

The Way Home Short Guide

The Way Home by Ann Turner

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

The Way Home Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	3
About the Author.....	5
Setting.....	6
Social Sensitivity.....	7
Literary Qualities.....	8
Themes and Characters.....	9
Topics for Discussion.....	11
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	13
For Further Reference.....	14
Related Titles.....	15
Copyright Information.....	16



Overview

The Way Home is a panorama of English life at the time of the Black Death.

It is a story of survival that centers on teen-aged Anne, who is outlawed and forced to leave her village to hide in a great marsh to the east of her home.

The novel is also a salute to the tenacity of the human spirit, as Anne overcomes repeated assaults that threaten to engulf and overwhelm her.

Anne is no lackluster heroine. She is strong, resilient, and high-spirited, and she is possessed of an inordinate sense of retribution. When taunted about her harelip, her response is to pay in kind.

Likewise, when she is mistreated by the baron, Lord Thomas, she curses him and conspires with her grandmother to punish him. Unfortunately, Lord Thomas dies, and it is Anne and her harelip that are blamed, rather than the mysterious illness that has come to town, bringing with it black boils, fever, and death. Anne is forced to flee for her life from the baron's men, who intend to hang her. She is instructed by her father not to return until the end of summer.

Although the reader doubts the possibility of Anne's surviving in "a wild place—with wild men" in quite so unscathed a manner, her exile in the marsh is nonetheless exciting reading.

Armed with a flint, a knife, and a wooden fishhook, Anne secures food and shelter and overcomes weather, insects, and loneliness through four full moons. On the way home, her resourcefulness and courage are again called into play when she is captured by a peasant who wishes to make her a slave and wife for his son.

Not until she returns to her village, however, is Anne's mettle fully tested.

Throughout her absence, she has been comforted by images of home and of returning to her grandparents, Gran and Da, and her friend Gilly. But Turner brings the horror of plague painfully into focus when Anne returns to an empty village. She is, for the first time, truly alone and must find within herself the courage to continue. She struggles to ease her aching spirit by hard work—restoring order to Gran's house and to Da's field and stable—but defeat seems imminent: "Someday someone could come into the village and find her crawling in the dirt, eating grass."

In the final scenes, Anne undergoes a symbolic as well as literal cleansing that finally brings her salvation. In a sudden impetuous act, she tears off her dress and wades into the river near her house. She lets the water run over her and into her mouth. "She imagined the river flowing through her, out her toes, leaving her clean and empty." A new life emerges for her when she looks down the road and sees Hugh, a friend

banished from the village by Lord Thomas, coming toward her. Turner has written a paeon to the human spirit's ability to endure and triumph.

About the Author

Ann Warren Turner was originally trained to be a teacher but decided early in her career that she would rather write books than teach about them.

Her first book, a nonfiction work about vultures, was published in 1973. From that time, she has never looked back and has continued to produce a wide variety of materials for children of various ages. In addition to her books for young adults, she has written poetry, picture books, novels for middle-grade readers, historical works, and books dealing with social problems for young readers.

Turner was born in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1945. She attended the University of Manchester from 1965-1966 and graduated from Bates College in 1967; she completed graduate work at the University of Massachusetts in 1968. In a brochure issued by her publishing company in 1989, she stated that she was a voracious reader when young and could not remember a time when she did not want to be a writer. She cited her upbringing as having been a major influence on the shape of the writer she has become.

Her mother, an artist who did the illustrations for *Vultures*, helped develop in Turner a way of taking a closer look at things, of discovering beauty and interest in the ugly and mundane.

Likewise, it is out of her family experiences that she develops the theme of survival, which recurs in many of her books. Because of her family's liberal philosophy, which was markedly different from that of her conservative New England neighbors, she grew up feeling out of place. Like many of her characters, she knew that she was different, and as a result she thought much about survival in a hostile environment. Through these evocative musings, Turner is able to imbue her characters with the qualities they need to achieve reasonably happy lives in spite of the hazards with which they must contend.

Turner is married to Richard Turner and has two children. She lives in Williamsburg, Massachusetts. Her advice to would-be writers is, "If you think you want to write, then do it. And keep going. Start with a journal. Carry a notebook with you and jot down things when you're at the movies, the mall, the beach." It is fortunate for her readers that Turner followed her own advice.

