Souvenir Study Guide

Souvenir by Jayne Anne Phillips

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Introduction

"Souvenir" is one of the twelve longer stories published in Jayne Anne Phillips's collection *Black Tickets.* The other fifteen stories in this collection are very short and are, appropriately, characterized as "short short stories." *Black Tickets* was published in 1979 to widespread critical acclaim.

The protagonist of "Souvenir" is the adult daughter of a fifty-five year old mother who is diagnosed with a potentially fatal brain tumor. Kate's mother is better able to face this terrible possibility with acceptance and calm than is Kate or her adult brother Robert. In this story, the younger woman struggles to come to terms with death, loss, and separation. Phillips presents Kate's special efforts to maintain a close contact with her mother, even though, as the conversations and scenes between them reveal, she and her mother sometimes disagree. The reader learns, for example, that Kate sends her mother a Valentine's Day card every year, except the year in which the events of this story take place, this year when her mother falls ill. By having Kate's failure to fulfill this special gesture coincide with the year that her mother falls ill, Phillips points to the inevitable failure of, or, at least, inadequacy of, our attempts to overcome or avoid the pain of life's separations.

Author Biography

Jayne Anne Phillips was born in Buckhannon, West Virginia, on July 19, 1952. She began to write at the age of nine as a way to entertain herself and her friends, and at the age of fifteen she became serious about herself as a writer and started to compose poetry. She received encouragement from her mother and a high school teacher, Irene McKinney, who was a poet in her own right. Phillips attended West Virginia University, and continued writing, publishing her work in small literary magazines.

Following her graduation from West Virginia University in 1974, Phillips hitchhiked with friends to California, lived in Oakland, California, for a time, and then moved to Colorado. She held various jobs to support herself during this period and gathered material that has sustained her writing ever since, although perhaps her short story collections most obviously record the lives she led, and the lives she witnessed, during her early adulthood. Eventually Phillips returned to West Virginia, later joining the prestigious Iowa writers' program.

In 1976 Phillips's collection of very short stories *Sweethearts,* was published. By the end of 1979, Phillips had completed the Iowa program, *Black Tickets* had been published to great acclaim, and she had given up a professorship at California State University at Humboldt in favor of a fellowship at Radcliffe College on the East coast. She also had begun work on her first novel, *Machine Dreams.* "Souvenir," with its treatment of educated middle-class characters (a mother, a daughter, and a son), stands out in the collection *Black Tickets* as one of the longer stories and also as one of the few stories which is not about working-class Americans or more socially marginal characters. Phillips now lives near Boston, Massachusetts, with her husband and children, and she continues to write and publish novels and short stories.

Plot Summary

"Souvenir" is related by an omniscient narrator. This narration is occasionally supplanted by dialogue between characters. The story begins with the information that the story's protagonist, Kate, has always sent her mother a Valentine's Day card, timed to arrive precisely on the holiday. This year, however, Kate has forgotten until it is too late for a timely mailing. She waits until the evening of the holiday and telephones her mother instead. Their conversation provides insight into their professional lives and their relationship.

The next morning, Kate's brother Robert phones to tell her that her mother is in the hospital. Kate flies to the hometown that Robert and her mother never left and meets her brother at the hospital. He insists that they keep from their mother the truth about her condition: that she suffers from a possibly malignant brain tumor and that the surgery itself may prove debilitating or fatal. Kate dislikes the deception, but Robert points out that they will know nothing for certain until after the surgery, which may in fact be entirely successful.

Kate and Robert visit with her mother. Some tension is evident between them, which their mother skillfully diffuses by joking with them. Alone in the room after Robert leaves and her mother has been taken away for more medical testing, Kate finds that her mother has brought with her all of the Valentines that Kate has sent her over the years. She spends the night watching over her mother. The next morning they eat breakfast together and look out the hospital room window at a fair or carnival set up in a park across the highway. They reminisce about the county fairs and carnivals that Kate loved as a child, and Kate offers to ask her mother's doctor if they can walk over to the park.

The two women cross a pedestrian footbridge and approach the park and its amusement rides. They ride the Ferris wheel together, Kate holding her mother's hand at first and then grasping the metal safety bar. Her mother tells her calmly that she knows "what you haven't told me" about her condition. Mother and daughter gaze levelly at one another and the story ends.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Souvenir describes a relationship between a mother and daughter. It uses thirds person narrative to reveal the nature of the relationship as the protagonist, Kate, discovers that her mother is dying. As the story opens the setting reveals that it is near Valentine's Day. Kate always sends her mother cards on Valentine's Day. She times when she should send the cards through the mail so that they will arrive at her mother's house on the February 14th. Her parents had always celebrated Valentine's Day and after Kate's father died, six years ago, she continued to send the cards as a gesture of remembrance. At first she made the cards herself. She made collages or would press grass on construction paper sewn in fabric. Now she sends store bought cards, glossy art reproductions with blank insides. Kate uses coloured ink to write in them. She would scribe simple, single line messages. Sometimes she would send a small gift inside the card, something that would be small enough to fit in the envelope, like perfumed soap.

This year Kate forgets to send a card, even though Valentines Day displays are placed in stores as a reminder. The holiday is near when Kate remembers. It is too late to send a card and have it arrive on time. She decides to call her mother long distance instead. She waits until nighttime, when the rates are low. Kate's mother's voice grows brighter when she hears her daughter on the phone. Kate asks her mother what she is doing. Her mother tells her that she was trying to sleep. Kate's mother is running in-service training sessions for primary teachers. She is the school superintendent at Kate's hometown school. She tells her daughter that the students at the training sessions are driving her crazy. Kate comments that at least they create a need for her job. Kate tells her mother that she forgot to send a card. Her mother is disappointed. She says the cards bring her good luck. Kate's mother wants the phone conversation to be short because it's costing Kate money. She asks her daughter how she is doing.

Kate is a university student. She jokes with her mother about spending time with her professors. Kate asks her mother if there are any men in her life. Her mother says no. She says once and awhile a married salesman comes through her office and asks her out to dinner, but she declines. She asks her daughter to write to her. Kate hangs up the phone and sits watching the windows of neighbour's houses. Her window curtains don't match. Her mother's curtains are all the same. Kate makes Chinese tea and turns the lights off. Her mother never has real tea in her house, just a bad diabetic mix in place of tea. Her mother keeps the "tea" packets next to miniature white scales that she uses to weigh food portions for meals. She is diabetic.

Kate often has headaches at night. She wonders if there is an agent in her body or secret in her blood that works against her. When she drifts of to sleep, the phone blares repeatedly. Kate runs out of bed, naked and cold. She stumbles before she realizes that her phone is on her bedside table where it always has been. Kate had recently stared wearing makeup again and when she wakes up her mascara is smeared, like when she

was in high school. It is Kate's brother Robert calling to tell her that their mother is in the hospital. He says they don't know what is wrong but she's having tests done. Robert is not sure about what happened. He knows their mother called neighbours and they took her to Emergency around dawn.

Robert's voice still has an accent, a slight twang that had disappeared from Kate's voice over the years. Kate imagines that her brother is calling from his insurance office. It is nine in the morning in his time. He wears thick glasses and a wide, perfectly knotted tie. Robert is a member of the million-dollar club. A small picture of him once appeared in *Mutual of Omaha* magazine. Kate would never make much money. Kate thinks his voice seems small over the distance. She asks if their mother is all right and asks how serious it is. Robert says that they are not sure. Kate thinks the doctors in her mother's town are no good and suggests that she should see someone else. Robert comments that Kate knows how their mother is about money. Kate asks if she can call her mother. Robert says not yet. He tells her not to get their mother worried because she is scared enough already. They hang up the phone.

Kate goes to the washroom to wash her face. She feels guilty about the Valentine's card. After breakfast she will call the hospital. She sits with her coffee for a long time, thinking about how many meals she and her mother ate alone. They ate at similar times of the day, hundreds of miles apart. Kate thinks about the last person she shared breakfast with. It was someone she met at a bar, who was passing through town. She is glad that she has forgotten his name. Kate has not slept with anyone in five weeks, and she was beginning to get dark circles under her eyes. Kate reached for the phone but stops herself. It seems like bad luck for her to ask for news.

Kate thinks about the previous summer. Her mother had argued with her. She warns Kate about what she will put herself through is she moves. They fight about Kate using birth control. Kate asks her mother why does she have to make her feel guilty. Her mother tells her that she might feel differently about her choices later on. Before Kate leaves they go shopping together. At an antique store they buy each other pewter candleholders. Kate's mom calls them a nice souvenir, to remind her to always be nice to herself. She tells Kate that if she lives alone she should eat by candlelight. Kate responds back jokingly and her mother replies that if Kate likes herself she must have done something right.

