Victory over Japan Study Guide

Victory over Japan by Ellen Gilchrist

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Introduction

The title story of Gilchrist's second collection of short fiction, "Victory Over Japan" (1984) is a first-person narrative that chronicles the adventures of a young girl named Rhoda Manning during the final days of World War II. This is the first of three stories in the "Rhoda" section of the book; the other two stories deal with Rhoda as a willful adolescent determined to lose her virginity and as a thirty-four year-old divorcee adjusting to declining fortunes.

Gilchrist's work is praised for its "deceptively simple" style, for the richness and eccentricity of her Southern female characters, and for the engaging quality of her prose. The story challenges gender stereotypes and explores the dynamics of power and victimization.

Author Biography

A Southern writer often compared to Bobbie Ann Mason, Carson McCullers, and Tennessee Williams, Ellen Gilchrist was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1935. In early adolescence, her father's duties with the Army Corps of Engineers caused the family to move around the country during World War II. At the age of nineteen, Gilchrist dropped out of school and ran away to marry the first of her four husbands. Her education was not resumed for sever al years; in 1967, at the age of thirty-two, she earned a B.A. from Millsaps College.

Gilchrist's writing career did not begin until she was forty with a stint as a contributing editor for a New Orleans newspaper. She joined poet Jim Whitehead's writing class at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. According to Gilchrist, the easy mix of social classes and the comfortable relationships between university professors and the members of the local community provided a welcome change from the pretensions and limitations of the upper class society she left behind in New Orleans. The constraints of that life are recurring themes in her fiction.

Gilchrist has published several collections of short stories, five novels, two books of poetry, and a collection of her journal entries. She has also authored a play based on the stories of one of her former teachers at Millsaps College, Eudora Welty.

In the mid-1980s, Gilchrist was heard regularly on National Public Radio's *Morning Edition,* reading selections from her journals. Her work has appeared in a wide variety of periodicals and she has won numerous awards for both poetry and fiction, including the American Book Award for

Plot Summary

In "Victory Over Japan," third-grader Rhoda Manning recounts a series of incidents that occurred at school and at home during the final months of World War II. As the story opens, a fellow classmate named Billy Monday has been bitten by a pet squirrel and must undergo a series of painful rabies shots. The daily ritual, in which the child is escorted from the classroom by his mother and the school principal, Mr. Harmon, turns the shy boy into the center of attention.

Rhoda's curiosity and her desire to capitalize on the sensational aspects of Billy's experience make her determined to interview Billy for the school newspaper. She had previously scored a journalistic coup with her revelation that Mr. Harmon had suffered shell shock during World War I; she was, she bragged, the only third-grader whose story was published that year.

Rhoda's initial overtures to Billy are rejected by her perceptive teacher, Mrs. Jansma, who tries to protect the boy from further victimization. In an effort to secure the exclusive interview and, at the same time, score points with her mother, Rhoda shrewdly chooses the unpopular child as her partner in a PTA-sponsored competitive paper drive in support of the war effort. Rhoda describes the incident:

When I got home that afternoon I told my mother I had volunteered to let Billy be my partner. She was so proud of me she made me some cookies even though I was supposed to be on a diet. I took the cookies and a pillow and climbed up into my treehouse to read a book. I was getting to be more like my mother every day. My mother was a saint. She fed hoboes and played the organ at early communion even if she was sick and gave away her ration stamps to anyone that needed them. She had only had one pair of shoes the whole war. I was getting more like her every day. I was the only one in the third grade that would have picked Billy Monday to help with a paper drive. He probably couldn't even pick up a stack of papers. He probably couldn't even help pull the wagon. I bet this is the happiest day of her life, I was thinking. (Excerpt from "Victory Over Japan")

Although Billy refuses to go to the doors of any of the houses on their route, the pair do very well collecting paper. At their teacher's urging the pair go out on one last trip before dark. This time Billy accompanies Rhoda to the door of a brick house on a corner, where a man invites them to take whatever they can carry from a stack of newspapers and magazines in the basement. Billy discovers that the magazines are pornographic; in fact, many of them are filled with pictures of naked children.

Shocked, Billy and Rhoda leave the man's basement and throw the magazines into a culvert. Rhoda swears Billy to secrecy. Although Rhoda intended to tell her mother about the magazines, she never quite gets around to it until she thinks she sees the man driving by in a car. Imagining herself as the man's next victim, she races home to report the entire story to her mother.

Mrs. Manning is listening to news of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the subsequent Japanese surrender on the radio. For the Manning family, this means, of course, that Rhoda's father will be coming home; rather than being overjoyed, Rhoda has mixed feelings about this news. Her father, when he was on the scene, frequently threatened Rhoda with physical violence and suggested to Rhoda's mother that she "hit her with a broom. Hit her with a table. Hit her with a chair."

Rhoda consoles herself with the thought that her father will not be home for days and falls asleep dreaming of finishing off both the Japanese and the man in the brick house with bombs, brooms, chairs, and tables.

Characters

Bad man

See Man in the Brick House

Mr. Harmon

Mr. Harmon is the principal of Horace Mann Elementary School. He acts as an escort for Billy Monday on his daily trips to the doctor for rabies shots.

Mrs. Jansma

Mrs. Jansma is Rhoda's third grade teacher. She rescues Billy Monday from Rhoda's attempt to capitalize on the boy's misfortune and comforts him afterwards.

Kenniman

Father Kenniman is an Episcopal minister. While Mr. Manning is away at war, he frequently stops in for a drink with Ariane Manning, Rhoda's mother. He regularly offers advice on how to handle Rhoda and his suggestions are far more gentle than her father's harsh recommendations.

