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TOP TEN AMERICAN WRITERS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

GULISTAN

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Manual on the History of American Literature for the students of English Language and Literature department.

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This manual is devoted to the students of Universities getting their education on specialty 5220100 “English language and literature”. The manual contains analysis of works of top ten American writers and playwrights. All men of literature and their major works given in the manual are included to the program of study of the higher education system on specialty 5220100 – English Language and Literature.

Contents

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

The Last of the Mohicans
(1826)

When *The Last of the Mohicans* was published in 1826, James Fenimore Cooper was riding a growing wave of fame and critical acceptance. Following on the success of his last two books, *The Last of the Mohicans* was praised at the time for its nonstop adventure, realism, and intricate plotting. Using historical sources ranging from actual characters, such as Colonel Munro and Major Heyward, to John Heckewelder's *An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs, of the Indian Nations, Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighbouring States*, and adding to them his own knowledge of the history of the area in which the novel was set, Cooper laid the foundation of his novel with fact and real events.

The Last of the Mohicans introduces Cooper's most well-known character, Natty Bumppo. It is an abduction narrative, and follows the adventures of Bumppo and his two Mohican Indian companions — father and son, Chingachgook and Uncas. They set out to free Munro's two daughters, Cora and Alice, from repeated kidnapping by a group of Huron Indians, led by their chief, Magua.

While well received and praised in its day, *The Last of the Mohicans* has since gone through a cycle of neglect and insult, and back into critical favor. Later critics found it very unrealistic, and considered its characters stereotyped. Cooper was taken to task for his portrayal of the Indians in the book. Uncas and Chingachgook were thought to be too idealized, and Magua far too villainous. The women in *The Last of the Mohicans* and Cooper's other books were considered to be mere damsels in distress, and completely undeveloped as characters. By the 1950s, Cooper had regained supporters, and was placed once again in the position as the father of the American novel. His lapses in style, sometimes poorly developed characterizations, and other literary offenses have been largely forgiven due to his role as pioneer of the American novel.

I. *PLOT SUMMARY*

The Journey Begins

Set in 1757 during the third year of the French and Indian War, the novel opens as Cora and Al-ice Munro are being escorted to Fort William Henry where they will meet up with the commander of the fort — their father, Colonel Munro. The two women are

accompanied by Major Duncan Heyward, a gallant young officer who soon falls in love with Alice, and David Gamut, a ridiculous travelling psalm singer and music teacher. The small group is led by Magua, a mysterious and terrifying Huron, who suggests a "short-cut" that will lead them into an ambush he has prepared. The group are rescued from this fate when they run into Hawk-eye, a skilled woodsman also known as Natty Bumppo (his birth name) and Le Longue Carabine (which means "Long Rifle"). With him are his two Mohican friends, Chingachgook and his son, Uncas. Major Heyward tells Hawkeye and his friends about his growing distrust of Magua, and the newcomers agree. Hawkeye and his companions then attempt to seize the "treacherous savage," but the guide escapes into the forest.

Hawkeye predicts that Magua will be back, and — fearing an attack by unfriendly Indians — leads the group to Glenn's Falls. The group takes shelter in a warren of caves behind the waterfall and spends an uneasy night. The sound of horses screaming early in the morning alerts them to danger, and they find themselves under attack by a band of Iroquois. Gamut is injured, and he, Cora, and Alice hide in the caves while the others plan a defense. Out in the forest Hawkeye, Heyward, Chingachgook, and Uncas engage in a bloody struggle with the Iroquois. They begin to run out of ammunition and prepare to die honorably. Cora begs them to go for help instead, so Hawkeye and the two Indians slip out down the river. Heyward stays to defend the girls, and they are all captured when a group of Hurons led by Magua enter the caves and uncover their hiding place.

Captured

Major Heyward attempts to trick Magua into releasing them, suggesting that Colonel Munro will pay good money to have his daughters returned. It seems to be working, until Magua asks to speak to Cora alone and reveals his true motives. Driven by a mix of lust for her and hatred of her father, Magua wants to take Cora as his wife. This will be his revenge upon Colonel Munro, who has whipped him in public for being drunk. He promises Cora that if she consents he will free her beloved sister, but she refuses to comply. Enraged, Magua stirs up the Hurons into a fury of vengeful feelings, and the whole group attacks the prisoners and lashes them to trees. As they stand waiting to be burnt alive, Heyward breaks free and struggles with one of their captors. Just as he is about to be killed, Hawkeye and the two Mohicans arrive at the scene. The Hurons, terrified of Le Longue Carabine, flee, and Alice, Cora, Gamut, and Heyward are freed. Again, Magua manages to elude them.

The group continues toward Fort William Henry only to find it besieged by 10,000 French troops led by the Marquis de Montcalm. In thick fog, they make a mad dash for the fort and are rescued at the last minute. The girls are joyously reunited with their father, Colonel Munro. Heyward asks the Colonel for Alice's hand in marriage. In response, Munro reveals some of his past in order to ensure Heyward's commitment to his daughter.

The Fort William Henry Massacre

The British await reinforcements from General Webb. De Montcalm intercepts a letter from Webb, and reveals to Munro and Heyward that no reinforcements are coming — Munro is to surrender the fort. The Marquis allows them to retain their military honor,

and promises that they can leave the fort "unmolested." However, he neglects to arrange a troop escort for the defeated British, and as they leave the fort they are suddenly attacked by a group of 2,000 Indians. The British are massacred in the bloody attack, during which Magua recaptures Alice and Cora and takes them into the forest. Gamut follows.

