You're Ugly, Too Study Guide

You're Ugly, Too by Lorrie Moore

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

"You're Ugly, Too" by Lorrie Moore was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1989 and was subsequently included in Moore's second collection, *Like Life,* and in several anthologies, including the *The Best American Short Stories, 1989,* the 1997 anthology, *The Penguin Book of International Women's Stories* and *The Best American Short Stories of the Century,* edited by John Updike. "You're Ugly, Too" wasMoore's first story to find a home in the *New Yorker,* the magazine considered by many to be the pre-eminent publication for new fiction. According to Don Lee, writing in *Ploughshares,* the story also had the distinction of causing a bit of a stir in the magazine's editorial offices. With the "turgidity" of long-time editor William Shaw still gripping the venerable "institution," *New Yorker* editors pointed out toMoore several "vulgarities" of the writing process she had committed in the story. "All through the editing process, they said, 'Oooh, we're breaking so many rules with this,'" Lee quotesMoore as saying.

Acclaimed for the cutting sarcasm and wit that Moore has come to be known for, "You're Ugly, Too" tells the story of Zoë Hendricks, an unmarried history professor who lives alone in the small Midwestern town of Paris, Illinois, and teaches in the local liberal arts college; the story examines her relationships with men, her students, her sister and, in general, her life. With a sparse plot,Moore's story relies on Hendricks's character and the running gags and jokes she relentlessly throws at anyone within listening distance to sustain it.

While one of the major themes that "You're Ugly, Too" addresses is obviously sexual relationships (throughout much of the story, Hendricks's relationships to men are somehow addressed, either through anecdotes, her biting commentary, or in the story's final scenes at a Halloween party where Hendricks is engaged in a long conversation with a recent divorcé), issues of loneliness, alienation and mortality play a prominent role in the development of Hendricks's character.

Author Biography

Lorrie Moore, born Marie Lorena Moore on February 13, 1957 inGlens Falls, New York, was the second of four children. The daughter of an insurance executive and a former nurse turned housewife,Moore excelled in her studies and earned a Regents scholarship, which allowed her to enter St. Lawrence University early. While at St. Lawrence,Moore was the recipient of a Paul L. Wolfe Memorial Prize for literature and was also awarded First Prize in a *Seventeen* magazine short story contest for her story, "Raspberries." She graduated summa cum laude from St. Lawrence in 1978.

After a brief stint as a paralegal in Manhattan, Moore entered the master of fine arts program atCornell University in 1980. Over the next few years,Moore saw several of her stories accepted by such national publications as *Ms, Fiction International,* and *Story Quarterly.* In 1983, Moore sent her collection *Self-Help,* which comprised her master's thesis, to Melanie Jackson, the literary agent of Alison Lurie, one ofMoore's teachers at Cornell.Jackson in turn sent the manuscript to Knopf, which immediately bought the collection and published it to rave reviews in 1985.

Moore has been the recipient of several major awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in 1989, an O. Henry Award in 1998, and a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship. In addition to *Self-Help,* Moore has published two novels, namely *Anagrams* (1986) and *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital* (1994), ajuvenile novel titled *The Forgotten Helper* (1987), and two other collections of short stories, which are *Like Life* (1990) and *Birds of America* (1998).Moore was also the editor of I *Know Some Things: Stories about Childhood by Contemporary Writers.*

Since 1984, Moore has taught at the University of Wisconsin,Madison, where she holds the Delmore Schwartz Professorship in the Humanities.

Plot Summary

"You're Ugly, Too" is a much more character-driven story than it is a plot-driven one. With a sparse plot, but layered with anecdotes and flashbacks that reveal the main character to be cynical and dismissive in her relationships with nearly everyone in her life, especially men, the story offers a glimpse into the thoughts and daily life of an unmarried Midwestern history professor who flies to Manhattan to spend Halloween weekend with her younger sister.

Although narrated in the third person, "You're Ugly, Too" is told from the point of view of Zoë Hendricks who, when the story opens, has been teaching atMidwest colleges for four years. Her first teaching stint was in New Geneva, Minnesota, or "Land of the Dying Shopping Mall" where "[e]veryone was so blond . . . that brunettes were often presumed to be from foreign countries." Her liberal arts students in Paris, Illinois, where she currently teaches□"by and large good Midwest-erners, spacey with estrogen from large quantities of meat and cheese . . . [who share] their parents' suburban values . .. [and who seem] to know very little about anything.. . . "□do not fare much better in her eyes. Known for her eccentric behavior□ students complain about her singing in class, for instance, and when asked by one student what perfume she is wearing, Hendricks replies, *"Room freshener"*□she is tolerated by her "department of nine men. ..." After all, the department had recently faced a sex-discrimination suit and the men are in need of a "feminine touch to the corridors."

Hendricks lives alone inParis and has had poor luck in meeting men. Of the three men she has dated since moving to the Midwest, the first was aParis bureaucrat who surveyed his own pectorals while driving and who became incensed when she brushed an ant onto his car floor. "Now it's going to lay eggs in my car!" he complained. Her second date concluded his emotion-filled critique of a piece of museum art by saying, "A painting like that. ... It just makes you sh□------1." And her third and final date was with a political science professor who liked to go on double dates with friends so he could flirt and play footsie with their wives in restaurants.

One of Hendricks's characteristic features is that she loves to tell jokes, often at the expense of her immediate audience. In fact, she is writing a book on humor, and her entire life, and this story, seems to be held together with one joke after another. Her jokes usually have a sarcastic and cynical edge to them, and she usually tells them with utter disregard for the situation. Even when severe abdominal pains force her to undergo ultrasound tests that we are all but told reveal a perilous growth inside of her, she is relentless in her sarcasm. Her favorite joke, which is the source of the story's title, is about a man who is told by his doctor that he has six weeks to live. The man says he wants another opinion. "You want a second opinion? OK," says the doctor. "You're ugly, too."

"You're Ugly, Too" comprises anecdotes and flashbacks that effectively paint Hendricks as a cynical, dismissive, lonely and possibly depressed character. The only "action" in the story takes place when her younger sister, Evan, invites her toManhattan where

Evan and her boyfriend are hosting a Halloween party. At the party, Evan introduces her to Earl, a recent divorcé, who is dressed as a naked woman with "large rubber breasts protruding like hams." Wearing a bonehead costume ("It's this thing that looks like a giant bone going through your head," she had told her sister), Hendricks engages in conversation with Earl, who wants to talk about love and relationships. Hendricks, however, dismisses him by replying with lies, vague allusions, and a long story that ends with the protagonist shooting herself in the head. Earl seems defeated, barely able to keep up with her wit and seeming irreverence, and at one point shakes his head in disbelief and says, "You know, I just shouldn't try to go out with career women. You're all stricken. A guy can really tell what life has done to you. I do better with women who have part-time jobs." Earl then turns to lean on the railing of the twentieth floor balcony, and after a snide exchange of comments, Hendricks performs her final joke of the story by shoving him from behind, forcing his arms to slip off the railing and his beer onto the streets below. "Just kidding," Hendricks tells the horrified man dressed as a naked woman, "I was just kidding."

Section 1

Section 1 Summary

Zoe Hendricks is a history professor at Hillsdale-Versailles, a small, liberal arts college in the heart of rural Illinois. The opening paragraph mocks the very setting of the college, noting the odd of names of farm towns in Illinois, such as Oblong, Paris and Normal. Even the mentality of the townspeople are mocked by Zoe's comment that when a big story like the two-hundred-point drop in the New York Stock Exchange occurred, the headline of the local newspaper blurted, "Normal Man Marries Oblong Woman."

Zoe is teaching at this institution, because a previous sex-discrimination lawsuit had been filed against the university, and the placement of a female history professor erased the lawsuit's accusations. The male faculty members there enjoy having a female in the ranks, even though they notice Zoe's eccentricities, like singing in class and wearing enormous, wild earrings. Student evaluations remark that Zoe comes late to class drinking hot chocolate, singing entire soundtracks, talking about movies she's seen, and that her tone is sarcastic. She is so different from her students that they think she's from Spain instead of Maryland.

Zoe spends her time writing articles about humor and politics, her current project being about the use of humor in various presidencies. When she writes, Zoe makes sure that she has written at each time of the day, so that her articles and chapters are written over the spectrum of hours with no one time period taking precedence over others.

Feeling frustrated by the caliber of her students and her surroundings, Zoe calls her sister Evan, who lives in New York with her well-to-do boyfriend and works as a food designer for professional photographers. Zoe complains to her sister that she's going crazy, that her students are complacent Midwesterners who have been lulled into a stupor and purchased by the material life that their parents bestowed on them. Her students, Zoe says to Evan, are not interested or attuned to the larger issues of history and geography, grouping all eastern states into one group labeled "New England."

Zoe recalls her previous job at another small school in Minnesota, where she resented that everyone was supposed to see only the good things. No kinds of complaints were acceptable, a polite cheerfulness was the expected behavior, and under no circumstances could anyone notice that the town's previous glory, the huge shopping mall, was going under. She feels that that particular Minnesota community had wanted everyone to have the same personality and behavior as Heidi.

As she contemplates her previous job, Zoe realizes that now, in her second job, she has become disillusioned and cynical. Where in the past she had promoted very personal interactions between herself and her students, she now feels they are overly demanding and whiny. One student comes in for a conference with her and says that Zoe thinks her

"opinion is worth more than everyone else's in the class." Sarcastically, Zoe replies that because she's the teacher, her opinion does matter more. Otherwise, every student would have a desk and an office. When the student complains that she wants her history degree to mean something, Zoe retorts, "Well, that's your problem."

Zoe's biggest thrill from living in Illinois is waiting for the good-looking mailman to bring her a letter, which she'd read over and over again at night. At holidays, and whenever appropriate, she tips both the mailman, and the friendly cab driver, Jerry, who drives her to the airport in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Zoe tells Evan that she's coming to visit them. Evan is elated since she and her boyfriend are hosting a Halloween party. Zoe plans to go to the party as a "bonehead," wearing a headdress that looks like a giant bone going through her head. Evan's response is that she is going to wear her old moon mask, joking that she's worn it so often, she will probably get married in it. Zoe immediately warns her sister not to get married, recalling her own dismal dating history in this small Illinois town.

Her first dating relationship was a dalliance with a man who was involved in town politics and fixed a parking ticket for her. He grew less interested in her, because she was not stylish. When he comments on her need for new clothes, she had the audacity to flick an ant off her sleeve into his new convertible. Zoe's next adventure in dating was with a man who, for the sake of entertainment, stole the food garnishes off her plate. The same guy was effusive in his praise for certain art but diminished his own eloquence and enthusiasm with a comment like, "a painting like that...makes you shit." Evan's comment to Zoe about this man implied he was probably gay.

Zoe's third romantic involvement was with a man named Murray Peterson, who was also a professor. Unfortunately, Murray liked the married wives of his colleagues, and when he and Zoe would double date, Murray and the wife of his colleague would flirt and sometimes play footsies under the table. When one of the wives tells Murray that she has memorized everything about him, Zoe quips that she once knew a dog that could to that, a comment that keeps Murray Peterson from ever calling again.

When Evan asks Zoe if she's currently seeing everyone, Zoe admits that instead of human contact, she's "seeing to her house," an investment that her parents are thrilled one of their daughters could make. Zoe's mother sends her decorating magazines, which fill Zoe with longing, wishing for a beautifully furnished house. Even though she has bought items for her home, she usually returns them after getting them into the house, feeling like they aren't quite right. In one particular case, she returns a mirror, because she doesn't like how she looks in it.

Evan wants to fix Zoe up with a single, straight man who is "fun." Zoe agrees, reminding her sister that she isn't too old to have fun. She contemplates "fun" in light of the other demands of her life, namely papers to grade and an upcoming doctor's appointment to investigate a mysterious growth in her abdomen. The doctor had said it was possibly her gallbladder, but it was also possible her ovaries or colon. Zoe is reminded of the comment her vet made when, as a young girl, she brought a dog in for treatment. The

vet had remarked that the "dog had worms or cancer or had been hit by a car." Zoe doesn't tell Evan about her medical problems although, when she said she felt like she was dying, Evan misses the underlying seriousness of the comment and tells Zoe that she's simply annoyed.