Robert phones again in the evening. His voice is tired and thin. He tells Kate that their mother has been moved to the University hospital. They can't deal with the problem at the hometown hospital. Kate is silent. She looks at her shoes, thinking they need shining. Her mother always says she never takes care of anything. Robert tells Kate that their mother has a tumour in her head. Kate says that she will be at the hospital the next day by noon. Robert warns her to do things his way. The doctors believe that the mother has a malignancy. Robert has decided that they are not going to tell her. The doctors don't think she can be saved. Kate agrees to do things her brother's way.

The hospital cafeteria is a large room with Formica tables. Across the highway there is a small park with amusement rides. A narrow river borders it. Kate finds it odd that anyone

would put a fair up next to a hospital. The sight is pleasant in a cruel way. Robert sits down with Kate. He tells her that their mom is booked for surgery in two days. There may be some paralysis afterward, facial or worse. Their mother doesn't know about any of this. She has been told the tumour is benign and that surgery will cause complications, but she will be able to learn back whatever she loses. The doctors hope this is true. Kate feels uncomfortable about lying to her mother. Rob doesn't see any other way to deal with it. Kate asks why they are even bothering to out her through the operations. Robert says it's because without it she will be in a great deal of pain very soon. Plus, she still may have a better chance than any of them think. Kate puts her hands on her face and closes her eyes. Behind her closed eyes she sees a succession of blocks tumbling over.

Kate and Robert take the elevator to their mother's hospital room. They stand close tighter, alone in the elevator. The doors open and stand in the hall with lunch carts that offer a hot bland smell. Kate looks at the women's shoes. They are covered in white polish. The nurses' legs look like boneless and two-dimensional white shapes. The elevator they step into is like a metal cage. Arriving at the room, Kate's mother looks small on the white bed. She seems powerless behind the metal bed rails. Kate's mother's hair is pushed back form her face. Her eyes seem different, wide and shiny with a veiled wetness. The room seems empty of anything else. Kate can only see her mother's eyes and the red roses with pine on the table beside her. Everyone sent the same flowers. Robert walks toward the bed with his hands clutched behind him as though he is afraid to touch anything. He asks his mother where the flowers came from. She says they came from school, neighbours and Kate.

Robert mentions that the doctors have said their mother wasn't eating. She says that she sounds irritated. She thinks they were sent in to convince her to eat. Robert says he has to make some calls back in his motel room. His mother is worried about the cost of him staying in a motel. They decide that Kate will stay for the next week or two and Robert will travel back and forth from home. He tells Kate he will be back at the hospital that evening. As Robert exits, Kate and her mother look at each other. Kate looks away guiltily. Her mother says that Robert has been there since yesterday and he is tired. Kate's mother says she feels like an invalid or lunatic in the hospital room. She tells her daughter that she had to take a leave of absence from work. Kate asks her mother if she knew something was wrong. Her mother says she did. She was having bad headaches but she thought they were migraines or her diabetes was getting worse. She was worried that she would have to be put on insulin.

An old woman stands at the open door. She looks confused as she stands there for a moment and then moves on. Kate's mother asks her to close the door. She says old women wander around the ward like refugees. She wants to get out of bed. She searches for a robe. They sit by the window as Kate's mother finishes eating. The light outside that has a tinge of spring. Kate finds this painful because it might vanish. Kate's mother says she will be taken for test any minute, but she would rather stay with Kate. Kate looks at the wrinkles on her mothers face. Her face seems unreal, as though her real face is behind this face. Her mother tells her that when she was four she said, that when she grows old she would be an angel who sweeps the rotten rain off the clouds.

Kate asks, where is God now? Her mother tells her she is not alone. Kate's heart becomes open and full when she hears this.

Kate's mother comments that her hands are dry. She is thankful for early spring. Looking at the park across the street, she says the park doesn't usually open until the end of March. Kate thinks her mother is helping her. She can't let her down. A nurse comes in with a wheelchair. Kate's mother doesn't want to use it, she thinks it's unnecessary, but the nurse convinces her. As the nurse takes her away she asks Kate to look for her hand cream. Kate looks through her mother's blue suitcase, a suitcase from years ago that still looks new. Her mother brought everyday use items, plus Kate's cards and some photos of her and Robert when they were babies. Kate wants fresh air. She walks to the window, carrying the cards and photos and placing them on the sill. As she pulls the screen back the alarm from her mother's clock goes off. Kate turns it off and brushes the bundle of papers with her arm. The cards fall to the floor. A few photos fall out the window and twirl through the air. She doesn't try to reach them. They look like scraps that are buoyant as they are blown away. Sirens sound from somewhere far off. They are almost musical. Their sound is drawn out, as though they are approaching carefully.

Kate's mother is back in her room. The nurse comes in to give her evening medication. The mother says she hopes they are strong enough. She didn't sleep much last night. The nurse assures her that she will sleep tonight. Kate and her mother stay up for an hour watching the moving lights outside. The hospital halls grow darker. Kate looks at the glow of houses across the river as her mother falls asleep. Kate wonders where Robert is. He said he would be back. She feels angry. She wants to tell her mother everything. What if there were things her mother wanted done, or people she needed to see. She wants to wake her mother and confess that she lied. There had always been trust between them, even when there was tension.

Suddenly Kate's mother bolts up. Her eyes are open and transfixed. She looks at Kate but seems to see nothing. "Who are you," she whispers. She opens and closes her mouth as though she is gasping and says, "Stop moving the table." Her eyes are wide with fright. Kate wakes her mother and tells her she is dreaming. Her mother says she can hear wheels. Kate says it is not true. Her mother goes limp. Kate checks her mother's pulse. It is rapid at first and then returns to normal. Kate sits up with her mother then lays her back down and smoothes her damp hair. Kate falls asleep in a chair but wakes up often to check if her mother is still breathing. At dawn Kate wakes up exhausted. She walks into the hospital corridor. Robert is slumped on a couch at the end of the hall.

Kate remembers when Robert flunked out of junior college. Her mother cried and Kate tried, in vain, to console her. When Kate went to university the following fall, she studied frantically and took voluminous notes. Robert returned home. He took a job in a plant that manufactured business forms and worked his way through his hometown college. The year their father died, Robert became the man of the house.

Kate tells Robert to go home. She says she will stay. At breakfast Kate is fatigued. She wonders how she will make it through the day. Her mother doesn't want to eat, and she looks out the window as if she were afraid of the walls of the room. She says she is glad Kate's father isn't there to see this. She says she will awful for the next few weeks with her head shaved. She has been thinking about her late husband. The suddenness of his death, by heart attack, left her with no chance to settle things. She says she wonders where she is headed. She wonders about her grandchildren. Kate tries to reassure her that she isn't going anywhere. Her mother asks if she remembers being in a parade at the country fair when she was young, before she started school. Kate does remember. It was a long parade and she had to sit still. Her legs fell asleep. Her mother says that fairs are magical. Kate suggests that maybe they can go to the fair at the park across the street. She says she will ask the doctors.

Kate and her mother walk over to the fair. Her mother is dressed in a winter coat even though it is sunny. Her mother had combed her hair and put on lipstick. Her mouth is defined and brilliant. They link arms like Kate is an escort. Her mother says she was afraid they wouldn't let her go. She says she was ready to run away. Kate says they only have ten minutes, enough time to ride the Ferris wheel. Her mother has not been on one in years. The grass at the fair is more ragged then it looks in the distance. The Ferris wheel is placed besides swaying elm trees. Its neon lights burned pale in the sun. The steel ribs of the machine are graceful but slightly rusted. A faint squeaking can be heard above the music. Only a few people are riding. The ride is free. An old man in an engineers cap and overalls runs the machine. He stops the wheel and opens a car. An orderly and his children ride in the car above Kate and her mother. The youngest child sways her feet absently; it looks like the breeze blows her legs around like fabric on a clothing line.

Kate looks at her mother and asks if she is "ready for the big sky." They both laugh. The houses across the river look empty. The surface of the river's water reflects the clouds. Kate searches for a definitive line. The Ferris wheel starts. The car rocks. They both look into the distance. Kate catches her mother's hand as they ascend. Far away the hospital rises up. It is white and glistening. Its windows catch the glint of the sun. Below the park is almost deserted. There are a few cars in the lot. Dogs chase each other in the grass. Two or three lone women hold their children on teeter-totters. Kate has a vision of the park at night, when its empty and the wind weaves through the trees. She feels a chill on her arm. The light has quickly gone dark. She tells her mother it will storm. Her mother says it will pass. She touches her daughter's knee and the fabric of her skirt.

Kate grips the metal bar and looks straight ahead. They are rising again. She feels like she might scream and tries to steady her breathe. Kate feels the weight of the air as they move through it. When they are almost at the top they stop. The car sways back and forth. Her mother asks if she is sick. Kate shakes her head. She feels the touch of her mother's hand, and then her mother moves her hand away and Kate feel the absence of warmth. They look at each other, and Kate's mother says she knows what Kate hasn't told her. The sky circles around them. Kate swallows calmly and her gaze

grows endless. She sees herself in her mother's wide eyes and feels she is falling slowly into them.