Munro, Heyward, Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas, who is now in love with Cora, follow their trail north through the forest. They find Gamut who tells them that Alice is still held captive by the Hurons and Cora is with the more peaceful Delaware. Uncas is captured, but using a cunning plan of swapped identities, Heyward and Hawkeye rescue both Uncas and Alice. They flee to safety with the Delaware, who free Cora when Uncas reveals that he is a chief and a Delaware descendant. The next day, Magua and his men come to the Delaware camp to demand the return of their captives. Tamenund, the Delaware chief, judges that Magua's desire to marry Cora makes his claim on her legitimate. Uncas vows that he and his friends will pursue them.

Tragedy

Followed by Hawkeye, the Mohicans, and a group of warriors, Magua and Cora set off for the Huron village. The two groups come into bloody conflict, and Uncas, Hawkeye, Heyward, and Gamut chase Magua and two warriors into a cave. Cora is as brave and strong-willed now as she has shown herself to be in earlier situations, and she refuses to move when her captors demand that she must. Attempting to force her, Magua threatens to kill her. His companions take him all too seriously, and another Huron advances to stab her to death. Desperately attempting to avert the tragedy, Uncas leaps into the fray from an overhanging ledge. He is too late to save Cora, and in the battle that follows he is killed by Magua, who is then shot by Hawkeye. The final chapter is one of sorrow for both the whites and the Indians. The bereft Munro returns to his territory with Heyward and Alice, who are now engaged. Hawkeye returns to the forest with Chingachgook. As the English leave, Hawkeye pledges eternal friendship with Chingachgook, the "Last of the Mohicans."

II. CHARACTERS

Natty Bumppo

Natty Bumppo is the hero of *The Last of the Mohicans*. Also known as Leatherstocking, the Deerslayer, and the Pathfinder in the other four books of the Leatherstocking tales, Natty Bumppo is known throughout this novel as Hawkeye. Hawkeye acts as guide and protector, rescuing half-sisters Cora and Alice Munro from Magua and his band of Huron Indians twice, and leading Major Heyward and Colonel Munro on several occasions. In the end, he shoots and kills Magua, who had killed Uncas, son of Chingachgook. This cements the bond of Hawkeye and Chingachgook's friendship, and at the end they wander off together.

Hawkeye is the archetype of the American frontier hero. Scout, tracker, marksman, he embodies the spirit of the West — the capable man. Hawkeye is in his thirties, at the peak of his physical powers. Civilized, mannered, and garrulous, he can at times be humorous and long-winded, or give over to boasts and superstition. He is a man

of dual natures, however, and can be as stoic and silent as his Indian companion, Chingachgook. Although a somewhat idealized character, Hawkeye is not without his flaws. He is always quick to point out his "blood without a cross," making sure that none mistake him for an Indian or even someone of mixed heritage. He is also prejudiced — quick to pass judgment on the Indians of the tribes other than the one with which he is allied.

Chingachgook

A middle-aged Mohican Indian and father of Uncas, Chingachgook is the longtime companion of Hawkeye. Last chief of his near vanished tribe, he is by the end of the book the title character, after Uncas perishes at the hand of Magua. Chingachgook speaks only when necessary, and then mostly to Uncas or Hawkeye, and almost always in his native tongue. He has not adapted at all to white ways, despite his long association with Hawkeye. In fact, he kills and scalps a French sentry after the party has been allowed to pass, merely because he is a representative of the enemy. Chingachgook is, however, always forthright and consistent in his dealings with the whites with whom Hawkeye throws in his lot.

David Gamut

David Gamut is a religious singing teacher, or psalmist, of New England. Odd-looking and rather clumsy, he serves no purpose in the world of Hawkeye, since as he cannot shoot, or make maps, or travel great distances. His singing does, however, make Hawkeye cry. It later serves to save his own life when in the midst of an Indian massacre he begins singing, and the marauding Hurons think him insane.

A thoroughly ineffective man, Gamut takes no part in battles, and when the Munro sisters are abducted by Magua, he merely follows them, doing nothing to hinder the kidnapping. He acts as a reinforcement of the idea that the world of civilization is powerless in the wilderness. Like the cowardice of General Webb, Gamut cannot or will not do anything to stop the actions of his own enemies. He also serves to symbolize the civilized side of spirituality in contrast to Hawkeye's more pagan view. The conflict between Gamut and Hawkeye represents the Lord, the church, and holy books versus the raw fact of nature.

Duncan Heyward

An English soldier, Major Heyward is initially the protector of the Munro sisters. Courageous, handsome, and gallant, he appears at first to be the hero, but rapidly loses the role to Hawkeye, the only white man competent in the ways of the uncivilized world in which he finds himself. A symbol of the overly confident outsider, Heyward trusts Magua to lead him and the two women to safety, thus causing the abduction and subsequent problems. Although armed and nominally a soldier, Heyward finds himself largely useless. He falls in love with Alice, the younger, more civilized and, importantly, most pure-blooded and white of the two Munro sisters. Eventually, he breaks from his role of conventionality, disguising himself as Hawkeye to get into the Huron camp and

attempt to effect the release of the captive women. In the end, he returns to the civilized world in which he has a place.

Magua

Magua, the antagonist of the novel, first appears as a simple guide, but is soon revealed to be the chief of the Huron Indians. A former soldier in Munro's army, his taste for whisky causes him to be punished by a brutal horsewhipping. This loss of dignity sets him on the path of vengeance, and he tries several times to kill the daughters of Colonel Munro.

