Toward the End of Time Study Guide

Toward the End of Time by John Updike

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

John Updike's *Toward the End of Time*, published in 1997, is a mixture of science fiction, magic realism, and a journal account written by an older man who feels his world collapsing around him. The story is written as if it were the journal of Ben Turnbull, a retired financier who is living an economically comfortable life in New England despite the chaos and destruction around him. The majority of the story takes place in 2020, after a massive war between the United States and China. Despite the failure of the U.S. government, a depopulated Midwest, food shortages, and marauding teenagers who stone to death people whom they do not like, the self-indulgent protagonist enjoys sexual relations with young women and has time to golf and to play with his grandchildren. The narrator also drifts into fantasies which are presented so realistically they are hard to distinguish from what is real. Did Ben Turnbull really kill his second wife? Did he then have sex with a deer? Did he really witness Moses on the mountain? In the end, the protagonist, a man whom readers may not like, reveals a vulnerability with which they may identify.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: American

Birthdate: 1932

John Updike was born on March 18, 1932, in Reading, Pennsylvania, located in what is known locally as Pennsylvania Dutch country. He spent the first thirteen years of his life, however, in the small community of Shillington, where his father, Wesley Updike, taught high school science. Updike's mother, Linda, encouraged her son's first attempts at writing in hopes that it might dispel Updike's tendency to stutter. She also supported his desire to attend Harvard when it came time for him to go to college. To their delight, Updike was awarded a scholarship to that university, an institution from which Updike and his parents realized many prominent authors had emerged.

In 1954, Updike graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree and decided to pursue a second love, drawing. He attended the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Arts in Oxford, England. While in England, Updike's first short story, □Friends from Philadelphia□ (1954), was published in the *New Yorker*, a huge accomplishment for any young writer. This first publication drew the attention of famed writer E. B. White, who helped Updike obtain a job at the *New Yorker* upon Updike's return to the States. While Updike was at the *New Yorker*, his writing is said to have come under the influence of J. D. Salinger (best known for his 1951 novel *Catcher in the Rye*) and John Cheever (most famous for his short stories, such as □The Swimmer□ [1964]), whose works often appeared in the magazine at that time.

Four years after receiving his bachelor's degree, Updike published his first book, a collection of poems called *The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame Creatures* (1958). One year later, he published his first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959), a book about a home for the elderly. From this point on, Updike made his living solely by writing.

In 1960, Updike published the novel that introduced one of his most memorable characters, Harry Angstrom. This character appears in four successive novels, beginning with *Rabbit, Run*. *Rabbit Redux* appeared in 1971, followed by *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981) and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990). *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest* both won Pulitzer Prizes.

Updike has won many honors, including the National Book Award for his novel *The Centaur* (1963), a story about the relationship between a schoolmaster and his son; the National Book Award in 1982 for *Rabbit Is Rich*; and four medals: the National Medal of the Arts in 1989, the National Book Foundation Medal in 1998, the Caldecott Medal in 2000, and the National Humanities Medal in 2003, presented at the White House. Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) is his twenty-second novel to be published.

Updike has been twice married: Mary E. Pennington, whom he married in college in 1953, was his first bride. In 1977, Updike married Martha Ruggles Bernhard. Updike has four children and has lived most of his adult life in Massachusetts.

Plot Summary

Chapter I□The Deer

Toward the End of Time is written as if it were the journal of the protagonist, Ben Turnbull, and it begins with an entry written in late November of 2019, describing the first snow of the season. By the end of the first paragraph, the reader knows that the protagonist is somewhat depressed, unable to find even a trace of his □childhood exhilaration□ and left only with □an unfocused dread of time.□ However, in the second paragraph, Ben is exhilarated, pleased with a new plastic snow shovel, an improvement over the metal ones of his childhood.

Along with many other subjects, the protagonist pays special attention to nature and all its transformations. He is also keenly aware of the people around him and the changes they go through. Ben analyzes his wife, Gloria, whom he says is always trying to tame nature by ordering people to trim one plant and uproot another. Deer have been eating the tender tips of his wife's shrubbery. Gloria wants Ben to shoot the animals. Ben believes that his wife secretly longs for his own death, too.

Ben and Gloria live in a sprawling old house on the shore of Massachusetts Bay. When Gloria spots a deer eating her bushes at night, she pushes Ben outside with a basket of old gold balls and tells Ben to throw them at the deer.

Gloria is Ben's second wife. Their relationship began as an affair, while Ben was married to another woman. On this particular night, Ben hopes that he and Gloria will have sex, but Gloria sees the deer again. She decides that she is going to borrow a gun from one of the neighbors so Ben can shoot it.

The next time that a deer appears, Gloria pushes Ben outside with the gun. She hollers for Ben to shoot, but Ben does not see the deer. When he returns to the house, Gloria calls him a □bastardly coward.□ Later, when Ben sees the deer again and fires a shot, Gloria promises to make love to him.

Next, in his journal, Ben ponders the word, □perhaps,□ thus introducing the quantum physics concept of probable lives, a theme that is developed later in the story. Ben also explores some details he has read about □Neandert(h)al man.□ He concludes that he, too, will one day be □as forgotten, as dissolved back into the compacted silt□ as Neanderthal man. This comment introduces the subject of death that Ben ponders throughout the novel.

It is now January of 2020, and Ben, a retired partner of an investment broker firm, travels to Boston to take care of some clients whom he still serves. During his trip, the reader learns that there has been a war between the United States and China. Ben outlines some of the destruction that he sees, the result of heavy bombing.

The story takes a curious turn at this point, as Ben, at home again and in what can be described as a fantasy, watches a deer approach his house. Gloria is away. Ben sees the deer transform itself into □a young lean-bodied whore,□ whom he invites into the house. Ben and the deer have sex. □I tell myself she is a fantasy,□ he writes, □a branching not existent in the palpable universe.□ Not too much later, Ben writes about Deirdre Lee (whose first name bears a likeness to the word, deer), a prostitute who comes to service him. Deirdre is more human than the deer, but there are still allusions to her being deer-like. So it is not certain if she is real or imagined. Also confusing is Ben's statement: □It is not clear to me that Gloria is dead.□ Then he writes about having a faint memory of having shot Gloria. There is little explanation of these events. It is more likely that Ben has drifted into one of the probable worlds that he mentioned earlier in reference to quantum physics. Then, during one of their encounters, Deirdre and Ben decide to explore Ben's old house. This is a lead-in to Ben's discussion of Egyptian grave robbers, which ends the chapter.

