

# What I Really Think of You Short Guide

## What I Really Think of You by M. E. Kerr (Marijane Meaker)

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

<a href="#">What I Really Think of You Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Overview.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">About the Author.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Setting.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Social Sensitivity.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Literary Qualities.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Ideas for Reports and Papers.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">For Further Reference.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles/Adaptations.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>



## Overview

What I Really Think of You explores the feelings and experiences of two young people, Opal Ringer, the daughter of an impoverished Fundamentalist preacher, and Jesse Pegler, the son of an affluent television minister. Both Opal and Jesse are identified as PKs. In Opal's opinion, this is their one common characteristic. The fact is that Opal and Jesse share many other commonalities, many of which are not unique to PKs. Many young people, regardless of their religious beliefs or family affiliations experience difficulties related to family relationships, peer relationships, sibling rivalry, and frustrations of their hopes and aspirations.

Opal Ringer considers poverty a natural part of her staunch Fundamentalist faith, yet she would like a more affluent lifestyle. She admits to herself that if it were possible to have material wealth and her faith as well, she would be pleased. Jesse recognizes his father's religion to be as much a financial enterprise as anything else, but he does not admit this.

What I Really Think of You shows how both Opal and Jesse get beyond the superficial fronts that have concealed their true feelings and come to grips with themselves as they truly are. This happens as a result of critical events on a certain Sunday in May during which Opal and Jesse experience a number of beginnings and endings. Opal is amazed about the lack of signs to warn a person about the appearance of critical experiences destined to change his or her fate.



## About the Author

Marijane Meaker was born in Auburn, New York on May 27, 1927, the daughter of Ellis Meaker, a manufacturer of mayonnaise, and his wife, Ida T. Meaker. An exceptionally prolific author, Meaker writes under a variety of pen names, including Ann Aldrich, M. E. Kerr, M. J. Meaker and Vin Packer. All of her novels for young adults have been written under the name of M. E. Kerr.

Kerr's lifelong major interests have been reading and writing, and she credits her early interest in reading to several role models including her father and her mother. She cites her father as an avid reader of all types of materials and a wide variety of subjects. Among his favorite authors were Dickens, Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Kipling, and O'Hara. Her mother encouraged her interest in fiction and in finding out everything possible about real phenomena in order to be successful in writing fiction involving it. She recounts how her mother believed in finding out about the habits of people by exploring their bathroom cabinets when visiting in their homes. Teachers of English and librarians also encouraged her reading habits which often focused on the writings by Thomas Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, and the Bronte sisters, among others. According to Kerr, her reading and writing interests developed simultaneously.

Kerr's formal education included attendance at Stuart Hall in Staunton, Virginia, where she was suspended during her senior year for throwing darts at pictures of faculty members.

Through her mother's intervention, she was reinstated and graduated from high school. She attended Vermont Junior College and New School of Social Work. In 1949, she received a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri with a major in English literature.

Except for a brief stint as a file clerk, Kerr's career has consisted of freelance writing. Her first book for young adults, *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack*, published in 1972, although banned from the district library at Randolph, New York, was accorded numerous awards and honors. Her subsequent novels for young adults have, likewise, been highly acclaimed.

Kerr gains inspiration for her young adult novels from real-life experiences.

She attributes her inspiration for *What I Really Think of You* to experiences she once had in rooming with a "PK" (preacher's kid).

Kerr considers her "job" in writing for young adults to be one in which she entertains them and inspires them to return for more reading experiences.

She distinguishes between writing for young adults and adults in terms, only, of their relative amounts of experiences. For adult audiences, she believes she can engage in more subtleties, wherein in writing for young adults she strives for clearer and less

ambiguous descriptions. She strives not to develop characters of pure villains or totally negative persons whether writing for adults or young adults. Several reviewers describe Kerr's writings as being concerned with love in the lives of her characters.