Analysis

In Jayne Anne Phillip's *Souvenir* the protagonist is forced to come to terms with the relationship between she and her mother amidst a tragedy. The relationship expressed between the protagonist Kate and her mother reflects universal notions. Kate seemingly opts to break free from her mother by choosing to live independently but all the while she compares herself to her mother. The first symbol in the story that acknowledges this is when Kate looks at her mismatched window curtains and thinks of her mother's perfectly matching curtains. The arguments between the protagonist and her mother symbolize a power struggle. Kate's mother is simply trying to look out for her daughter, but Kate insists that her mother must except that she will do things her own way and her mother shouldn't try to make her feel guilty about this. The casual exchange of words between the two women suggests that they do have an open and close relationship. This is evident when Kate's brother Robert decides that they should not tell their mother about her medical condition. Kate feels horrible about lying to her mother. She reflects upon the fact that even when there had been tension between them, there had always been honesty. She fears that keeping this secret from her mother degrades their relationship. These early notions appeal to the author's complex use of foreshadowing throughout the story, all of which lead the reader to the discovery that Kate still needs her mother.

The protagonist in the story discovers that her mother has a tumour in her head and doctors feel that they may not be able to save her. The story opens with a narrative explaining that Kate always sends her mother a card on Valentine's day, but on this particular year she has forgotten to do so. She calls her mother instead. Her mother is disappointed that she will not get a card because she says that the cards bring her good luck. On the morning following this conversation Kate gets a phone call from her brother to tell her that her mother is in the hospital. The juxtaposition of these two events creates the feeling that the forgotten card serves as somewhat of an omen. Kate shares her mother's superstitions. The next morning she considers calling the hospital but stops herself, deciding that it would be bad luck to seek out news about her mother's condition.

Once Kate arrives at the hospital, now knowing what is wrong with her mother, there are further instances of symbolism and foreshadowing in the story. In the cafeteria, Kate notices the park across the street that has amusement rides. This foreshadows the setting for the end of the story. When Kate and her brother travel on the hospital elevator to their mother's room the author describes the elevator as a metal cage. Minutes later they arrive at the room. Kate notes that her mother looks small on the white bed and seems powerless behind the metal bed rails. When the two women are alone together Kate's mother tells her that the room make her feel like an invalid or lunatic, which extend the notion that the room feels like a prison. Symbolically, the room is the mother's prison; this is because the room hold greater meaning. It reflects the way

illness is a form of imprisonment. Later on when the two women go to the park, Kate's mother admits that she was afraid that the hospital would not let her go. She says she was ready to run away.

Kate recognises the seriousness of her mother's condition when she notices that her eyes look different. She says they are wide and shiny with a veiled wetness, describing eyes that reveal illness. As the protagonist sits by her mother's hospital bed and looks out the window she feels that the light outside that has a tinge of spring. Kate finds this painful because it might vanish. Spring is symbolically equated with life. Kate's fear of the vanishing light represents her fear of her mother dying. The use of nature imagery contains throughout the rest of the story. Kate discovers that her mother has brought photos of her children with her. Accidentally, Kate knocks these pictures out the window. She doesn't attempt to retrieve them. She watches them twirl through the air. Symbolically, this seems like a preparation for the loss of her mother. Perhaps she sees her mother as a way to ground her self, in the absence of her already deceased father. When her mother passes on, she and her brother will not have a foundation to come back to. They will be drifting, as implied by the lightweight photographs that tumble buoyantly through the air.

Kate's fear of the Ferris wheel is additionally symbolic of her fear of her mother's death. When they first get on the ride Kate asks her mother if she is "ready for the big sky." As they move through the air the sky grows dark, bringing back the early imagery of spring sunshine disappearing. Kate tells her mother a storm is coming. Her mother reassures her it will pass. Symbolically, this represents the mother's attempt to comfort the daughter by telling her she will make it through this. While at first, this imagery seems to have less symbolical relevance because the reader assumes that the mother is not aware of her condition, the story ends with the mother telling her daughter that she knows the secret that Kate is keeping from her. This turns the author's final use of symbolic imagery into something concrete. The mother knows exactly what Kate is feeling, but offers some hope, that no matter what happens her daughter will be all right.

Characters

Kate

The protagonist Kate is a graduate student whose mother objected to her move from her hometown a year before the action of the story. She applied herself obsessively as an undergraduate student after her brother's failure at a small junior college was upsetting to her mother. Kate has maintained contact with her mother and has sent her a card every Valentine's Day since her father's death because her parents always celebrated that day together.

Mother

Kate's mother is a school superintendent whose husband died six years before the events of the story. Her phone conversation with Kate at the beginning of the story reveals an intelligent and vital woman with a sense of humor and self-possession. She has diabetes, and she is diagnosed with a potentially malignant brain tumor. Kate and her brother agree not tell their mother the full truth about the seriousness of her condition, but she reveals that she knows.

Robert

Kate's brother Robert never left their hometown. As a young adult his failure at a small junior college was a source of great disappointment for their mother. The story implies that Kate felt driven to succeed as a student in compensation. He has since become a successful insurance salesman. He insists that he and Kate not tell their mother all the possible negative outcomes of her diagnosis and surgery because they will know nothing for certain until after the surgery and it is possible that she will make a good recovery.

Themes

Death

The inevitability of separation and loss is a major theme in "Souvenir". For the six years since her father's death, the protagonist has sent her mother a Valentine's Day card, to commemorate the day that her parents always celebrated together in some way. The day after the first Valentine's Day she forgets to send the card, she learns that her mother might die from a brain tumor. The rituals that serve to maintain human connections are inadequate in the face of inevitable loss.

Cycle of Life

The story ends with Kate and her mother at the top of a Ferris wheel. As the ride began, Kate asks her mother if she is "ready for the big sky," unwittingly voicing her concerns about her mother's now precarious hold on life. This unconscious reference suggests the ultimate separation of parent and child by death. Nevertheless, it is important that the scene is a Ferris wheel. This revolving ride suggests the cyclical natural routine of birth and death, degeneration and regeneration. The Ferris wheel's revolutions take riders on a circular ride through space; riders descend, only to be taken upwards once again. In this story about connections lost to death, this final image of endless revolution suggests that human death is but one stage in a cycle. Human birth, life, and death are all only parts of a ceaseless and larger natural cycle.

Alienation and Loneliness

Alienation and loneliness are themes closely related to that of death. To contemplate the death of a loved one leads to the contemplation of the individual's isolation as a discrete human consciousness. After Kate's brother has told her about her mother's tumor, Kate thinks about how she and her mother each eat many of their meals alone, separated by great distance. She is also stirred to remember an incident from her recent past when she spent a night with a strange man. This night which was supposed to amount to a connection between two individuals turned out to be the opposite. They failed to connect in any meaningful way and the memory is a dismal one.

Style

Point of View and Narration

"Souvenir" is narrated in the third person, a narrative form sometimes referred to as omniscient. The narrative voice does not always explicitly describe the thoughts or feelings of the characters; rather, the reader can often judge them by what the characters do or say. Instead of writing "Kate was upset," the narrator tells the reader that Kate sat "for a long time"over the same cup of coffee, remembering something unpleasant that seems to have no connection to her mother's illness. The reader surmises her feelings from what is described. On the other hand, when she talks with her mother in the hospital, the narrative recounts that Kate "felt her heart begin to open. . . ."

Foreshadowing

Kate's thoughts following the Valentine's Day telephone call to her mother offer instances of foreshadowing, or hints of what is to come in the story. She thinks about the curtains in her mother's house, all white and identical: "From the street it looked as if the house was always in order." Later in the story, the reader learns about familial conflicts, disappointments, and missed chances to "settle things." Other images of white objects, order, and precision are suggestive of the white institutional expanses found in hospitals. Kate muses about a man she slept with whose name she can no longer remember; her mother wakes up in her hospital bed and does not know who Kate is.

Symbolism

The candlestick souvenirs which give this story its name are important symbols in the story. As the narrative progresses, the reader learns that Kate left her hometown only the year before, and against her mother's wishes. They argued about her leaving, but before her departure they went shopping together. Each bought the other a pewter candlestick as "a souvenir. A reminder. . . ." The word souvenir is taken from the French. In French, as in English, the word signifies an object that embodies special memories. In French it also means memory. Kate finds that her mother has brought other souvenirs with her to the hospital: all of the valentines from her father and from her, baby pictures of Kate and Robert. The actual photographs are indistinct; Kate's mother calls a childhood memory of Kate's "a pretty exaggerated picture."