Chapter II□The Dollhouse

It is early spring, and Ben notices flower buds that are all but ready to open. He recalls another spring, while he was still in college. Through this reverie, Ben introduces his first wife, Perdita. She was an art major and eventually bore Ben five children, and Ben relates that he now has ten grandchildren□nine boys and one girl.

Ben is reminded of Perdita when he sees his children and grandchildren. He then talks about the spouses of his children. One of his daughters has married an African man, whom Ben believes has taught his children and his first wife how to be a family, though they are now all separated.

Next, Ben provides a little more information concerning the aftereffects of the war. The population of the United States has been dramatically decreased, so much so that the current president has offered free farmland to any citizen who is willing to move to the now-depopulated Midwest.

Ben then refers to Deirdre as if she has moved into his house. They go shopping together for such domestic items as washcloths. When Ben looks into the faces of the people at the mall, he suspects that they think Deirdre is his daughter or an escort from a nursing home. When they are back at the house, Ben talks about how Deirdre is ridding the place of furnishings, especially those belonging to Gloria. Deirdre makes Ben carry rugs and other furniture to the barn. Memories are stirred when Ben goes into the barn and sees old children's toys, including some that were his. He remembers the doll house that he once tried to build for his oldest child, Mildred. While still married to Perdita, Ben would go to the cellar to work on the doll house. But the atmosphere in the cellar was anything but inspiring. He felt the weight of the house, the mortgage, his children, and his pregnant-again wife pressing down on his head. Instead of being inspired, Ben would think about his death, that of his daughter Mildred, and even the death of the dolls for which the house was being made. □There was no God,□ Ben had thought at that time, □just Nature, which would consume my life as carelessly and

relentlessly as it would a dung-beetle corpse in a compost pile.□ He could not stand it in the cellar. But when he would go back upstairs, even though Perdita would try to help relieve his stress, he would blame her for trying. Finally, Ben buys a doll house for Mildred from a store.

Spin and Phil come for Ben's monthly payment for protection. When Ben looks like he might balk, Phil insinuates that Ben might find his barn or house burned down if he does not produce the money. Deirdre comes out and tells Spin and Phil to leave. Deirdre tells Ben that she and Phil went to school together. Deirdre refers to Ben as her husband and butts her head into Phil's and Spin's bellies (like a deer might do). Later, Ben notices a smashed window in his barn. He discovers that things are missing. He also hears people in the woods around his house.

In a new episode, Ben goes skiing with Ken and Red. There are not many people at the ski resort, and the equipment is in need of repair. When he returns home, Ben is stiff from the experience but not too tired to notice that something has changed. □An infinitesimal measurement had been made, and Deirdre and I were in another universe.□ Ben suspects Deirdre has been with another man, but Deirdre denies it.

At Easter, Deirdre takes Ben to church. The preacher talks about Mary Magdalene and how she wept when she found that Jesus was not in the sepulcher where his body had been buried. A man appears, according to scripture, and Mary recognizes him as the Master. This figure tells Mary Magdalene not to touch him. Ben then says that it was at this point that Christ was in what in quantum theory is called □superposition□neither here nor there . . . He was Schrödinger's cat.□

Spin and Phil show up again and warn Ben of some teenagers from Lynn, presumably the town in Massachusetts. The kids have been threatening local people. Deirdre suggests that the teens from Lynn might just get Spin and Phil if they do not watch out. Later, Deirdre tells Ben she is getting bored living with him. When Deirdre watches television, Ben searches the Bible, looking for the story of St. Paul. Ben recites part of the history. It was Paul, Ben concludes, who marketed Christianity to the world. Quite abruptly, Ben becomes part of the Biblical story and is with Paul, and the narrator and the timeframe of the story changes. The narrator is now John Mark. He is traveling with Paul. This narrator claims he is the one who wrote about the encounter on the mountain between Moses and God.

Ben goes to visit his oldest son, Matthew. When Ben returns, he finds a note from Deirdre, stating that she can no longer take it. She is now with Phil. They have taken more things from Ben's house because Phil suggested that it is a woman's right to do so.

Chapter III□The Deal

Gloria returns in the third chapter. Ben is surprised and asks where she has been. Gloria responds: □You *never* listen when I tell you where I'm going.□ Ben hopes Gloria

will not notice the missing furniture. Their lives just pick up where they left off. Gloria complains about the deer.

Ben goes to Grandparents' Day at the school of his grandson, Kevin. Perdita, Ben's first wife, is there. Ben is still struck by Perdita's beauty; he and she still communicate well and understand one another with just a few words, often completing one another's sentences. When he gets home, Gloria is obviously jealous, assuming that Ben enjoyed seeing Perdita.

Ben follows a scientific line of thinking. It begins with his noticing an object in the sky that is □at least twenty times wider than the moon□ and three times larger than an object that was made on Earth and projected into the heavens before the war with China. No one knows for sure what it is. There is speculation that it may have existed □in prehistory.□ All anyone really knows for sure is that it is some kind of spaceship. No communications, however, have been received from it. Scientists have speculated that whoever owns it has □found a way to travel from point to point by the power of the mind.□ On Earth, Ben continues, the human mind has learned to coexist with matter, whereas those who travel in the mysterious object in the sky have learned to control matter with the mind. This realization makes Ben feel as insignificant as an ant. The object hangs in the sky, he states, □like a dead man's open eye.□ Ben feels as if the intelligence inside the object is studying life on Earth, like a zoologist might study a group of chimpanzees.

Ben discovers three young teens in the woods below his house. The teens have gathered pieces of wood and are putting together a make-shift shelter. Ben tells them to get off his property. One of the boys mentions Phil and Deirdre. The boys suggest that Ben allow them to stay there for Ben's protection. All kinds of troublemakers are moving this way, the teens tell Ben, who threatens to go to the police. After that, the boys mock him. They know that there are no police. Ben leaves them alone, rationalizing that he does not really use that part of his property. He does not tell Gloria about the incident. He does not want her to investigate the teens because they might tell her about Deirdre. The teens keep a close eye on Ben's house and know personal details about his life.