## Setting

The story of *What I Really Think of You* occurs in the small town of Seaville located near the Atlantic Ocean on a tip of Long Island. Seaville has eight churches, including Dr. Guy Pegler's on-the-air ministry and his new TV Summer House. Not included in the count are the Jewish Center and The Helping Hand Tabernacle. The Helping Hand Tabernacle, known simply as "The Hand" is the Fundamentalist church pastored by Opal Ringer's father, Reverend Royal Ringer. According to Opal, all the "fancy" churches are along the main street. Even the Black Baptist Church is located on the "good side of the track." The Hand, however, is located down in the Hollow so close to the dump that the gulls can be heard squabbling over the garbage which could be smelled if the windows were open and the wind blowing. Current events of the story occur unexpectedly. Opal observes, "That's when things happen . . . when you're not expecting them. . . . your dumb mind doesn't even give you any warning that your whole life is about to change."



## Social Sensitivity

Kerr treats the often controversial topic of unorthodox religions openly and with sensitivity. With no hint of persuasion, criticism, or leveling of moral judgment, she presents aspects of the Fundamentalist church and its attendant phenomena such as speaking or singing in tongues, holy rolling, dancing in the spirit, experiencing The Rapture, slain in the spirit and the like as natural concomitants of the religion and without sensationalism. The same matter-of-fact treatment is given to TV evangelism. In the context of the story, Opal's ambition to achieve The Rapture is natural both for her salvation and as a means for defining herself in the sight of her peers. Jesse's indifference to religion is understandable in light of his past experiences. The ambition of Opal, in principle, is representative of the types of ambitions held by teenagers. Kerr's success in presenting these aspects of religious life is aptly stated by a reviewer in *The New York Times*: "It's hard to believe that a novelist could indulge in such concepts as being 'slain in the spirit' and 'The Rapture,' faith healing and speaking in tongues without either proselytizing or mocking them—but glory be, M. E. Kerr has done it."

Details of family life in either of the homes are not only inoffensive but indicative of the lives of many families.

Kerr stresses universal conditions and emotions, such as sibling relationships, child-parent relationships, love, loyalty, obedience, and the questioning of the values of their parents by younger generations.



# Literary Qualities

Kerr uses a variety of techniques to make *What I Really Think of You* an unusually engaging reading experience.

Opal Ringer and Jesse Pegler narrate the story from each of their unique perspectives. Use of this technique is compatible with the dual natures of many concerns in the story. Opal and Jesse live different lifestyles. Their fathers promote different approaches to religion. Opal is poor. Jesse is well-to-do. Although not consecutive, the story is continuous throughout the fifteen chapters of the novel.

The technique of flashback is used to convey the major portion of the story.

While the immediate action takes place during one day, events and conditions that precipitated it occurred over an extended period in the lives of the characters. Opal begins the story by observing the current events in her home on what appears to be a typical Sunday. Her reflections reveal much about the physical appearances of each member of the family and the family's lifestyle. The argument that is taking place between Bobby John and his father over bumper stickers is only an example of the types of arguments in which they customarily engage. Opal's nature as a quiet, serious, solemn person becomes apparent. It becomes clear, also, that Opal often allows herself to daydream and occasionally separates herself, mentally, from unpleasant circumstances. When Jesse Pegler begins his account of the story in the following chapter, his entire account is a flashback to a series of past events that brought his family to their current position. Jesse's account acquaints the reader with the physical appearances and lifestyle of the Pegler family. Both Opal's and Jesse's accounts throughout the story are structured in such a way as to acquaint the reader with the background that supports the current action.

The critical events taking place on the Sunday when things came to a startling conclusion are all foreshadowed in the accounts narrated by Opal and Jesse. Opal has a recurrent and strange night dream that she does not share with anyone, but she believes that it has some spiritual significance. Opal believes that she has been "saved" but admits that she has never really felt The Power and never "got slain in the spirit." Opal believes in, and looks forward to, The Rapture, which she does not fully understand. She suspects, however, that if she should attain The Rapture it would redeem her in the views of the peers who have taunted her about her religion. Opal talks often about The Rapture. "When The Rapture comes" she says at one point, "everybody'll be kissing all over the place . . . and it will be all right to do it." The reader is well prepared to view events that happened to Opal on that Sunday as credible and believable.