Letitia

Rhoda Manning's best friend, Letitia, shares her fondness for chasing boys at recess, but habitually reminds Rhoda of her superior social standing.

Man in the Brick House

The man in the brick house is Rhoda Manning's description of the unnamed character who invites her and Billy Monday to take a stack of pornographic magazines to their school's paper drive. Several months later, Rhoda thinks she sees him driving by and watching her while she walks home from school.

Ariane Manning

Ariane Manning is Rhoda's mother and is described as "a saint" who makes regular sacrifices for the war effort. The story strongly suggests that Ariane is involved with her minister while her husband is away at war. This, however, is lost on Rhoda, who proudly

reports that it is just like her mother "to be best friends with a minister." Rhoda's mother also acts as a buffer between Rhoda and her abusive father.

Rhoda Manning

Rhoda Manning, a recurring character in Gilchrist's fiction, is the protagonist of "Victory Over Japan." In the story, she appears as a thirdgrader narrating her experiences during the closing months of World War II. Although she aspires to be like her saintly mother, Rhoda's actions are far more self-serving than self-sacrificing. She attempts, for example, to befriend the victim of an animal bite, not out of genuine concern for the boy, but in order to obtain an exclusive interview for the school newspaper and to impress her mother with her apparent generosity. Rhoda is a rebel and a rulebreaker and hardly fits the stereotypical role of a little girl in the 1940s. She is determined never to become a victim—of an animal bite, of a potential child molester, of her potentially abusive father, or even of the Japanese. Her aggressive, proactive stance toward these threats is contrary to the notion of the passive female usually associated with this time period.

Minister

See Father Kenniman

Momma

See Ariane Manning

Billy Monday

Billy Monday is a shy third-grader who was bitten by his brother's squirrel and has to undergo a series of painful rabies shots. The experience makes him the unwilling center of attention in a classroom full of students who previously ignored him. According to Rhoda, Billy is "a small washed-outlooking boy" who talks to no one and who is barely able to read. Billy's meek acceptance of the daily ritual of the rabies shots marks him as one of the story's victims. As Rhoda explains, "[e]very day we waited to see if he would throw a fit but he never did. He just put his books away and left the room with his head hanging down on his chest and Mr. Harmon and his mother guiding him along between them like a boat." The passive demeanor of Billy is contrasted with the active resistance of Rhoda, who swears she would take her chances with rabies before she would allow herself to be led away to such an ordeal for fourteen straight days.

Themes

Victims and Victimization

The theme of victimization is integral to "Victory Over Japan." For example, Billy Monday is the victim of a squirrel bite and the painful rabies shots that follow. Rhoda is quick to exploit Billy's tragedy. Pretending to befriend the unpopular child, she hopes to exploit his situation in an effort to enhance her own reputation both as a budding journalist and as a "good" daughter. She had, after all, been the only third-grader to have a story published in the school newspaper by capitalizing on the victim status of the school's principal, Mr. Harmon, who suffered shell shock during World War I. She hopes to do the same with Billy.

When Billy and Rhoda discover the child pornography, Rhoda sees the children in the pictures primarily as prey: "They looked like earthworms, all naked like that. They looked like something might fly down and eat them. It made me sick to think about it. . . ." A few months later when Rhoda thinks she has spotted the man whose basement contained the offensive material, she fears that she herself will become his next victim.

Racing home to tell her mother about the man, Rhoda is confronted with the news that Japan has been devastated by an American nuclear attack— the potential victimizers have themselves become victims of an atom bomb. As Rhoda ponders her violent father's return from the war, she falls asleep and dreams of bombing Japan as well as the "bad man" in the brick house; they will be her victims, not the other way around.

Violence and Cruelty

The themes of violence and cruelty are directly related the issue of victimization in the story. Billy correctly perceives Rhoda as a threat when she approaches him at recess offering him a forbidden cinnamon toothpick. His vulnerability brings out Rhoda's mean streak, although she resists the temptation to act on that impulse: "Part of me wanted to give him a shove and see if he would roll. I touched him on the shoulder instead," Rhoda reports. Her teacher, Mrs. Jansma, also senses Rhoda's true intentions towards Billy and rescues him just as he is starting to cry.

The man in the brick house poses a very real threat to both Rhoda and Billy. Later that summer, Rhoda imagines the possible violence this sexual predator might visit upon her: "He might grab me and put me in the car and take me off and kill me." Yet the reader soon learns that the more likely threat to Rhoda comes not from this stranger, but from her own father, whose return from the war is imminent in the wake of America's violent victory over its enemy Japan.

Sex Roles

The character of Rhoda challenges conventional gender stereotypes. Rebellious and even outrageous, she chases boys and shows off her underpants. It is Rhoda who plays the part of the schoolyard bully, preying on a much weaker male. While she claims that she wants to emulate her sainted, selfsacrificing mother, Rhoda's fantasies of violent retribution against her enemies, both personal and political, suggest that her true role model is her aggressive father.

Style

Point of View

"Victory Over Japan" is narrated in the first person by Rhoda Manning, a third-grade girl. Like many of Gilchrist's female characters, Rhoda is completely self-absorbed, which makes her version of the events she recounts entirely subjective.

Style

Allowing her characters to speak for themselves is typical of Gilchrist's fiction and "Victory Over Japan" is no exception. Since Rhoda is a child when she recounts these events, it is natural that her narrative voice will be that of a young child. But critics have commented that this style marks many of Gilchrist's stories even when the narrator is an adult woman. According to Dean Flower, "The distinctive trait of Gilchrist's colloquial style is its deliberate naiveté: short sentences, simple phrasing, lists. At moments this voice can sound like children's storytelling."