Illness as Metaphor

The circumstance around which "Souvenir" revolves is the potentially life-threatening illness of the protagonist's mother. Immediately before this plot development the reader learns that Kate's mother is diabetic. The description of the mother's house, with its

identical white curtains and its paraphernalia of a diabetic life, brings to mind a hospital room as living space. Or, conceivably, these identical fresh white curtains correspond to the "fleecy clouds" of heaven to which Kate's mother refers later in the story. These associations, along with Kate's own paranoid thoughts about an "agent" in her blood "making ready to work against her," make illness a central metaphor in the story. Illness in "Souvenir" functions as a metaphor for the fragility and mortality of the human being.

Historical Context

The 1970s: Youth Movements and Politics

Jayne Anne Phillips graduated from high school in 1970. This means that her teen years coincided with the last years of the 1960s. During this decade, youth culture became a dominant social force due to such phenomena as pop music, recreational drug use among the young, and such anti-establishment, unconventional youth groups identifying themselves in various ways: as hippies, yippies, or "Greens" for example. A prominent political position taken by many young people, and by many Americans of all ages, was opposition to the Vietnam War. The American public was deeply ambivalent about sacrificing young Americans in this conflict.

President Richard Nixon officially ended US involvement in the Vietnam War in 1973. That same year he was discovered to have engaged in illegal activities and in 1974 became the first president to resign from the office. This scandal, known as Watergate, undoubtedly produced a permanent effect on the national consciousness, leaving Americans somewhat cynical regarding the honesty of public figures.

"Second Wave" Feminism

While the history of feminism in the western world is a long one, it was in first decades of the twentieth century that women's rights began to play an important role in United States' cultural and political life. The right to vote, attend institutes of higher learning, university, and work in all professions, were achieved by the "first wave" of twentieth century feminists. Feminism's "second wave," beginning in the 1970s, addressed such issues as negative attitudes toward and demeaning treatment of women as well as legal, professional, and political issues, rallying at one point under the slogan "The personal *is* the political."

Critical Overview

The short story collection *Black Tickets,* which contains "Souvenir," was Jayne Anne Phillips's first major publication. It appeared in 1979. Most commentary on the book discusses the collection as a whole.

Critical reviews of *Black Tickets* tend to make certain recurring points and distinctions. Commentators focus on the longer stories in the collection (of which "Souvenir" is one). Mary Peterson describes these stories in *The North American Review,* writing that they "have at their center a young woman who makes contact, or misses it, with one of her parents."

Peterson had called some of Phillips's shorter stories "flashy," and Doris Grumbach, in a review for *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* writes that they achieve their power from unnecessarily "ornate" language. In poetic prose, most of the stories in *Black Tickets* are about drug-addicts, pimps, prostitutes, and other marginal figures. They are shocking, then, not only because of how ornately and densely they are written, but also because the voices which speak come from outside the mainstream. Peterson considers that the longer stories "show more range, take bigger risks, and mostly succeed at what they try."

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Carol Dell'Amico is a doctoral candidate in Literatures in English at the State University of New Jersey, Rutgers. Her primary field is twentieth-century literature. In the following essay, she discusses "Souvenir" within the context of literary realism, and Black Tickets *within the context of short short stories in contemporary prose fiction.*

This essay in criticism on Phillips is a genre study, so the notion of genre first will be defined. The word genre generally refers to two things. On the one hand, it refers to forms found in literature, such as the novel, the short story, the sonnet, the lyric, the essay, and so on. On the other hand, it is used to refer to styles within these genres, such as realism, science fiction, magic realism, gothic. Genre studies classify novels and look at the history of forms. When did realism begin; what is realism? When does science fiction take off as a highly popular sub-genre? "Souvenir" as a story, and *Black Tickets* as a collection of stories, are both interesting topics in genre. Stylistically, some of the longer short stories in *Black Tickets* such as "Souvenir" are treated in genre criticism as stories by American writers which evince a "return to realism" in contemporary letters. The significance of this critical claim will be explored, and "Souvenir" as an instance in realism will be addressed. Then, since *Black Tickets* contains fifteen stories out of twenty-seven which are four pages or less in length, and since other contemporary writers have written "short short stories," the generic phenomenon of the short short story in contemporary letters will be the final brief discussion in this essay on Phillips and genre.

Jayne Anne Phillips immediately comes to mind when reading recent critical studies announcing a return to realism on the part of writers. This resurgence tends to be dated from the 1970s. Realism in this sense is distinguished from prose fiction that departs from stable points of view or that tends to a greater artifice in plot or narrative construction. Stories told from multiple viewpoints that contest each other and thus make discovering a discrete story-line difficult, or stories which contain signifi-cant elements of dream or fantasy, or stories which depart from the process of story-telling to self-consciously comment upon what is being written about can be excluded from stories more properly described as realist stories. Realism proceeds around the minutiae of life. It is like a historical chronicle of the individual, her thoughts and activities, in her open-ended present. The bulk of nineteenth-century fiction is realist, and, beginning with writers such as Willa Cather and F. Scott Fitzgerald, realism in the novel and short story modified somewhat to suit the modern age. However, since twentieth-century fiction also witnessed significant developments in narrative quite different from this modified realism, much of the genre criticism on twentieth-century forms addresses itself to these developments. Some of these developments are modernist stream-of-consciousness writing, symbolic fiction, and so-called metafiction like self-reflexive writing or historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction in some instances involves the meshing of real historical figures within an overarching fictional work and is a form of writing particularly widespread and popular in post-modern, or post-World War II, fiction (Michael Ondaatjie's *The English Patient,* for example). While prose fiction continues to change (witness developments in cyberspace

publishing), and while new twentieth-century forms must be generically addressed, nevertheless, realist prose never really stopped being written. This "return to realism" conversation most accurately points to how young writers coming of age from the mid-1960s on simply felt less pressured to try out non-realist forms in writing and felt freer to continue in the realist tradition. Thus, realism persists, and the "return" in this equation includes a return to paying attention to this tradition. Today, it seems best to acknowledge that the field of prose fiction is highly diverse, harboring everything from the realism found in some of Phillips's work, to the gothic supernaturalism of a writer like Anne Rice.

The question then becomes, if realist fiction resembles a historical chronicle of people's lives, then whose lives does Phillips chronicle in "Souvenir"? The story is about a middle-class family, and focuses on a young woman's relationship to especially her mother, but also to her father and brother as well. Kate, her mother, her dead father, and her brother, Robert, are the characters in "Souvenir." Given the story's focus on Kate and her mother, the story's realism could be said to provide us with a glimpse at the ways that mothers and daughters communicated and related in the 1970s. Kate and her mother are educated, and are tolerant of each other, this much we learn from the initial telephone conversation between them. We also detect in this conversation the generational divide, a major source of conflict between them. Kate, as the younger will do, urges her mother to live more recklessly than she does in her life as a school superintendent. For her part, Kate's mother encourages Kate to be careful in her dealings with men. What we glean from this conversation is a sense of a generational divide produced by a difference of mores, or values. This sense is confirmed in the portion of the story which is a sustained treatment of a scene from these two women's past.

In this scene, Kate and her mother are arguing bitterly, and both are upset. The dialogue reveals the source of the conflict:

"But, hypothetically," Kate continued, her own voice unaccountably shaking, "if I'm willing to endure whatever I have to, do you have a right to object? You're my mother. You're supposed to defend my choices."

"You'll have enough trouble without choosing more for yourself. Using birth control that'll ruin your insides, moving from one place to another. I can't defend your choices. I can't even defend myself against you." She wiped her eyes with a napkin.

The particular historical moment which Phillips captures here chronicles the changing sexual mores of a nation. Kate's free lifestyle and her use of birth control frighten her mother, but Kate desires approbation and support from her parent. No matter what happened and was not spoken about in middle-class homes before the 1960s, until the 1960s, the American middle-class woman remained celibate (or were supposed to) unless married. Here, Phillips writes about the changing status of women in culture, and the clash that resulted between an older more traditional generation and a younger,

changing generation. As in "Home," another story in *Black Tickets,* Phillips's realism treats historically specific conflicts between mothers and daughters.

The second topic in genre this essay takes up is *Black Tickets* as a whole, that is, as a short story *collection.* Considering that most of the stories in *Black Tickets* are short short stories, we can take Phillips at her word and try to read this shortening of the short story as a deliberate attempt to modify the short story in terms of expectations of length. Since other contemporary writers have also written short short stories, this genre is deserving of mention as, at least, a phenomenon in contemporary letters. One wonders if *Black Tickets* could have made the impact it did if it were not in part because of these startling exercises in short short fiction. Critics who have attempted to theorize about this sub-generic efflorescence come up with different commentary. Perhaps it is a bit early to say. A critic like Miriam Marty Clark, for example, asks whether these fragments are not evidence of a weakening in the sense of history? "The stories I am interested in here," she writes in *Studies in Short Fiction,* "thematize *within* narrative the weakening of historicity." Is this inability to sustain a story a sign of the inability to place an individual within history, and project a coherent future for that individual? A possible criticism of this position is to note how a writer like Phillips can write this sort of fiction but then can write a historical novel as well (*Machine Dreams*). Another approach would be to note how these fragments capture slices of scenes and lives and voices that together add up to a sort of anthropological or ethnographic conglomeration of fragments which attest to an incredibly diverse world. In this case, a fascination with difference and the specificity of the local and particular can be seen to be urge behind this type of writing. In the short short stories of a writer like Amy Hempel, for example, the argot, cadences, and rhythms of contemporary urban Los Angeles are captured with documentary-like clarity, in one short burst of vision followed by another.