Zoe's goes for her ultrasound on Friday, joking with the technician about the word ultrasound sounding more like stereo equipment than a medical test. The attention that her bare stomach is receiving causes her to remember her college boyfriend who had rubbed her stomach when she was sick, both of them hoping for a pregnancy. After two years and no baby, they separated ways. Zoe's thoughts, however, are called back to the radiology technician who won't tell her anything except that the doctor will call her that afternoon. Zoe knows she's going out of town and will miss the call, but on the way home, she examines her appearance and decides she doesn't look well. Again, she recalls a joke about a doctor who tells a guy he's got only six weeks to live. When the patient says he wants a second opinion, the doctor says, "You're ugly, too."

Jerry, Zoe's favorite cab driver, takes her to the airport, confessing that he's never even been on an escalator, an airplane, and certainly not to New York. Zoe's philosophy on travel is to tell yourself you have nothing to live for. When your plane crashes, it's no big loss. Unfortunately, when it doesn't crash, you have to find a reason to go on with life.

Section 1 Analysis

The use of humor is essential to the story. Zoe reacts to life through wit and word play and is constantly reminded of jokes she's heard in the past. The humor, however, usually masks a sadness or a problem, particularly with regard to her medical prognosis. The joke she remembers after she's been to the doctor becomes the title of the short story. When the man didn't like the diagnosis of having a short time to live, he asks for a second opinion, to which the doctor replies, "You're ugly, too."

Setting is crucial to the story. The first half of the story takes place in rural Illinois, a setting that Zoe denigrates and belittles, claiming that students are "spacey with estrogen from large quantities of meat and eggs." She jests about their awareness of the world, their complacency, their lack of knowledge, claiming that, "They seem actually to know every little about anything, but they were good-natured about it." The lack of acuity and sharpness in these Midwesterners is noted in Zoe's perception that students often don't get her jokes. When a student once asked what perfume she was wearing, she retorted, "Room freshener," and he was "unnerved."

Zoe feels herself to be culturally and academically superior to her students and the community she lives in, and her students' comments on her evaluations, always noted in italics and scattered throughout Zoe's own thoughts, ring true. She, herself, even recognizes her growing cynicism and apathy with teaching.

Zoe's sense of being dissatisfied is partly based on the notion that other people expect her to be something she is not. The Minnesota community wanted her to be cheerful

and polite, even when things were going awry. She is so far from the behavior of typical Midwesterners that she is thought to be from a foreign country. She is appreciated in her job only because she is female, not for her writings, publications or knowledge in her field. This lack of appreciation for who she is, is reflected in her attitude toward men. Zoe believes that men, like the Minnesotans, want all women to be Heidi. However, they want a big-bosomed Heidi in a Barbie-doll body with a Barbie-doll wardrobe. Zoe is definitely not "Heidi." She is quirky, not quite beautiful, has a sharp tongue, moods and definite opinions.

Zoe Hendricks is filled with longing by the pictures her mother sends her of decorating ideas and beautiful rooms. The emptiness of her own house is an analogy for her own life. Something is lacking. Like the furnishings that she's constantly buying and then returning, nothing is ever quite "right." The text itself notes how Zoe decorates, not doing much about filling in the gaps and silhouettes left in the wallpaper. "She had bought furniture, then taken it back, furnishing and unfurnishing, preparing and shedding, like a womb." The obvious illusion here is that her home is like her body. Empty, preparing, discarding. Her childlessness is one aspect of her longing for something more. She does not find satisfaction in her job, her love life, or her home. She writes at all areas of the day, possibly to fill up the hours. Her disenchantment with life is also reflected with her comment about travel believing that if the plane doesn't crash, you have to find a reason to go on living.

Section 2

Section 2 Summary

After throwing up into an airline bag while on the flight to New York, Zoe is reunited with her sister at her apartment. She hugs her sister hard, realizing that when they were younger, she took care of Evan. Now Evan has taken on the role of advisor and counselor. Evan's apartment belongs to her boyfriend, Charlie, and is large and well-situated with a balcony and a doorman, far above Zoe's means. Evan admits to Zoe that her relationship with Charlie is mundane, almost sexless. While Zoe thinks that she feels like a bird being situated on the twenty-first floor, Evan continues to complain that Charlie is messy and lazy and uninvolved. When Zoe comments that they might as well get married, Evan admits that they are going to, asking Zoe to be her maid of honor.

Zoe's reaction to Evan's news is to start telling a story about an extremely talented, motivated, violinist who comes home from a competition in Europe, falls for a local man, and begins to be involved in the mundane activities of life. The violinist attends softball games with other wives cheering for their husbands. The real ending of the story is that the violinist commits suicide, but Zoe realizes that this is not an appropriate ending to tell her sister and improvises, saying that the woman got really into softball.

As Evan prepares for the Halloween party, Zoe goes to a movie, hoping that she wouldn't have to dress exactly like the other bridesmaids. Zoe has never been able to conform, not even joining the Elf Girls, because she couldn't stand wearing a uniform. She begins to think of bizarre ways to distinguish her bridesmaid's dress from the others. The movie Zoe watches is "Death by Number," and in the theatre, she munches on red licorice kept in a baggie in her purse along with other essentials like pens, Kleenex, and aspirin. She thinks to herself that she's become, "a woman alone at the movies with everything in a Baggie."

A couple dozen people attend the Halloween party, all except one couple dressed in costume, including numerous sexy witches, a get-up that Zoe abhors. Evan urges Zoe to be nice to Earl, the man she has in mind for Zoe. Earl arrives, dressed as a naked woman, a costume created by a large body stocking with steel wool glued to the triangle above the legs and to the underarms. He also has large false rubber breasts stuck in the body stocking. Sexual innuendoes pervade Earl and Zoe's early banter, he complimenting her "great bone," and she praising his breasts. They go out on the balcony to talk as Zoe looks at the clear starlit night and the cityscape of New York.

Zoe is nervous as she begins to talk to Earl, because she knows that she often dooms herself in relationships by immediately imagining a courtship, a marriage, kids, and then a bitter divorce, feeling that there is no hope even before she knows his last name. Earl opens dialogue by noting that Evan has already told him Zoe is a history professor. Earl asks where she teaches and is surprised to find she teaches in a rural Illinois college, a detail that Evan has omitted. Zoe, in her typical joking manner, begins by excusing Evan

for omitting this detail because, as youngsters, both she and Evan had speech impediments. Earl asks how she got through that difficulty, and Zoe admits that she joked about everything, and even now, loves jokes and songs.

Zoe's remark causes Earl to ask about her favorite joke. When Zoe begins to tell the joke about the doctor and the second opinion, Earl interjects and says he thinks he's heard this one. Earl then tells a joke about a doctor who has good news and bad news. The bad new is that the man has three weeks to live. The good news is that the doctor finally had sex with the secretary. The language Earl uses, however, on the punch line is much cruder, and the joke is inappropriate. Not only that, but Zoe is left unable to tell her own joke. Earl doesn't ask about Zoe's joke, but does ask what kind of history she teaches. He relates that he's a photographer, but he's beginning to be worried about spending so much time with chemicals in the darkroom since he doesn't wear rubber gloves, a thought that alarms Zoe.

Earl asks Zoe if she's in a relationship with a man. She says no, but she does make up a story about her last lover, a fictional botanist from Switzerland, who she names Jerry. She asks Earl if he's involved with a woman, and Earl admits that he's getting out of a marriage and going through a very bad divorce. Zoe begins to have a sharp pain in her stomach and excuses herself while Earl grabs stuffed mushrooms from the tray Evan offers. Zoe has noticed one lone, stiff hair coming out of her chin, and while she's in bathroom, she goes to battle with the hair, eventually even tearing skin in order to pluck the hair from its stronghold. When Zoe returns, Earl has aligned his costume which continually tries to slide all the false female anatomical parts into the wrong areas on his body. When he asks if she's okay, she relates that she's going through tests for a possible medical problem. Earl quickly dismisses what Zoe says might be a gallbladder operation and asks her opinion on her sister's upcoming marriage.

Zoe launches her story about the violinist, only to have Earl interrupt her when he notices the blood on her chin. Zoe continues her story, giving Earl the real meaning, and saying that's what she thinks of love stories. Earl comments that Zoe isn't like Evan, and that she should wear more blue as he tries to touch her face. Zoe angrily slaps his hand and asks him what the word "fag" means to him. Regretting that he's ever tried to go out with career women, Earl says that he can always tell what life has done to women like Zoe.

Earl's comment makes Zoe recall a poem once she read about professional women and grief, a poem that had a line about moonlight dancing across a lake in conniptions. She can't remember the title of the article, but it might have been "The Empty House: Aesthetics of Barrenness," or "Space Gypsies: Girls in Academe."

Earl turns away from Zoe in contempt, muttering, "Live and learn," and Zoe spouts, "Live and get dumb." Noting that the people below look like bugs, Earl tells Zoe that bugs are controlled by being sprayed with female hormones, causing the male bugs to try to have sex with everything, even rocks. Angered by his insinuation, Zoe looks at his bizarre female costume and pushes him against the balcony railing, causing his beer to

fly into the street below and his arms to splay out. Enraged, he asks Zoe what she's doing.

Zoe tells Earl she was just kidding as the wind blows her hair into upward spikes around the bonehead. Zoe smiles at Earl wondering how she looks and thinking that "if there were a lake, the moonlight would surely dance across it in conniptions."

Section 2 Analysis

The section begins with a shift from Illinois to an east-side apartment in New York. Zoe has escaped back into civilization and the love of her sister, who accepts her as she is. Zoe finds, however, that the men in New York are no better than the men in Illinois. Earl isn't interested in what she has to say, her jokes or illness. Instead, he takes the joke away from her and tries to tell her what to wear.

The image of emptiness and longing from the first section is echoed in the lines Zoe recalls from a poem or article she's read. The titles of the articles echo the analogy presented in the first section of the story: "The Empty House: The Aesthetics of Barrenness." The other title emphasizes her dissatisfaction with her work, her feelings of not belonging, of not being appreciated: "Space Gypsies: Girls in Academe."

Zoe has feelings of loneliness and of not being fulfilled, in part due to her childlessness. There is an irony in this, however, in that she may feel empty, but her insides have something growing. The growth in her abdomen is malicious and threatening, filling her with anxiety and dread, very different feelings from the maternal satisfaction she would have if she were pregnant.

It's important, though, not to believe that the story is about Zoe's lack of children - quite the opposite. While her barrenness may be one aspect of the emotional turmoil of the story, Zoe is still an individual, not necessarily ready to give into the traditional marriage scenario. Her inability to conform is commented on in the first part of the story with the memory of how she couldn't stand to join a group that required uniforms. In the second part of the story, Zoe warns her sister against marriage. She also doesn't conform to the man's idea of "Heidi" at the Halloween party. She dresses in an outlandish costume, not playing up her femininity like the women who dress as sexy witches, and she throws Earl curveballs in her comments to him. She resents his insinuation that women who have careers and brains have something wrong with them and even tries to exert her physical superiority over him by scaring him with an unexpected shove against the balcony railing.

The ending of the story can be interpreted in several ways. First, Zoe might be perceived as the heroine who has overcome traditional stereotypes and in a fit of laughter frees herself from expectations. Her appearance, hair standing up in spikes against a bonehead, is not the expected, and is a direct, strong contrast to Earl's false-female costume, with an implied reversal of sexual roles. . The line she remembers from the poem she had read about women and grief, "If there were a lake, the moonlight

would dance across it in conniptions," becomes a victory cry symbolic of her own triumph against an ordinary life. An alternative reading might be that Zoe, always eccentric and quirky, filled with unease about her life and a dread about her illness, goes mad, laughing maniacally at the world. A third reading of the ending combines the first two interpretations. It involves going against the expectations of the world results in a kind of insanity that is both freeing and frightening.

Humor, with jokes and punch lines ingrained in the dialogue, is essential to the story. Images of emptiness, female barrenness, and sexual roles are also inherent in the plot. Student comments and Zoe's memory of a line of poetry are inserted into the text as italicized lines, intentionally interrupting the flow of the story.