Magua has been tainted by his service to the whites, and he has lost some of his Indian character. Besides the scars he bears on his back, like a common soldier or slave, his consumption of alcohol has caused him to walk spread-legged, unlike other Indians, and this makes him easy to track. This fact is pointed out by both the "true" Indians, Uncas and Chingachgook, and even Hawkeye.

Although initially making clear his desire to kill the Munro sisters, at several points he makes an offer of marriage to Cora. For whatever reason, Magua cannot go through with the murders of the two, and eventually tries to use his abduction of Alice to convince Cora to enter into a willing union with him. Later, he even looks to Tamenund to grant him express permission to take her away. This betrays his deeper feelings for the girl, as he could simply have spirited her away again. Rather than killing her, Magua wants Cora to desire him, and seeks either her approval, however coerced, or the approval of an authority figure.

Magua is the most complex of the Indian characters in the book. Not motivated by greed, military duty, or simply doing what is right, he seeks vengeance for himself. Allying himself first with the English, and later with the French, Magua has no true loyalty to either. Instead, he serves his own need for vengeance. He regains his place in the Huron tribe, which had previously shunned him, by leading them into battle to collect scalps and booty. This is incidental to him, and like all of his actions, is simply the means to an end. Magua appears to be the savage reflection of the noble Indian portrayed by Uncas. Similarly graceful, strong, and handsome, he is treacherous rather than noble, and driven by vengeance rather than love or fellowship.

The Marquis of Montcalm

Montcalm is the leader of the French army that besieges Fort Henry. He is a cunning, selfish man. He insists on speaking French with Major Heyward during their surrender negotiations, yet understands every word of their English conversation. Montcalm is devious; he grants generous terms of surrender to Munro and his men, only to allow the Huron Indians to sweep down and slaughter them once they are out of the safety of the fort. Montcalm illustrates the less noble side of white behavior, acting as an opposite to the actions of Colonel Munro.

Alice Munro

Alice is the archetypal damsel-in-distress of adventure fiction. The younger half-sister of Cora, she is by far the more conventionally feminine of the two. She faints under stress, speaks only when spoken to, and only follows the actions of others, especially her sister. Major Heyward, the civilized suitor to Uncas's primitive, falls in love with her. Despite her inability to act for herself or offer any attempt at self-preservation, she is the one who lives in the end, while her more forthright sister is killed.

Colonel Munro

Colonel Munro is the father of Cora and Alice Munro, and the commander of Fort Henry. A Scotsman, Munro is no stranger to serving his military posts in strange lands, having met and married Cora's mother in the West Indies. Betrayed by his superior, General Webb, and bereft of his murdered daughter Cora, Colonel Munro finds himself defeated by the forces of both Old World and New in the end.

Cora Munro

Cora is the older of the two daughters of Munro. Dark-haired and bolder than her sister, Cora is of mixed racial heritage. Her mother is descended from slaves of the West Indies, her father is Scottish. With her mixed blood, Cooper allows her a more forthright, less feminine nature and greater freedom of action. When her sister, Alice, is abducted by Magua after fainting, she goes along, pursued by the hapless and useless David Gamut, to see that she does not meet her fate alone. Later, Uncas falls in love with her. After he dies at the hand of Magua, Cora is herself killed.

Tamenund

Tamenund, chief of the Delaware, grants Magua the right to have Cora Munro as a wife. Based on a real man, Tamenund is the only Indian introduced within the context of his own people. He speaks prophetically of the eventual downfall of his people and the other Indians at the hand of the white men in their inevitable push West.

Uncas

At the outset of the book, Uncas, the son of Chingachgook, is the title character, the last of the Mohicans. He falls in love with Cora, the older and far less "civilized" of the Munro girls. In attempting her rescue from Magua, chief of the Hurons, who intends to marry her, Uncas is killed, thus leaving his father as the last of the Mohicans. At his death, the tribe dies with him; he is the only son of the last chief.

Uncas is an idealized portrait of the Indian: strong, graceful, beautiful. Although initially he seems to be merely along with the party because of his father, his actions eventually become his own, rather than simply following the lead of both his father and Hawkeye. Uncas is also set up as the foil for two of the other characters in the book. He provides the wild, untamed suitor to the Munro sisters in contrast to Major Heyward's civilized being. He is also the noble, handsome, and perfect Indian to Magua's treacherous, scarred, and evil savage.

General Webb

General Webb is the cowardly commanding officer of Colonel Munro, and makes the decision of surrender that sends the inhabitants of Fort George to their deaths. He is characterized by his absence. He does not appear in the text, but rather is spoken of and makes decisions outside of the narrative. Unsure of how to use his command, or what the dangers and strengths of it are, he prefers instead to not act. His inaction causes the fatal events of the last part of the book. He gives up Fort Henry to the French without a skirmish, causing the deaths of the people who had lived within it. This in turn results in the recapture of the Munro sisters, and ultimately in the deaths of both Cora Munro and Uncas.