Structure

Like many of Gilchrist's stories, Rhoda's tale is gossipy, even amusing at points. An unexpected violent ending is a Gilchrist trademark; in "Victory Over Japan," the violence is a threat rather than an actual event, but nonetheless the reader realizes that for all of Rhoda's blustery insistence on her own invincibility, she is apparently a victim or a potential victim of abuse.

Setting

The geographical setting of "Victory Over Japan" is Seymour, Indiana. This Midwestern setting, with such homey details as treehouses, children on the playground, and the PTA-sponsored paper drive, evokes the idealized nostalgia of smalltown American life. This idyllic vision contrasts with the suggestions of violence that emerge in the story.

However, since Gilchrist was born and raised in the South and lived (and continues to live) there as an adult, she thinks of herself as a Southern writer and is characterized that way by critics. Her character Rhoda also remains a Southerner. Indeed, the other Rhoda stories in both this collection and the earlier one feature Rhoda in various Southern locales like New Orleans and Franklin, Kentucky.

The temporal setting for the events in "Victory Over Japan"—the final months of World War II— adds to the sense of potential violence that underlies the story. The Allied Forces, which included those of the United States, achieved victory in Europe with the surrender of Germany on May 7, 1945 (VE Day). The war in the Pacific continued until

the United States dropped the atomic bomb on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima on August 6 and Nagasaki on August 9; the Japanese surrendered the following day (VJ Day). It is this news that commands the attention of the adults in Rhoda's life when she attempts to tell her mother about the "bad man."

Historical Context

International Warfare

During the 1980s civil war raged in several Latin American countries—often with at least a hint of U.S. involvement—most notably in Nicaragua and El Salvador. There were at least two instances of limited wars involving superpowers: the British invasion of the Falkland Islands in May, 1982, and the American invasion of Grenada in October, 1983.

However, the most volatile area of the world during those years was the Mideast, where Iran and Iraq engaged in constant warfare. Lebanon became the site of numerous conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and terrorist attacks against the U.S. presence in Lebanon occurred during this time. In April, 1983, the U.S. Embassy in Beirut was bombed and sixty-three people were killed; later that year, a suicide attack on the U.S. Marine barracks resulted in 241 deaths.

Child Abuse and Pornography

Child abuse became the focus of enormous media attention and public concern in the 1980s. This was the result of not only an increase in the number of abuse and neglect cases, but also an increased reporting of such incidents due to new laws which mandated that teachers and other professionals report all suspected cases of child abuse.

Prominent cases involving sexual abuse of children outside the home, such as those involving the McMartin Preschool, the Boy Scouts of America, and various clergymen, received national attention in the media. It also led to an intense campaign to educate youngsters on potential dangers.

Another national debate involved the issue of pornography. Various conservative groups joined forces with some feminist leaders to condemn pornography on the basis of its possible link to violence against women and children. While child pornography was universally condemned, restrictions on adult material were considered by many to be forbidden under the provisions of the First Amendment.

Critical Overview

The collection *Victory Over Japan: A Book of Stories* won the American Book Award for fiction in 1985. In general, the book was favorably received and commercially successful.

Critics invariably focus on Gilchrist's female characters and their unique narrative voices. Commentator Dean Flowers maintains that her colloquial style is deliberately naive; at times, he remarks, "this voice can sound like children's storytelling." While occasionally, as in "Victory Over Japan," the narrator actually is a child, Flower finds this voice appropriate even for adult narrators, since "the style admirably suits the frustrated-child mentality of most Gilchrist characters." These childwomen are variously characterized by critics as spoiled, willful, unpredictable, and racy. Lowry, for instance, describes Rhoda as "redheaded and a hellion."

Gilchrist's surprise endings are praised by Flower, who says her stories typically seem like "the most marvelous gossip you ever heard" until the reader is faced with the sadness and anger of the final paragraphs. On the other hand, Beverly Lowry finds fault with these abrupt changes in tone. "Miss Gilchrist seems to have her difficulties with endings," Lowry writes, "Sometimes the last paragraph seems tacked on, like a patch placed slapdash on a leaking inner tube."

Most critics seem to agree that the unity Gilchrist achieves by featuring the same characters in different stories is both pleasant and effective. "Because many of the stories are connected in ways both obvious and subtle, you feel as though you are reading a novel; at the end you have that satisfied, contented feeling only a good novel can give,"

writes Jonathan Yardley in the *Washington Post.* Yet when Gilchrist has ventured into the longer form, the reviews have not been positive. Yardley himself claims that her second book, the novel *The Annunciation* (1983), is "flabby, narcissistic, sophomoric."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
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Critical Essay #1

Dewsbury has taught English and American Studies at Wayne State University. In the following essay, she explores Rhoda's efforts to defy gender stereotypes and avoid victimization—efforts that in the end are futile.

Although Ellen Gilchrist's writings include poetry, novels, and even a screenplay, she is most recognized as a master of short fiction, specifically short stories that feature Southern females chafing against their confining culture. Many of her characters, including Rhoda Manning, Nora Jane Whittington, and Crystal Manning (Rhoda's cousin), appear in several stories at different ages and in varying circumstances.

For example, Rhoda appears in the first three stories of Gilchrist's second short story collection, *Victory Over Japan*. The "Rhoda" section includes "Victory Over Japan," featuring an eight-year-old Rhoda during the spring and summer of 1945; "Music," in which Rhoda as a rebellious young teenager experiments with smoking and sex; and "The Lower Garden District Free Gravity Mule Blight or Rhoda, a Fable," which catches up with Rhoda at the age of thirty-four, when she is in the process of a divorce.