Setting

The novel is set in England in the village of Foxleigh and its environs in the late spring and summer of 1349. A portion of the story takes place in the great marsh that lies three or four days' journey to the east. In the beginning, Anne lives in one of the tiny cottages in the village with Gran and Da, her grandmother and her father. Her mother Rose died so long ago that Anne scarcely remembers her. Gran knows about healing with herbs and instructs Anne in their uses. Their life is narrow and restricted, and much of it is dictated by the demands of food, shelter, and clothing.

When Anne moves to the marsh, she lives in a makeshift hut at the base of an oak tree, comforted by a "stick of days" on which she keeps a record of the passage of time. Her companions are two chicks, Rose and Piper, which she hatches from fertile eggs taken from a stable en route to the marsh.

Later, the action shifts to the cottage of Sow-woman and Robert, who attempt to keep Anne prisoner until they can marry her to their son Jem. Their cottage is a small hut, much like Anne's own, but there is no fireplace; in its stead is a blackened hollow in the floor.

Turner's historical expertise is evident in the description of the village, the marsh, and life within the cottages.

All come alive to the reader—the smell of the peat fire, the squish of soft dung underfoot, the overwhelming vastness of the marsh, and the terror of the creeping illness. From the opening sentence, one is in Foxleigh: It is 1349, and the church bells are ringing for the wedding of Emma and Tom.

Social Sensitivity

This novel explores a significant social issue: the portrayal of women as little more than slaves and breeders of children who have no worth outside of marriage. The idea, of course, belongs to the fourteenth century and not to Turner. She can do no less than remain true to the era. However, in marked contrast to the prevailing mores of the day, Anne and her friend Gilly voice their disdain of matrimony: "There's nothing holy about marriage, Anne thought. A baby every year and a husband who drinks like Harry." Gilly says of a new bride, "I wouldn't change places with Emma for any money." Anne and Gilly swear to each other that they will never marry. But these ideas seem too modern for the era and echo the author's rather than the character's thoughts. It is as if Turner is compensating with her own voice for the attitudes and social values of the times.

Literary Qualities

Turner has gained a reputation in the field of children's literature for her accurate depiction of historical information. She has demonstrated a talent for creating a vivid sense of time and place, an ability strikingly displayed in *The Way Home*. One sees clearly the village of Foxleigh, with its rutted road that loops through cottages so crowded together that one can spit from the front steps and hit another's door. The inhabitants speak in an earthy manner, jocularly discussing subjects such as breeding, whether among animals or people, and there are myriad details that bring into sharp focus the mores, value systems, and social customs of the day. Anne can count but cannot read; the ale house is the gathering place of men; herbs are the only medicines available to fight sickness; and the floor of Anne's cottage is dirt and the family's beds are wooden shelves covered with straw mattresses. It is a time when the trappings of a rich woman are "chamber pots and three good dresses, meat everyday, and warm blankets for winter." It is this wealth of detail that gives the book its authenticity, as well as much of its charm.

4220 *The Way Home* In addition to its historical significance, *The Way Home* exhibits other qualities that add to its literary value.

One of these is Turner's use of highly visual language and striking metaphors. When describing the dawn, she writes, "As if hammered in the smithy's fire, the sun rose flat and shining." She describes Gran thus, "There were dark purple smudges under her eyes, and her skin was the color of cold ashes." She writes of a bird, "Step by step, like an old woman with failing eyesight, a marsh bird stalked past and blurred into the fog."

One could pull many such examples from the book. Other literary qualities of note are the creation of a memorable heroine that engages the emotions of the reader; the development of interesting secondary characters with personalities of their own; an arresting plot that sustains the reader's interest through to the denouement; and a satisfactory conclusion that is an open rather than a closed door.



Themes and Characters

The Way Home is a grim picture of life in fourteenth-century England. It depicts the grinding poverty and narrow social choices open to the peasants and accentuates the harshness of existence amid the growing pall of the Black Death. The only thing that saves the book from slipping into the abyss of despair is the characterization of Anne. Her stalwart courage and her ability to endure hardship balance the grimness and lift the novel's tone to one of hope.