Ben continues to talk about nature. It is the only ordered aspect of his circumstances. Nature follows the cycle of the seasons each year, no matter what kind of confusion and chaos is occurring in human affairs. It is now summer. Ben goes back down toward the beach to check on the teenagers. This time he carries the rifle that Gloria borrowed for Ben to scare away the deer. Ben is shaking with fear, but he hopes the gun will convince the teens that he has authority on his land. Ben has no intention of using the gun. When Ben gets down to the beach, he finds a young girl among the teenagers. The girl's presence subdues the boys slightly. Ben takes this opportunity to be slightly more aggressive. He mentions Spin and Phil, believing that this will scare the teens away. Maybe Spin and Phil are known as dangerous thugs or gangsters. But the teens are not impressed. They tell Ben that Spin and Phil will not be coming around any more. The boys tell Ben that he should change his routine and make his protection payments directly to them. If he does not, the boys threaten to burn down Ben's barn, or worse. A few days later, Ben finds Spin's rotting corpse in his barn. Ben rushes to his house to

call the police. No one answers. By the time he returns to the barn, the body is gone. It was meant as a message, Ben concludes. He is shaken but goes down to the teens and asks them how much they are charging for their protection.

Later, Ben visits the teens more often. He even offers them advice on how to get his neighbors to give the teenagers protection money. Ben suggests that the kids burn down a neighbor's beach cottage and kill another neighbor's cat.

Chapter IV□The Deaths

The girl on the beach, now identified as Doreen, attracts Ben. One day when Ben goes down to the beach, he finds Doreen alone. She tells Ben that the teen boys have left the message that Ben can touch her, but he cannot penetrate her.

Ben is diagnosed with prostrate cancer and has an operation. Still in pain from the operation after a few weeks, Ben wanders down to the beach. Everything that the teens had built is pulverized. Ben finds small fragments of bone and flesh. He is not sure whose bodies are in the ruins. He believes □metallobioforms,□ some cross between a biological life form and metal, are to blame for the deaths. These creatures rise from the ground and devour their victims from the feet up.

The FedEx driver, who turns out to be Phil, now collects protection money, and the U.S. government may move from Washington, D.C., to Memphis, the center for FedEx. Mexico has repossessed Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and lower California.

Ben's world is changing rapidly. He wears diapers now and cannot perform sexually. His friends, Red and Ken, finally come to visit him. They have little to say, and Ben cannot understand how he once enjoyed their company. Gloria hires a man to kill the deer that eat her plants. Winter is rushing in, marking the end of the cycle noted in Ben's journal. Although the seasons repeat one after another, seemingly unchanged, the same is not true for Ben's life. Even Gloria is drifting away from Ben. She even insists on sleeping in her own bed because Ben is now incontinent. Ben begins to feel like some plant in Gloria's garden, which she is constantly trying to train through pruning, tying back, and various forms of poisons.

Slurping my soup, picking my nose even in the dark of the movie theatre, putting on a striped tie with a checked jacket□all these harmless self-indulgences excite her to flurries of admonition, and perhaps I am wrong to take offense. She merely wants to train me, like a rose up a trellis. As I age and weaken, I more and more succumb to her tireless instruction.

Ben is fading, much like the large object in the sky that suddenly, one day, disappears.

Chapter V□The Dahlia

The last chapter opens with Ben discussing the two life forms on earth: humans and a fungus. The fungus grows all over the land in various forms. The narrator (it is not clear if this is Ben) wanders around, picking and eating it.

John, the man who is to kill the deer, arrives at Ben's house, dressed in camouflage. He will kill the deer with a bow and arrow. In order to lure the doe, John brings a fawn blat that mimics the cry of a young deer. When John finally gets the deer, he guts it and shows off the carcass to Gloria. John explains in detail how he killed the doe. Gloria is ecstatic. John offers Gloria and Ben a deer steak. They tactfully refuse.

Near the end of the novel, Ben wants to find the dahlia tuber that Gloria has safely stashed away. She had won a prize for the flower in the summer and has packed it away for the winter. Ben does not want to ask Gloria where it is because he realizes that she does not trust him with it. He also realizes that the greatest moment of that year for Gloria probably was the winning of the dahlia prize.

Characters

Adrien

Adrien, who is from the African country of Togo, is married to Ben's daughter Irene. He and Irene have two children, Olympe and Etienne. Adrien teaches computer science at a local prep school. Ben gives Adrien credit for helping to teach Ben's fractured family how to stay together. Adrien's cultural definition of family influences Ben's children.

Beatrice

Beatrice, one of Ben's daughters-in-law, is married to Allan. She is overweight, has a drinking problem, and has trouble controlling her two sons. She visits Ben and announces that she is pregnant. Ben is slightly jealous of his son's license to seduce Beatrice.

Ken Dixon

Ben's golf buddy, Ken, is a retired airline pilot. Though Ben often plays golf with Ken, he really does not know much about Ken until after Ben has surgery. Ken comes by to see Ben, but the two men do not have much in common.

Doreen

The teenager Doreen hangs out with the three boys who camp out at the edge of Ben's property, the ones who offer Ben so-called protection from other troublesome youths. Ben lusts for Doreen, and Doreen notices. She tells him one day that the boys have told her that Ben can play with her sexually, but he is not to have intercourse with her. At the end, Doreen is killed or just disappears.

Geoff

Geoff shows up with Perdita during Grandparents' Day at the school of one of Perdita's grandsons. Geoff lives with Perdita. He is an artist and noticeably younger than she. Ben thinks Geoff might be gay.

Irene

Irene, Ben's middle daughter, is married to Adrien. She and Adrien have two children.

John

Gloria hires John to kill the deer that eats her flowers and bushes. John chooses to use a bow and arrow to do so. He arrives near the end of the novel to perform this act. John claims he can feel the deer and patiently waits for weeks before he finally takes the opportunity to kill the deer. Glory believes that John is much more sensitive than Ben, despite the fact that Ben did not have the heart to kill the deer.

José

José is one of the teens who force Ben to pay protection money. He is the biggest of the boys and appears to be potentially the most violent.

Deirdre Lee

Twenty-three-year-old Deirdre is a prostitute whom Ben often likens to a deer. For instance, he refers to her as brown-skinned and heavily furred. She comes to Ben's house during Ben's fantasy of having killed Gloria, his second wife. When Deirdre is finished having sex with Ben, she steals items from his house. She never reappears in the story, but she is discussed. She ends up with Phil, who continually refers to her as a whore. In the end, Ben asks Phil about her. Phil insinuates that she has returned to prostitution.