Although all three of these incarnations of Rhoda have plenty to say for themselves, it is only the first who is permitted to tell her own story in her own words. Rhoda also appeared in several stories at various ages in Gilchrist's first short story collection, *In the Land of Dreamy Dreams.*

Gilchrist's characters are variously described as willful, brash, outspoken, and outrageous; Rhoda, even at the age of eight, exhibits all those traits. Although she is a Brownie Scout in "Victory Over Japan," Rhoda otherwise defies gender stereotypes. She is neither sweet nor innocent—she recounts without shame her normal routine at recess: chasing boys with her best friend Letitia and hanging upside down on the monkey bars in order to show off her underpants. She is opportunistic and devoted to enhancing her reputation at any cost.

She is a bit of a bully to her shy classmate, Billy Monday. The boy's unfortunate encounter with a potentially rabid squirrel provides Rhoda with a chance to get a second story published in her school's newspaper. Her first story exposed her principal's experience with shell shock during the First World War.

When she tries to get an exclusive interview with Billy, the young victim becomes visibly upset; perhaps he senses the predatory nature of her overtures to him. Her teacher recognizes the threat Rhoda poses and rescues Billy just as he collapses into tears.

It is perhaps the backdrop of World War II that emboldens Rhoda. For the most part, the men are away at war and the women are preoccupied with the war effort. Rhoda seems, at least temporarily, unfettered by normal social constraints.

The males who remain on the domestic scene appear to be victims of one sort or another, prompting Rhoda to exploit their condition even more. The language that she uses to describe both Billy and Mr. Harmon emphasizes their vulnerability. For example, Mr. Harmon, wearing casual clothes for the school paper drive, "looked more shell-shocked than ever" to Rhoda who had never seen him in anything but a gray suit.

Billy is compared to a bug in Rhoda's descriptions— first a roly-poly, then a spider. As he tries to protect himself, Billy answers her prying questions with "I don't know," while "his head was starting to slip down onto his chest. He was rolling up like a ball."

Rhoda persists and Billy shrinks into himself even more: "He had pulled his legs up on the bench. Now his chin was so far down into his chest I could barely hear him talk. Part of me wanted to give him a shove and see if he would roll." When Mrs. Jansma intervenes, Billy clings to the teacher "like a spider," according to Rhoda.

The young boys in the pornographic pictures are described in a similar fashion. Although the magazines contain photos of both boys and girls, it is the males that Rhoda focuses on—she is, of course, interested because she's never seen a boy naked before, but she is also morbidly fascinated by their vulnerability and assigns them the same victim status she has given to Billy and Mr. Harmon.

As she walks home, she thinks about the little boys in the picture. "They looked like earthworms, all naked like that," she thinks, "They looked like something might fly down and eat them. It made me sick to think about it."

Rarely does she think of herself as a victim. If she were Billy, she would kill the squirrel by cutting its head off, she tells him. If she were faced with fourteen painful rabies shots, she would run away. The threat posed by animals, like the squirrel that bit Billy, does give her a moment of reflection. "I was thinking about the Livingstons' bulldog," she recalls, "I'd had some close calls with it lately."

Throughout most of the story, Rhoda is in charge. For example, she quickly assumes control at the paper drive. So sure that Billy is too weak to be of much real help, Rhoda pulls the wagon; moreover, she approaches the homeowners asking for papers, since Billy says he would prefer to wait on the sidewalk.

On their final stop of the day, Billy finally does the talking and it is he who discovers the contents of the magazines the man has invited them to take. Still, it is Rhoda who insists on a hasty retreat from the basement and swears Billy to secrecy. Only when she thinks she sees the man on the street does Rhoda's bravado begin to crumble. Suddenly she begins to imagine herself as a potential victim, describing the events of an August afternoon:

I had been to the swimming pool and I thought I saw the man from the brick house drive by in a car. I was pretty sure it was him. As he turned the corner, he looked at me. *He looked right at my face.* I stood very still, my heart pounding inside my chest, my hands as cold and wet as a frog, the smell of swimming pool chlorine rising from my skin. What

if he found out where I lived? What if he followed me home and killed me to keep me from telling on him? I was terrified. (Excerpt from "Victory Over Japan")

Rhoda describes him as about the same age as her father, a fact that makes him immediately suspect. Why, after all, is he not away at war with all the other men of fighting age? The connection becomes more concrete when the reader discovers that both "the bad man" and her father are sources of physical danger to Rhoda. The end of the war means her father will be coming home, Rhoda realizes, and she is uncertain how she feels about that.

Before he left for the war, he was always yelling at her mother to discipline Rhoda. "Hit her with a broom. Hit her with a table. Hit her with a chair," her father would shout. This is in direct contrast to the minister's gentle advice to Rhoda's mother concerning her child's discipline problems, advice that had more to do with correcting the possible psychological problems behind the behavior than with physically punishing the misdeeds.

Suddenly the reader begins to understand the source of Rhoda's aggressive ways. Although she deludes herself (and perhaps her preoccupied mother as well) that she is becoming more and more like the generous, self-sacrificing Ariane with each passing day, the final two paragraphs of the story suggest that her father is the parent Rhoda most emulates.

Overjoyed that America has "dropped the biggest bomb in the world on Japan," Rhoda lapses into a dreamy slumber in which she imagines herself bombing both the Japanese and the man in the brick house. Thus, Gilchrist brings together the violence of war and the violence of child abuse in Rhoda's dream. In the same language that Rhoda's father had used regarding her, Rhoda dreams of destroying her enemies, both foreign and domestic: "Hit 'em with a table, I was yelling. Hit 'em with a broom. Hit 'em with a bomb. Hit 'em with a chair."

Some critics, notably Beverly Lowry, have criticized Gilchrist's abrupt, often violent, endings, but the fact that they differ in tone from the rest of the stories adds considerably to their sobering, even shocking effect.