Characters

Charlie

Charlie is Evan's boyfriend. Described as "independently wealthy [with] an amusing little job in book publishing," Charlie spends his time at home watching football games on a television that gets fuzzy reception and has a ritual of undressing at night in which "he kicks up his leg and flips the underwear in the air and catches it." It is in Charlie' sManhattan apartment that the Halloween party takes places where Zoë meets Earl.

Earl

Earl is the date Evan arranges for Zoë at the Halloween party. He arrives to the party dressed as a naked woman with "large rubber breasts protruding like hams." Earl has recently gone through a divorce, and throughout the evening he attempts to engage Zoë in conversation about love, only to be continually interrupted by her sarcastic quips and vague allusions. Earl is a photographer who worries aloud about the effect the photographic chemicals are having on him. At one point in the evening, after repeated attempts at having a comprehensible discussion with Zoë, Earl gives up and says, "You're not at all like your sister." And in final defeat he announces aloud that he shouldn't go out with "career women" anymore. "You're all stricken," he says and adds that he'll be better off "with women who have part-time jobs."

Evan Hendricks

Evan Hendricks is Zoë's younger sister, five years out of college, who lives inManhattan with her boyfriend, Charlie. Evan has a part-time job arranging photo shoots of food and lives inManhattan in "a luxury midtown high-rise with a balcony and access to a pool. ..." Evan sets her sister up with Earl at the party and just prior to the party announces to Zoë that she and Charlie are getting married.

Zoë Hendricks

The main character in the story, Zoë Hendricks teaches American history in a small liberal arts college outsideParis, Illinois. Considered eccentric or simply misunderstood by both her students and her administrators, she often interjects seemingly irreverent statements to conversations and has been known by her students to sing aloud as she enters class. Cynical and sarcastic, Hendricks loves jokes, but the punch lines are often lost on her audiences. Her response to every situation□whether it is a date with a colleague or the ultrasound tests she undergoes due to the severe abdominal pains she has been experiencing□is to make joke or sarcastic comments. Her favorite joke, and the source of the story's title, is about the doctor who tells his patient that he has six

weeks to live, and when the patient asks for a second opinion, the doctor says, "You're ugly, too."

As a single woman, she has unsuccessfully tried dating local men, but the only two men she seems to care for are her postman, who delivers her "real letter[s], with real full-priced stamp[s], from someplace else," and a cab driver, whom she has gotten to know from the repeated trips she took to the airport in order to leave town. When her sister Evan invites her toManhattan for a Halloween party, Hendricks accepts, and it is there that she meets Earl, a friend of her sister. In her long talk with Earl on the balcony, Hendricks lies to him repeatedly about herself and offers him her cynical views of love and relationships.

Jerry

Called "Jare" by Zoë, Jerry is the town's only cabbie and one of Zoë's two favorite men. He gives her cut rates on her rides, and while dropping her off for her flight to New York to see her sister, he admits that he's never been on a plane or an escalator before. Jerry represents one of Zoë's few links to the world outsideParis, Illinois.

The Mailman

Like Jerry the cabdriver, the mailman is also one of Zoë's few links to the world outside her small town of Paris. Zoë lives for the daily arrival of the postman, "that handsome blue jay" who will deliver her letters which she'll read over and over again in her bed.

The Students

Zoë considers her students to be "by and large good Midwesterners, spacey with estrogen from large quantities of meat and cheese" who share the "suburban values" of their parents and who have been given "things, things, things" by their parents. Zoë shows very little respect for her students, often chiding them with what she believes to be ironic remarks but which one student points out are sarcastic. "Illinois. It makes me sarcastic to be here," Zoë admits to her sister. Her students are one of the many excuses Zoë uses to escapeParis as often as she is able.

Themes

AmericanMidwest

The American Midwest, known for its lack of ethnic diversity and socially conservative values, bears the brunt of many of Hendricks's remarks and observations. Her town of Paris, Illinois, is one of "those Illinois towns with the funny names" people have to escape from every so often; her students inParis are "by and large good Midwesterners" who seem "to know very little about anything." The students at her first college in New Geneva, Minnesota, or the "Land of the Dying Shopping Mall" where everyone was "so blond . . . that brunettes were often presumed to be from foreign countries," fare no better in Hendricks's eyes. There everyone was expected to be a "Heidi" who would "lug goat milk up the hills and not think twice" and who would never complain. These Midwestern characteristics are the antithesis of Hendricks's personality; they lead her to tell her sister, "Illinois. It makes me sarcastic to be here," and they contribute to her alienation.

Academia

Academia has long been accused of being a bastion of male values. Hendricks teaches American history for a small liberal arts college in Illinois. Her department, which recently faced a sex-discrimination suit, is made up of nine men who put up with her eccentricities because of the "feminine touch" she contributes to the atmosphere. This male environment, coupled with students she feels have little intellectual abilities, also contribute to Hendricks's overall sense of alienation.

Alienation

Hendricks lives alone, does not feel connected to the culture of theMidwest, has had no luck meeting men, and is not respected or understood by her students or her colleagues. Her constant cynicism and snide comments underscores the lack of connection she feels with her surroundings, and the only people she seems to connect with are her postman, who delivers mail "from someplace else," and her cab driver who takes her to the airport on her regular escapes from her small Midwest town.

Loneliness and Isolation

At Christmas, Hendricks gives large tips both to the cab driver who takes her to the airport for her frequent weekend escapes and to the postman who delivers her letters which she reads again and again in her bed. Every Tuesday she phones her sister in New York and often flies to visit her on weekends. She also has her television in her bedroom, a self-admitted "bad sign," and she has not had a successful date since moving to theMidwest. The loneliness and isolation Hendricks experiences are partly

the result of the disconnection she feels from her surroundings and possibly due to issues of emotional and mental instability that the story hints at.

Mental and Emotional Instability

Although there is no explicit discussion of Hendricks being unstable, nevertheless she makes several inappropriate comments and performs several questionable acts that can possibly be attributed to mental or emotional instability. Many of the sarcastic comments she makes to her students are professionally inappropriate and border on being hurtful, and her sharing of stories that end in a violent suicide or death seems to hint at larger issues of depression she may be experiencing. At her home she tacks a sign to a tree in her backyard that says, *"Zoë's Tree";* she returns a mirror to the store because it had been frightening her "with an image of a woman she never recognized"; and she also returns an Oriental rug because she convinces herself that the Chinese symbols on it say *"Bruce Springsteen."* While some of these acts may merely indicate an "eccentric" personality, others, such as her final act of shoving Earl against the balcony rail 20 stories above the street, push the boundaries of eccentricity and reveal a woman who is out of control with her emotions and who does not have the ability to know when a joke goes too far.

Absurdity and Meaninglessness

One of the reasons for Hendricks's constant barrage of jokes could be her inherent nihilism, her view that life is essentially absurd and meaningless. If others don't understand her or her jokes, or if the jokes backfire, it doesn't matter because, in her opinion, life is essentially meaningless anyway. A telling moment in the story to indicate that Hendricks suffers existentially occurs when she describes to herself the trick to flying safe. Never buy discount tickets, she suggests, and "tell yourself you [have] nothing to live for anyway, so that when the plane crashed it was no big deal." And if the plane doesn't crash, by the time the cab arrives to take you and your baggage away, you will have had time to "come up with a persuasive reason to go on living."

Illness

Hendricks is clearly suffering from what could be a serious illness. Severe abdominal pains force her to undergo ultrasound tests. While the results of the test are not revealed, at one point the technician becomes "suddenly alert" with his machine "clicking away," and Hendricks is convinced that she has a "growth." She decides not to mention the test to her sister, but during the Halloween party, she is forced to leave her conversation with Earl because of her pain, and her stories and jokes are full of allusions to death.

Mortality

The title of the story is taken from Hendricks's favorite joke, which is about a patient who is told by the doctor that he has six weeks to live. Throughout the story, Hendricks alludes to death□either her own or that of someone she knows. At one point, just prior to her ultrasound tests, she tells her sister that she feels like she's dying□a statement Hendricks intends more literally than her sister can understand.

Irony

Throughout the story, Hendricks makes her students and her dates the brunt of her jokes. Somewhat smugly, she believes she is being ironic, using "gently layered and sophisticated" wit in their telling, but ironically, her students, whom she believes "know very little about anything," understand the difference between irony and sarcasm and accuse Hendricks of the latter, which Hendricks ultimately admits to. Another ironic aspect of the story relates to Hendricks's existential crisis. Many of her stories and quips point to her belief in the ultimate meaninglessness of life; if she does in fact have an abdominal growth and if she is in fact dying, as she believes, Hendricks may have a chance to discover first-hand whether life does in fact have meaning.

Sexual Relationships

One one level, "You're Ugly, Too" is about a woman trying to find love, but through her actions and the stories and jokes she tells, it is clear that Zoé has little faith that men and women can live or love together harmoniously. At the hospital, she wonders aloud with the technician performing her ultrasound test whether the rise of infertility in the country is the result of "completely different species trying to reproduce." Indeed, from her descriptions of her dates, and from her final interaction at the Halloween party with Earl, it seems that Hendricks believes that men and women are not ultimately made for one another and that healthy sexual relationships, particularly if the woman is to retain her own sense of individuality and identity apart from the man, are impossible.

Role of Women

One of the underlying issues in Hendricks's life is connected to the fact that she is unmarried, that she has yet to take on the role of "wife," and she refuses or has the inability to be a "good date" for the men she meets. "Oh, my God. ... I forgot to get married," she sarcastically tells her sister, who will soon reveal her own marriage plans to Hendricks. However, she is able, as expected of her, to add a "feminine touch" to her mostly male history department. Hendricks is obviously cynical about traditional female roles; she prefers to live her life as she pleases with utter disregard for the opinions of others. When her cutting remarks and sarcasm become too much for Earl at the Halloween party, he blurts out, "You know, I shouldn' t try to go out with career women. You're all stricken. ... I do better with women who have part-time jobs." He later turns

away from Hendricks and mumbles, "Live and learn," to which Hendricks responds by saying, "Live and get dumb." While her final act of shoving Earl against the balcony railing can be seen as the act of an unstable personality, it can also be interpreted as Hendricks's response to Earl's complaint that "hormones" metaphorically being sprayed around is preventing men from wanting to have intercourse with women, as if the man's desire is the all-important part of the equation while the woman has no say in the matter.

Style

Style

Throughout "You're Ugly, Too,"Moore uses flashbacks, jokes, and anecdotes to complete Hendricks's character. Although the story's plot is sparse, the reader is given ample details of the protagonist's dates, her relationships with her students and colleagues, and her feelings for her geographic surroundings that effectively fill in her psychology and personality.

Tone

"You're Ugly, Too," seen through the point of view of the main character, is told in a witty, often sarcastic and glib tone. Hendricks's views of her surroundings□her students, the Midwest, and the men she's dated□are revealed through cutting and sarcastic anecdotes and jokes. Even her trip to the hospital for ultrasound tests that may reveal a fatal growth is described with wit and sarcasm. This tone acts to underscore her generally morbid and cynical view of her life.

Point of View

Although the story is narrated in a third person omniscient point of view, "You're Ugly, Too" is told through the eyes of Zoë Hendricks, the story's main character. Through the telling of stories and jokes, the reader is given a deep understanding of Hendricks's daily life and personality.

Setting

"You're Ugly, Too" takes place in Paris, Illinois, where Hendricks lives and works, and inNew York City, where her sister and her sister's boyfriend live. TheMidwest, known for its conservative values, is the target of many of Hendricks's sarcastic comments and the source of much of her isolation and loneliness. Although no date is given, references to the singer Bruce Springsteen reveal that the story is set in contemporary times.

Historical Context

Women and Academia

In the 1980s, women were greatly outnumbered by men as faculty members, accounting for only 27 percent of all academic faculty, according to *Academic Women Working towards Equality* (Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1987). This number was an increase of about 5 percent over the period 1942-1962, according to the same study. By contrast, women reached their peak in terms of representation among faculty members in 1879-1880 when they made up 36 percent of all faculty inU.S. colleges and universities. According to the National Resource Council's *Humanities Doctorates in theUnited States, 1991 Profile* (National Academy Press, 1994), about one-third of all PhD candidates in History between 1981 and 1988 were women.