With Deirdre, Ben has his most fulfilling sexual experiences. Of the two women with whom Ben lives, Deirdre seems to be the more caring. Gloria, by contrast, seems only to tolerate Ben, maybe for his money.

Manolette

Manolette is the youngest of the three teenage boys who build a hut on Ben's property. Ben guesses that Manolette is about twelve. He is the quietest and least demanding of the trio.

Mildred

Mildred is Ben's oldest child and daughter. Ben tries to build a doll house for her.

Phil

Phil is one of the thugs who come to Ben's house and threaten to hurt him or his property unless Ben pays them for protection. Phil is heavy set and wears crumpled suits. Phil went to school with Deirdre and is not afraid to tell her to keep out of his

dealings with Ben. When Deirdre leaves Ben, she goes to Phil. At the end of the story, Phil is a FedEx driver. FedEx has taken over the protection business.

Ray

Ray is one of the older teens who have camped out on Ben's land. Ben refers to Ray as the little lawyer. Ray appears to be the most rational person in the group.

Red Ruggles

Red Ruggles is Ben's golf buddy. Red owns a fish business and is often on his cell phone when the men are together, talking to managers of his business and to international suppliers. When Red comes to visit Ben after Ben's operation, Ben gets a different impression of the man. He used to tolerate Red when they played golf together, but Ben does not understand why.

Spin

Spin and his buddy Phil are referred to as the ambassadors. Spin comes to Ben's house to collect protection money. Spin has a red and gray mustache. He often has a toothpick in his mouth. Spin is more aggressive than Phil. In the end, his aggression may contribute to his being brutally murdered. The teenage boys stone Spin to death, sending a message to Ben that Ben better pay them the protection money he used to give Spin.

Allan Turnbull

Allan, Ben's son, has, according to Ben, most closely followed in his father's footsteps. Allan has made his profession in finance. He has two sons, Quentin and Duncan.

Ben Turnbull

Ben, the protagonist, grew up poor but made a lot of money working for an investment company. He is now retired and living comfortably but not too happily. Ben has five children, all of them fairly well off financially. He has been married twice. Neither marriage was successful. He was not faithful to either Perdita, his first wife, or to Gloria, his second wife. However, he seems have been more in love with Perdita than with Gloria.

Ben has unsatisfied sexual appetite. He lusts after women, no matter what their ages. He even feels sexually drawn to one of his daughters-in-law. He has a low opinion of women, yet he needs them. His sexual drive seems to be his main focus; ironically, he becomes impotent due to prostrate cancer. By the end of the novel, he appears to grasp

a hint of an awakening. He has always been observant of nature, but at the end, its beauty is more important to him.

Gloria Turnbull

Gloria, Ben Turnbull's second wife, likes to rearrange nature. She pushes Ben and seems rather negative toward him. Ben suspects that she wants him dead. She disappears completely for a large section of the book. Ben fantasizes that she is dead. In her absence, Ben invites Deirdre into the house.

Gloria appears to see little worth in Ben. She does not trust him and believes he is not sensitive to her needs. When Ben has his operation, Gloria is distracted by her business and completely withdraws from him. In the end, Gloria shows more feminine warmth toward John, who kills the deer for her, and Phil, who collects protection money from her. She belittles Ben and takes full charge of their lives.

Perdita Turnbull

Perdita was Ben's first wife. Ben and she met in college. Perdita was an art student. She bore him five children in the course of their marriage. When Ben sees her during Grandparents' Day celebration at the school of one of their grandsons, he refers to her as the □gaunt old witch□ who □contains a beauty that I am one of the last on earth to still descry.□ Ben was not faithful to Perdita while married to her. One of his affairs was with Gloria, who eventually pulls him away from Perdita. However, Ben does not seem to be completely over Perdita. He senses his love for her when he sees her. Gloria senses it too and is jealous of Perdita, who may be the only person in the novel for whom Ben has deep feelings.

Themes

Lust

Lust is a driving force in Updike's protagonist, Ben Turnbull, in *Toward the End of Time*. Lust seems to keep Ben alive. Ben's lust broke up his first marriage, driving him toward his second wife. Even though Ben is retired and elderly, his desire for women is constant. Whenever Ben watches his second wife, Gloria, he sees her in a lustful way and wants to have sexual intercourse with her. But whenever Gloria is away, Ben either fantasizes about bringing another woman into the house or actually sneaks another woman in. If neither of these options works, Ben resorts to his pornographic magazines. He pays to have a prostitute come to his house. The prostitute is in her twenties, at least forty years younger than Ben. After the prostitute leaves him because she is bored, Ben engages sexually relations with a teenage girl who has camped out on his property. When he goes shopping or travels to Boston, he lusts after any attractive woman who crosses his path. Sex seems always to be on his mind. So long as he can dominate a woman, he knows he is superior, that he is himself.

Ben is diagnosed with prostate cancer and becomes impotent and incontinent afterward his operation. Gloria will have nothing to do with him and even refuses to sleep in the same bed with him. The young teenage girl tells Ben that he can sexually play with her, but he is not allowed to have intercourse with her. Of course, this restriction is not necessary, since Ben cannot perform sexually anyway. When Ben's body begins to deteriorate, he cannot do much about his sexual appetite. His condition connects with the pervasive decay conveyed through his old age and Ben's thoughts of dying. His sexual impulse also is related to the destruction all around Ben, in his country, his government, and his society. Everything is deteriorating, even the one factor□sexual drive□that has motivated Ben most of his life. The loss of male sexual prerogative is the chief sign of deterioration and death. Living is reduced to this one dynamic: male sexual gratification through dominating females. But death ultimately levels that hierarchy.

Death

Death recurs in the novel. The protagonist is dying. Death is present in many elements in this story. Ben's journal begins with the first snow then progresses through the seasons, ending with winter once again. Winter suggests death, as leaves fall off the trees and plants die back.

Gloria wants a deer killed. Ben refuses to kill it, but by the end of the story, Gloria has found a hunter to do the job. This hunter shoots the deer with a bow and arrow, guts the doe, and offers Ben and Gloria a piece of the meat. The deer, which caused only minor damage to some of Gloria's plants, is sacrificed. Ben believes that Gloria secretly wants him shot, too. In the end, it is not the hunter but Ben who is sensitive to the cruel fate of the young doe.