Dean Flower and others are convinced that the jarring effect Gilchrist achieves in her stories' closing passages is deliberate, and not the result of some failing on the part of the author, as Lowry suggests.

Gilchrist is, Flower claims in his review of the short story collection, "ostensibly a comic writer, and can be relied on for hilariously funny moments, but at heart all these tales are grim." "Victory Over Japan" is certainly no exception.

Source: Suzanne Dewsbury, "Overview of 'Victory over Japan,'" in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Sauer is a professor of English at Eastern College in Philadelphia. In the following essay, he discusses the major themes of Gilchrist's story.

Ellen Gilchrist has developed her engaging voice as a writer by using a low-keyed, half-humorous, amoral tone. Her stark, down-home style holds our interest. In "Victory Over Japan" we are carried along not by expansive epic, but by straight storytelling, a bit of wit, and eye-opening concluding images.

Gilchrist's humor can be sarcastic, as it is when Rhoda's teacher thanks her for "comforting" Billy Monday, whom Rhoda has reduced to tears; or satirical in its implication of adult hypocrisy, as instanced when Rhoda's mom prepares for a "visit" from the Episcopal priest. Our mind's eye is drawn to her mother's legs as she applies liquid hose, our suspicions confirmed by the off-hand childish remark, "He'd been coming by a lot since daddy was overseas. That was just like my mother. To be best friends with a minister." Sexuality is ever-present in this world, but the child cannot recognize it.

It is this innocent reflection through the voice of a child that provides the dynamic vehicle, jumping from topic to topic, observing, but not seeing, being central to the action, while actions move all around her. Rhoda is the know-it-all American kid who in fact knows but little of reality. Her perception of reality is filtered through Book-of-the-Month Club readings and speeches by shell-shocked old World War I veterans, through overheard conversations and a precocious imagination.

Like all of us, Rhoda is piecing together bits of reality trying to make sense of a world at war and of a family separated by oceans. Often a brat but never dull, Rhoda is growing up and will soon join in the empty human lives of the "spoiled, willful yet captivating women" who inhabit Gilchrist's fictional world. "Victory Over Japan" allows us a glimpse of Rhoda's psychological development.

Gilchrist writes in the tradition of the mildly depressed, emotionally dissipated, morally wornout South. Like many a literary Southerner, her voice offers a lilting emptiness, which in some ways is an echo of the jaded voice of mid-America. The South is a parable of our national exhaustion.

Yet in spite of this, we also feel a connection to Gilchrist's characters and settings. Her evocative use of references to Americana throughout the short story link us to the familiar. Her allusions to our cultural framework act as a means for calling forth the stock responses and memories of American life. We feel nostalgia for sensate objects: cinnamon toothpicks, coonskin caps, the beating of chalky erasers for the teacher, treehouses, basements full of newspapers tied up neatly with string as if sloppy newspapers were a crime.

She evokes a bygone era of innocence, an American pastoral already passing away at the time she describes. Yet the American dream is an illusion that also has its dark underside. The innocent child or nation is father to the "wised-up" adolescent of empire. Rhoda and America are both changing.

Throughout the story these two worlds of innocence and dark worldliness are kept psychologically distinct, interacting at various moments for contrast and revelation. Gilchrist's writing leaps back and forth between contrasting concepts and images: the ideal of living happily with a pet balanced against a boy undergoing painful treatment for the bite of a rabid squirrel; the safe orderly world of public school and its reassuring teachers against the hidden world of doctors who strap you down and stick you with needles. Paper drives with their light suburban feel of civilized productivity and frugality support a war effort that drops bombs on people and destroys lives.

World events balance against personal events; the sublime and the trivial are related. Violence in the world parallels conflict in the soul. Nations are destroyed; the innocence of little girls is lost. All reality is two-sided. Our memories may choose to recall only the sweet images of girls in their little Brownie suits; we repress the sick awakenings of our imaginations to pornography in somebody's basement.

The loss of innocence, the rites of passage into adulthood, the glimpses of sexual awareness, are the central creative and destructive powers in human life. Gilchrist has used the merger of events, themes, feelings, and conflicts to bring the personal sexual catastrophe and the world war catastrophe together. The evil that men do reaches out into the mind of the child.

This American pastoral ends for two children as they look at the pictures of child and adult pornography in a man's basement. (Never mind that the tale offers no explanation of why the man is nonsensically giving his pornography away for the paper drive. We suspend our disbelief for the purpose of the shock.) Rhoda and Billy Monday feel real evil and its presence in the world, hidden in the dark, in the depths of a basement, in the subterranean depths of mankind's dark side.

The children flee, but the pornography is now in their wagon. They can't escape; it will follow them forever. It is in their minds, awakening the dormant sexual darkness. They cast it away into the bushes as if to rid themselves of its taint. They swear to each other never to reveal what they found.

Later in the story, the man reappears in Rhoda's life as he drives by and stares at her. Rhoda cannot escape the knowledge of his eyes. "He looked right at my face." The man will always be looking.

Gilchrist's characters are broken creatures sliding from the world of Southern gentility into an American muck. Rhoda is no exception. What seems to be missing in this world of hostile and malignant men is any sense of redemption. Gilchrist's light storytelling techniques reflect the sorry sadness of Southern tragedy.

By contrast one thinks of Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird.* In that book, Jem and Scout, two children, also provide the narrative viewpoint. As in Gilchrist's writings, there is a sense of the tragic structure of Southern life, of things not appearing as they are, of hidden evils. In Harper Lee's work, however, we have a greater sense of resolution— the villain falls on his knife (or does he?), and reclusive hero Boo Radley is left alone. A Southern tragedy finds a Southern solution.