Detection of Tumors

Ultrasound imaging, also known as ultrasonography, is a non-invasive medical imaging technique that uses high frequency sound waves and their echoes to help physicians get an inside view of soft tissues and body cavities. By the 1980s, ultrasound had been widely available to clinics and hospitals for years and was the method of choice for diagnosing abdominal-related pains. Magnetic Resonance Imaging, or MRI, had just been approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1984, but because of its costs would not be widely used for diagnosis for at least another decade.

Critical Overview

"You're Ugly, Too," first published in 1989 in the *New Yorker,* was included inMoore's second collection of short stories, *Like Life.* The consensus of critics at the time of its publication was that it helped to cementMoore's growing reputation as a masterful short story writer known for her engaging wit.

However, several reviewers also noted that, while Moore's strengths were obvious and many, the wit expressed in her writing often came at the expense of an emotional depth to her characters, and her stories revealed a lack of thematic diversity: most of her stories in the new collection, like her previous work, were about middle-class, educated, single women looking for love.

Writing in the *Chicago Tribune,* the National Book Award winning author John Casey called the collection "a dazzler" with "witty (and sometimes wisecracking) narration [that is] wonderfully theatrical. ..." While Casey notes that all of Moore's characters in *Like Life* "want both solitude and love," a quandary that is not a new one, "Moore brings her own variations to [the quandary], her own comic talent and her own eloquence." Writing in the *Houston Chronicle,* reviewer Sally Poivoir also points to Moore's comic tendencies, stating that in her "search for the authentic, Moore's lantern is humor. Humor in every form and of every degree, from the most abject pun to the subtle insinuation of a vast cosmic joke, from tender irony to mocking contempt to total devastation."

Although critic Dan Cryer, writing in *Newsday,* concludes thatMoore's voice is "badly needed" in fiction, *Like Life* is "both a cause for celebration and concern." While the stories themselves are "full of sharp observation and stylistic grace," they reveal thatMoore may be in a "thematic rut" with the "single women's anxiety over finding lasting love" being her predominant concern. Cryer writes that there is a "danger .. . that [Moore's] smart, articulate career women quipping their way out of pain may come to seem interchangeable."

Boston Globe reviewer Matthew Gilbert called *Like Life* a "deceptively complex" collection that "contains a moving emotionality that was previously banned" inMoore's work. "In *[Like Life],* the laughter turns to tears. The stories are not merely witty, they are relentlessly tragic."

However, *Los Angeles Times* reviewer Merle Rubin disagreed, stating that though Moore's writing provided "enough verbal glibness to provide material for all the stand-up comics in Los Angeles," she has "very little ability to create convincing characters or tell stories that invite us to suspend our disbelief as we read them or to brood upon them after they've been read." Rubin concludes his review by praising "her flair at doing what she does," but warning that "when style becomes this stylized, it is likely to prove a fad." And in a generally positive review, the *Christian Science Monitor* criticizesMoore's one-liners, "[h]owever entertaining they may be," for being "distracting."

As for the story itself, if reviewers mention it at all, it is to discuss the similarities between Hen-dricks and the charactersMoore had created in her other work. The reviewer for the *Christian Science Monitor,* for instance, writes that Hendricks, like most of Moore's characters, "teeters on the edge of rationality," while Matthew Gilbert, in the *Boston Globe,* writes that Hendricks, like many of Moore's other characters, "is married to pure isolation."

Although "You're Ugly, Too" itself has not been critiqued extensively, it has been widely anthologized since it was first published in such collections as *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction* and the highly regarded anthology, *The Best American Short Stories of the Century* edited by John Updike.

Criticism

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- Critical Essay #2
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Critical Essay #1

White is the publisher of the Seattle-based literary press, Scala House Press. In this essay, White argues that, whileMoore displays an extraordinary gift of language in "You're Ugly, Too," she does not reveal the sources of her character's anguish and therefore leaves little for the reader to empathize with.

Lorrie Moore's "You're Ugly, Too" is a witty and sometimes hilarious account of an unmarried woman who, like so many of Moore's fictional creations, is unable to connect with men□or with anybody else, for that matter. With Moore's signature barrage of one-liners, jokes, and what critic John W. Aldridge, in his critique of Moore in *Talents and Technicians: Literary Chic and the New Assembly-Line Fiction,* calls "other ludicrous dislocations of language," it is easy to understand the acclaim thatMoore and this story have received.

However entertaining her style may be, readingMoore can ultimately be a frustrating experience. While she has an obvious knack for creating memorably eccentric and disassociated characters (especially women characters), and while she displays a pyrotechnic touch of language that makes those women smolder with a clarity and intensity rarely seen in contemporary fiction, Moore generally keeps her readers in the dark as to the causes of their predicaments. It is never quite clear ifMoore's women are genetically predisposed to live a life of isolation and loneliness or whether there are larger cultural or social forces at play. Do her women merely have bad luck with men, or are they rebelling, subconsciously or not, against society's expectations of how they should behave in sexual relationships? More often than not, it is as ifMoore keeps her characters hermetically sealed from their surroundings, allowing them to be influenced only by their own internal clocks and thoughts. And even at that, her readers can never be certain if there are more serious bio-chemical or psychological issues beyond mere "eccentricity" that are driving these women to the precipice of spinsterhood.

Zoë Hendricks, the leading woman in "You're Ugly, Too," is a typical Moore creation: a remarkably eccentric but possibly clinically depressed woman who, for whatever reasons the reader can never know, lives a life utterly alone, with only her wit and her jokes to accompany her.

That Zoë Hendricks is an extraordinary, though not necessarily likeable, character is inarguable. An east coast transplant teaching American history in a Midwest college, Hendricks seldom lets an opportunity for a snide remark or joke elude her. When a student asks her about her perfume, she retorts that it's ' *'Room freshener"*; when another student tells Hendricks that she wants her history major to be meaningful, Hendricks snaps, "Well, there's your problem." She relates seemingly irreverent stories at the most inappropriate occasions that conclude in suicide or violent death, and she tells drawn-out lies to her dates for no apparent reason. With impeccable timing, she often reduces her audience to various states of incredulity, disgust, and disdain. Her final act of pushing Earl against the balcony railing, her final "joke" in "You're Ugly, Too," is little more than a physical manifestation of what she had been doing to him the entire

evening through dialogue: pushing him, pushing him, and pushing him some more until he metaphorically and literally has no place left to go.

When Hendricks first began teaching inParis, she thought she was using "irony, something gently layered and sophisticated" in her joking. But ironically, her students, whom she believes "know very little about anything," understand the difference between irony and sarcasm and accuse her of the latter, and Hendricks is eventually forced to concede their point and admit to her sister, "Illinois. It makes me sarcastic to be here."

Hendricks does not derive pleasure from her behavior; her incessant joking is what Aldridge calls "a kind of sublimated scream . .. anxiety displaced into jokes thatMoore and her characters incessantly make but at which no one is laughing." And what is Hendricks anxious about? For starters, she is extremely lonely. She lives by herself in a "rather empty" house that she bought; her television, which she watches at all hours, is in her bedroom, a self-admitted "bad sign." She lives for the mailman, "that handsome blue jay," who brings her letters "from someplace else" which she then takes to her bedroom to read "over and over." And her dates, of which there have only been three since she moved toParis, are miserable failures. The men she meets may as well speak ancient Greek for all the success she has in communicating with them. And although she talks with her younger sister Evan every Tuesday and visits her regularly, Hendricks does not communicate much better with her. "I'm going out of my mind," Hendricks tells Evan at one point, very possibly intending the statement to be taken more literally than her sister has the capacity or willingness to do, and shortly before the ultrasound test that would reveal what may be a tumor growing inside of her, Hendricks resorts to another cliché, thus glossing over the stark truth she may be trying to convey, when she tells her, "I feel like I'm dying."

If Hendricks is like others, she has probably used phrases such as "I'm going out of my mind" and "I feel like I'm dying" countless times in her life as the innocuous figures of speech they are normally intended to be. In the context of this story, however, it is conceivable that in both cases she literally means what she says. But for reasons that Moore never makes clear, Zoë Hendricks, a liberal arts history professor whose first chapters on her book on presidential humor have been generally "well received," seems to have the ability to speak only in clichés to describe her feelings, or through jokes to communicate to the world, and the reader is never certain what she is actually trying to convey.

In effect, Hendricks is a character who suffers from loneliness but does not have the communication or social skills to escape that state, a predicament that is, of course, self-generating: the more she fails to communicate, the lonelier she gets.

But why exactly is Hendricks so lonely? Why is she unable to build any lasting relationships, with either men or women? This is one of the frustrating aspects of reading "You're Ugly, Too": the reasons behind Zoë Hendricks's situation are unclear, and as a result, her abject loneliness and alienation are mere window dressing to her character, evoking little sympathy from the reader.

It is not entirely true thatMoore does not offer some reasons behind Hendricks's situation, but what she gives is inadequate. Moore suggests that theMidwest, known for its conservative customs and lifestyles, is one factor to consider. "You had to get out of them occasionally, those Illinois towns with the funny names: Paris, Oblong,Normal," the story opens. And if living in Paris as an expatriate east coast academic and an eccentric one at that is not difficult enough, to make matters worse, Hendricks is a woman in an otherwise all-male department. Her reaction to this situation is reflected succinctly by one of her students in a faculty evaluation: ' *'Professor Hendricks has said critical things about Fawn Hall, the Catholic religion, and the whole state of Illinois. It is unbelievable.* "

However, neither regional dislocation nor her all-male department can be blamed entirely for Hendricks's predicament. She has not been served a prison sentence, after all; she was not forced to move toParis to begin with, and her purchase of a house can easily be interpreted as a commitment to establishing roots. And regardless of whether or notParis is making her miserable, is it truly possible that there is not a single human being in the college, in the town itself, or in the surrounding area with whom she can relate on some level? Another dislocated easterner, for instance? And if geographic and cultural isolation are the problems, how does one explain Hendricks's dismal failure at connecting with Earl, an east coast photographer and divorcé, at Evan's party in New York?

With regard to her professional situation, despite her being the only woman in her department, there is no indication that she is either being unfairly treated or has expressed any complaints. In fact, the obvious lack of respect she shows toward her students should raise eyebrows in her department and cause Hendricks at least some worry about job security, but her colleagues seem indifferent.

No, there is something besides her geographic and professional environment that is causing Hendricks these feelings of isolation. One clue may be found in Evan's response to Hendricks when Hendricks tells her she is losing her mind. "You always say that," Evan replies, "But then you go on your trips and vacations and then you settle back into things and then you're quiet for a while and then you say you're fine, you're busy, and then after a while you say you're going crazy again, and you start all over."

In other words, according to Evan, Hendricks is on an emotional or psychological roller coaster. Although the story does not offer anything more than suggestions of biochemical or psychological instability, the suggestions are numerous. While tacking a ' *'Zoë's Tree"* sign to a backyard tree may be a sign of innocent eccentricity, her returning of the Oriental rug to the store because she convinced herself that the symbols on it said ' *'Bruce Springsteen,"* and the return of the pine chests because they reminded her of baby caskets, and the return of the mirror because it kept "startling her with an image of a woman she never recognized," are acts that push the envelope of eccentricity into the mail boxes of the unstable. In this light, her seeming obsession with stories and images of death begin to make sense: Hendricks may very well be clinically depressed, or worse. But again,Moore only provides hints, with nothing for readers to grasp; there is no conscious discussion or thought about these possibilities. In fact, the possibility

exists that Hendricks is, ultimately, nothing more than a mean-spirited, eccentric, and lonely academic who deserves all the isolation she gets.

Ultimately, what ails Hendricks is that she is, for all intents and purposes, a nihilist; she believes in nothing and sees little meaning in life. Her trick, for instance, to flying safely "is to tell yourself you had nothing to live for anyway, so that when the plane crashed it was no big deal." And by the time the time the cab arrives to take you and your luggage away, make sure you've "come up with a persuasive reason to go on living." It is easy, then, to understand her scornful attitudes to her students and her biting response to the young woman who wants her history major to mean something. Believing in *anything* is a problem for Hendricks.