III. THEMES

Heredity

A recurring theme of *The Last of the Mohicans* is that of personal lineage and its inescapable effects. The idea of lineage is illustrated in several ways, most obviously in the hereditary title of chief that is passed from father to son. This is most direct in the case of Chingachgook, a chief and a Mohican, who passes that lineage to Uncas, the titular last Mohican who will become the last chief, or sagamore, upon his father's death. "When Uncas follows in my footsteps, there will no longer be any of the blood of the sagamores, for my boy is the last of the Mohicans." It is also clear in Hawkeye's repeated insistence that he is "a man without a cross." He obsessively points out that his "white" blood makes him purebred and civilized, despite his time among the Indians. Magua, too, is inheritor of the title of chief from his own people. Cora's forthright and passionate nature is due to her "uncivilized" lineage, as her mother was descended from native peoples of the West Indies. Her sister, of white stock, is retiring and calm.

Cutural Destruction

Though *The Last of the Mohicans* is clearly an abduction narrative or historical novel, it can also be read as a long essay about the destruction of cultures. Most obviously, the death of the Mohican tribe, embodied by the murder of Uncas, last son of the last chief, acts as a microcosm of the programmatic destruction of Native American culture. It is also shown through the degradation of Magua's character. He too is a chief, and his heritage has been tainted not by murder but by his interaction with whites — both English and French — and the evils of their culture, especially whisky. It is this sin, drinking the "firewater" of the white man, that leads to his savagery, treachery, and ultimate death. Subtler still is the symbolism of Cora's mother, a woman of West Indian slave origin. In her story, and in the genetic legacy she passes to her daughter, the novel recalls the earlier destruction of native culture in the first conquests of the whites. At the same time, the destruction of culture is effected through "miscegenation" — both metaphorically and literally. Just as West Indian culture has been destroyed, so intermarriage has destroyed the individuality of Cora's racial heritage.

The metaphoric role of interracial relationships is reinforced in Uncas's story. His love for a woman of white extraction leads to his death, just as his involvement with white politics leads to his moral decay. In much the same way, each character in *The Last of the Mohicans* experiences the dangers of mixing and losing one's place in one's culture. The Hurons have destroyed themselves by allying with the French, and becoming actively involved in the white man's destruction of both their way of life and their culture. Even Chingachgook has partnered himself with a white, both because there are no others of his tribe and because no other tribes are trustworthy. The "purity" of Indian Nation loyalties are no longer clear because they have begun to choose sides and align themselves with one white nation or the other, precipitating their own destruction. Chingachgook's fate is sealed as soon as he chooses Hawkeye as a companion. Though Hawkeye is a solitary white man, not "white culture," and although he appears more or less uninterested in the conflicts and conquests of the invaders, Chingachgook has nonetheless left his own world and culture. In the end, Tamenund is the only chief who still remains with his own tribe, and he foresees the death of Native American ways of life. As he says, "The pale faces are masters of the earth, and the time of the redmen has not come again. My day has been too long. I have lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans."

Opposing Forces

Cooper makes wide and varied uses of opposites as a major theme. These range from the obvious — French versus English armies, and Indians against whites — to subtler, character-based oppositions. Of the characters, Hawkeye is a man of the woods, a native in his own environment, and he is revealed through his juxtaposition with a variety of "civilized" and "rude" men. Major Heyward is a soldier who cannot fight in the ways in which he needs in order to survive in Hawkeye's world. Uniformed and educated in the arts of war, Heyward can do nothing except follow Hawkeye's lead in all things once he is outside the confines of the fort. Removed from the world he knows, Heyward is useless. David Gamut, the psalmist, represents an ordered and civilized spirituality in contrast to Hawkeye's natural, pagan world. Chingachgook is the other side of Hawkeye's wilderness existence. Where Hawkeye is careful and reserved, his Mo-hican companion is rash, killing nominal enemies who offer no threat, and wishing to rush into conflict without consideration. Hawkeye is always quick to point out that though he has spent thirty years in the woods and living among the Indians, he has no Indian blood in his veins. For Chingachgook, it is just the opposite. He is to be perceived for what he is, an Indian.

Uncas, too, is used as a foil for multiple characters. Most obviously, he stands in contrast with Magua. Where Uncas is handsome, strong, and unmarked, Magua is savage-looking, devious, and bears the scars and marks of battles and his own foolishness. Uncas lives in the wilderness, with his father and Hawkeye. Magua has been cast out from his people, and serves first the English and then the French army, and later returns to his tribe. Though both are to be chiefs of their respective nations, Uncas does not have a nation to rule, and Magua's has cast him out. In the simplest terms, Cooper has set Uncas up as the ideal, noble Indian, and made Magua the crafty, vicious savage. Uncas and Major Heyward are used as opposites, both filling roles as potential suitors for

the Munro sisters. Uncas is silent, classically beautiful, as the girls remark, and makes his love for Cora known through his actions, including his eventual death. He also acts as a contrast with Major Heyward, who loves Alice. Hey-ward, handsome as well but not classically so, is a talkative man of words and little action, who neither fights for nor gives his life for Alice. He becomes a part of her rescue by following the party, following the instructions of Hawkeye, and by simply being in the right place at the right time.

IV. STYLE

Point of View

The Last of the Mohicans is told from a third person limited point of view. The narration of the story explains the events and actions of the novel, but does not give insight into the characters' thoughts or motivations. The only way to gain this information is by interpreting what the *dramatis personae* do and say. This perspective is further limited by the centrality of Hawkeye to the narrative. With very few exceptions, Cooper limits the scope of the narration to events that directly involve Hawkeye.

At the beginning of the story, the narration and point of view follow first David Gamut, then the Munro sisters and Major Heyward. Cooper shifts the story to introduce Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas, only to lead them to the party consisting of Heyward, the Munro sisters, Gamut, and Magua. From that point, there is a minimum of interruptions of the point of view directly involving Hawkeye.