Then, too, Spin is killed. Spin is kicked and stoned to death by a group of teens who want to prove a point. Spin's death is a message to Ben that he had better meet the teens' demands. Spin's life is meaningless to these young kids, just as meaningless as Ben feels his own life is when he looks up at the huge spaceship in the sky. These teenagers, then, are eaten by the metallobioforms. These half-mechanical, half-biological widgets are indiscriminate about what they consume. The teens, like the deer, are in the wrong place at the wrong time, and so they are devoured.

The title of this story, of course, says it all. The end of time suggests the death of everything: the country, the Earth, the atmosphere, and all forms of life. As Ben ponders his own death, as he experiences the deterioration of his body, he also thinks about the end of everything that he has known. He realizes that everything eventually dies, just as the Neanderthal population became extinct. This thought presses down on him especially hard as he attempts to make a dollhouse for his daughter. He cannot manage to focus on the project after he realizes that even his daughter will die one day. Everything will disappear, will be wiped out, just as certainly as the war has wiped out vast numbers of people both in the United States and in China. Ben realizes that death may be the only certainty.

Illusions

With the failure of the government and the erosion of law and order, chaos rules Ben Turnbull's world. At least, Ben calls it chaos. However, in large part, Ben's world is barely affected by the breakdown. There are no police; there is little food left in the stores; thugs demand protection money but offer no services. Yet Ben continues to play golf, to go on ski trips, to satisfy most of his desires. Is the chaos, then, just an illusion, like some of Ben's fantasies? He imagines having sex with a deer-like creature The deer walks into his house as a deer, but it seems to change once it gets into Ben's bed. Perhaps, Ben only thinks that the deer comes into his house, and he really has sex with a prostitute. Later, however, the prostitute refers to Ben as her husband. But this is not as strange as Ben believing that he has killed his wife, Gloria.

Updike may be exploring the concept of multiple, coexisting realities. Gloria is absent from the scene, and Ben cannot remember where she is or if she is alive. According to him, she may be both dead and alive. Likewise, Deirdre may be both a deer and a young woman, both a prostitute and Ben's wife. Ben could be both John Mark, a character that he pulls out of history, and himself. He could also be an old, incontinent, and impotent man and someone who is still virile enough to act sexually with a teenage girl.

Ben speaks directly about illusion when he describes the large object that hangs in the sky as a second moon. No one knows for sure what it is, and when it fades into the atmosphere, Ben suggests that the object may, in fact, be the result of mass illusion. Ben also speculates that the beings in the spacecraft may have advanced intelligence. In order for them to appear in the skies in such a large ship, Ben believes, they must

have mastered mind over matter. If they have done so, then perhaps all reality is an illusion.

Style

Journal Writing

Toward the End of Time presents itself as the journal of the protagonist, Ben Turnbull. The daily details contained in the journal provide the plot. For example, the journal reports on the arrival of Phil and Spin, who demand protection money. These two characters are eventually replaced with the teenaged boys. Their deaths are recounted, too. The journal also records Ben's sexual encounters, although it is unclear if Ben actually has these experiences or just fantasizes about them. The journal describes Ben's married life with his second wife, Gloria. Readers are privy to the slow disintegration of Ben and Gloria's relationship as Ben gives in to his wife's commands. Ben also records some details concerning his bout with cancer, his operation, and recuperation.

But the journal contains more than outward daily occurrences (including the seasons as described in terms of the cyclical budding, blossoming, and fading away of plants, which Ben carefully chronicles). The journal also reflects Ben's emotions as he explores why he reacts to the situations in which he finds himself. These thoughts are often written in a loosely associative way, similar to stream-of-consciousness writing. One thought leads to another, and pretty soon, Ben is off on a tangent that might explore a story from the Bible or a speculation in a scientific magazine.

Ben's journal writing is significant to him. Its importance is evident in the frequency of his writing in it and in the periods when he cannot write. As Ben becomes ill and does not want to write anything in his journal, he leaves lines blank, as if he is honoring the spirit of the journal. This construction in the novel helps the reader to understand Ben better. The protagonist shows his vulnerability in his journal, which causes readers to feel more empathy for him. Readers may suspect that Ben can only be honest in his journal.

Magical Realism

Related to surrealism, magical realism enriches reality by incorporating dimensions of the imagination. Realistic and fantastic parts are presented as equally real, though these disparate parts may fit together quite illogically. For example, Ben imagines making love to a deer and the action is presented as though it literally occurs or as if the animal morphs into a woman. Gloria wants Ben to shoot the deer, and his feelings extend beyond the ordinary; the deer enters his house, turns into a human being who maintains some deer-like characteristics; and Ben makes love to her. □She becomes,□ Ben relates, □a young lean-bodied whore, whom I invite into the house.□ Later, Deirdre is described as □heavily furred.□ When Deirdre leaves, Ben describes how she □bound[ed] down through the woods with her lifted tail showing more white than anyone could expect.□ Magical realism allows Updike to probe the boundaries of reality

and to suggest that fantasy and thought are as real as matter, and they shape the nature of what people take as the external world.

Science Fiction

Science fiction is a type of fantasy writing in which scientific information and theories are used as the basis of the story or to explain it. Several elements in the novel suggest science fiction. For example, Updike creates a huge object in the sky that the narrator sometimes refers to as the second moon. The journal reports that scientists have been unable to detect what the object is. At times, Ben wonders if it is a projection of mass illusion. However, at other times, Ben believes (or at least ponders the possibility) that the unknown object is a spaceship, created by beings that are much more advanced than humans. He supports this idea by considering the destruction and chaos caused by a war between the United States and China. Matter and mind on Earth, Ben concludes, are equally vital, whereas those beings in the spaceship surely must have minds that have learned to control matter.

Updike also inserts what he calls metallobioforms. These science fiction creatures combine inert matter and biological life. The metallobioforms kill humans just as often as humans destroy material objects. Metallobioforms are a strange hybrid of metal and a biological life form. These creatures live underground and can be heard ticking. They rise out of the ground slowly and devour human beings (as well as other matter) from the ground up. The metallobioforms eventually destroy the teenagers who camp on Ben's land. Science fiction imagines a futuristic world by stretching the limits of the known and taking scientific information and creating something new with it. In this way, Updike creates a world quite unlike the one inhabited by his readers, an act of imagination which allows the characters to move across realities and extend them.