What happened between Opal and Bud was reasonable when it is considered that throughout the story there have been many signs that it is Bud, not Jesse, for whom Opal has deep feelings. At one point she reflects, "In my time I've had daydreams and night dreams of Bud. Then when he took off they stopped until Jesse showed up in my





life." At another time she muses, "Then in some of my daydreams, Jesse said everything Bud would say, which had to be the most secret part of my whole existence, no one even guessed, I know that much." Yet the reader is not likely to guess the part played by Bud at the climax of the story.

Nor is the reader likely to anticipate Bobby John's behavior on that day, although there are subtle indications of the kind of person Bobby John is and his deep feelings that wrongdoing should be avenged. Bobby John has a history of believing that the devil is at the root of all things that are not right.

He also believes that there should be some way to get even with people who deliberately cause misery. Once, when Opal was complaining about the way she is picked on at school, her father and Bobby John expressed opinions about what she should do. Opal complained that she was asked questions such as "Can you talk in tongues, Opal? . . . Is it like this Opal?, Cook a look a book, a dook, a duck?" Reverend Ringer tells her, "They was just curious, Opal. Next time tell them calmly how we believe when certain people receive the Holy Spirit they find a mysterious language, described in I Corinthians XII tell 'em, the heavenly language of angels." Bobby John is sarcastic. He tells Opal, "That'd go over real big, just keep your mouth shut, Opal. That's all you can do . . .

What neither of you understand is that them high-school kids aren't interested in tongues, they're out to get you."

Later, when Bobby John tries to get his father to involve Dr. Pegler in some service at The Hand, he says, "Daddy, it's what we need. The congregation's dwindling down to nothing and we're not fighting back." There are indications that Bobby John resents what he perceives as advantages taken by Dr.

Pegler at the expense of The Hand.

Symbolism is used subtly throughout the story. It can be seen in the physical appearances of Dr. Pegler and Reverend Ringer as well as in the opposing thrusts of their churches. Opal describes Reverend Ringer as a man who would never be seen in anything but a "white shirt and dark pants, tie sometimes, sometimes not, but he wouldn't put a colored shirt on his back if the Devil was about to eat him." Of Dr.

Pegler, Jesse says, "If you have seen him on TV, you probably haven't forgotten him. How do you forget a minister in blue robes with gold tassels running up a white staircase to a white and gold balcony overlooking the Atlantic Ocean? . . . Then my old man turns around, blond hair blowing in the wind, blue eyes sparkling behind big black owl glasses, white teeth flashing this big broad smile . . ." Opal contrasts herself with Seal von Hennig, whom she envies, "I was sixteen and had black hair falling past my shoulders and light brown eyes. Had the pale face all Ringers have. Look like ghosts" Of Seal, she says, "She had blond hair like an angel (never saw one with black hair, which was something to think about) green eyes like emeralds, all those freckles." Streets in the town also have names symbolic of the status of the residents who live on



them. The Ringers live on "Hog Tree Road;" Diane, one of the "haves" lives on "Ocean Drive." Opal and Bobby John call Reverend Ringer "Daddy" while Jesse and Bud refer to Dr. Pegler as "Father," symbolic of their contrasting lifestyles. The nature of the families' lifestyles is also symbolized in the nature of the food served in the respective homes. Meatloaf and chicken were mainstays in the Ringer home; roast beef was often served in the Pegler home.

Humor is paramount throughout *What I Really Think of You*. Reverend Ringer's expression of his disgust about the size of the collection for the services at The Hand, in context, is hilarious: "When the haves come down here to the have-nots for their miracles, they leave their checkbooks home.

They wait until they're back up there in front of the cameras to give witness, and they wait until they're back up there with the rest of the haves to whip out their checkbooks."

# Themes and Characters

All the members of the Ringer and Pegler families play major roles in development of the themes of the story.

The major characters are supported by several other characters whose roles are less critical but who are, nevertheless, essential to the mood and progress of the story. The most vivid and clearly drawn characters are Opal Ringer and Jesse Pegler whose different perspectives are shown in their joint narration of the story.