Anne is an intriguing, multifaceted heroine. As befits real life, she is not all good; she is drawn with a frankness that approaches antihero status. For example, she scoffs at fellow villagers, steals wood from the baron's forest, woos the baron's falcon to keep it for herself, kills a hen without hesitation, and exacts revenge against those who mock her harelip. It is in the business of punishing Lord Thomas, however, that her actions are most bold and questionable. She curses the baron after he gives her a beating for stealing his falcon, and she and Gran decide that the baron must be punished. Not only has he mistreated Anne, he has banished her friend Hugh from the village for stealing a single dove, and it is the memory of Hugh, with his red curls and merry ways, that Anne carries within her heart.

To get their revenge, Anne and Gran send Lord Thomas a tainted length of silk in the guise of a gift. Anne rubs the silk against the body of their dead cow before she persuades her father to bring it to the baron. When the baron dies, whether of the plague that has infected the village or from Anne's curse, she experiences no remorse or guilt. In her eyes, the baron deserved to die. If she helped accomplish it, so much the better.

Anne's personality is not all sass and vinegar and rough elbows, of course.

She is fiercely loyal, resourceful, and determined, and she possesses a strength and courage that endears her to her readers. The only incongruent notes in Turner's depiction of Anne are her feminist ideas. She and Gilly object to the way wives are treated and vow never to marry, an idea that appears out of place in the year 1349.

Although Anne dominates the book, Turner has peopled *The Way Home* with a myriad of memorable characters.

There is Gran, who has the gift of healing; Gilly, who longs for a bed of her own; Jem, who wants to build Anne a cottage and buy ribbons for her hair; and Sow-woman, who has a body like a pregnant sow and who smells of "old cheese and stale woman." There are also Emma and Hugh and Da and Maggie, each made real regardless of their brief appearances.

The theme of this novel is a classic one in literature—the human struggle to survive when cast adrift and forced to fend for one's self. Anne does so by relying on her wits, her resourcefulness, and the stamina of her character.



The flaws in her makeup are sufficiently redeemed by her suffering. She is, by the end of the novel, a different person from the flippant girl at Emma's wedding. When she plunges into the cold water of the river and feels it wash over her, she leaves behind the old life, with its struggles and pain, and comes ashore to become something better. It is then that she sees Hugh, and, as the novel closes, "Anne ran down the road, shouting a greeting."



Topics for Discussion

1. To punish Lord Thomas for the beating he gives her, Anne and her grandmother send him a length of silk that has been rubbed over their dead cow. Were Gran and Anne justified in sending it, thinking that it could harm Lord Thomas?

2. Anne is born with a harelip. How important is it in the development of her personality? Does the harelip influence the outcome of the story in any way?

3. Consider Lord Thomas's death.

Does he die as a result of the curse? Of contact with the contaminated cloth?

Or is his death entirely coincidental to Anne's curse and punishment?

4. Much is said in the book about marriage: Emma and Tom wed; Anne needs a husband; Jem needs a wife; Gilly and Anne vow never to marry.

What does the book suggest are typical ways of obtaining a husband or wife?

5. When Anne flees to the great marsh to live in hiding, she takes very little with her. How does she supply her basic needs?

6. Anne is convinced that because of her harelip she can get only the worst of husbands. Why does she not agree to marry Jem, who is kind and gentle and anxious to please her?

7. During Anne's summer in the marsh, she knows that she must be careful of strangers, as many of them might do her harm. Not everyone she meets is unkind, however. Discuss those who are sympathetic. Who were they? What kindnesses did they perform? What are their motivations for doing so?

8. After Lord Thomas dies, Anne is hunted by the lord's men and their dogs. Suppose she had been captured.

What are some of the ways that Turner could have developed the story had she been caught?

9. Homesickness and loneliness were two of the enemies that Anne had to battle while living in the marsh. What are some of the things she does to combat them?

10. Anne steals wood from the baron's forest and steals bread and cheese from a cottage when returning to Foxleigh; she keeps the baron's falcon instead of returning it; and she and Gran send the contaminated cloth to Lord Thomas even though they think it will harm him. Do these actions make you think more or less of Anne? Do you find her more of a heroine or an antiheroine?