Historical Context

Quantum Physics

Concepts connected to quantum physics and quantum mechanics are suggested in Updike's novel *Toward the End of Time*. On the quantum (or submicroscopic) level of existence, scientists have discovered that tiny bits of matter, such as electrons and protons, have indeterminate being. This means they may or may not exist. They exist as probabilities. In Newtonian physics, larger objects are said to either exist or not exist, but they do not exist as probabilities.

When extremely small bits of matter can be measured, they are said to exist. Scientists have shown that when quantum particles are not seen or cannot be measured, they exist only in what is referred to as potential reality. An electron, for example, can exist in multiple possibilities of realities, like a cloud of possibilities, and is, therefore, said to exist in a superposition. This is true, however, only as long as it is not observed or measured. Quantum particles can potentially be, therefore, in two different places at once.

In 1935, Erwin Schrödinger proposed an illustration for the quantum theory of superposition. In his illustration, he suggested that a cat be placed into a steel container. In the container with the cat was a contraption that could possibly open a vial of hydrocyanic acid, which would in turn kill the cat. Those observing the steel container (all they could see was the outside walls of the container and not what was inside it) could not determine if the contraption had or had not been triggered to release the vial of acid, nor could they determine if the cat was dead or alive. Since the observers could not tell if the cat was dead or alive, Schrödinger said the cat existed in a superposition and was both dead and alive at the same time. Superposition is known to exist on the quantum level. Whether it also exists in the larger reality is not known.

Throughout his novel, Updike uses concepts associated with quantum physics to create mystery and to suggest multiple levels of reality. Like Schrödinger's cat, which, according to one theory, is both dead and alive, Updike's characters (and storyline) incorporate multiple possibilities. The idea that there can be multiple and simultaneous realities suggests that interpretation of the text should remain open-ended. Within this framework, readers are encouraged not to seek a single truth in the details but to focus instead on how multiple levels of reality invite various interpretations of the novel.

Relationship between the United States and China

In the early 2000s, China was not considered an enemy of the United States; neither was it trusted fully as an ally. One point of disagreement between the two countries concerned Taiwan: China claimed it as its own territory; the U.S. government and certain business interests supported Taiwan's efforts to remain independent.

Despite this potential area of conflict, the United States and China had reasons to work together. One reason was economical. Between 1970 and 2000, U.S. manufacturers outsourced production to other countries. One country that benefited from this practice was China. While U.S. businesses and the U.S. economy benefited from cheaply produced goods, China's economy was strengthened so that urban areas could be modernized; China also increased its military strength.

In an annual report to Congress presented by the secretary of defense in 2005, China's rapid military expansion was noted. Training as well as military weaponry improved sharply between 1995 and 2005, possibly as a result of China's hope to reclaim Taiwan. Were China to try to force Taiwan to give up its independence, the U.S. position in support of Taiwan independence might draw the United States into a conflict with China on the side of Taiwan. In the early 2000s, the United States supported an independent Taiwan, which broke away from China, both philosophically and politically after the 1940s. China, however, did not recognize the separation and continued to claim Taiwan as one of its provinces. The military buildup in China was seen by the secretary of defense as possibly signaling that China was considering a showdown with the Taiwanese.

Critical Overview

Updike's *Toward the End of Time* received mixed reviews. Some critics really liked it; others did not. For instance, a critic for *Publishers Weekly* commends □this magnificent new novel□ for □its futuristic setting.□ The same critic concludes that the □book . . . has all the hallmarks of a classic.□

From another point of view, Jeff Giles, writing for *Newsweek*, states that Updike's *Toward the End of Time* □is one of the author's rare misfires, a dull, disjointed roadside accident of a novel.□ In a similar tone, Marvin J. LaHood, writing for *World Literature Today*, states that *Toward the End of Time* is one of Updike's □worst.□ LaHood continued: □There is nothing noble about Turnbull [the protagonist]. His mind is filled with tawdry images and erotic desires; his attitude toward women is demeaning and contemptible.□ LaHood concludes that Updike □seems one of the most uneven of American writers.□ Updike can write great books, LaHood concedes, but *Toward the End of Time* is definitely not one of them.

Writing for the *New Statesman*, Jan Dalley points out that □to complain about Updike's attitude to women is like complaining that a cat has claws.□ Since the sexism is inescapable, Dalley cautions readers: □If you don't think that the vibrant beauty of his prose and the taut rhythm of his ideas are worth the price, then you just have to read another writer.□ At the end of her review, Dalley states that Updike's □quirks are infuriating as always, but his imaginative brilliance and ferocious commitment to his truth are undimmed.□ Then Dalley adds: □His gaze is as unflinching as ever; as ever, its contempt for others is richly matched by its self-disgust. That is Updike. If you don't like the cat's claws, get a dog.□

Will Manley, writing for *Booklist* begins his review of *Toward the End of Time* with strong praise for Updike's style:

His work is uplifted by a prose style of beauty and precision and a narrative skill of perceptiveness and sensitivity. Updike is a captivating storyteller with an insightful eye and a wonderful mastery of the English language. His characters are memorable, his dialogue is real, and his plots speak to us with directness and meaning.

This is Manley's view before reading *Toward the End of Time*. After reading this □wretched□ book, however, Manley concludes: □Updike is indeed human, maybe not like you and me, but human all the same.□ Flawed as all humans are, the great author is fully able to write a terrible book.

The author Margaret Atwood, writing a review for the *New York Times* paradoxically states that *Toward the End of Time* □is deplorably good.□ Atwood continues: □Surely no American writer has written so much, for so long, so consistently well.□ Atwood praises the book and its □brilliant metaphors.□ She asserts that □As a writer, Updike can do anything he wants.□ Atwood concludes that this novel could □scarcely be bettered.□

Coming down between the admirers and detractors, Edward B. St. John, a critic for the *Library Journal*, describes the novel as □uneven□ but nonetheless evincing □the bittersweet, elegiac quality of *Rabbit at Rest*. □

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Hart is a published author and former writing teacher. In this essay, she examines Updike's descriptions of and references to women in order to explain why some readers think the author is a misogynist.

Some literary critics, even those who do not refer to themselves as feminists, have stated that John Updike, as represented through some of his writing (including *Toward the End of Time*) is a misogynist. As a matter of fact, there is a lot of reading material on the subject, including interviews in which Updike confronts this charge and does not quite conclude that his critics are in error.