The point of view shifts to the Munro sisters and Heyward when they are captured by the Huron Indians, and follows them until they are to be killed by their captors. Once Hawkeye and the Mohicans effect their rescue, the narrative once again follows them, until the capitulation of Fort Henry to the French. At that point, during the ensuing battle between the Hurons and the English, Cooper once again focuses on the Munro sisters and Gamut as they are led away by Magua. The story then moves to Hawkeye, Colonel Munro, and Heyward as they follow the sisters and their abductor. There are only a few shifts of scene to keep the reader informed as to their fate, while Cooper mostly gives the story over to the events and actions of Hawkeye and his party.

The Historical Romance

Set in the third year of the French and Indian War, *The Last of the Mohicans* is a historical novel, but does not attempt to provide a straight telling of any recorded events of the time. Cooper, like one of the other popular authors of his day, Sir Walter Scott, lends more importance to the narrative than to the historical context in which it is set. The book is not entirely fictional, however. He makes reference to the massacre of Fort William Henry, and some of the characters of the novel are based at least in part on actual figures: Colonel Munro, of the English army, and the Marquis de Montcalm, of the French. The names of the Indian tribes, the Delaware, Huron, and Mohawk, are of course factual, and "Mohican" is a corruption of "Mohegan."

There are some deviations from the facts. Despite the title and events of the book, there were members of the Mohican tribe still extant in the area when Cooper wrote his novel. In fact, the Mohicans, or Mohegans, as they are now more commonly known, were not wiped out by the French and Indian War. Members of the tribe still exist today, and

are still living in the upper New York State area. The novel is set within the area in which Cooper himself lived. By the time it was written, the rural areas of New York State were no longer the wild forests of Cooper's novel, and the frontier had long ago moved West. Basing his story in the area around him, Cooper was able to draw on the memories and histories local to himself.

The historical romance was one of the two largest selling and most popular genres of fiction of the day. After taking the English drawing-room comedy for the model of his first novel, Cooper turned to the other form, where he found success. Duplicating the work of Scott down to estimated word length, he adapted an already accepted form of writing to the American narrative, and set down for posterity the tales and legendary characters of his own nation. This allowed him use of archaic language, a major component of the historical romance, as well as a certain suspension of disbelief. Only in the world of historical romance could two maidens be abducted multiple times, affording the author many chances to describe the heroism of Hawkeye and his companions, and to describe, over and over again, the dangers and savagery of those they faced.

V. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The 1760s: the French and Indian War

The French and Indian War, which is the setting of *The Last of the Mohicans*, lasted seven years. Originally, the conflict was between England and France, with various tribes supporting both sides. The failure of the English to use their allies in an effective manner, and their poor treatment of those who did assist them, led most to leave, either not taking part or going over to the side of the French. While the Cherokee originally sided with the English, they soon joined the Delaware, Miami, Potawatomi, Chippewa, Micmac, Abenaki, Ottawa, Shawnee, and Wyandots on the side of the French. The forces of France had much more in the way of Indian support from the outset, as the French were much less numerous than the English, and were perceived as less of a threat to themselves and their territories.

The Indians viewed the French in this way because the French had, for the most part, inserted themselves into existing standards of intertribal diplomacy. The English were rude by comparison. The French were also much more content to let their allies act as autonomous forces, arming them and letting them go and choose their own targets and battles. The English merely tried to conscript them into their armies. Many, like Magua in *The Last of the Mohicans*, did not adapt well, either to the strange and strict ways of their military leaders, or to the problems inherent in liquor.

At the outset of the war, the importance of the Native Americans as allies was minimal. That changed in 1759, when the Iroquois Confederacy joined the forces of England in the attack on Fort Niagara, an important French base. Their numbers swelled by the Iroquois, the English army eventually waited out the French, who had no means of getting supplies, reinforcements, or food. The Iroquois were widely believed to have been the decisive factor, and the battle was an important one in the fight to drive the French away.

By allying themselves with the English and driving the French away, the Iroquois Nation hoped to gain more in the way of considerations for their autonomy and lands. Also, by forming the Iroquois Nation of many differing tribes, they were attempting to marshal a force great enough to eventually drive all foreigners from their lands. Neither goal was achieved, since the English gave them nothing in the way of treaties or equality and the Iroquois Nation itself fell to infighting and separation of its constituent tribes.

The 1820s: National Indian Policy and the Birth of American Literature

The 1820s were an age of great transition for the United States. Just eight years before, the United States had defeated the British in the War of 1812. At the beginning of the decade, the American South became the world's largest producer of cotton. This in turn spurred the growth of the industrial economy in the northern states, as more and larger textile mills were built to use the raw material. In 1821, the United States wrested Florida from the Spanish and defeated the Native tribes of the state at the same time.

The success of the U.S. military in its territorial conquests and war victories was matched by the high rate of economic growth in the country as a whole. However, America had no reputation whatsoever for its artistic or cultural output among the older, more established nations of Europe. The folk-ways and people of America were unique, a greater mix than any before in the world. But there was nothing that was looked on as a lasting, permanent monument to the nation for the rest of the world to take part in — until *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Cooper produced *The Last of the Mohicans* as an apparent tribute to the vanishing cultures of the Native Americans. At the time of the publication of Cooper's book in 1826, the U.S. government had been pushing the Indians further West with greater speed and force than at any time before. In 1824, the Indian problem had come to a head in President James Monroe's State of the Union address. He declared that the only solution to the "Indian problem" was their removal to lands further west, far from the white settlers.