Opal Ringer, the sixteen-year-old daughter of the Fundamentalist preacher, Royal Ringer, alternates narration of *What I Really Think of You* with Jesse Pegler, sixteen-year-old son of Dr. Guy Pegler, TV evangelist. Opal, candid and perceptive, recognizes the differences in the lifestyles between those who "have" as represented by the Peglers and those who "have not" as represented by the Ringers. To an extent she accepts the type of lifestyle resultant from being a PK whose father is not only poor but is affiliated with a religious faith considered to be sensational.

Opal is often embarrassed by the customs of her church and the habits of her father. She is teased, taunted, and chided by her high-school peers. Publicly, she seems to bear these stoically, but she is deeply hurt by their cruelties. She would like to find some way to get even with her tormentors. Not a vindictive person, however, she puts faith in her religious convictions for eventual redemption and relief. Opal, who likes nice things, envies those who possess them. She wishes there were some way to be true to her religious faith and at the same time have some of the nicer things in life. Opal does not always approve of everything associated with her church and with her father's behavior, but she keeps these feelings well concealed. She does admire her brother, Billy John, for sometimes standing up to her father and arguing his point of view.

Jesse Pegler freely admits that being a PK is not only his sole claim to fame but also the determinant of what he does and does not do. Although not so tall as his father, Jesse resembles him physically but in no other way. Jesse is acutely aware that in comparison with his brother, Bud, he comes off a poor second. He knows that he is not his father's favorite son, and he tries not to care. Jesse tends to be somewhat indifferent to his father's evangelism, although he is loyal and obedient to him.

Jesse becomes more and more aware that the financial side of his father's ministry is just as important as the evangelistic side, if not more so. Like Opal, Jesse tends to be easy-going, faithful, and loyal as a PK. His attentions to Opal help her to feel some sense of belonging, temporarily, in the world of the "haves."

Reverend Royal Ringer, Opal's father, always addressed as "Daddy" by Opal and her brother, loudly and fearlessly proclaims his message to the "unsaved" in every way possible to him. He plasters slogans such as "I know the way if you are lost," "Honk if you love Jesus," and "Come to the Hand for a hand," on a light pink rusting van. The van is equipped with a speaker which blares recorded hymns for all to hear. Aptly



dubbed "the mouth," he is described as "a big man but skinny and his thick black eyebrows met at a point on his nose." His devotion to his religion is unquestionable and unyielding, although he would like for his ministry to be more financially rewarding. Feeling some envy toward Dr. Pegler's success, he makes a valiant effort to love everybody as he believes is God's will.

Bobby John Ringer, Opal's brother, resembles his father with his coal black hair and blue eyes with which the resemblance stops. He shows little promise for ever following in his father's footsteps as a preacher. Opal says "that would be like an ant trying to put his legs down in elephant tracks." When Bobby John tries to deliver a sermon, he is unable to hold the attention of the audience. Although he is nineteen years old, he is regarded as "boy" by everyone, including Daddy. Just as stubborn as his father, however, Bobby John often has spirited arguments with him. Bobby John loves his father, the family, even the church. He resents the way Dr. Pegler sometimes capitalizes on "miracles" that happen at The Hand.

Arnelle Watson Ringer, wife of Reverend Ringer and mother of Opal and Bobby John, accepts Fundamentalism in all its aspects. Devout in her beliefs, she is capable of speaking in tongues and dancing in the spirit. Once a pretty, one hundred sixteen pound woman, she has grown fat and likes to go barefoot at every opportunity. She is a secret listener to records of Dolly Parton, Loretta Lynn, and Crystal Gayle. Once a good singer herself, she no longer sings solos in public. She is fond of Good and Plenty candy and does domestic work at the home of a prominent family in order to help her family make ends meet. She loves her children unconditionally. She trains, counsels, and comforts them with love and understanding. A good-natured woman, she sometimes cautions her husband about the fierceness of his sermons.

While both Mrs. Ringer and Mrs. Pegler participate in their husbands' ministries, Mrs. Ringer is the more clearly drawn of the two characters.

Dr. Guy Pegler, father of Jesse and Bud, enjoys financial success as a result of his ministry. Because of his television appearances, he has gained a degree of fame. He is an exponent of the values and wealth of the haves in the town. He conducts his ministry with drama, creativity, and practical financial sense. Once a tent-preacher, he is proud of the success he has achieved.