Misogyny is the hatred of women. The Greek roots of this word are □misein,□ which means □to hate,□ and □gyne,□ which means □woman.□ Misogyny is hatred based on sex, and it can take many different forms, some more overt than others. In all, the prejudice assumes that women are inferior to men or are to be used by men. Possibly even the misogynist does not always recognize his prejudice. Misogyny may be subconscious, acted out without the person who has the prejudice recognizing his own bias. However, there are telltale signs of misogyny and a whole vocabulary of reasons for it. The intent of this essay is not to analyze misogyny but rather to examine how Updike refers to women in *Toward the End of Time* in order to explain how he may have earned this label.

There are four types of women in Updike's novel: the wife, the daughter, the lover, and the prostitute. These types are not always mutually exclusive and discrete. For example, the prostitute type and the wife may overlap at one point and the daughter (step-daughter, daughter-in-law) sometimes overlaps with the lover. Noting how Updike describes these different types, portrays them, and then has his protagonist, Ben Turnbull, react to them, should indicate some of the beliefs that the author has about women, or if not the author's concept then the concept of the narrator who may serve as the author's mouthpiece.

First is Ben's current wife, Gloria. Ben states quite noisily throughout his journal that Gloria wants to control everything in her presence. She wants to control Ben, her business, and all of nature that surrounds her. She wants deer killed, trees uprooted, and flowers encouraged, all according to her definition of aesthetics. Gloria, as Ben depicts her, is a bully. She calls Ben □a bastardly coward,□ when he refuses to shoot the deer that eats her shrubs. She also promises to have sex with him if he will scare the deer away by shooting over the deer's head or killing it.

Ben is passive-aggressive in response to Gloria. He pretends to recognize her strengths, but at the same time, he puts Gloria down and, therefore, diminishes her. She may think she is the dictator of the household, but Ben portrays her as frivolous, such as when she has one plant dug up only to replace it with a similar one, all for no logical reason. When Gloria barks a command (or even when she pleads and cajoles), Ben only pretends to go along with her ideas. He listens to her instructions to do this or that,

but if he moves to the sound of her voice, he does so only according to his own fancies. Gloria hands him a gun, which Ben takes outside, but he does not (and never intends to) shoot the deer.

Overall, Gloria is depicted as the hen-picking stereotype of a wife. This image blurs, however, when Ben remembers what she was like before he married her. Then Gloria's character more closely resembled a prostitute. Ben remembers Gloria for the sexual gratification that she once provided him and for the costly gifts that he bought for her afterward. The narrator, at one point, offers: □Just as she, I thought, was helpless to do anything but attempt to direct and motivate me: ferocious female nagging is the price men pay for our much-lamented prerogatives, the power and the mobility and the penis.□ He puts up with her, in other words, as long as she puts out.

Gloria disappears for a while in the story, and Deirdre appears next. Deirdre is seen first as an animal that arouses Ben as he imagines a deer loping into his house and then into his bed. The deer morphs into Deirdre, whom Ben defines as a prostitute. Deirdre is another example of Ben's passive-aggressive reaction to Gloria. While Gloria is away, Ben cheats on her by inviting a prostitute into their house. He justifies this betrayal by convincing himself that Gloria is dead, that he has, in fact, killed her. Gloria no longer satisfies Ben sexually. □In our old age,□ Ben relates about his and Gloria's relationship, □we had to carefully schedule copulations that once had occurred spontaneously, without forethought or foreboding.□ Ben and Gloria have grown complacent and programmatic; now they schedule their sexual interactions. Ben even states that facing the deer, eye to eye, was □more exciting than anything I had done lately, including making love to Gloria.□ Deirdre is more exciting; she is also younger.

Before Gloria leaves the scene, at least temporarily, Ben daydreams about what he would do if Gloria were to die. He had once thought that he would look up old girlfriends to see if they might still be interested in him. But he has changed his mind. Now, he would □seek out only young whores, with tight lower bodies and long, exercise-hardened limbs.□ He would seek these women because they would have what it takes to handle his □erratic erections□ and assure him of a gratifying sexual experience. Old girlfriends mean emotional baggage. Young prostitutes, on the other hand, are adept at servicing him without further expectation. Their sole purpose would be to figure out how to re-stimulate his sexual passion, □like a tricky tax matter laid before a well-paid accountant on a clean, bed-sized desk.□ It is all numbers to Ben, all rational interactions. He pays; the women provide the service. This is Ben's fantasy female relationship, which he partially makes come true through Deirdre. Ben's arrangement with Deirdre works for a while, at least until Deirdre begins to refer to herself as Ben's wife. □Deirdre is becoming a little too familiar,□ Ben states. □Instead of submitting to my sexual whims, she prefers to give me the benefit of her feminist rage.□ Then their relationship deteriorates. Ben loses interest; Deirdre eventually leaves.

However, while Deirdre is still with him, Ben ponders prostitutes. He estimates that, since the so-called collapse of civilization, the □quality of young women who are becoming whores has gone way up.□ Instead of □raddled psychotics,□ Ben states, now women who might have otherwise become □beauticians or editorial assistants,

nurses or paralegals, have brought efficiency and comeliness to the trade.□ Ben is not glorifying prostitution for the sake of the women who are involved in it. Rather, he is glorifying himself. He has not stooped so low, in other words, that he has invited a person who is half-crazed into his house. Instead, he has asked for the services of a woman from an acceptable, albeit secondary, profession. That is the picture Ben paints for his own sake.

Then Ben treats Deirdre badly. At one point, Ben states: □It had not occurred to me until this moment to hurt her. Now it seemed an inviting idea.□ He enjoys hurting Deirdre and thinks the pain arouses her, too. Ben slaps her so hard that □she tumbled onto her back, her eyes stung into life by the blow.□ In slapping Deirdre, Ben thinks he proves his power over her. This is emphasized shortly after he slaps her, when he sees Deirdre as a child. He looks at her and sees □her face like the face of a girl being mussed in the backseat of a family Chevrolet.□ Then as he attempts to hurt her by plunging himself inside her, he notices her body □stiffening like a scared child.□ Here, the man plays the master who subjugates his slave, or even worse than that, the adult male forcing himself on a female child. Ben degenerates from misogynist to pedophile.