Immediately after the publication of the address in national newspapers, Cooper began work on *The Last of the Mohicans*. This work, conceived both in tribute to and as apology to the American Indian, was the first American fiction to be accepted in Europe as a significant and serious novel. While the policy of the U.S. government and the actions of its army worked to move the Indians west, destroying their way of life and cultural identities, the readers of the world came to know them "as they were." Cooper produced a novel that set the public's perception of the American Indian for years to come, but the irony was that he wrote it even as their way of life was being destroyed forever. The greater irony is that rather than approach the culture and problems of the Indians of his day, Cooper chose instead to concentrate on a past that was already gone.

VI. CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Initial Responses

The critical response to Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* was overwhelmingly positive. An American work of fiction was at last praised on both sides of the Atlantic for its realism, adventure, and characters. The editor of *Escritor* called Cooper "a genuine talent who has successfully bound realism in the guise of romance." The *Literary Gazette* praised his "ability to maintain interest and paint vivid characters and scenery," while *Literary World* referred to his "real life scenery created with faithfully presented narrative." *New York Review and Atheneum Magazine* described Cooper as "an imaginative writer," exhibiting "extraordinary power." The *Liverpool Repository* stated that Cooper was superior to Sir Walter Scott as an imparter of information.

Cooper's characters excited reviewers, but there was no consensus as to which were the best. His portraits of Indian life were praised by the *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* and *Monthly Review. Panaromic Miscellany* went so far as to call it "the most vivid and truthful portrait of Indians that has yet been written." *New York Review and Atheneum Magazine* claimed that Cora and Alice Munro were "delightful creations." Some critics and reviewers tempered their praise with criticism. *The Monthly Review* stated that while "Cooper has woven a tale of incredible suspense," it "need not have culminated in the tragedy that it did." The *United States Literary Gazette* said, "while *The Last of the Mohicans* is superior of those of a similar type that have preceded it" the book is "capable of improvement." The writer went on to criticize the plot as "simple" with "little variety." *The New York Review and Atheneum Magazine* said that "if the author fails at all, it is in his ability to keep his characters' motive consistent with their actions."

Some condemned the novel entirely. W. H. Gardiner, writing in *The North American Review*, said that "Cooper goes out of way to put his characters into impossible situations that do nothing for the plot except clutter it with far too much action." One reviewer, in *United States Review and Literary Gazette*, attacked the author's research. Instead of faulting Cooper's acknowledged sources, however, he blamed Cooper for using the "absurdities and improbabilities" of Heckewelder's *An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs, of the Indian Nations, Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighbouring States*. John Neal, writing for the *London Magazine*, referred to *The Last of the Mohicans* as "the Last American Novel," condemning it as "the worst of Cooper's novels — tedious, improbable, unimaginative and redundant." In fact, Cooper's novel was so well known that two of his contemporaries published parodies of him: William Makepeace Thackeray's "The Stars and Stripes" in *Punch* (October 9, 1847), and Bret Hart's *Muck-a-Muck: A Modern Indian Novel after Cooper*.

A Reputation in Decline

Cooper's literary reputation seemed untouchable, but had declined even before his death in 1851. Thomas Lounsbury savaged both the man and his work, and Cooper's critical demise was assured and hastened by Mark Twain's "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," published in the July 1895 *American Review*. By the turn of the century, *The Last of the Mohicans* had become nothing more than a boy's adventure story. The criticism continued in the twentieth century. James Holden chronicled a list of Cooper's historical inaccuracies in his 1917 book, *'The Last of the Mohicans': Cooper's Historical Inventions, and His Cave*. John A. Inglis, of the *Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, took

Cooper to task for his use of Colonel Munro, noting that with the exception of his nationality, Cooper got nothing about the historical figure correct, even misspelling his name as "Munro" instead of the correct "Monro."

Detractors were going to extraordinary lengths to attack Cooper, and he had few defenders — most notably William Brownell, Brander Matthews, and William Phelps. However, their work was far more biographical in nature than scholarly, and did little to repair the damage of their colleagues. There were also a few tongue-in-cheek critiques of the novel, most notably John V. A. Weaver's "Fenimore Cooper — Comic," published in *Bookman*. Weaver argued that "Cooper could not have written such an incredibly bad book and been serious about it." He suggested that Cooper was in fact trying to create the "great comic novel of the nineteenth century."

A New Appreciation

After World War I, there was a sudden rebirth in the popularity and critical estimation of Cooper's work. In *Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times*, Robert E. Spiller sought to prove that Cooper was a profound social critic and serious author, refuting the perception of Cooper as an author of adventure stories. Suddenly, a vast cross section of authors and critics were reexamining *The Last of the Mohicans*. No longer taken at face value, it was reinterpreted in a variety of ways and used to illustrate the social ideals inherent in the work. In *Studies in American Fiction*, Dennis W. Allen pointed out the semiotic differences in the viewpoints of the white and Indian characters. Frank Bergmann explored the racial tolerance of the book, but also touched on Cooper's apparent reluctance to make solid statements about race. In *New Left Review*, George Dekker claimed that "miscegenation provided the vehicle by which Cooper was able to investigate the more general problem of race relations." Terence Martin suggested in *The Frontier in History and Literature: Essays and Interpretations* that Cooper had trouble fitting a civilized man into the wilderness, or a wild man into civilization, and turned to the racial themes to inquire into the nature of the frontier.