Still, none of this is enough to evoke the sympathy necessary for the reader to feel anything but curious disdain for Hendricks. Nihilism is the result of other forces□social, psychological, spiritual, metaphysical. Explaining Hendricks's nihilism on any of these grounds could provide ample information for the reader to empathize with her, but Moore only offers her readers the products of Hendricks's nihilism□her jokes, her sarcasm, and her dismissive treatment of humanity.

While this ultimately leads to a frustrating experience in reading "You're Ugly, Too," it is the exact readingMoore seems to want for her stories. In an interview with the *Paris Review,* Moore calls her stories "a kind of biopsy of human life." As far as "You're Ugly, Too" is concerned, "biopsy" is the perfect metaphor. The purpose of a biopsy is, after all, to test for a malignancy in tissue. The source of the cancer, if it exists, and its possible treatments, are revealed through a series of other tests. The biopsy simply answers the question, "Is the tissue cancerous?"

"You're Ugly, Too" isMoore's biopsy of Zoë Hendricks□a lonely, unmarried, woman who has only her wit to keep her company. The results of this biopsy reveal that Hendricks is being eaten alive by profound psychological, emotional, spiritual, and, very likely, physical cancers. But whether these cancers are treatable or not, or whether any reader actually cares, are questionsMoore's biopsy is not designed to answer.

Source: Mark White, Critical Essay on "You're Ugly, Too," in *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 2004.

Critical Essay #2

Dybiec Holm is a freelance writer and editor. In this essay, Dybiec Holm looks at the theme of sadness in "You're Ugly, Too," a theme whichMoore accentuates through use of cynical humor, nuanced observation of the human condition, and description.

Lorrie Moore, in talking about her short stories and novels, has admitted that her work has an underlying theme of sadness. Her narrative is often overlaid with tones of cynicism, one-liners, and wisecracks, which suggest sadness below the surface. Certainly, this appears to be the case in "You're Ugly, Too," an acclaimed short story fromMoore's collection *Like Life.* How, then, doesMoore keep a reader engaged? Sadness alone will not hold all readers. Part of the effectiveness ofMoore's writing lies with her detailed, nuanced observation about the human condition, via her characters and her descriptions.Moore's observations about the human psyche are fascinating. But it's the edgy interplay between acerbic humor and the darker aspects of the human experience (despair, anger, grief, realization) that make this story unique. This interplay accelerates throughout the story, showing the reader the sadness of the character's life and of life in general.

As reviewer Ralph Novak of *People Weekly* says of Moore's writing,Moore is "effective with indirect approaches" and "her stories are usually thick with insight and laugh-first, think-later humor." In "You're Ugly, Too," this is immediately evident in protagonist Zoë's observations and feelings about living in the Midwestern United States.Moore finds original ways to make observations here that manage to convey cynicism, disdain, and wry humor all at once. These observations are motivated by sadness, ever a part of the world in this story.Moore takes the reader below the surface. Instead of Zoë simply saying, "Illinois. It makes me sarcastic to be here," Zoë goes to great lengths in the beginning of her stay in the Midwest to insist to herself that she is being ironic rather than sarcastic, even when talking about sarcasm. Irony, to Zoë, is subtle and seems more appropriate to a sophisticated New Yorker in exile rather than more blatant sarcasm. Both sarcasm and irony, however, reflect a deeper despair on the part of the character. This kind of observation on the part ofMoore makes Zoë a fascinating character. It's exactly the kind of thought anyone might have in the protagonist's situation. But such nuances do not always get captured so well in writing.

Humor and sadness are interwoven throughout the story so skillfully that the reader is not aware of the transition from one to the other.Moore leads the reader from wisecracking observations to the sharp edge between sadness and madness, and it's what keeps story tension high. Zoë's Midwestern students are "spacey with estrogen from large quantities of meat and cheese," complacent, unnerved by Zoë's brunette hair, and ignorant about the geography of the east coast. Zoë compares the Midwestern tendency to repeatedly insist that "everything is fine" to the worldview of a sort of archetypal or stereotypical Heidi. But Heidi doesn't stand in front of broken copiers and threaten to slit her wrists. Zoë has discovered her "crusty edge," and in the scene that quickly follows, with teacher and student (who has a "big leather bow in her hair, like a cowgirl in a TV ranch show"), Zoë slams it to the girl, telling the student that it's her

problem if she wants "her history major to mean something." Zoë's had it; she's realized that she'll never fit into theMidwest and will never completely understand it.

So that the reader isn't completely estranged from Zoë,Moore soon gives a sense of Zoë's vulnerability (still motivated by sadness, however). Vulnerability is actually suggested earlier in the story, when Zoë skips into class singing all two verses of "Getting to Know You." It is difficult to tell at this point in the story whether Zoë's behavior is spurred by cynicism, frustration, vulnerability, or all of these. As the story progresses, however,Moore gives the reader a clearer picture. This happens not so much in the description of the three men Zoë tries to date in theMidwest. Instead, it is presented in smaller, everyday ways. Narrative such as the following shows her actions as intensely human, whether motivated by loneliness, sadness, or a sense of personal insignificance in the world: "Zoë lived for the mail, for the postman, that handsome bluejay, and when she got a real letter. . . she took it to bed with her and read it over and over."

Zoë stares with longing over the interior decorating magazines that her mother sends; remnants from a family that could not afford what the magazines suggested. But when Zoë attempts to decorate her own house, the ideas don't quite take hold. Most unnerving is Zoë's reaction to her reflection in a newly purchased mirror: "Most times she just looked vague . . . 'You look like someone I know,' she had been told . . . sometimes she seemed not to have a look of her own." Zoë returns the mirror, scared by thoughts of insignificance or the nullification of personal identity. In a *Ploughshares* article aboutMoore, Don Lee notes that the author, as a child, "fretted, quite literally, about her insubstantiality." Reviewer Sybil Steinberg of *Publishers Weekly* refers toMoore's characters' "quiet desperation and valiant searches for significance." In "You're Ugly, Too," the character's desperation has subtly been building since the beginning of the story and is nicely alluded to in Zoë's reaction to the mirror.

The skill with whichMoore plays with story time (perhaps purposefully) imitates Zoë's tendency to deflect crisis with jokes or sarcasm. Always, however, the character's sadness drives her cynical humor. Zoë does not quite get to the center of certain issues; she cannot face the certain despair of looking at these issues straight on. For example, during her ultrasound procedure she jokes about the word "ultrasound" and babbles about infertility, although it is obvious that she is completely worried about her health and the consequences of the tests.

Zoë approaches difficult issues tangentially. While Zoë is well aware of the sadness in her own life, she somehow can't bring herself to burden those she is closest to (her sister Evan, for example) with in-depth discussions of some of the strange or frightening things Zoë is facing. She evades her sister's questions about her dating life and can't quite come out and tell Evan that she will be having an ultrasound. When the ultrasound is mentioned, the reader knows that the stakes have suddenly shot through the roof for Zoë and for the story. The sentence is presented and constructed in an emphatic way ("The ultrasound Zoë was keeping a secret, even from Evan"). The construction of the sentence (object ahead of subject) gives the wording added impact, which it deserves. The irony is that this character can hardly bear to face these huge aspects of sadness in

her life herself, even though she's ready and willing to deflect everything or express herself with a cynical joke. Reviewer Ralph Novak callsMoore "so effective with indirect approaches," and this point in the story is a stellar example of such a tactic. Much like a cynical joke-teller, Zoë and Moore come at sadness indirectly, but the reader is always aware of its pervasive presence.

Zoë and Moore continue to juxtapose humor and sadness, but it feels as if now, at this point in the story where the stakes are out in the open, both protagonist and author become more forthcoming and direct about the sadness. Even the humor has more bite, reflecting more at stake for Zoë. Zoë finds a particular joke (from which the story takes its title) "terribly, terribly funny," even though the first part of the joke deals with someone who has only six weeks to live. Perhaps it is no accident thatMoore uses a word like "terribly" rather than a bland " very." There is something terrible about the joke and its consequences. Zoë's life, for the reader, has taken on a hard, new edge. This seems reflected by the sad wave of the cabdriver who reveals the smallness of his world. When Zoë ends the scene with her philosophy of flying, her humor has turned completely acerbic ("you had nothing to live for anyway" and "keeping [the plane] aloft with your own worthlessness"), and one is no longer sure of this character's fuzzy boundary between humor and intense sadness.

More and more, the reader gets a taste of the author's and Zoë's reflections on relationship. Much of this is accomplished throughMoore's attention to telling details. Evan's boyfriend comes home and watches "fuzzy football." He kicks his underwear in the air and gets into bed. These details are funny yet sad and tell the reader more in a few words than Evan could if she had she gone on to describe the monotony of her relationship in more explicit ways. Zoë also reveals her obsession with relationship with a few telling details thatMoore slips in: "the toad-faced cicadas . . . like little caped men" and the "size fourteen shoes" on the doorstep, indications of her lack of a relationship. These details are placed next to another starkly sad realization "as soon as you think you've got the best of both worlds ... it can suddenly twist and become the worst of both worlds."

Again,Moore deflects the reader from lingering too long in sadness, just as Zoë tries to use humor to avoid facing her despair. Evan doesn't seem to hear what Zoë has just said about "the worst of both worlds" and abruptly changes the subject. Zoë cuts short a story of mismatched lovers.Moore saves this for later, when Zoë gives the man at the party the full force of her edgy humor/anger, and tells the man the sad story in its entirety.

The party scene is the rawest part of the story, and both the bite of the humor and the depth of Zoë's desperation are accelerated during this scene. True to Zoë's and Evan's fears about marriage, Evan dresses for the Halloween party as a hausfrau and later regrets it. Earl represents the epitome of what frustrates Zoë about the dating life; appropriately, his costume seems to make a mockery of women. Zoë, in a subconscious way, contrasts Earl's female representation with her own costume choice, but the reader does not pick up on this until Earl compliments her "bone" and she compliments (in a sarcastic manner) Earl's "tits." Typically, Earl interrupts Zoë's recitation of her favorite

joke, and gives it an ending which has overtones of sex and victory ("I finally f□------ked her") rather than overtones of self-perception and defeat ("You're ugly, too"). Earl talks of wanting physical contact, and Zoë is reminded of gorillas smacking each other when they've been in a cage together for too long. All during the conversation between Earl and Zoë,Moore lets us see Zoë's thoughts. These are detailed, honest, and despairing; the kind of tangential mind-jumps any human might make in Zoë's place. Zoë is complex, andMoore's descriptions help us see Zoë as a subtle, layered woman.

To Zoë, Earl represents the most frustrating aspects of men. The reader feels Zoë's irritation when Earl laments dating career women ("A guy can really tell what life has done to you. I do better with women who have part-time jobs."); the reader feels her scorn when Earl talks about female hormones and "men screwing rocks."Moore convinces the reader that Zoë really meant to push Earl off the balcony, even though, in typical Zoë and Moore fashion, Zoë insists that she was only kidding. The entire story represents an edgy interplay between cynicism and sadness, and this instance in the climax of this story is the strongest illustration ofMoore's strange, jarring, story dynamic.

Source: Catherine Dybiec Holm, Critical Essay on "You're Ugly, Too," in *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 2004.

Critical Essay #3

Sudo is currently pursuing a master's degree. In this essay, Sudo explores stereotypes found in Lorrie Moore's "You're Ugly, Too."

In "You're Ugly, Too," Lorrie Moore presents the story of a female character who is a mixture of tradition and modernity. She presents a new style of writing about women that is colorful and charismatic, portraying women with true emotional baggage and reaching readers on a more personal level. Her characters are drawn in a streamlined and uncluttered way. In fact, critics are split between finding fault with the characters because they lack traditional development and findingMoore's representation of women with real faults incredibly refreshing.Moore reaches readers by constantly changing the roles through which her male and female characters interact and by writing about women and their perceptions of men. In "You're Ugly Too," she accomplishes this with various devices, stereotypes, and symbols.

