteed to pass; and leaves one feeling that it is wise, indeed, to beware of mysterious strangers on dark roads, who may very well be calling souls to immortal battle.

Source: Jennifer Bussey, for *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2000

Adaptations

The French Romantic poet and dramatist Alfred de Musset adapted "Wandering Willie's Tale" into a French stage play called *La Quittance du Diable* [The Devil's Receipt] in 1830, but the play was not produced owing to revolutionary disturbances that year in Paris. A production was mounted in Avignon, France, in 1998.

There have been several stage and operatic adaptations of *Redgauntlet*, the novel containing "Wandering Willie's Tale," including English stage productions in 1824, 1825, and 1872, the last named being in Dundee, Scotland (adaptation by A. D. McNeill). A French musical called *Le Revenant*, based on the novel, was put on in 1834 at the Paris Opera-Comique. A French opera called *Redgauntlet* was produced in 1843 (words and music by Paul Foucher and Jules Alboise de Pujol).

Topics for Further Study

How well does "Wandering Willie's Tale" fit the pattern of the quest story as outlined by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*? In what ways, if any, does it differ?

Compare "Wandering Willie's Tale" with its main source, the folk legend reprinted in Joseph Train's 1814 book, *Strains of the Mountain Muse* (pp. 191-95). Discuss how Scott altered the legend, pointing out specific instances. What did he add or change or leave out? What effect did his alterations have?

Read the rest of *Redgauntlet* and see to what extent "Wandering Willie's Tale" fits in with the novel of which it is a part. Some commentators have said the tale has little to do with the novel. Others say its themes parallel those of the novel. What is your view? Explain, using examples from both texts.

Compare the characters of Sir John Redgauntlet and Sir Robert Redgauntlet. Which one does the story seem to favor? Why?

Research the landlord-tenant relationship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What were the advantages and disadvantages for both tenant and landholder? Based on your research, do you think most landholders tended to feel kind toward their tenants or did they take advantage of their superior status? Is the character of Sir Robert representative of actual landholders from that era?

Research the Jacobites and loyalty to James II after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. What kind of reputation did the Stuart family have with their detractors and supporters? From what social groups did they draw their support?

Compare and Contrast

Seventeenth Century: In the seventeenth century, the old feudal relations involving service and protection, though passing away, still survived to some extent in Scotland, especially in the northern Highlands region.

Modern Day: Feudal tenure was legally abolished in Scotland in 1748, and by the nineteenth century, when Scott was writing, it was only a memory. Today it is hardly even that; the notion of landlord-tenant relations involving military service or any other sort of relationship beyond rent payment is hard even to grasp.

Seventeenth Century: Scotland in this century still had a lawless, violent aspect; violent persecutions took place, as did fighting between clans. The central government was not always able to assert its control.

Modern Day: In some ways, the situation in old Scotland resembles the American frontier of the nineteenth century, a region where the rule of law did not always extend and violence was common. Similarly, Scott's writings about the old rough days in Scotland have a certain similarity to twentieth-century Westerns; both describe a violent, lawless past in a romanticized way.

Seventeenth Century: Religious persecution, including laws against Presbyterians and violent acts against them by individuals with or without government sanction, was common. **Modern Day:** Although religious toleration is common today, religious conflict is far from eradicated. For instance, Catholics and Protestants have engaged in violent clashes against each other in Northern Ireland for many years.

Seventeenth Century: Old Scotland was an independent country until the Union with England in 1707. In the years after that, especially after the final defeat of the Jacobites in 1746, Scottish national feeling was a romantic sentiment but little more. It is this sentiment that Scott brings to life in his novels without seriously advocating a return to Scottish independence.

Modern Day: In the late twentieth century, especially after the collapse of Communism, old national feelings revived around the world. Countries like Czechoslovakia split in two, the old Soviet Union broke up into smaller units, and Yugoslavia tore itself apart in civil war. In Scotland itself, nationalist feeling has increased. At the very end of the twentieth century, though remaining part of the United Kingdom, Scotland got its own Parliament back for the first time in nearly 300 years, along with a limited amount of autonomy.

What Do I Read Next?