Genre studies make up one area of literary critical inquiry. Novels and short stories are a part of an intricate cultural web undergoing continuous change. Generic classifications keep track of the history of forms and trends in literatures and the arts. The longer short stories in *Black Tickets* like "Souvenir" correspond to a twentieth-century tradition of realist prose. But Phillips can not be too easily "pegged" as a writer. In her short short stories, her prose pushes the bounds of realism in its highly condensed temporal scope. Since the publication of *Black Tickets,* Phillips has published another collection of short stories, *Fast Lanes* (1987), and, besides *Machine Dreams* (1984), another novel entitled *Shelter* (1994).

Source: Carol Dell'Amico, "Topics in Genre in the Writing of Jayne Anne Phillips," for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

Mesher is a professor of English and American Studies at San Jose State University. In the following essay, he discusses Jayne Anne Phillips use of characterization in "Souvenir."

"Souvenir," the one-word title of Jayne Anne Phillips' story about Kate, a woman who comes to terms with herself and her mother when the latter is diagnosed with terminal cancer, means "to remember" in French. A souvenir is a keepsake, a memento, something to serve as a reminder. Near the beginning of the story, Kate recalls a visit with her mother the previous summer, when "they bought each other pewter candle holders. 'A souvenir,' her mother said. 'A reminder to always be nice to yourself.'" But the visit begins much less pleasantly: Kate feels frustrated and betrayed by her mother's criticisms of her, while the mother predicts that Kate "may feel different later on," once the mother is dead and "floating around on a fleecy cloud." In the time-present of the story, Kate remembers that visit between receiving the telephone calls from her brother Robert, that inform her of her mother's hospitalization, first, and then of the diagnosis. The memory, a souvenir in itself, effectively portrays the tension, as well as the love, between mother and daughter, in a story in which characterization, and not plot, is the chief focus.

Someone reading only for plot might not find much in "Souvenir": Kate learns that her mother has cancer, and agrees to abide by her brother's decision not to tell her mother the truth; later, while she is visiting her mother in the hospital, the two women walk to a park and take a ride on a Ferris wheel. Her mother tells Kate, "I know what you haven't told me." Such a reading, however, would miss the rich texture of Kate's characterization, as well as Phillips' achievement in producing so complex a personality within the limitations of a short story. In "Souvenir," that texture is woven from strands of personality often only suggested or implied, producing what seem to be confused or contradictory impressions of the main character.

Consider the false impression created in the first lines of "Souvenir": "Kate always sent her mother a card on Valentine's Day," the story begins, conjuring up the image of a loving daughter in a cherished relationship with her mother. The rest of the story's opening, however, undermines that image. Kate's Valentine's Day tradition has only been going on six years, since her father's death, not "always"; and, rather than an act of love, Kate has sent the cards as— in the story's cold and impersonal phrase— "a gesture of compensatory remembrance." Further, there has been a decline in her effort over those six years, from hand-made cards to mass-produced "art reproductions . . . with blank insides" on which she has written short, almost trite sentiments. That decline culminates with the Valentine's Day on which the story begins. "This time, she forgot." And even the long-distance telephone call she makes to her mother, in place of the forgotten card, seems devalued, because Kate waits until "night when the rates were low."

Having reduced Kate in the reader's estimation, however, Phillips begins to rehabilitate her. Though the mother's voice grows "suddenly brighter" when she realizes it is her daughter calling, Kate recognizes in it "a tone reserved for welcome company" — as if family has always been of less importance to her mother and, worse yet, as if sometimes it takes her mother "a while to warm up" that welcoming tone in Kate's case. By the time her mother says, "this is costing you money," the reader may be wondering if Kate waited for the low rates before calling to save money or merely to please her mother.

But why begin with a false impression of Kate as the loving daughter, only to undercut the image and then blame the mother for the problem? In part, the answer has to do with narrative technique: the story is told in the third person, not from an omniscient point of view, but from Kate's "center of consciousness." All the thoughts and descriptions in the story are Kate's, and the narrative never leaves her presence, or her mind. The story's first line, "Kate always sent her mother a card on Valentine's Day," is therefore not a statement of fact, but Kate's own way of looking at herself, and the details that follow are her own recognition of the falseness of that image. Further, the reader cannot be sure that there is ever any "tone reserved for welcome company" in her mother's voice; what is certain, however, is that Kate thinks there is such a tone, since the description comes from her thoughts, as related by the narrator. Through the use of these apparently contradictory impressions, then, Phillips has involved the reader in a sense of the tensions that are at the core of Kate's characterization.

Those same tensions are also expressed in the story in other ways, including, on occasion, the incongruent pairings of Kate's thoughts. When, for example, her brother Robert phones early on the morning after Valentine's Day, with the news of her mother's hospitalization, Kate thinks of herself, "She would never make much money, and recently she had begun wearing make-up again, waking in smeared mascara as she had in high school." Sitting over a cup of coffee after speaking with Robert, Kate again reflects on herself: "She hadn't slept with anyone for five weeks, and the skin beneath her eyes had taken on a creamy darkness." The fact that Kate's thoughts turn inward, when her mother has fallen ill, is revealing in itself. But what is the connection between making money and wearing make-up, or having sex and having dark patches under one's eyes? The free associations underlying both pairings seem to offer a glimpse into Kate's troubled subconscious, and to suggest that she lacks a sense of fulfillment in her life. By leaving the exact terms of those associations undefined, Phil-lips adds to her portrait of an emotionally distraught young woman.

One of the most important strategies in Phil-lips' creation of Kate's characterization is her use of the double— a literary technique in which two characters share parallel (or opposing) attributes, allowing elements of the minor character's personality to reflect directly on that of the major one. For all the tension between them, Kate and her mother are doubles in "Souvenir." They are both women, both teachers, both living alone. That Kate recognizes this part of their relationship is clear from the frequent comparisons she makes between herself and her mother. Sometimes, those comparison point out their differences, as when Kate makes a "cup of strong Chinese tea," and then thinks that "her mother kept no real tea in the house." But she is just as likely to focus on

similarities: her mother is a diabetic, so Kate fears "a secret agent in her blood making ready to work against her." They both eat their meals alone, Kate thinks, at "similar times of day, hundreds of miles apart. Women by themselves."

After Robert's call, Kate remembers the curtains on her mother's windows: "all the same, white cotton hemmed with a ruffle, tiebacks blousing the cloth into identical shapes. From the street it looked as if the house was always in order." On one level, this suggests that her mother's house is not always in order. But whose house always is? Without any evidence as to the degree of disorder, it is unclear whether those curtains hide a mother who is too concerned with appearances, or reveal a daughter who unreasonably holds her mother responsible for the random nature of everyday life.

When Kate arrives at the hospital, however, her role has been reversed. Having acceded to Robert's demand that the diagnosis be kept secret from the patient, Kate finds herself in the uncomfortable position of putting up a false front. Yet her remark to Robert, that "we're lying to her, all of us, more and more," suggests that Kate now believes the current one to be only the latest in the succession of lies she has told her mother. The "succession of blocks tumbling over," which she sees when she closes her eyes, may represent the collapse of walls she has built from those lies to separate herself from her mother.

The role-reversal continues during their first visit, when her mother comforts Kate, instead of the other way around: "'You're not alone,' her mother said, 'I'm right here'." Again, Kate experiences an emotional change described in concrete terms: "She sat motionless and felt her heart begin to open like a box with a hinged lid. The fullness had no edges." But for all the emotional progress Kate has made during the story, she is still in denial, thinking mostly about herself. This is best illustrated when, looking for hand cream in her mother's suitcase, Kate finds "a stack of postmarked envelopes" her mother's keepsakes, "beginning with the first of the marriage" and including family photographs and "Kate's homemade Valentines." These are her mother's souvenirs, reminders of her own happiness. But Kate finds the love they suggest to be literally smothering: "Kate stared. *What will I do with these things?* She wanted air; she needed to breathe." And when a few of the photographs fly out of an open window, Kate does not even try to reach them.