11. The lives of the people in this book seem dominated by poverty, sickness, and hard work. What are some of the diversions that make life a little easier?

12. Anne believes that the entire population of Foxleigh has died. However, she does not find the bodies of the last ones to die. What are some other explanations for what might have happened?

13. When Anne returns to Foxleigh, she finds the village deserted. Why do you think the author did this? Could the story have ended as well if Gran and Da had been there to greet her?

14. Suppose Anne had not found the falcon and there had been no problem with Lord Thomas. Discuss what her life might have been like if she had not been sent to the marsh.

15. The book gives a vivid picture of peasant life in 1349. How have personal freedoms changed from the accounts given in the book?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. There are many ways that Turner could have ended this story besides the one she chose. If you had been the author, how would you have ended the story?
2. What would your life have been like if you had been a resident of Foxleigh in 1349? How would it differ from your present life?
3. As the story ends, Hugh comes down the road to meet Anne. Write a continuation explaining what might happen afterward.
4. When Anne is exiled to the marsh, she takes those few items she considers necessary for survival—a knife, a flint, a fishhook, and a blanket. If you were exiled to an island where you had to fend for yourself, what items would you consider invaluable?
5. The practice of marriage differs from culture to culture, as one can see by Da's promise to find Anne a husband, even if they have to visit every fair in the east of London. Choose one aspect of marriage, research it, and report on your findings. For example, you could research arranged marriages or compare and contrast marriage in your culture with that in another.
6. An oral history project is one way of preserving our cultural heritage.

Interview a grandparent or someone in your parents' generation. How have courtship and marriage changed within our country from their time to the present?
7. Read another book with a Robinson Crusoe theme, such as Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* or Jean George's *Julie of the Wolves* or *My Side of the Mountain*. Compare it with *The Way Home*. How do they differ? Is one better than the other? Why?
8. Consider the status of women in England in 1349. How have their positions and the treatment of them changed there? Compare the status of women in present-day England with that in other present-day cultures.

For Further Reference

"Anne Turner: Imprint of the Macmillan Children's Books Group." New York: Macmillan, 1989. In this brochure distributed by the publisher, Turner discusses her work. She talks about the major themes of her books and the inspirations that she finds for her writing.

Cianciolo, Patricia J. "Literature for Children." *The Reading Teacher* (March 1983): 712-16. A brief review of the book is included in the Novels section of the article. It deems the book a "precise picture of a historical period," and states it is fine material for reading aloud.

Flower, Ann A. "Early Spring Booklist: The Way Home." *Horn Book* (April 1983): 176. A review that summarizes the story and cites its merits in portraying a historical era.

Related Titles

Turner has written two additional books for young adults with themes of self-reliance and courage. *A Hunter Comes Home* is the story of Jonas, a fifteen-year-old Eskimo boy caught in a controversy between his mother, who wants him to go away to school to prepare for the changing ways of their people, and his grandfather, who wants him to stay in the village and learn the traditional ways. Jonas goes to school in southern Alaska for a year, but he finds it painfully lonesome.

When he returns to the village, however, he feels stifled and frustrated by the demands of his grandfather. Jonas seems to fail at both the old and new ways until a tragedy occurs on an expedition with his grandfather. He eventually arrives at a sense of self and a path that is right for him.

In *Third Girl from the Left*, Sarah's unconventional ways and outlandish humor make it unlikely that she will find a husband, and certainly not one that she loves. Anxious to free herself from the dull stuffiness of her nineteenth century New England Village, Sarah becomes a mail-order bride and journeys from her home in Maine to the Montana Territory. There, she struggles to adjust to the intense cold, a sixty-year-old husband, and the tiresome drudgery that is little different from what she left behind in Maine.

She finds unexpected pleasure, however, in the open vastness of this new land, the dark mountains that rise on the horizon, and the workings of the ranch to which she has come. Soon after her arrival, Sarah's husband is killed in an accident, and she must make new decisions about her life. She decides to keep the ranch and run it herself. She knows that a woman running a ranch is an oddity, but being an oddity is a specialty of hers.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996