Redgauntlet (1824) by Sir Walter Scott, the novel in which "Wandering Willie's Tale" is found, is a tale of a young man's quest to discover the secret of his identity told against the background of a failed Jacobite rebellion.

Old Mortality (1816) by Sir Walter Scott is a novel about the struggles between the Covenanters and anti-Covenanters in seventeenth-century Scotland.

The Bride of Lammermoor (1819) by Sir Walter Scott is a love story set against the backdrop of Scottish history and events that may or may not have supernatural explanations.

The Supernatural Short Stories of Sir Walter Scott (1986), edited by Michael Hayes, includes Scott's other supernatural tales.

"Young Goodman Brown" (1835) by Nathaniel Hawthorne is a short story about a young man who may or may not have attended a witches' sabbath.

"The Devil and Daniel Webster" (1937) by Stephen Vincent Benet is a story about a struggling American farmer who accepts the devil's help and then regrets it.

"Thrawn Janet" (1882) by Robert Louis Stevenson is a horror story told in Scots dialect involving the devil.

Dr. Faustus (1594) by Christopher Marlowe is one of the earliest versions of the story of making a deal with the devil.

The Odyssey (8th century BC) by Homer is the original quest story. Odysseus encounters various supernatural beings during his attempt to sail home to Greece.

The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949) by Joseph Campbell is a non-fiction study of the various heroes and quest motifs found in world folklore and literature, suggesting that all the heroes are just variants of one archetypal hero in one archetypal quest story.

Further Study

Boatright, Mody C., "Scott's Theory and Practice Concerning the Use of the Supernatural in Prose Fiction in Relation to the Chronology of the Waverly Novels," in PMLA, Vol. 50, 1935, pp. 235-261.

In this book, Boatright explores Scott's inclusion of supernatural themes in his writings in general and in relation to the Waverly Novels.

Brown, David, *Walter Scott and the Historical Imagination*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

A study of Scott's Waverley novels.

Cowan, Ian, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 1660-1688, London: Gollancz, 1976.

A study of the religious struggles in seventeenthcentury Scotland.

Daiches, David, "Scott's *Redgauntlet*," in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad*, edited by Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr., University of Minnesota Press, 1958.

Daiches' review of the great English writers provides an overview of notable figures and important literary movements.

Harris, Wendell V., *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: A Literary and Bibliographic Guide*, Wayne State University Press, 1979.

This book provides an overview and guidelines for researching Britain's nineteenth-century short story writers.

Hewitt, David, ed., *Scott on Himself: A Collection of the Autobiographical Writings of Sir Walter Scott*, Scottish Academic Press, 1981.

Through letters, essays, and other personal writings, this book offers the reader insight into Scott's life and times.

Johnson, Edgar, *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown*, 2 vols., New York: Macmillan, 1970.

A detailed biography of Scott containing corrections of the errors in Lockhart's biography.

Lockhart, J. G., *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 6 vols., Edinburgh: Cadell, 1837.

A detailed biography of Scott by his son-in-law. Includes an autobiographical memoir by Scott himself.

Mitchison, Rosalind, *A History of Scotland*, 2nd ed., London and New York: Methuen, 1982.

A standard political history containing a critical perspective on the Covenanters.

Parsons, Coleman O., "Demonological Background of 'Donnerhugel's Narrative' and 'Wandering Willie's Tale,'" in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 30, 1933, pp. 604-617.

Folklore, superstition, and belief in the supernatural are examined as they appear in literary work in the early nineteenth century.

———, *Witchcraft and Demonology in Scott's Fiction with Chapters on the Supernatural in Scottish Literature*, Oliver and Boyd, 1964.

In this book, Parson discusses popular beliefs about evil powers in Scottish culture, specifically as they relate to the writings of Scott.

Scott, Sir Walter, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft,* George Routledge and Sons, 1887.

Scott discusses the origins of black magic and expands his treatment to include fortune tellers, apparitions, witches, charms, and immortality. There is specific commentary on Major Weir, after whom the jackanape in "Wandering Willie's Tale" was named.

Smout, T. C., *A History of the Scottish People*, 1560-1830, London: Collins, 1969.

Focuses on social and economic developments.

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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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