Kate would like to believe that, despite the "tension," there has always been "a trusted clarity," between her mother and herself — a clarity now "twisted," because she has gone along with Robert and hidden the truth of her mother's condition from her. Instead of revealing that truth, however, Kate takes her mother to the small amusement park near the hospital to ride the Ferris wheel. As they ascend on the ride, Kate finds herself again reassured by her dying mother, this time about an approaching storm, when her mother makes a comforting gesture, moving "her hand to Kate's knee and touch[ing] the cloth of her daughter's skirt." And once again she feels smothered, aware of "the immense weight of the air as they moved through it."

This time, however, something is different: her mother is close to death, which she once described as "floating around on a fleecy cloud." The description is recalled when, as

they begin to ascend, Kate asks her mother, "Are you ready for the big sky?" Near the top of the Ferris wheel, literally suspended between heaven and earth and figuratively between life and death, her mother withdraws her hand and Kate, no longer smothered, feels "the absence of the warmth." It is at this climactic point that Kate's mother resolves the tensions between them. "I know all about it . . . . I know what you haven't told me," she says, apparently referring to a great deal more than the doctor's diagnosis. And the story ends, as Kate sees "herself in her mother's wide brown eyes" and feels she is "falling slowly into them" — an image of acceptance and harmony between mother and daughter at last.

Source: D. Mesher, for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #3

Gilbert is an American poet, editor, and critic. Below, Phillips discusses her life and writing career.

Phillips, 31, slender and lovely with brown hair parted simply in the middle and huge, intelligent eyes, is also the author of *Black Tickets,* a collection of short stories published in 1979, which won her instant critical acclaim and a large readership when it was translated into 12 languages.

Many of those stories were set in fictional Bellington, a small town in West Virginia like the one Phillips herself grew up in. Readers of *Black Tickets* will find in [her novel] *Machine Dreams* themes and incidents they remember from the short stories. Phillips has always been obsessed by the rootlessness of her generation and the accommodations families have to make to changing times.

"I didn't start out to write a novel," she says. "I had been meditating, brooding over some of the characters in the family stories of *Black Tickets,* but I planned nothing until I got deeply into the book. I wanted to write a book that worked associatively, rather than a book that worked according to a story or that took place in three days. I wanted to give a sense of time going on and beyond for the characters. . . ."

Phillips would never define herself as a political writer, nor are her characters at all interested in politics, but, she says, "I think writing about so-called ordinary people is a political statement because it's talking about everyday life and why it's precious and why it's worth defending against whatever forces. It was only when politics filtered down to ordinary people like the people in the book [*Machine Dreams*] that anything changed. If you feel yourself or your family to be immediately imperiled, well— people will do anything to keep from losing their children. It really comes down to survival, and then people realize they have to survive, against their own governments in some cases."

Phillips values affection and family ties. She grew up in a small town (pop. 8000) in West Virginia, the middle child and only girl born to a father who was in the road construction business and a mother who was a schoolteacher.

"West Virginia is a strange state," says Phil-lips. "It's never belonged to the South or the North. The rural population is larger than the urban one. Family and tradition are what's important there. It's hemmed in by hills and valleys. People don't *leave* West Virginia."

Yet, as a child, Phillips dreamed of traveling. "I was never the kind of kid who said, I want to be a mommy when I grow up. I was a voracious reader; I'd sit indoors all day in the summer reading a book. Not particularly good ones, but somehow very early I got the idea that language was some kind of private, secretive means of travel, a way of living beyond your own life."

Her mother encouraged independence in her children. "She wanted all her kids to be somebody," says Phillips. "She wanted us to be proud, in the sense that we wouldn't be ground down by anybody, and she communicated that to me especially because I was the girl and I'd have to protect myself, not my physical self as much as my spiritual self."

Her drive for independence and adventure is reflected in the material Phillips used in her short stories. She had jobs in amusement parks, motels, taught reading in a rural school and helped put herself through the University of West Virginia by working for a home improvements company.

It was at the University that she first began publishing her work, then poetry, in very small magazines. She liked that, she says, because it gave her a sense of privacy which she needed. "It was like a guarantee that my identity as a writer and my identity as a person were entirely separate. Part of that need came from growing up in a small town where everyone knew everyone else. But part, too, came from my feeling that the writer in the family structure is the one who has been entrusted with the psyche of the family. Obsessed, that person will explore it, perhaps trying to save the family by making a new environment. The writer is caught by being charged with this responsibility and, at the same time, running great risk for herself and the others. Of course, in reality you are always writing about yourself, but when you start out, if you're writing about family members or characters based on them, it's good to have this guarantee of secrecy."

Out of the school in 1974, she traveled across the country, lived in the black section of Oakland for a while, and then went on to Colorado, supporting herself by waitressing. Writing about drifters, stripteasers and addicts, people on the road and at loose ends, she reflected part of her generation's experience, the generation that was of college age in the '70s.

"Unlike the people of the '60s, we didn't have a strong sense of goals, nor the illusion we could make a difference. They were very organized and considered themselves a community. Their enemy was an obvious one. By the '70s, people began to experience a kind of massive ennui. People felt on their own. Kids dropping acid did it to obliterate themselves, not to have a religious experience. Only people with a strong sense of self came through.

"On the other hand," Phillips continues, "we still thought of ourselves as outside the political system. The undergraduates I see today certainly don't; that's the last thing they want."

Phillips has been teaching since 1982 in the Creative Writing Program at Boston University. "Some of the undergraduates don't know if we fought North or South Vietnam. They don't have a sense of recent history at all. They feel they have no control over their government, and they're trying to make their personal situation as strong and protected as possible. They're concerned about money, and they want structures very much. In the '70s there was still enough security so that people felt they could be floaters. Now things are too shaky for that."

In 1976 Phillips was accepted by the writing program at Iowa on the basis of poems and only two short stories. In the summer of that year, on her 24th birthday ("I'm superstitious, says Phillips), Truck Press, a small press, brought out an edition of 24 one-page prose pieces of hers in a collection called *Sweethearts.* The book has subsequently gone into three printings. Phillips, who had started out as a poet, was changing.

"I became more challenged by the difficulty of writing fiction; I was really attracted by the *subversive* look of the paragraph," she says. "In a poem you're always having to confront the identity of the writer. In fiction the reader becomes less defended against that identity and more open to the text."

Iowa was a new experience for Phillips. She had never had a writing course before. It was the first time she'd ever lived in a community of writers, and she enjoyed both that and her respite from waitressing jobs. Reflecting on creative writing programs in general, Phillips has very definite ideas. Writers shouldn't become involved in them until, in a personal sense at least, they have established their identities as writers and until they have lived on their own for a while.

She's very enthusiastic about the support of small presses. After *Sweethearts* appeared, she worked with Annabelle Levitt, who publishes Vehicles Editions, on a book called *Counting,* this year in September, Levitt will do a short story collection of hers, called *Fast Lanes.* "It's nice now that I can support the small presses because I think it's important for those who've been helped early on to continue to publish with them," she says.

In 1978 Phillips attended the St. Lawrence writer's conference. There, meeting Seymour Lawrence, then an editor at Delacorte, she asked him if he was interested in publishing short stories. The answer was a firm no. Nothing daunted, she gave him a copy of *Sweethearts.* He asked to see her manuscript and, later that summer, at home, just as she was about to get into her car and set out to California to a job at Humboldt State University, the phone rang. Her mother rushed out of the house; Lawrence was on the phone and he was taking *Black Tickets.*

"Working with Sam has been a great experience," says Phillips with a smile. "He's not an editor who edits your copy; he leaves you entirely alone on that, but once he decides to take on an author, he's really committed to that person's work. Since it's very hard to find long-range relationships in the publishing world today, it's great to know that you have someone to stand by you.

"It was also his brainstorm," she adds, "to do a simultaneous quality trade paperback of *Black Tickets* in addition to the 2500 hardcovers they were bringing out. They did 10 or 15 thousand; for a first collection, that's an ideal way to publish."

Today, Lawrence is reaping the benefits of his loyalty to his author, as foreign rights for *Machine Dreams* have been sold for record amounts in England and Germany, and at

home Pocket Books outbid Dell for paperback rights. Both BOMC and its subsidiary, QPBC, have chosen the books as an alternate.

While she is pleased by all this, Phillips doesn't feel it puts pressure on her. She defines herself as a writer who is a seeker, "a seeking consciousness, not even a person," in her phrase. "I write for my own psychic survival," she explains, "and that's why I never have considered the reader. Nor have I ever written with any kind of plan, because the whole point is to follow the story to its center, not to impose some point of view. I believe that you are led to discover what things mean and how things relate to each other through the process of doing the work. The real risk is to be strong enough to understand and accept what you're going to find out so that you are not destroyed by what you find. If there's a sense of surprise in the work, it's coming to grips with that risk that makes the revelation. That's the reason to do it.