He finds no conflict between his religious endeavors and the use of creative, sometimes bizarre, techniques for raising money. He is not averse to using whatever opportunities that may be available for enhancing himself and his ministry even if it means profiting from something that was done at The Hand.

Bud Pegler, Jesse's only and older brother is "the chip off the old block" when it comes to comparison with his father. The "apple of his father's eye," he is considered to be the natural and eventual successor to Dr. Pegler. Handsome, bright, energetic, tall, fair, and charming, Bud is always the center of attention whether functioning in enterprises connected with the church or in social situations with his peers. He enjoys being the center of attention, a star. Bud engages in spirited arguments with his father because he



does not always agree with his father's approach to financial matters. He questions some of the tactics used by his father to raise funds for his ministry.

Following one of these arguments, so intense that he and his father come to blows, Bud leaves home.

Even minor characters in *What I Really Think of You* are important to several of the themes. Sally von Hennig (Seal), well-to-do and beautiful, was Bud's steady girlfriend before he left home. Opal considers Seal to have all the things she, herself, would like to have and envies her. Called, unaffectionately, "Chicken" by Opal, Seal is known for befriending animals and persons less fortunate than she is.

Upon occasion, she gives some of her old clothes to Opal who does not wish to be seen in them. Seal's antics, sometimes are well intentioned. She is responsible for introducing Opal and Jesse. She is also responsible for arranging some of the contacts between the ministries of Reverend Ringer and Dr. Pegler. Diane Young-Cheek, a member of the "haves," who ostensibly achieved a "healing" at The Hand. She becomes a close friend of Bobby John and engages in a secret conspiracy with him. Activities and secrecy shared by Diane and Bobby John lead, eventually, to some of the critical events on the fateful Sunday. A series of ministers all friends of Reverend Ringer or Dr. Pegler, respectively, are essential to the implementation of several specific activities in the opposing churches.

The themes of religion, different approaches to redemption, love and loyalty, sibling rivalries, struggles between the "haves" and "have nots," and teen-age friendships are among the themes illustrated in the actions and personalities of the characters in *What I Really Think of You*.



## Topics for Discussion

1. The title of the novel, *What I Really Think of You*, carries a special meaning for both Opal and Jesse. What is this special meaning? Does the word "really" change the meaning of a phrase or sentence, in your opinion? Why or Why not?
2. At the beginning of the story, we see Opal in all her glory. During the course of the story we find out how she arrived at this point. Is the story logical? Why or why not?
3. Do you think Opal is telling the truth when she declares that what she really thinks of her former tormentors is: "I love you, yes I love you." What experience has Opal had that enables her to express herself in this way?
4. Why did Jesse not appear among the persons who came to see and adore Opal after her victory? Was Jesse's absence an indication that he did not want to be near Opal?
5. What was the special contribution that Jesse made to Opal's life?
6. Although Opal and Jesse shared far more actual experiences than did Opal and Bud, why did Opal dream of and prefer Bud? Who were more alike, Opal and Jesse or Opal and Bud?
7. What indications were there in the story that showed that Opal preferred Bud to Jesse, even before the climax of the story?
8. What were Opal's true feelings about the differences between her lifestyle and that of her more affluent peers?
9. What were the characteristics that made Opal a realistic, well-rounded character? Can the same characteristics be attributed to Jesse? To Bud?
10. Opal's family tended to be impoverished. Jesse's family was well-to-do. Were there differences between the two families in ways other than in their material wealth?
11. Opal's father privately accused Jesse's father of having stolen miracles occurring at The Hand for his own financial gain. Was this true? What evidence was there in the story that Dr. Pegler and Reverend Ringer brought different types of business sense to running their churches?
12. Which preacher, Dr. Pegler or Reverend Ringer, was the truer believer in the doctrines they espoused?

Support your conclusion by citing actual events in the novel.



13. Can a value judgment be made regarding an individual's religious beliefs? Why or why not?

14. Opal and Jesse were P.Ks.

(preacher's kids). Were they different from kids whose parents follow other professions? If so, what were these differences?