There were also those who sought to defend Cooper's facts, style, and characters. Explaining away Cooper's tendency to play fast and loose with facts, Daniel J. Sundahl said in *Rackham Journal of the Arts and Humanities* that the book "is flawed in historical detail, for Cooper sacrificed fact for literary effect." He went on to suggest that the development of Hawkeye as a well-rounded character actually harms the book. "To assume that Cooper indulged in prolonged study is fallacious," stated *American Literature* contributor Thomas Philbrick, in an attempt to diffuse the belief that Cooper mixed up facts and chronology. Philbrick claimed that while the author did use reference works for his writing, he was by no means devoted to them.

T. A. Birrell's 1980 preface to Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* claimed that the author had created a new literary form: "dramatic poetry as fiction." James Fenimore Cooper has once again been raised to his place as first man of American letters. His lapses in style, broad and underdeveloped characters, and convoluted, unrealistic plots are forgiven in the new view of Cooper as the father of the American novel.

VII. CRITICISM

Tabitha Mcintosh-Byrd

McIntosh-Byrd is a doctoral candidate and English literature instructor at the University of Pennsylvania. In the following essay, she critiques the role of mediation in the construction of romance, race, and national identity in The Last of the Mohicans.

The Last of the Mohicans is centered on Hawk-eye, the figure of the pioneer and pathfinder who provides the link through which wilderness and civilization can be mediated. Throughout Cooper's novel, both Hawkeye and the reader are presented with a series of oppositions based on culture, race, and geography that create seemingly irreconcilable tensions and paradoxes. Indeed, the text itself is driven by an overarching narrative and generic paradox — the uneasy reconciliation of fact with fiction, history with romance.

Cooper's blend of fact and fiction has been extensively analyzed. Set in the third year of the French and Indian War, *The Last of the Mohicans* elides the boundaries that separate history and literature in order to create a quasi-mythic narrative of American history within which the New Man can be understood. Hawkeye, the archetypal American, straddles the fiction/fact divide, linking the actual events and persons of the period to the demands of Cooper's genre. Colonel Munro, the Marquis de Montcalm, the Indian nations, and the Fort William Henry massacre all find their basis in fact, though all are significantly altered by their incarnations in a romance.

The traditional narrative model of the romance is a quest, and its traditional textual movement tracks the protagonist as she or he enters unknown territories and worlds that transcend normal existence. This model also serves as the basis of the historical romance, Cooper's chosen genre, which is normally structured by the movement between hostile civilizations, worlds, or stages of cultural development. In so doing, the form allows narrative articulation of cultural self-analysis and awareness. By allowing the "Self" culture to come into conflict with its "Other," the central features of the former are thrown into relief. In the American versions of the genre, this definitional clash of cultures gains intense significance. By endlessly enacting and reenacting the distinctions between New American and Native American cultures, historical romances act as a primary tool of self-definition for a young country that finds itself in need of a stable self-identity. In *The Last of the Mohicans* this series of clashes takes place between multiple "Selves" and "Others," and serves several purposes. Hawkeye, as the hero of the romance quest, travels between the Old and New Worlds and is in permanent contrast with both. Moving uneasily between his affiliations with the "natural" Delaware and the "pure-blooded" Europeans, Hawkeye creates a version of American identity that challenges the old order while retaining many of its key myths of lineage and purity.

Cooper's novel is most easily understood through an analysis of these kinds of oppositions. The narrative gains its momentum from the juxtaposition of such opposed elements as French and English, Indian and white, and from more particularized juxtapositions of characters and types. The complexity of the novel's structure is suggested by the density of such contrasts, which not only provide comparisons between the Old and New Worlds, but also refract those worlds in upon themselves, removing the possibility of simplistic assessments. Uncas and Magua, both chiefs without a tribe, stand in contrast to each other and with the contrasted Europeans, provoking a more complex negotiation of cultures than is at first apparent. Where Uncas is handsome, strong, and unmarked, Magua is "a savage" in appearance, painted and scarred by custom, war, and

punishment. The level of scarification serves a clear symbolic function. Just as Uncas is a "pure" Indian, untainted by corrupt contact with Europeans, so he is "untouched" in appearance, while Magua's increasing corruption is literally inscribed into his flesh. Uncas in turn mirrors Major Heyward, both of them in love with one of the Munro sisters, but only the former capable of adequately defending them. Moving outwards in the ripple of textual associations, the relationships of Webb/Munro, Munro/de Montcalm, and Heyward/Gamut provide interior commentary-through-comparison on the European worldview.

Following the generic conventions of the romance, Hawkeye's character is created through an assembled chiaroscuro of contrasts with all of these representatives of various cultures. A "woodsman" and "beaver expert," Hawkeye's dangerous wild-ness is made valorous and valid by what he is *not:* neither a "civilized" nor a "rude" man. Major Heyward, uniformed, chivalrous, and educated in all the arts of war, is literally and figuratively "lost" as soon as he leaves the fort. Where his environment is circumscribed and dangerously finite, Hawkeye's natural medium *is* the environment in its most general sense — the wilderness. David Gamut, the psalmist, epitomizes an ordered and civilized spirituality inflated to a ridiculously hyperbolic level. Physically jarring and unable to assimilate into any of the situations in which the characters find themselves, Gamut becomes representative of the Old World religion against which American culture is defining itself. When he is juxtaposed with Hawkeye, the latter thus takes on a quasi-Jeffersonian naturalism by contrast, one in which harmony with nature and the self is elevated above formal protestation of faith as a signifier of moral virtue.