In "You're Ugly Too,"Moore creates a character, in Zoë Hendricks, who reveals her humanity through her flaws.Moore uses italics to identify pieces of information that are crucial in defining her characters and enhancing character development. Early in the story,Moore's narrator reveals, *"Professor Hendricks is often late for class and usually arrives with a cup of hot chocolate which she offers the class sips of.*" This makes explicit the metaphor that, as a professor, Zoë comes to class equipped with "a cup of knowledge" to share with her students. Some time later, we hear one of her students say to her, "You act. . . like your opinion is worth more than everybody else's in the class." Consequently, the reader can see that, as a teacher, Zoë has fallen into the "I come to teach you, you don't come to teach me" trap, which shows that Zoë is an average woman with real human flaws. This is just one of many ways that shows that Zoë is the average woman.

Zoë's personality is revealed by her humor andMoore's projection of skepticism onto female characters. Zoë considers her humor to be ironic, but her students consider it sarcastic□an opinion that Zoë eventually comes to accept. In fact, Zoë's humor is sarcastic and cynical, which reveals her pessimistic view of life and dark humor. The joke that Zoë uses to cope with the abdominal growth is revealed as Zoë drives home from the ultrasound procedure. The punch line, "You're ugly, too" when the patient asks for a second opinion from the doctor is referenced in the title of the story. Zoë finds this joke hilarious because the punch line of the doctor's second opinion, a matter-of-fact statement, is not an answer to her original serious question. Instead, it serves to illuminate the fact that the doctor is offended because the patient feels that he needs another opinion. One can see that the doctor's response to Zoë is similar to Zoë's response to her students in her class and that the doctor's and Zoë's opinions are no longer matter-of-fact.Moore's use of italics to reproduce the thoughts of Zoë's student□ "You act like your opinion is worth more than everyone else's in the class"□puts Zoë in the place of the patient and the student, and Zoë realizes that the shoe is on the other foot now. The joke shows Zoë getting tangled in a web of her own thoughts, just as we do in the real world. Michelle Brockway, a writer for *Poets and Writers,* describes

Moore's characters in the following way: "Intelligent and well-meaning as the next guy, wisecracking, willfully illogical, these men and women invariably trip over life's accepted wisdom and assurances□only to come up ... slack-jawed, gawking at an endgame replete with unanticipated incongruities." This description could be used to describe the multiple female roles that Zoë embodies.

Moore's story depicts a female driven satire that is a result of mismatched roles or stereotypes that some women, like Zoë, combine, as they search for who they are. The use of stereotypes in a satirical manner brings an ironic tone to her representation of Zoë as a hopelessly lonely woman. According to the stereotype of the traditional woman represented by Heidi, Zoë is a disappointment in society's eyes because she has not fulfilled the traditional expectation of a happy marriage with several children.

However, Zoë does not try to remedy her situation through marriage. A prime example is the interaction between Zoë and Earl, the man dressed as a naked woman. Zoë's attitude is not typical of the woman longing for a male companion, especially as she switches between playing the aloof already-divorced-though-never-married woman and the almost homicidal bonehead at the party. Jumping between non-traditional female roles may occur because Zoë does not know how she is expected to act or what society will classify as an acceptable and desirable flirtation. She experiments with her roles, playing off the reactions Earl gives her.Moore exaggerates a simple conversation to prove how non-traditional responses from Zoë are awkwardly received by others.Moore effectively uses the contrast of modern independent woman and the stereotypical Heidi by using satire in the character of Zoë toward the archaic image of woman.

Particularly intriguing is the explanation of Heidi.Moore illuminates the notion of conflict between the expectations of modern woman and the traditional passive woman. "You were never to say you weren't fine thank you and yourself. You were supposed to be Heidi. You were supposed to lug goat milk up the hills and not think twice. Heidi did not complain. Heidi did not do things like stand in front of the new IBM photocopier, saying, 'If this f□------king Xerox machine breaks on me one more time, I'm going to slit my wrists.'" Zoë represents the struggle between the woman that was and the woman that is, including her struggle with society's reaction to the transition between the two types.Moore infers that people typically expect Heidi□ the woman who was□and few see or accept the woman who is, or so Zoë believes. Zoë is a representation of the struggle of woman to transcend the Heidi of yesterday to be the woman of today, who does not live for chores to support others, but rather stands before modern technology and cusses until she is emotionally satisfied. As technology advances, so do women. The Heidi stereotype humorously contrasts archaic expectations of woman with current demands on her and her current reality.

In addition,Moore uses Zoë symbolically in another way, to show a darker side of the typical woman that is no laughing matter. A harsh reality presents itself privately to Zoë in the form of an unidentified growth in her abdomen. Robin Werner ofTulane University categorizes the quest to identify Zoë's growth as Zoë's struggle to find herself. As a woman who has not yet "solidified" her life by becoming a wife and bearing children and staying home and doing the dishes, Zoë is confused by how people react to her reality

and how she reacts to the reality of others. The abdominal growth may be a symbol of Zoë's unspoken self-doubts. Though Zoë's reality of being utterly alone is obvious, she harbors a secret that represents all the fears of any woman who shares Zoë's longing for company. She refuses to tell even her sister, Evan, though at times she seems to want to. Fear and self-consciousness may vary in degree from woman to woman, but, in the end, every woman experiences them. Zoë does not want to attract attention to the elephant in the room□her isolation□but she cannot help but fixate on it. Admitting that she is utterly alone may just touch the surface of the accumulation of insecurities that she has because she does not fit the mold of Heidi□one stereotype of the traditional woman.

Moore represents Zoë as an ordinary woman with very real human flaws, as a type or symbol of the modern woman. Zoë stands in contrast to the stereotype of Heidi, the traditional woman, the woman who used to be, who had no flaws, who lived for others, made no demands to have her own needs satisfied, and never complained. Zoë is seeking the acceptance that Heidi received when her behavior was socially accepted, but she cannot or will not do what Heidi did to achieve that acceptance. Zoë tries several non-traditional female roles to try to gain acceptance, but these do not give her a sense of satisfaction. Her repeated attempts elicit mixed reactions from society, which she does not know how to process into a new attitude or behavior that fits the mold. A conflict is set up within Zoë over who she should be, and this conflict grows like a tangible growth inside her. The growth symbolizes not only the conflict between the traditional and the modern woman but Zoë's doubts, the modern woman's doubts about herself, about her ability to measure up to Heidi. Nevertheless, Zoë as the modern woman does not want to do what Heidi did: she does not want to lose her identity in the process of pleasing others, and by not achieving the acceptance she desires, she becomes a symbol of frustration and sadness.

Moore upsets ideal romanticism by using Zoë to explore what might happen to a woman who does not get married and have 2.7 children and a white picket fence. One would traditionally expect a love story, as she states it is, to end with something wistful and romantic. Instead, Zoë gives the story an ugly spin by having the heroine commit suicide. As the reader is stunned by this unexpected outcome,Moore illustrates that not every story and not every life has a happy ending. Don Lee, editor of the literary journal *Ploughshares,* in his article "About Lorrie Moore: A Profile," encapsulates Moore's own assessment of her work: "WhileMoore's fiction is renowned for its wit and humor full with repartee, pithy one-liners, and wisecracks, she considers the essence of her stories sad." Zoë's character in the end is ultimately sad, as exemplified by her confusion in how to act in response to Earl's reactions. What is not clear is what she wants from Earl; perhaps she does not know. In her attempt to deal with society's response to her lifestyle, Zoë represents the antithesis of the woman who has it together, the woman all women are expected to be. Zoë becomes the symbol of the modern woman who is caught between fulfilling the stereotype of the traditional woman, Heidi, and being who she really is, someone who cannot give what others expect or get what she wants.

Source: Ericka Marie Sudo, Critical Essay on "You're Ugly, Too," *in Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 2004.

Critical Essay #4

In the following panel discussion excerpt,Moore discusses her views about and experiences with writing short stories.

Erin McGraw: As soon as we start talking about the short story, the long shadow of the novel shades our conversation. After all, the short story is only short in comparison with longer works, and through the twentieth century the novel has been generally considered fiction's most ambitious and important form. Nobody talks about wanting to write the great American short story (though maybe people should). Instead, we get opinions such as this, from E. L. Doctorow's introduction to *Best American Short Stories 2000:*

While there are exceptions□Isaac Babel or Grace Paley, for example, writers-for-life of brilliant, tightly sprung prose designedly inhospitable to the long forms□we may say that short stories are what young writers produce on their way to first novels, or what older writers produce in between novels. The critic will hold title to all its estates, and the novel is a major act of the culture.

Well. How are we to respond to this assured assertion placed in the introduction to a collection of short stories that novels, not stories, are a major act of the culture?

Richard Burgin: I take exception to Doctorow's remark. I'm thinking of something Isaac Bashevis Singer, who wrote masterful novels *and* stories, said. He felt that a novel really was a story, just a longer, more complicated story. And he felt as a simple matter of logic that a novel would, as a rule, have more mistakes in it than a story. I think he said that Tolstoy's *War and Peace* had many more aesthetic mistakes than his "The Death of Ivan Ilych," and I would agree. So, in that sense, I think he was arguing that a story is a more perfect form, or perfection can be more readily approached, and perhaps even have the illusion of being achieved there than in the novel.

And I am thinking of another important writer in my life, with whom I also had the good fortune to do a book of conversations, Jorge Luis Borges. He, of course, felt the same way. He's famous for not writing a novel. So that would be my initial response to Doctorow's statement. Also, it occurs to me that if time is infinite, and literature keep proliferating with it, it's going to be increasingly attractive for writers to write and readers to read short stories to get any sense of this monster of literary history that just won't stop. And that in the future writers even very good writers, will be lucky to be remembered for even a single short story or perhaps for a single line. I suggest this just from the point of view of literary ecology, one might say.

Moore: I've never been on a panel before, so I don't know when I'm supposed to speak. Now?

I do think there's this idea afloat in the culture, which is an erroneous one, that the short story is suited to our diminishing attention spans. But there's a kind of organic

wholeness that a short story requires which contradicts that idea. One can, if necessary, read a novel in five-minute increments. One cannot read a short story that way. So as time fragments and gets scarcer, and our attention spans supposedly diminish, the short story is not something that can rush in and fill the gap. The short story will be a casualty.

The short story is written in a manner similar to the way it's read, which is all at once. At some point in a short story the writer sits down and writes it all the way through from beginning to end. Whether it's on the eleventh draft or on the first draft, there's a wholeness to it, a momentum to it, a seeing of it all the way through from beginning to end. And when you sit and read a short story you read from beginning to end. You don't read five minutes here and there. But novels are checked in and out of, and they're checked in and out of by the novelist. A novelist can even sit down and work on it for ten minutes, and then go away, and work on it ten minutes the next day, too. That's how you can read novels as well, even if it's not ideal.

I don't really know what my point is except to argue against the particular idea that short stories are convenient for our shortened attention spans. They really are the opposite of that, I think. You need thirty-five, forty minutes to read a good short story, whereas you don't necessarily need that to continue reading a novel. And forty uninterrupted minutes are sometimes, perhaps increasingly, difficult to come by.

McGraw: You know, earlier this week the critics Charles May and Susan Lohafer gave their own panel. And Charles, who's read everything, was talking about what he says was his preference for reading a collection of stories over a novel□just assuming books of equal merit. Which I found astonishing. I think it's hard to read a book of stories. It's much, much easier to sit down and read a novel. After fifty pages you know what the terrain is. ...

Audience Member: I have a question that changes the subject, is that okay? If the novel is something that began in eighteenth-centuryEngland and developed from there, you could call the short story a newer form. Unless you see an alliance between the short story and the folktale, the colloquial oral tradition that goes back infinitely. How do you see it? Do you see the short story as a newer kind of twentieth-century form, or do you see it as connected with that old, old tradition?

Moore: Me? I see it as a more oral form. It's confined to a physical idea, to sitting down, telling in a single sitting, receiving in a single sitting. It's very much attached to that idea of your body, your half-hour sitting, your hearing in a single shot. I always thought the first collection of stories was *The Decameron,* which goes way back. And those stories are incredible. And they don't seem all that different from what writers, short story writers, are trying to do now. And *The Decameron,* that first collection, makes explicit in the frame the idea of sitting down, and hearing stories, and telling stories. And then it also makes explicit the sense of disaster that's surrounding this storytelling, that storytelling is one way we keep ourselves alive, to celebrate our living, if not our lives.