In Ellen Gilchrist's world, there is less of a sense of finality; the evil pornographic man is always lurking. The best our little Rhoda can do is to wish that the world were not as it is.

Beverly Lowry has commented: "Gilchrist seems to have her difficulties with endings. Sometimes the last paragraph seems tacked on, like a patch placed slapdash on a leaking inner tube." Some might find it so with "Victory Over Japan." There is a purposed strangeness to the ending; but it is a strangeness which ties the themes together. The violence of the ending serves to bring the two worlds of adult and child together in an explosive and apocalyptic conclusion.

The symbol for that conclusion is the atomic bomb. Today we understand that the Bomb is dangerous. The Bomb is our collective phobia. We worry about nuclear holocaust, nuclear accidents, nuclear proliferation, nuclear terrorism, and nuclear waste. What we often fail to remember is that the initial use of the atomic bomb offered not a problem, but a solution. It solved the problem of the continuing war with Japan by vaporizing large numbers of Japanese. However horrendous the killing of thousands of Japanese, the general response of the American people was one of triumph and relief. The war was over.

Gilchrist transfers this methodology of solving the world's problems to Rhoda's childish vision. A sweeping annihilation offers itself as the solution to the problems that confront her. Press this button, throw that switch, and your problems will disappear. With the Bomb, Rhoda can eliminate the war, the evil man with the child pornography, and a distant unloving father whom she is really not sure she wants to come home.

The psychological explosion within cleanses the world outside. Problems and people are vaporized. Her psychological overload is solved by the release of the dark side. With the pure selfishness of a child she offers up her wish fulfillment: destroy the enemy. Blast him. She has become like the rest of us, like the adult world around her. The quick solution is the human solution. Rhoda has started to grow up.

Source: James Sauer, "Overview of 'Victory over Japan,'" in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Fowler analyzes the characters of Rhoda, Nora Jane, and Crystal, contending that they "are not only willful, they are also warmhearted, brave, and generous."

In one of the stories in Ellen Gilchrist's Victory Over Japan. a wealthy woman barricades herself in her bedroom and combs through newspapers and magazines cutting out words and gluing them to the walls, the chair, the bed. It is, she says, "her work"—"I have to find the words, when I find the right words I will expose them. You'll see. I will have it all out in the open where everyone can see. Then they will not be able to deny it. Then everyone will know." When a friend comes to visit, she whispers urgently, "Bring me words."

For Southern author Ellen Gilchrist too, words are important. In her new collection of stories, *Victory Over Japan* she too is looking for the right words, to set it all down just right and so then perhaps to make some sense of the diverse and bizarre shapes human existence can take. For the most part, the stories in this collection revolve around the lives of three very similar Southern women: Rhoda, Nora Jane and Crystal. Above all, what these women have in common is an awesome and seemingly undeterrable willfulness. When, for example, Rhoda, an adolescent of 14, determines to take a train to St. Louis to offer her virginity to her reluctant Jewish boyfriend and her mother attempts to stop her, Rhoda seems to go mad. Blind with rage, she screams, "'I'm going to kill you . . . I really am,' and she thought for a moment that she would kill her, but then she noticed her grandmother's Limoges hot chocolate pot . . . and threw it all the way across the room and smashed it into a wall beside a framed print of 'The Blue Boy.'" Equally formidable is Nora Jane Whittington, a self-taught anarchist who, to get enough money to go to San Francisco to join her lover, disguises herself as a Dominican nun and robs a bar in the Irish Channel section of New Orleans. And nothing stands in the way either of beautiful, wealthy, notorious Crystal Manning. In the climactic final story of the collection, Crystal has a showdown with her archrival, her brother, who arranges African safaris in Texas for people who do not have the time to go to Africa. Using her brother's custom-made Mercedes like a tank, Crystal rams it repeatedly into a pen holding his prized imported antelopes and frees them, then makes good her own getaway in his smoking Mercedes.

But Gilchrist's women are not only willful, they are also warmhearted, brave and generous. Crystal Manning, a born crusader, campaigns obsessively against the selling of young boys in whorehouses; Nora Jane demonstrates soldierly calm when during an earthquake she is trapped on a collapsing bridge; and the third-grader Rhoda chooses for her paper-drive-partner Billy Monday, a classmate who has been bitten by a rabid squirrel and has to have 13 shots in the stomach.

Multifaceted and unpredictable, Gilchrist's Southern belles elude easy classification. But Traceleen, Crystal's black maid, comes closest to assessing accurately all of the members of this sisterhood when she says, "Some people just meant to be more trouble

than other people. Demand more, cause more trouble and cause more goodness. Got to study them, so we see how things are made to happen." In *Victory Over Japan,* Gilchrist takes Traceleen's advice seriously and, with resounding success, "studies them."

Source: Doreen Fowler, in a review of "Victory over Japan," in *America,* Vol. 152, No. 16, April 27, 1985, p. 351.

Dean Flower

In the following excerpt, Flower assesses the colloquial style of Gilchrist's story, suggesting that her narrative form is appropriate for the characters and themes in the stories.

Ellen Gilchrist's stories are charming and funny, instantly engaging, deceptively simple. With the appearance last fall of her second collection [*Victory Over Japan*] it has become clear that her voice is unique. Another woman, you say, to compete with Bobbie Ann Mason, Alice Adams, Ann Beattie, Alice Munro, Ella Leffland, and (name your favorite) all the rest? Amazingly, yes. And another Southerner besides. Gilchrist now lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas, but her stories range from Indiana and Kentucky on down through Memphis and Jackson to New Orleans, taking side trips to Pensacola and Texas, out to Berkeley and back to Virginia. Her characters are mostly affluent girls and women from families well-rooted in Southern traditions (collapsing, of course) and richly aware of the privileges money can buy. Most of them are busy causing trouble, and getting themselves into it.