"I'm the type of writer for whom writing is more painful than anything else, the kind of writer without the personal exuberance or ego orientation of those who are more like public performers. We are like acolytes, or novices, people who have put themselves at the mercy of something they surrender to completely.

"If I've had a good day, I feel that I've stumbled onto some kind of knowledge and I'm sort of wiped clean. I'm a little shell-shocked and awed, not at anything about myself, but at how things have ended up making sense.

"Once the book is done, I don't relate to it very personally because I feel that a work of art is completely separate from the personality that created it. It's on its own. There's much that the writer isn't even aware is there. The writer can take the credit for having seen it through, but not everything that came together in it.

"Of course, I care very deeply about what is in the book, so I hope that it's understood and valued, but I don't necessarily expect that it's going to be understood.

"I work very slowly," says Phillips. "I don't write every day. Sometimes I go for months without writing. I work like a poet, really, one line at a time. . . . But the writers who've influenced me, not for their style but their subject matter, were Welty, Porter, Faulkner and Edgar Lee Masters, writers who wrote about materially disenfranchised people who had rich histories and myths, stories that were almost destinies in themselves."

Source: Jayne Anne Phillips with Celia Gilbert, in an interview for *Publishers Weekly,* Vol. 225, No. 23, June 8, 1984, pp. 65-6.

Critical Essay #4

Cushman offers a favorable review of Phillips's collection of stories. Jayne Anne Phillips brings a new voice and talent to familiar literary terrain. *Black Tickets* will buy you admission to Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty country, where the people, mostly poor whites, are invalids and grotesques and where all are desperately lonely. Love is at best something that happened a long time ago.

Phillips tries her range with all sorts of characters, many of whom tell their own stories. She takes a virtuoso delight in trying to get under the skin of strippers, bar owners, delinquent teen-aged girls, even homicidal maniacs. She is most convincing though in the several stories which depict the home-coming of a woman in her middle twenties, at the end of an affair and uncertain where to turn. Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. But these young women discover that the parents are now just as adrift and emotionally needy as they are. Only memories of happier times remain, and the memories are not to be trusted.

Jayne Anne Phillips was a poet before she became a short story writer. The poet's feeling for language and habit of condensation are qualities that set this collection apart. Phillips captures her disturbed characters in prose that is disturbing. The writing is bright and bold and sometimes elliptical, stylized but authentic:

We went to the movies every Friday and Sunday. On Friday nights the Colonial filled with an oily fragrance of teen-agers while we hid in the back row of the balcony. An aura of light from the projection booth curved across our shoulders, round under cotton sweaters. Sacred grunts rose in black corners. The screen was far away and spilling color— big men sweating on their horses and women with powdered breasts floating under satin. Near the end the film smelled hot and twisted as boys shuddered and girls sank down in their seats. We ran to the lobby before the lights came up to stand by the big ash can and watch them walk slowly downstairs. Mouths swollen and ripe, they drifted down like a sigh of steam. The boys held their arms tense and shuffled from one foot to the other while the girls sniffed and combed their hair in the big mirror. Outside the neon lights on Main Street flashed stripes across asphalt in the rain. They tossed their heads and shivered like ponies.

Sixteen of the twenty-seven stories are extremely brief, a paragraph or two in length, and these highly compressed pieces are less successful. The brief stories tend to be splashy and self-indulgent, but they display in concentrated form Phillips' heady delight in the sounds and rhythms of the American language.

Black Tickets reminds me of the work of Ann Beattie, a better-established young woman who also writes about lonely people coping, not very successfully, with their bleak lives. Like Beattie, Phillips knows that the chilliest scenes of winter are to be found inside us. At the same time the two authors relate to their damaged characters quite differently. Phillips treats hers not only with fascination but also with compassion. That compassion is to be preferred to Beattie's icy detachment.

Black Tickets won the 1980 Sue Kaufman Prize for First Fiction presented by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. These stories are the work of a young writer, still trying to find her legs, but they also add up to a notable debut. Though it seems heretical to say it in the pages of *Studies in Short Fiction,* I'm looking forward to the novel Phillips is inevitably writing now.

Source: Keith Cushman, a review of *Black Tickets,* in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Vol. 18, No. 1, Winter, 1981, 92-4.

Critical Essay #5

Edwards examines the tone of the stories in Black Tickets, *concluding that Phillips is at her best when portraying ordinary family life.*

When she cares to invoke it, Jayne Anne Phillips also has a strong sense of place (Appalachia, in her case), and she could never be accused of saying too much. More than half the stories in *Black Tickets* run to a page or less, and the longer ones have no fat on them. Compared with [Scott] Spencer and [Al-ice] Munro, who work coolly, well within the limits of their means, Phillips writes with noticeable power, even violence, so that her brevity seems more a matter of conscious self-discipline than of natural sensibility.

Her usual fictional material, as it happens, calls for self-discipline. Consider the remarkable "Under the Board Walk," a sketch of only five paragraphs. "Her name is Joyce Castro," it flatly begins, "and she rides our school bus. The Castros all look alike. Skinny, freckled, straw-haired." Her father is a fundamentalist preacher, and Joyce is never seen without her transistor radio: "Music is the work of a devil that licks at her legs. She stands, radio pressed to her face, lips working. Undah the boardwalk, down by the sea ee ee ye eh eh. Ona blanket with my baybeh's where I'll be." She is shy, stares at the floor, doesn't talk to the other kids. She is also pregnant, by her brother ("The Castros all look alike"), who's gone off to work in the steel mills.

The words of the song "Under the Boardwalk" come hideously true in the story's next to last paragraph, with perhaps a touch of overcalculation that yet doesn't spoil a brilliantly imagined moment:

She disappears from school but comes back a month later, having had it in a bloody way. She rolled up a horse blanket and walked to the field. Daddy thundering I won't lay eyes on your sin and big brother in Youngstown, holding a thing that burns orange fire. She rolls yelping, dogs come close and sniff. They circle. The sky circles. Points of light up there that sting. Finally she sees that they are stars. Washing herself in the creek she remembers the scythe against the grass, its whispering rip.

Phillips finds a kind of beauty in this horror —the phallic suggestion in the red-hot steel the brother holds and its association with the stinging "points of light," her animal yelping that seems almost to create the ominously circling dogs, the suggestion, in her seeing the stars and remembering the sound of the scythe through the grass, that giving birth has been, even for her, a brief participation in natural order.

But the story's final sentences return bleakly to things as they are in Joyce's world. When she is alone in the house the next day, "The dogs come in with pieces in their mouths. She stands in the kitchen shaking while the Drifters do some easy moanin." Their simulated commercial moaning is indeed easy, and it seems appallingly possible that her "shaking" may be only her habitual, mindless reaction to the music and not a

recognition of what the dogs have brought her. This is remarkably alert and resourceful writing.

But Phillips pays a price for her interest in human beings who are frozen into their worst possible cases. Most of the stories in *Black Tickets* examine the lives of people who are desperately poor, morally deadened, in some way denied comfort, beauty, and love. Girls tell each other dirty stories in a shack, while small boys listen avidly outside; a crazed black woman beats up drunken derelicts while policemen laugh, drug drops are made in porn movie lavatories; a rich old homosexual is cared for by a calculating male nurse who spends all his spare time in peep shows; a fourteen-year-old mute orphan girl sells dirty pictures and hustles her body for her drug-addict pimp; a Son of Sam type describes his quest for murderable girls; the sighted daughter of blind parents watches her nearly blind brother die of (apparently) a cerebral hemorrhage; and so on. None of these alone, is an unworthy subject for art, and Phillips's interest is compassionate; but in such heavy concentration, horror begins to seem predictable, and then positively funny. So represented, the world in effect becomes a machine designed to do the worst things possible— sidewalks are for displaying dog-puke, delivery boys are for screwing suburban housewives while the prissy neighbors watch with binoculars through the curtains; public lavatories are for drunks and juveniles to throw up in.

Happily, a small group of these stories— and the best ones. I think— deals not with the lower depths but with more or less ordinary people in families, who are trying to love each other across a gap. Their common situation is the more or less reluctant return home of a young woman, usually a student or a teacher, who finds herself challenged or threatened by her parent's concern about what she's doing with her life. The parent, usually the mother, is invariably divorced or widowed, not at all ill-willed or obtuse, not very demanding but anxious to understand better what has replaced the old closeness they once had. These stories are full of beautiful touches that stand without need of explanation—a mother who leaves the house when she hears her daughter making love with her boyfriend, not out of offended assumptions about decency but because she fears getting interested again in sex, a father who touchingly deflects his worry about his daughter into an obsessive and annoying worry about the condition of her car.