Burgin: I suppose one could argue there are stories in the Bible, aren't there? Isn't the Bible full of little short stories really?

McGraw: Yeah, but I like the big stories in there, too.

Moore: Outside the parables of the New Testament, however, it doesn't make explicit the idea of storytelling which *The Decameron* does.

McGraw: Like *A Thousand and One Nights,* too, which is sort of pleasant because it's weird.

Audience Member: And how about *TheCanterbury Tales?*

McGraw: TheCanterbury Tales. Yes, absolutely.

Audience Member: I think, related to this, I was at a conference where a woman was talking about short story collections. And she mentioned yours, Ms. Moore, as well as *The Canterbury Tales,* countering people who say a short story can't tell about life. And what she was saying is that you should look at these collections as a whole, like *The Canterbury Tales,* that it really is a short story cycle. And I thought in some ways it's an interesting concept, but it also undercuts the short story itself, as it pushes toward this idea that it has to be large, that it has to be something from which you can take away an understanding of human life. That you can't took at an individual story and learn something from it. And I wonder what you thought of that way of approaching a collection, especially since you write stories separately, and only later put them in a collection.

Moore: A lot of short story writers are interested in the idea of a collection. I'm not, so much□ at least not for myself. For me, each story comes separately and I don't even know if there ever will be another story after I write one. I don't know. I'm starting from scratch every time. Eventually, when you have enough short stories you can sort of see what they have in common, and see how they form a collection. They form a temporal document. Over a ten-year period these were your obsessions and your concerns; here are your little summaries of life. And you put them together and give them a title. Now, then, afterward someone else can come along and just read them as or see them as a collection, or see the collection as a genre, or as a form. I'm not that interested in that, except maybe with respect to other people's collections.

I think the danger, also, as a writer, of seeing stories as a collection, is that it starts to corrupt the genesis of the story. If you're trying to find a story that fits the other stories, there's some kind of corruption that's already gone on. It's a worrisome idea. I was just talking to a writer who was actually doing that in his collection. He said he had a story that he was going to fit in and□

Burgin: Mix and match.

Moore:□link, link the theme of this story and that story. But he was getting stuck. Well, of course, he would get stuck because he's making something else. He's removed from the original impulse of writing a story.

Burgin: That's what the editors try to do later, with a story. I really like what Lorrie is saying about the individual stories and the potential corruption of a collection. I also think that a single good story can tell us just as much about "life" as a single good novel.

First of all, novels don't tell us what "life" is. They talk about a section of it, a little bit of the writer's personal emotional real estate, as it were, but hardly the entire earth. So, thinking of one example off the top of my head, Faulkner's great story "That Evening Sun" tells me personally a lot more about racism, among other things, than Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird,* which was not a bad novel. But, you know, as far as learning something about life, I think this single short story teaches a lot more and is a far more powerful aesthetic document than Lee's novel or many other novels about racism. You don't need a collection of stories to illuminate reality. One really good one will do it.

Jim Schiff: I have a question. Since you all not only read a good deal of short fiction but write it, I wanted to get a sense of some of the differences you see in the two forms, between the short story and the novel. And just going over some of the things that have been said over the last week, I know that Charles May, when he was here, was talking about the short story not really having much to do with realism. I think he felt like the novel had a lot more to do with realism. And, I think, even going back to when Updike was here, I mean if you look at the Rabbit novels they're full of sociological data and details. They're very contemporary, maybe even more so than his stories. And I remember somebody else talking about the passage of time and how a Tolstoy novel obviously conveys that passage of time in a way that short stories don't, I think, or at least does it differently. So I wonder what kind of differences you see in how the two forms operate?

Burgin: Erin, why don't you take it? You haven't spoken in a while.

McGraw: Well, you've got me thinking about Alice Munro. Because nobody writes stories that cover more time than Alice Munro does. And she tends to do it, I think, in lurches. You'll spend a great deal of time in a long scene in an Alice Munro story, and then vault ahead, with no transition at all, ahead or backwards fifty years, or you'll get a space alien or something. And I don't think that she is all that unique in using the story form as a way to hopscotch through time, though few do it so audaciously as Munro. She is such a case by herself.

Moore: She is unique.

Moore: Someone once said that Munro does start out every time to write a novel, and I don't believe this, so maybe I shouldn't repeat it, but someone believes it: that Munro's stories start off with the ambition to be a novel, then they somehow get distilled down. Which, if true, is perhaps why they don't resemble anyone else's stories: they have an unusual handling of time. I mean, time is usually more the subject and the medium of novels than of short stories. But Munro has a kind of story that has always had the satisfactions and elements of a novel. And it's because she's started off with novelistic ideas and just ended up, I think, with a kind of sculpture in the end. I think that's how

she creates her narrative time, sort of sculpturally. And she ends up with something that's a long short story that's not like anybody else's. . ..

Audience Member: Yes. What about the collections of linked stories? I mean,*Winesburg, Ohio, The Joy Luck Club,* there's a bunch more. *Go Down, Moses.* Is it a fad? Is it another genre? What is it?

Burgin: I think it can work commercially just by some of those examples. It's not something I've ever done. But I know some writers want to do that because they figure, "Well, I can sell each story individually, and sell the book as a whole." So, you know, it has that commercial dimension to it or whatever else you want to call it.

Audience Member: Are you interested in that?

Burgin: I don't have a particular interest. They haven't been among the best story collections that I've read, the so-called theme stories. They get tiresome because they're repetitive. You know, every story collection you pick up, there're going to be two or three stories of personal victimization and adultery in the suburbs. But eleven of them? I mean, it gets a little old.

Moore: I think those kinds of linked stories are novels, and they're just taking a story collection as their structure□I mean a novel can take any structure it pleases, and a novel-in-stories is taking the structure of stories and just linking them together. *Lives of Girls and Women,* which is Alice Munro's second book, is that. And it's just astounding. And there are other ones, too, obviously. But I think they're novels essentially. But the experience of reading them is much more like reading short stories. And they're written so carefully. Each of the "chapters" is a story complete unto itself. Sort of beautiful. In a way it's more accomplished than either a novel or a collection of short stories because it's done both things.

Audience Member: But then it does seem like a training ground for a would-be novelist. I know Pam Houston tried, well, she did write a collection of short stories, but they were linked stories. But what was interesting was that all the same characters were in each story. So you could read it as a short story. But I think, in her mind she felt that, well, I can't speak for her, but I think the idea was, "Yes I need to write a novel, and maybe if I do it this way it will be a novel." I don't know if that is why her memoir or short stories are linked. But it seemed to me something that was actually edging toward a novel, but didn't quite make it.

Audience Member: A Peruvian writer, Laura Risco, originally wrote a collection of short stories, and all the short stories had a little girl. And then after she presented them to the editor inPeru, the editor suggested to link the short stories, and then it ended up like a novel. And it was a successful novel.

Moore: I think that happened with Amy Tan's book, *The Joy Luck Club.* She offered it up as stories initially, right? And the editors said, "We need this to be a novel."

Audience Member: There's that book of Alice Munro's, *The Beggar Maid.*

Moore: The Beggar Maid is like *Lives of Girls and Women.*

Audience Member: I read somewhere that she wrote a lot of those stories where the characters did all, in fact, have different names. And she said something about□

Moore: "Who am I kidding?"

Audience Member: Yeah. Like she was standing in the grocery store, literally, or something, and said, "They're all the same person." And they had to do something to the galleys. It was ready to go, and they had to get it out for the Christmas trade inCanada. And she said that if you look at it carefully there are some mistakes, a pronoun here or there, something's wrong in one or two of the stories where they rushed to get it out and to make those changes. Yeah, yeah, I've never looked closely enough to see if I could find the mistakes.

*Moore:*Her publisher must have fixed the mistakes in subsequent printings. . ..

Audience Member: I think there's one point that needs to be made about the short story, and that's how we can experience it. How the story can exist for us. And the reading last night was a case in point. That is, my reading of the story and the author's reading of the story are two different things. I've long known, of course, that everybody reads a story differently from the next person. So that with a short story, you can hear the whole thing, the whole definition of something you can read in one sitting is likely true. And that's okay, that's not a bad definition, actually, for a short story.

And so we can listen to the whole thing and hear the whole thing. But not only can we hear the whole thing, we can hear the writer herself, in this case, reading the whole thing. And last night, when Lorrie was reading "Dance inAmerica," it became a different story and I watched and followed it in the book. You made some changes, in case you didn't notice.

Moore: Oh I noticed.

Audience Member: And you put in some "he saids" and "she saids" that weren't there. Were you reading from the text?

Moore: You're every writer's nightmare!

Audience Member: Well, I'm interested in how writers represent their stories aloud. Because we get back to the old notions that all of our fiction is basically oral. And when you read a story I think you have to hear a voice telling it to you. And if you can hear the author, in this case, it makes it a different kind of story. For instance, last night your story was funnier than I'd thought it was. I'd thought it was kind of sentimental when I read it. And you can hear the details repeating in it. And you can hear the whole story's implicit in the first line. And it comes home in the end and you can hear that. You can't do that with a novel.

Bur gin: No, that's a really good point you're making.

Audience Member: And so, so it's like Walter Benjamin's notion of aura. What's the authentic reading of this story? What should we hear, and what should we be perceiving when we read this? How does it exist? And when you hear the author read it, it's something else. And certain other things came out where you could hear the parts are being juxtaposed as you went along, and you could hear the connections. And so, I think, the great defense of the short story is that it takes us back, close to the oral tradition. And secondly, it's something we can experience as a whole. And it's something that the artist herself, or himself, can present to us, something that you can't do with the novel. You've got to have breaks in reading the novel. You've got to stop some place. You can't just read seven hundred pages of a Pynchon at the same time.

McGraw: Desirable though that might be.

Audience Member: But at any rate, the short story is something that, it seems to me, is one of our most extraordinary forms of literature because of the fact that we can hear the whole thing at one time. That we can hear the writer present it to us, too, which I think is invaluable. That's why all this stuff is worthwhile. To bring people, writers, here to read them, to see how the writers represent what's on the page. And it's surprising what will happen. I'm sorry, I'm lecturing. But it's surprising the way some writers sometimes can't read their own stuff. And it's sometimes surprising how good things are by the way the writers read them. SoI think that it's not just the voice in the story, it's also how the writer himself, or herself, hears this thing, and then represents it to us. And we can perceive that in one sitting, at one time. And that's why I think the short story is so very important, and why it stays around.

Moore: I think it's a musical form, which perhaps ties it to performance. That is a very important point. And it does connect, again I think, more with theater, more with poetry, more with music. Whereas novels are not connected with those things, are not performed successfully that way. I will add that when a writer reads his or her own work the writer is seldom offering up his or her own reading as definitive or exemplary, the way the story should be read, or must be read, or the way it should exist. When I write a story I'm hearing a voice that I can't actually reproduce in a room for anyone. When I read it out loud I'm doing my best, but it's just not even very close to how I want the thing to sound, but it's my attempt. But I'm so pleased that you felt the story was improved by the reading, and that means I have somehow at least gone in the right direction. But the writer hearing his or her own voice reading the work is always disappointed. It's not really the perfect voice you want to hear for the perfect reading.

Burgin: I agree with Lorrie. I also feel that when I read from my story collections I'm not offering a definitive reading. And, like Lorrie, I also will make little changes that aren't in the printed text. So maybe what I'm offering is my definitive reading at that moment, because it's always evolving. And that's something tying in with some of what you said, and some of what Lorrie said, about the short story being somehow related to performing arts. Just like an orchestra will play Stravinksy' s "Rites of Spring," or Mahler's Second, or whatever, a little differently each time, that's what's going to happen in the short story. Because even though there's a version between covers, that doesn't mean that it ends. It still exists in the writer's mind and you'll get these subtle changes. If

not in actual language or words being omitted or added, in the inflection in the way one reads it. In that sense it is a kind of evolving performing art in a way that, just because of the logistics you alluded to, a novel isn' t.