"Music," the second of three stories about the youth, adolescence, and marriage of Rhoda Manning, describes the determined way in which a fourteen-year-old loses her virginity. "The Double Happiness Bun" tells how the nineteen-year-old Norah Jane robs a New Orleans bar, steals a car, and gets herself pregnant. Naturally for a Gilchrist character, her baby has two fathers. In a sequence of stories about the restless life of Crystal Weiss, the heroine gets her older brother's new Mercedes smashed and then wreaks havoc on his soak-therich business, a game ranch in Texas. These quite extravagant actions are all kept credible and even sympathetic by Gilchrist's skillful handling of voice. Here is how "Music" begins:

Rhoda was fourteen years old the summer her father dragged her off to Clay County, Kentucky, to make her stop smoking and acting like a movie star. She was fourteen years old, a holy and terrible age, and her desire for beauty and romance drove her all day long and pursued her if she slept.

If is a charming touch. Whether in the first person or the third, Gilchrist always gets her characters vividly on the page by letting them talk. The author remains detached, paring her fingernails. "The Gauzy Edge of Paradise" begins, "The only reason Lanier and I went to the coast to begin with was to lose weight." Another voice starts out, in "DeDe's Talking, It's Her Turn," "The groom's mother's garden. You've never seen such roses," followed by a list. Four of the stories about Crystal come from the voice of Traceleen, a

black woman who tries to care for this flamboyantly unhappy family. Traceleen is a perfect choice for narrator because she foreshortens things so decisively: "He was marrying this girl, her daddy was said to be the richest man in Memphis," Traceleen explains. "The Weisses were real excited about it. As much money as they got I guess they figure they can use some more." Greatly to the author's credit, she does not strain to differentiate the language of Traceleen from anyone else's, rich or poor, black or white. Traceleen is no fool in any case: "That's the kind of man Miss Crystal goes for," she tells us. "I don't know why she ever married Mr. Manny to begin with. They not each other's type. It's a mismatch. Anybody could see that."

The distinctive trait of Gilchrist's colloquial style is its deliberate naiveté: short sentences, simple phrasing, lists. At moments this voice can sound like children's storytelling: "Nora Jane Whittington was going to have a baby." Or, "Lady Margaret Sarpie felt terrible." But the style admirably suits the frustrated-child mentality of most of Gilchrist characters. Freed of linguistic entanglements, one dashes headlong through these stories, sometimes as if they were just the most marvelous gossip you ever heard, only to come up short against the sadness and anger and self-defeating pride of these vigorously unselfconscious people. Gilchrist has a strong impulse to tie her stories together, in sequences of three, four, and five episodes about a single figure, and with very suggestive non-chronological loops to hint at the fateful patterns of these lives. She is ostensibly a comic writer, and can be relied on for hilariously funny moments, but at heart all these tales are grim. Traceleen has an apt comment on this phenomenon: "Sometimes I start telling a story that's sad and the first thing anybody says is how come? How come they went and did that way? Nobody says how come when you tell a funny story. They're too busy laughing." Gilchrist's unique art is to tell such funny stories and get you to ask how come.

Source: Dean Flower, in a review of "Victory over Japan," in *The Hudson Review,* Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2, Summer, 1985, pp. 313-14.

Critical Essay #4

In the following excerpt, Lowry provides an overview of the female characters in "Victory over Japan," praising Gilchrist's portrayal of racy Southern women.

Ellen Gilchrist is a very nervy writer. That fact ought, first off, to be given its due. Nerve won't suffice to get a tightrope walker across the wire, but it provides the initial boost: without nerve, no circus. In the same way, nerve urges a fiction writer to go ahead and shoot whatever moon it is he has been given to aim at, without caution or respect for current fashion, a boon for the reader to be sure.

In her new collection of stories, *Victory Over Japan*, Miss Gilchrist once again demonstrates not only her willingness to take risks, but her generosity as a writer as well. Without much authorial manicuring or explanation, she allows her characters to emerge whole, in full possession of their considerable stores of eccentricities and passion. A Gilchrist story typically begins with the central character— almost always a woman—out on some limb. The limb will be of a spindly tree, say a blossoming crape myrtle, and the woman on it, who will have grown up as somebody's daughter, will once have been better off than she is now: richer, thinner, younger . . . in short, will once have had more power in her world. She does not, however, cling to the branch, since nothing in her life has taught her that clinging ever did anybody any good, but is perched there, commenting on the view, trying to think of a way down that will neither scare small children nor tear the lace from her French underwear.

Miss Gilchrist's first collection of stories, *In the Land of Dreamy Dreams,* was published in 1981 by the University of Arkansas Press, an event still noted in those short lists of authors made famous by university press books. The book was widely noted and well received. Miss Gilchrist, as a result, was given a fair amount of literary publicity when she signed on with Little, Brown, which has published two other books, her novel *The Annunciation* and now, this new collection. Those who loved *In the Land of Dreamy Dreams* will not be disappointed. Many of the same characters reappear, including the bravehearted and tenacious Nora Jane Whittington who, "nineteen years old, a self-taught anarchist and quick change artist," dressed as a Dominician nun and robbed a bar in the Irish Channel section of New Orleans to get enough money to go meet her boyfriend in San Francisco. Often new characters show up with old names. A Dudley, for instance, crops up here and there, usually as a father. A land surveyor whizzes through, wearing various hats, as does an aristocratic Mr. Leland. Rhoda and Crystal Manning have the same last name, though it's not clear they are kin. These crossovers are neither distracting nor accidental. Like Nora Jane, Ellen Gilchrist is only changing costumes, and she can "do wonderful tricks with her voice."