15. Opal's father accused her of wanting to have nice things, a fact that Opal admitted. Why did Opal feel that her desire for nice things conflicted with her religious faith?

16. By the end of the story, Opal had achieved everything she had dreamed of. What particular event occurred in Opal's life to make all of this possible?

Why was there no longer any conflict in Opal's mind about the relationship between her desire for nice things and her religious faith?



## Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. The small town of Seaville had numerous churches and various types and styles of worship. In 1991, the United States celebrated the 200th anniversary of the document that guarantees the people the right to freedom of religion. What was this document?

What other rights are included in the same paragraph of this document that are protection for preachers such as Reverend Ringer and Dr. Pegler? Examine this document and develop a report on the people's right to religious freedom.

2. Describe the techniques Kerr uses to make the story appear realistic and timely.

3. After Kerr wrote her first novel for young adults, *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack* in 1972, she began to write regularly for this audience. Compare Kerr's first novel for young adults to *What I Really Think of You*. What similarities can be seen in the types of personalities of the characters in each book?

What differences are there in the settings of the novels? Are the styles of writing similar in the two novels?

4. How does Kerr use symbolism to represent opposing values in *What I Really Think of You*?

5. Find out all you can about Kerr's life. Her autobiography, *Me, Me, Me* and the interview with her reported in *The English Journal*, December 1975, will be helpful. Compare her real-life experiences and the experiences she includes in her fiction for young adults.

6. What is the meaning of freelance writing? How do you suppose the fact that Kerr is a freelance writer has affected her extensive production? What other characteristics does Kerr have that account for her success in writing for young adults?



## For Further Reference

Carlson, Dale. "Smack: Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack." *The New York Times Book Review* 7,1 (February 11, 1973): Carson reviews Kerr's *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack*, calling it "brilliantly funny." He states that "few writers succeed as well as Kerr in trying to characterize the peculiar poignancy and the terrible hilarity of adolescence."

Janiczko, Paul. "An Interview with M. E. Kerr." *The English Journal* (December 1975): 26. Kerr responds to a series of questions about her early life, her interests, and her writing habits.

Kerr, M. E. *Me, Me, Me*. New York: Harper, 1983. In this autobiography, Kerr reveals her real-life experiences.

She describes diverse escapades ranging from her first kiss to her first publication. She describes some of the personalities from her real life that later became the bases for characters in some of her novels.

## Related Titles/Adaptations

Kerr has written a large number of books designed especially for young adults. In all of these, she has shown a high degree of sensitivity to the language, thought processes, activities, concerns, and aspirations of teen-agers.

In many cases, Kerr focuses attention of teen-agers with problems that are unusual. On the other hand, in *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack*, the major characters are not into drugs, as the title might suggest, but are plagued with common problems associated with being overweight, having psychological problems, attempting to become involved in first-time dating, and maintaining relationships with parents who tend to lack understanding of the perspectives from which the characters view their worlds.

Kerr is especially sympathetic to teen-agers grappling with problems associated with being the offspring of parents whose occupations or achievements place inordinate responsibilities on them. In *Son of Someone Famous* as in *What I Really Think of You*, Kerr writes sympathetically regarding these problems. In *Is That You Miss Blue?* the focus turns to life in a boarding school in which the antics of the characters result in the disintegration of an authority figure. Kerr examines the problems associated with being a teen-aged dwarf or being the parents of one in *Little, Little*. In *Gentlehands*, Kerr focuses on the problems of a teen-age romance when the boy and girl represent widely diverse economic backgrounds.

In all her writings, similarities exist in the manner in which Kerr handles dialogue, descriptions, humor, and pathos. Kerr shows an extraordinary amount of familiarity with the special world of teen-agers. All of the novels can be read as entertainment, sources of information without didacticism, and as sources of inspiration. Adaptations of novels for young adults by Kerr include a film for television based on *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack* distributed by Learning Corporation of America (1978) and an audio cassette of *If I Love You, Am I Trapped Forever?* (Random House, 1979).



# 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