McGraw: And sometimes you're just off. Sometimes you read it and you know you've muffed it. You've screwed up words, or you didn't, you couldn't get yourself present enough to do a good job. The actor Richard Shiff read a story of mine a year ago, and I was flabbergasted. He read that story much better than I ever have. He was getting laughs, oh! And I've really studied that. And I have been trying to imitate his reading of my story because he did it better. So, I very much think that a public reading of a story is a performance and that we are not trained as performers. We are trained to be solitary people who sit in a room.

Audience Member: Well, you have to become a performer, then, if you're going to read them in public. Because you have to respect your reader and your audience.

McGraw: Well, sure. And how many of us have sat through deadly readings where you're like this [looks at her watch] that whole time?

Moore: I have to say I've felt the opposite experience with actors and actresses reading my work. I have found it unbearable because it was too actressy, too performed. There is another sort of place that you're trying to get to when you read your work aloud. And I can't exactly get to it, but neither can a number of actresses. So it's not just about being an actress. It's some other level that the story has to live on, which actors sometimes bypass and writers can't quite get to.

Audience Member: Getting back to the question of political correctness.Erin mentioned that often it is the narrative point of view which controls the narrative of the story. But there is this strange, irony-impaired point of view in our culture, that the writer, whether a short story writer or whatever, is always announcing his own point of view in everything that he says. And that the voice of the story is always the voice of the person behind the story.

Bur gin: Yes, it's unfortunate that that exists because that's one of the pressures, I think, that, subliminally at any rate, make writers write politically correct stories where the "right people" are always noble and wise. It's because of this fear that, "Oh, well, no one would even think that I'm just writing a story, so I can't have my characters use this word or think those thoughts."

Audience Member: Nobody could imagine that this is just a character I'm writing about. They're always saying, "Keith!"

Jim Schiff: You know, I agree with the point about political correctness and see how that operates. But I also wonder if there's something counter to that. I mean in terms of *The New Yorker,* how that's changed from the pre-Gottlieb years, in terms of what you can say, and so on, and the outrageous-ness of humor with a number of Lorrie' s stories and George Saunders and others. So I wonder if there's something working against that also.

McGraw: Thank you for saying that. I understand what you're getting at Keith, but I'm startled to hear you talk about American literature as being an irony-free zone. Because my experience is that most American literature is drenched in irony. I would like to see rather less of it.

Burgin: Yes, ironists have their own political correctness.

McGraw: Yes, yes!

Burgin: The compulsive ironists are totally unaware of their own cliches. They're only aware of writing they deem to be too earnest.

Audience Member: Well I'm thinking of the fear of the reader. There's often a fear of the reader's reaction.

McGraw: Have you ever feared the reader's reaction, Lorrie?

Moore: Maybe I should, but no. I have a fear of my own reaction. I'm sort of out of this conversation, I guess. I don't really know what any of you are talking about. I don't feel an invisible fence of political correctness that I'm confined by. I feel like when you write a story you're just going out there, and you're on this journey, not this frightened little tour around your yard. So I don't know. I don't feel those things as a writer.

Burgin: Well, the writer shouldn't feel them. I'm saying these are cultural forces.

Moore: Political correctness should be, and mostly is, I think, a movement toward sensitivity and openness, not away. I have to say that I did just write a tiny piece of nonfiction that I dashed off in an hour and after it appeared several people said to me, "Oh, did the anti-defamation people call you yet?" So I went, "Really?" One can offend when one isn' t aware of it, and then be made aware. That's OK. I think that afterwards it's good to, you know, have the conversation if, in fact, you have stepped on some toes and you didn't realize it. But no, one shouldn't censor oneself. But one should be as intelligent as possible and not get defensive about carelessness.

Burgin: But I'm saying these forces are out there among editors, among publishers, among people who are on awards committees and professors who determine the courses that are taught at universities, and finally, not hearing anything else but that, readers themselves. And eventually some of that trickles back, and affects some of our less courageous writers, as opposed to you, Lorrie.

Audience Member: This is going fully on something that Rebecca asked, and that Lorrie partly touched on, too, when you were talking about reading sort of experimental short stories back in the seventies. Do you see, as far as trends go, and big established names in short story writing, do you see length becoming a trend with them. For instance, Alice Munro, her earliest stories in *Dance of the Happy Shades* were much shorter than what she's doing now, in the last book for instance. She keeps getting longer, and longer, and longer. And that's not a complaint. Even somebody like Ann Beattie, who was one of the so-called minimalists when that term was especially

derogatory, she's even working longer. And in her just-published collection, *Perfect Recall,* the stories are the longest I've ever seen her write. And even Amy Hempel who works really, really tiny, tried a novella in her last book. Do you see that? Does that have something to do, possibly, with being established and with feeling free to work longer? Or is that a trend among younger, more inexperienced writers as well?

Moore: I have no idea. I don't think an artist makes these decisions in response to trends, careers, editors, magazines. I think they have something they want to write, and they find a form that can best contain it. The long short story is a wonderful form. Ethan Canin works really well within that form. He's written some of the best, as have Stanley Elkin and Andre Dubus. And Alice Munro was always working in that length. In *Lives of Girls and Women,* there's a very long story called "Baptizing," which is one of her best stories. I think the long story is hardly new.

Audience Member: Yeah. I'm just wondering because of Carver and Beattie, that sort of trend from the seventies into the eighties that was very small, compact, pared down stories. Very few adjectives, very short, compact sentences. So I'm just wondering because that seems to be gone from stories you see nowadays. I mean, you don't see those in *The New Yorker* anymore.

Moore: You don't?

Audience Member: I don't see them as much anymore. Or maybe I'm just not reading them.

Moore: I know *The New Yorker* has space constraints like it's never had. So I think the long story is not going to work happily with any commercial magazine if it's not working well in *The New Yorker.* So maybe among literary magazines you'll find the long short story more often.

Audience Member: So a twenty to twenty-five page manuscript that was okay before is now way too long. I think to tell that you have to keep your story shorter to fit in the constraints of today's lack of available space is really a shame.

Bur gin: That's something you have to resist, again, like political correctness. You just have to write what you want and let the chips fall as they may.

McGraw: Well, that's what I was about to ask you, Richard. You're seeing all these things cross your desk. Are you seeing a lot of long stories that can't find a place in the slicks, or are you seeing very tight stories á la Carver that are also not, by and large, showing up in the slicks?

Burgin: I think I see all kinds of them. We get about six thousand a year and pretty much see a lot of different kinds. I couldn't generalize really.

McGraw: Fink. You're exactly the one who should be generalizing. Carol?

Audience Member: I have a dim-witted question and an impertinent question. The dim-witted question is, since all three of you have written in both forms, I'm wondering what you feel you can do in a short story that you can't do in a novel and vice versa?

Moore: This metaphor has been used by so many people but it seems the most accurate to the experience of writing short stories versus writing novels. A short story is like a love affair. It's got this quick excitement to it and closure; one throws oneself into it, and then is done with it. I'm not going to continue to describe a love affair. But the novel is much more like marriage. It's a daily, daily struggle, taking place over years. It's work, as everyone tells you about marriage, but forgets to tell you about novel writing. And there are all kinds of other metaphors you can come up with. I once thought that the short story was like a biopsy. You know, you go in, and you get a kind of layered sample of the body. And that a novel was more like cloning. You started with some cells, and you had to grow, over time, the whole body.

For short story writers I do think that writing short stories is just much more satisfying. You know, all the rewards are faster. The sense of accomplishment is there. And you can feel, you can internalize the form, you've written more short stories, always, than novels and so you feel familiar with the form. And there's a kind of happiness and, I don't know, a sense of familiarity with the whole thing. And novel writing is just painful. It's mysterious and it's just never ending. Short story writers working on a novel are always in great pain. But sometimes, asErin was saying, you have something you need to explore that won't fit into a short story. It has different parts. It may have different points of view. It may have two different themes, two different worlds. It may have time as its subject. And so you just need to work in the novel form. It's a miserable business.. . .

Source: Erin McGraw, Lorrie Moore, and Richard Burgin, "The State of the Short Story," in *Boulevard,* Vol. 17, No. 1-2, Fall 2001, pp. 1-27.

Adaptations

A recording of Lorrie Moore reading "You're Ugly, Too" can be found in the audio version of *The Best American Short Stories of the Century,* edited by John Updike. Published in 1999 by Houghton Mifflin, an abridged version of the collection is available on cassette and an unabridged version is available on CD.

Topics for Further Study

In his 1992 book *Talents and Technicians: Literary Chic and the New Assembly-Line Fiction,* John E. Aldridge criticizes writers such as Lorrie Moore for tending "to treat the personal life [of their characters] as if it were a phenomenon existing totally apart from society and without connotations that would give it meaningful relevance to a general human condition or dilemma." Do you think this criticism applies to "You're Ugly, Too" ? Are there social forces behind the problems Hendricks is facing, or do you agree with Aldridge that Moore treats Hendricks's life as something apart from her social context?

In her snide remarks to her undergraduate students inParis, Illinois, Hendricks believes she is being ironic, but her students accuse her of being sarcastic□an accusation Hendricks eventually accepts. Research the definitions of "sarcasm" and "irony." What is the difference between the two terms, and do you agree with the students that Hendricks is being sarcastic? Where, if anywhere, can you find irony in "You're Ugly, Too"?

The history department Hendricks teaches for recently faced a sex-discrimination suit, and Hendricks is the only woman currently teaching there. Research the male-female ratios in academia in general, and in history departments in particular. Is Hendricks's experience unique, or are women widely represented as professors in academia? What are the male-female ratios among teachers in liberal arts colleges in theMidwest? Are they significantly different from those in Northeast schools?

While Hendricks may be simply considered to have an eccentric personality, there is some indication that she may suffer from any number of mental or emotional disorders. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fourth Edition,* published by the American Psychiatric Association, is the main reference used by mental health professionals and physicians to diagnose mental disorders. Also referred to as the *DSM-IV,* the reference helps professionals determine if patients are suffering from any number of depressive conditions, such as major depression, dysthymia, or bipolar disorder. Using the *DSM-IV* as your source, research the symptoms of major depression, dysthymia, and bipolar disorder to determine whether or not Hendricks suffers from any of those conditions.

What Do I Read Next?

Self-Help (1985), Lorrie Moore's first collection of short stories, largely consists of her master's thesis at Cornell, where she studied under the writer Allison Lurie. Many of the stories in *Self-Help* are written in the second person and display the wit and humor thatMoore has come to be known for.

Who Will Run theFrog Hospital? (1994) isMoore's second and most accomplished novel. In it, a disillusioned, middle-aged woman vacationing in Paris looks back to her girlhood in a smallAdirondack tourist town near the Canadian border.

Allison Lurie, who mentored Moore at Cornell, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1985 for *Foreign Affairs,* a novel about two academics living and working inFrance. Fred Turner is an attractive, twenty-nine-year-old English professor and Vinnie Miner is an English professor in her 50s, divorced and not that pretty, but they share many needs and passions.

Raymond Carver, considered by many to be the master of minimalist fiction, is often mentioned as a precursor to Lorrie Moore. *Where I'm Calling From: New and Selected Stories by Raymond Carver* includes a wide selection from Carver's career.

In an interview with freelance writer Lauren Picker in *Newsday,* Lorrie Moore calls Alice Munro' s collection of stories *Open Secrets* "one of the greatest books of the century."

In *Talents and Technicians: Literary Chic and the New Assembly-Line Fiction,* John W. Aldridge takes a critical look at writers in the 1980s, such as Moore, whom he believes were committed to a style of fiction that was largely nihilistic with little connection to the world surrounding them.

Further Study

Gelfant, Blanche H., ed., *The Columbia Companion to the Twentieth-Century American Short Story,* Columbia University Press, 2000.

This comprehensive reference guide to twentieth century short stories includes over 100 pages of thematic essays that focus on the form of the short story as well as stories from over 100 writers.

Updike, John, and Katrina Kenison, eds., *The Best American Short Stories of the Century,* Houghton Mifflin, 1999. Updike, one ofAmerica's leading short story writers, co-edited this critically-acclaimed anthology that includes writers from the entire twentieth century.

Williford, Lex, and Michael Martone, eds., *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: Fifty North American Stories since 1970,* Simon and Schuster, 1999.

This is an eclectic anthology of contemporary short stories written by American writers, including Lorrie Moore.

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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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