Phillips wonderfully catches the tones and gestures in which familial love unexpectedly persists even after altered circumstances have made it impossible to express directly, the ways in which grown children, while cherishing even an unrewarding freedom, can be caught, and hurt, and consoled by their vestigial yearning for dependency, safety, a human closeness that usually seems forever lost. I don't of course mean that Phillips should devote her very promising talent to writing more stories about such parents and children, but I do think that her remarkable powers work best in the realm of the ordinary and the domestic.

Source: Thomas R. Edwards, "It's Love!," in *The New York Review of Books,* Vol. XXVII, No. 3, March 6, 1980, pp. 43-5.

Critical Essay #6

Brown is an American critic, journalist, and author of several children's books. Below, he commends Black Tickets *for its memorable surrealistic tone.*

The short stories, prose poems and surreal vignettes that comprise *Black Tickets* read like comments on life from one who has stood graveside with Samuel Beckett and nodded mournful agreement as he intoned, "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole lingeringly, the gravedigger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries."

The 27 "cries" recorded by Jayne Ann Phillips in this her first publication, especially those of young women and teen-age girls, are reproduced with perfect pitch.

"Wedding Pictures," more a succinct three-paragraph poetic description than a story, introduces us, fugue-like, to the themes of emptiness, estrangement and despair which resonate through each succeeding page. From the incipient misery of children in "Blind Girls," "Lechery" and "Under the Boardwalk," to the drug-induced horrors of "The Powder of the Angels and I'm Yours" and "Black Tickets," to the perversion and psychoses in "Sweethearts," "Satisfaction" and "1934," most of the stories are tickets by which we gain admission to watch Phillips present her characters in the fashion of the killer in the concluding story "Gemcrack," who wants to "crack . . . and expose their light in the dark Saturdays, the night."

Black Tickets presents a creative variety of prose forms ranging from impressionistic essays and terse, cathartic outbursts to intimidatingly articulated nightmares. One of the most effectively innovative works is "El Paso," The story is a series of monologues, each one as stark and searing as the Texas desert "glaring as a lidless eye." The five speakers, life's detritus, are presented as they exist— separate, fragmented creatures who speak directly to the reader as if life mattered, but who know on the gut level that "it's already over."

Phillips's most successfully orchestrated and viable work is three stories that are stories in the modern recognizable sense of the word: "Home," "The Heavenly Animal" and "Souvenir." Each story sensitively enacts the moribund relations between daughters and mothers.

"Home" verifies Thomas Wolfe's dictum, and whenever the daughter does return to visit her mother, an alien being glazed over with the monotonous routine of television and incessant knitting, each visit becomes less endurable and more oxymoronic. In the final scene, the mother washes and rewashes dishes, tormented by the sounds of her daughter's lovemaking during the previous night with one of her many lovers. The sounds (the "cries") have rendered her own life, as well as her daughter's, more unbearably inexplicable. "I heard you, I heard it. Here in my own house. Please, how much can you expect me to take? I don't know what to do about anything. She looks

into the water, keeps looking. And we stand here just like this." Standing there, endlessly peripheral to one another.

When the 25-year-old daughter in "The Heavenly Animal" returns for separate visits with her divorced parents, they all struggle awkwardly to prove that once they did exist as relevant family members in an irretrievable past. Neither whiskey nor dalmane will blot out the daughter's awareness of their pathetic sham, however, and she drives off fighting not to lose herself in remembrances of things past, when "her father was driving. Her brothers had shining play pistols with leather holsters. Her mother wore clip-on earrings of tiny wreaths. They were all dressed in new clothes, and they moved down the road through the trees."

In "Souvenir," the mother, dying with a malignant brain tumor, whispers to her daughter that "except for when the pain comes, it's all a show that goes on without me." This statement could have been made by every character in *Black Tickets*. These are the people Jayne Ann Phillips wants us to see, creatures who could have been sketched by Hogarth or Brueghel in their most hideous portrayals of life, creatures for whom life is only a show that goes on without them. Except, of course, when there's pain.

Quite possibly, much of this book will be forgotten in the weeks or months after it's been read, but I believe most readers will carry the stubs of Black Tickets around in their minds for years to come.

Source: Joseph Brown, in a review of *Black Tickets,* in *America,* Vol. 141, No. 18, December 8, 1979, p. 376.

Adaptations

"Souvenir" was recorded as an audiocassette in 1991, along with excerpts from *Machine Dreams*, read by Jayne Anne Phillips. Available from American Audio Prose Library.

Topics for Further Study

"Souvenir" is a story about a middle-class American family, all of whose members live separately. Research contemporary demographic patterns in the United States. How often do people move now as opposed to several generations ago? How far away do they typically move? How large is an average family today compared to fifty years ago? What do you think these demographic patterns tell us about society?

"Souvenir" is a portrait of a family. The bond between mother and daughter is highlighted. There appears to be a certain degree of rivalry between sister and brother. Reread the story closely, paying special attention to the development of the children's relationship to their parents and to each other. To what extent have Kate and Robert become the adults that they are because of their responses to their parents' expectations and to each other? Imagine a conversation between Kate and Robert during the hours that their mother is undergoing surgery. What grudges or resentments might they hold against one another? Do you imagine that this crisis would bring them closer or drive them further apart? Give reasons for your answer.

Most hospitals employ medical ethicists to advise staff, patients, and family members facing the complex legal, moral, spiritual, and emotional dilemmas that modern medicine presents. These can include whether or not to perform surgery on a terminally ill person that may only add days or weeks of life; to offer or withhold artificial measures of sustaining life in comatose or brain-dead patients; and whether or not to use "heroic measures" to resuscitate a very old or terminally ill patient. Research the kinds of cases regularly faced by medical ethicists. Should family members have the right to withhold information from a competent person (as Kate and Robert do with their mother)? Why or why not? Would your answer be different if the patient were not mentally competent? To what extent should parents have the right to make all medical decisions regarding a minor child? Under what circumstances, if any, should parental wishes be overruled? Why?

Compare and Contrast

1970s: The birth control pill abets the "sexual revolution," leading to widespread change in sexual mores.

1990s: The sexual revolution is curtailed by the spread of incurable sexually transmitted diseases, including herpes and AIDS.

1970s: A numerical decline in the number of two-parent families in the U.S. begins in this decade. The decrease continues at a rate of about 4 per year.

1990s: The decline in the number of two-parent families stabilizes in mid-decade and slowly begins to reverse. there are about 25.1 million married couples with children in the U.S. in 1995— an increase of about 521,000 since 1990.

1970s: Teenagers and young adults become a distinct demographic with enormous buying power and hence, the power to influence popular culture. The choices, beliefs, and icons of a youthful generation are seen as significant historically.

1990s: Economists note that people born in the post-World-War-II years who came of age in the 1970s constitute the first generation of Americans who will enter middle age less well off financially than their parents were at that point in their lives.

What Do I Read Next?

Reasons to Live (1985) by Amy Hempel is a collection of short short stories. Hempel's narrative voices offer wry, pithy observations that are both intriguing and disturbing.

Housekeeping (1970), by Marilynne Robinson, is a novel about a family of four women. Robin-son's prose captures the pace of rural life and of her characters' lives and thoughts.

White Noise (1984) by Ron Delillo is a keen, funny satire and reflection on contemporary American life. In it, a blended family makes its way through surreal mutations in environment that characterize an age of malls, multiplexes, media, and technology.

Further Study

Adams, Michael J. "Jayne Anne Phillips," in *Postmodern*

Fiction: A Bio-Bibliographic Guide, edited by Larry McCaffery, Greenwood, 1986, pp. 481-83.

Useful reference guide.

Hill, Dorothy Combs. "Interview with Jayne Anne Phil-lips," in *South Carolina Review,* Fall, 1991, pp. 53-73.

Phillips discusses her life and career.

Lassner, Phyllis. "Women's Narration and the Recreation of History," in *American Women Writing Fiction,* edited by Mickey Perlman, University Press of Kentucky, 1989, pp. 193-206.

An exploration of the different narrative voices in *Machine Dreams* considered individually and as contributing to the overall effect of the novel.

Price, Joanna. "Remembering Vietnam: Subjectivity and Mourning in American New Realist Writing," in *Journal of American Studies,* August, 1993, pp. 173-86.

Besides touching on the question of "new realism," Price explores Phillips's treatment of character and the Vietnam war in the novel *Machine Dreams.*

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Clark, Miriam Marty. "Contemporary Short Fiction and the Postmodern Condition," in *Studies in Short Fiction,* Spring, 1995, pp. 147-59.

Gorro, Michael. A review of *Machine Dreams,* in *Boston Review,* August, 1984, p. 27.

Grumbach, Doris. "Stories Caged in Glass," a review of *Black Tickets,* in *Books & Arts,* November 23, 1979, pp. 8-9.

Peterson, Mary. "Earned Praise," in *The North American Review,* Winter, 1979, pp. 77-8.

Tyler, Anne. "The Wounds of War," in *The New York Times Book Review,* July 1, 1984, p. 3.

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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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