The stories in *Victory Over Japan* are divided into four sections: "Rhoda," "Crazy, Crazy, Now Showing Everywhere," "Nora Jane" and "Crystal." Rhoda also appeared in *In the Land of Dreamy Dreams.* In the new collection, she is variously 8 years old on a World War II scrap paper drive with a boy who's been bitten by a rabid squirrel; 14, with a passion for cigarettes; and 34, divorced and "poorer than she was accustomed to

being." Newly acquired poverty is a constant with Gilchrist characters. And as another character in another story says, "Being poor wasn't working out. Being poor and living in a shotgun apartment wasn't working out. It was terrible." Like many other of Miss Gilchrist's women, Rhoda is redheaded and a hellion. At whatever age, poor or not, she manages to raise Cain.

The stories are wonderful to tell aloud. In "The Gauzy Edge of Paradise," two friends, Lanier and Diane, both 29 years old, go down to the Mississippi coast to loss weight. Diane speaks: "This trip to the coast was a Major Diet. We'd been at it five days, taking Escatrol, reading poetry out loud to keep ourselves in a spiritual frame of mind, exercising morning, night and noon." When Diane's cousin Sandor, who "had a nervous breakdown trying to be a movie star," appears, there goes the diet. As Sandor says, "The trouble with getting drunk with your cousins" is that "they tell everything you did." The three end up losing not pounds but all their money, and their amphetamines as well.

Nora Jane Whittington, by the way, does get to San Francisco, only to find her boyfriend gone hopelessly California. Nora Jane, however, manages to have her adventures, including one on the Golden Gate Bridge during an earthquake, in which Nora Jane sings songs in different voices for a car full of terrified children, "Walt Disney and 'Jesus Christ Superstar' and Janis Joplin and the Rolling Stones and . . . some Broadway musicals." Nora Jane is different from other Gilchrist heroines in that she is strictly New South, an altogether modern and lovable punk kid.

Like LaGrande Magruder in *In the Land of Dreamy Dreams,* Crystal Manning may be the queen creation of *Victory Over Japan.* Crystal is one of a brand of Southern women who have not been well written about, the once rich, very bright and harddrinking girls who, despite having to borrow the money to pay for the dress, have made their debuts and still wear silk next to their skin, one way or another. Anyone who has read the biographies of Zelda Fitzgerald and Martha Mitchell will have a speaking acquaintance with these women. Tennessee Williams's heroines—Maggie the Cat, from "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" and especially Blanche du Bois in "A Streetcar Named Desire"—long to be what Crystal Manning already is, but Maggie is bitter and Blanche too weird. Regina, in Lillian Hellman's "The Little Foxes," comes out plain mean. And none of these characters have what is perhaps Crystal's essential element, her dark and crackling sense of humor, which can be vicious in any direction, including her own. Reynolds Price has written about women like Crystal from time to time, as does Alice Adams, but Ellen Gilchrist's racy females probably take the cake.

There are problems with a few of these stories. Miss Gilchrist seems to have her difficulties with endings. Sometimes the last paragraph seems tacked on, like a patch placed slapdash on a leaking inner tube. And her point of view within a story sometimes conveniently wanders—in order to explain something or give yet another reaction to the central character. It is jarring.

But this is a writer who does not play it safe and so the risks and misses are bound to be there. The pay-off is definitely worth the ride. *Victory Over Japan* belongs beside *In*

the Land of Dreamy Dreams, not as sequel but complement. If we're lucky there will be yet another, with yet more overlapping tales, of Rhoda at 50 and Nora Jane in a new wig; of new and old versions of Lady Margaret Sarpie and Devoie and of King Mallison and Crystal. As one character says, "Who could stay away from anything Crystal Manning is up to?"

Most of us wouldn't want to try.

Source: Beverly Lowry, "Redheaded Hellions in the Crape Myrtle," in *The New York Times Book Review,* September 23, 1984, p. 18.

Topics for Further Study

Research the contribution women and children made to the war effort during World War II. What types of scrap materials, besides paper, did children collect? What consumer commodities were rationed and how did Americans compensate for these shortages?

Read another of Gilchrist's "Rhoda" stories, either in the collection *Victory over Japan* or in another of her books. How does the character change over time?

Read one of Gilchrist's "Miss Crystal" stories, either in the collection *Victory over Japan* or in another of her books. How do Rhoda and Miss Crystal compare as characters?

What Do I Read Next?

In the Land of Dreamy Dreams (1981) is Gilchrist's first collection of short stories. Rhoda Manning makes several appearances at various ages.

Net of Jewels is a 1992 novel featuring Rhoda Manning as a college student and young adult.

Rhoda: A Life in Stories is a 1995 collection that brings together all of the Rhoda short stories from earlier collections plus two new ones.

Published in 1987, *Falling Through Space: The Journals of Ellen Gilchrist* features several of the journal entries read by Gilchrist in her regular appearances on National Public Radio's *Morning Edition*.

Shiloh, and Other Stories is a collection of short fiction written by Bobbie Ann Mason and published in 1982. A Southern writer, Mason shares with Gilchrist many stylistic elements and thematic concerns.

Further Study

Seabrook, John. Review, in *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 7, 1984, p. 38.

Seabrook provides a mixed review.

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Flower, Dean. "Fiction Chronicle," in *The Hudson Review*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2, Summer, 1985, pp. 301-14.

Lowry, Beverly. "Redheaded Hellions in the Crape Myrtle," in *The New York Times Book Review*, September 23, 1984, p. 18.

Yardley, Jonathan. "Knockout 'Victory': The Best Stories Yet from Ellen Gilchrist," in *The Washington Post,* September 12, 1984, pp. B1, B10.

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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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