Ben assumes that his right to be sexually gratified justifies his abuse of others. Women are objects, vehicles by which he satisfies himself, and he feels most alive when he has made a new conquest. When he reminisces about his first wife, he remembers how he cheated on her. He realizes that eventually he will be caught, and it will cost him his marriage. Ben, however, turns this in some strange, twisted way to his advantage. He states: □My marriage, I knew, was doomed by this transgression or by those that followed, but I was again alive, in that moment of constant present emergency in which animals healthily live.□ The word, □healthily□ sums up Ben's contradictory attitude. Deluding himself, he excuses his behavior by equating it with health and vigor. His activities are positive. They make him feel healthy, and he does not care at whose expense.

In Ben's pursuits of sexual fulfillment, no woman is safe. There are no women outside his sexual radar. He knows no boundaries. At Christmastime, for instance, Ben's daughters-in-law stay at his house. While describing them, Ben admits that two of his daughters-in-law stir him sexually. □They seem,□ Ben adds, □for all their impenetrable grooming and manners, not quite content.□ In Ben's fantasies, he assumes he can satisfy them. Later, when his daughter-in-law, Beatrice, comes to visit, Ben states that her being in the house with him when Gloria is not at home □had a lyrical illicit side, an incestuous shadow.□ Ben sees yet another female only in relation to sex. He adds: □The languor of the child's [Ben's grandson's] frail, unambitious white limbs disturbingly suggested to me how my daughter-in law would dispose herself in bed.□ And when Beatrice bends over to pick something up, Ben cannot take his eyes off her. □How nice it would be, I thought, to be beneath her and feel her breasts sway, heavy and liquid, across my face.□ When Beatrice gets ready to leave, Ben admits: □My exchange with Beatrice had been all irritable foreplay, ending in biological jealousy of my son.□ He is lusting after his son's wife, which he admits without guilt or shame. According to him, Beatrice is the object designed for male gratification; she is not a person, and she certainly does not have equal status to the male who wants to use her.

Updike wrote the novel; that he has Ben writing his journal removes the text just slightly from Updike's own hand. The author who creates the world of the novel is responsible for the images of women the protagonist envisions. In this novel, women are dissected into parts, and those parts are all sexual in nature and presented to satisfy the male and at the female's expense. Women's thoughts are insignificant. Their emotions go unnoticed or are ridiculed or demeaned. Female intelligence is not acknowledged. In the world of this novel, if women have any power, it is the reflexive power that men allow them so that women can satisfy men.

There is only one female in the novel toward whom no sexual impulse is implied. She is Ben's only granddaughter. Ben cuddles her, feeds her, and enjoys her as the human being she is. If this story continued and that granddaughter matured, who knows what Ben's attitude would be toward her?

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *Toward the End of Time*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Topics for Further Study

Read a book written for the general public on some of the theories of quantum physics as applied to everyday life. Suggested authors are Amit Goswami's *The Quantum Doctor: A Physicist's Guide to Health and Healing* (2004) or Fred Wolf's *Matter into Feeling* (2002) or watch the movie *What the Bleep Do We Know?* (2005). List some of the concepts that most appealed to you or made you think about life in a different way. Discuss these ideas with your class.

Read some literary criticism on Updike's *Toward the End of Time*, looking at the ways in which the criticism evaluates the work. Then write an essay in which you argue either that the novel succeeds or that it fails, using quotations from the criticism you read to support your argument. Present your paper to your class.

Updike presented his view of what the year 2020 will be like. What is your view? Write an essay in which you describe what your neighborhood, your city, your country, or the world will be like in 2020. Will it be better or worse than it is now? You may want to consider global warming, globalization of industry, and the political scene as well as situations closer to home such as what your daily life might be like.

Research the political relationship between the United States and China. What did your research indicate were the possibilities of China and the United States engaging in a war? Does China have the potential of becoming a military threat? What about an economic threat? Is there any chance that China might one day dominate the world such as the United States does today? You may want to include information about the balance of trade and U.S. national debt. Present your findings to your class.

What Do I Read Next?

Updike is probably best known for his so-called Rabbit series□novels having the same main character, Harry □Rabbit□ Angstrom. The first of these novels made Updike famous. The series was collected in a book called *Rabbit Angstrom: The Four Novels: Rabbit, Run; Rabbit Redux; Rabbit Is Rich; Rabbit at Rest* (collected in 1995). Most reviewers believe that the Rabbit novels are Updike's best.

Phillip Roth is a contemporary of Updike and often compared to him. Roth's most famous novel is *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959), a story of romance and a clash of class and culture. Readers who would like to read a more recent novel with an older protagonist by Roth may want to try his *Human Stain* (2001).

Saul Bellow's work is often compared to the work of Updike. Bellow's *Herzog* (1964) is often referred to as the author's best work. It tells the story of a man who has suffered many setbacks. The book consists of a series of letters through which the protagonist tries to gain a perspective on his life.

Updike was trained as an artist before he became a writer. In 2005, he published a series of essays on American art, *Still Looking: Essays on American Art*. Updike uses his gift with language to help broaden readers' appreciation of certain American masterpieces.

In 1990, Updike published *Self-Consciousness: A Memoir* about his life and philosophy. Critics have proclaimed that this book goes much further than just autobiography because readers are able to glimpse the way the author thinks.

Further Study

De Bellis, John, *John Updike: Critical Responses to the Rabbit Saga*, Praeger Publishers, 2005.

The collected twenty-seven essays, including some by Updike, explore Updike's writing and explain the Rabbit series.

Goswami, Amit, *The Self-Aware Universe*, Tarcher, 1995.

The physicist Amit Goswami of the University of Oregon has brought together spirituality and quantum physics in a language that lay people can easily understand. Like Ben Turnbull in Updike's novel, Goswami searches for a way to understand the universe and the meaning of life through science and religion.

Pritchard, William H., *Updike: America's Man of Letters*, University of Massachusetts Press, 2005.

Pritchard examines all of Updike's novels as well as his memoirs in an attempt to provide a clear picture of the author's work.

Updike, John, and James Plath, *Conversations with John Updike*, University Press of Mississippi, 1994.

These thirty interviews on Updike's work give the reader an intimate view of Updike's thought and the progression of his ideas.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) 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, NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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

NfS 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 Novels 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 NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS 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 Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels 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 NfS 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." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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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