However, the near paganism of Hawkeye's "natural religion" is carefully distanced from the spirituality of the "Natural men" — the Mohicans. Chingachgook and Uncas, the new American counterparts of Hawkeye's dual cultural alignments, are separated from the hero both by the narrative and the character himself. While Hawkeye's "natural" instincts are in contrast to the formalized useless-ness of both Heyward and Gamut, they are also configured as "rational" or "civilized," when juxtaposed with the behavior of his comrades. Where Hawkeye is careful, reserved, and feared as the dead-shot "Longue Carabine," Uncas is rash, killing nominal enemies who offer no threat and rushing headlong into conflict. Significantly, it is neither a European nor a native, but only Hawkeye — the man who is of both and neither cultures at the same time — who is compassionate enough to waste his ammunition in putting a dangling enemy out of his misery. As a "man without a cross" who lives with natives but remains insistently white, Hawkeye is allowed to negotiate all possible worlds by remaining either genetically or geographically detached.

What happens if these series of opposed elements blend instead of finding or creating a removed mediation point, as Hawkeye does? Cooper's "romance" gains much of its thematic momentum from answering this question through the use of "romance" — the metaphoric role of sexual relationships between members of opposed cultures. Significantly, the protagonist is resolutely excluded from this literal "mediation" of cultures, providing a model of "untainted" communication instead. Thus while Hawkeye is, as he insists to a hyperbolic degree, a "man without a cross," many of the other characters are either symbolically or actually "crossbred," and the results are never shown to be positive. Cora's mother is a woman of West Indian slave origins, and though Colonel Munro takes great pride in his daughter's heritage, it is clear that he expects it to

retard her progress through life. Cora's "bursting blood" recalls both the destruction of an earlier culture, as well as the cultural erasure signified by assimilation: just as West African culture has been destroyed, so intermarriage has destroyed the individuality of Cora's racial heritages. The result is not decay but vitality, the excessive life that is uneasily demarcated as both positive and negative within the text. Unlike her blonde and feeble sister, Cora is determined and heroic, but the only textual resolution available to her character is death or further "crossbreeding." Only "savages" fall in love with Cora.

The metaphor of interracial blending is reinforced in the story of Cora's lover. Uncas's love for a European woman leads to his death in the same way that his involvement with white affairs leads to his moral decay. On a broader symbolic level, this pattern can be applied to much of the novel's treatment of culture. Chingachgook identifies the "blending" of European and native cultures through the trade of "firewater" as the primary and devastating force of European colonialism. The Hurons are shown in the process of self-destruction through alliance with de Montcalm's forces, which threaten to destroy both their ways of life and their culture. By Magua's own analysis his character is destroyed by his interaction with whites — both English and French — and the evils of their culture, especially whisky. His sexual obsession with Cora, who symbolizes both colonizer and colonized, compounded with his drinking — Chingachgook's Original Sin of colonialism — leads to his punishment, revenge, and the cycle of treachery that ends in his death. Even Chingachgook, despite his integrity, embraces the dispersal of his culture when he accepts Hawkeye as his "brother." Though Hawkeye is a solitary white man, and a new kind of white man at that, Chingachgook has nonetheless been forced by genocide and cultural self-destruction to leave his own world when he accepts Hawkeye as family. In this new, American idea of family, only Hawkeye has the ability to retransmit his culture to another generation, and their interracial relationship thus signifies death even as it appears to provide narrative hope. As Tamenund says, "I have lived to see the last warrior of the wise race of the Mohicans."

The core paradox of Cooper's historical romance lies in the uneasy ambiguity of its hero's mediation of these opposed cultures. Both Cooper and his protagonists work from the assumption that the modern stages of historical development are inherently better than the "savagery" of prior stages. At the same time, they also view the present as a dangerous challenge to the communal values and hierarchical relationships of the recent past. Both European and native cultures are shown to be violently disrupted throughout *The Last of the Mohicans*, with established systems of leadership and conduct broken down by alcohol, war, corruption and cultural contamination. Hawkeye, the only man to successfully negotiate these disruptions, is also significantly removed from the social hierarchy that has reformed itself by the novel's closing pages. The "man without a cross" may be the new American archetype, but he is also its Other — a man who dwells in the borderlands that separate Europe and the natives, with no familial or emotional ties to the people who comprise the power elite of either side.

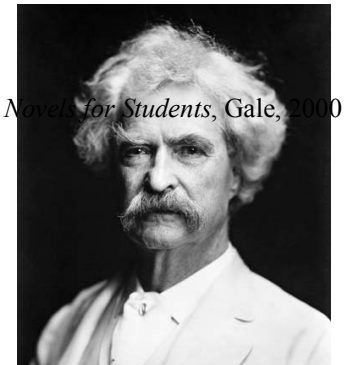
The end of Cooper's historical romance thus intimates both stability and disruption — an uneasy celebration of both the return of hierarchical order and the heroism of the man who remains outside of that hierarchy. It allows identification with a socially mobile outsider and simultaneously promises that real social mobility will be denied him. In exactly the same way, it validates the possibility of a superior native culture even while it

is careful to make that culture an irretrievably dying one. If, as many literary theorists have claimed, the historical romance genre acts as a stabilizing force for the demands of social hierarchy, then the main impulse of *The Last of the Mohicans* is not the articulation and celebration of "natural," or "wild," self-identity, but instead the exact opposite. Hawkeye is both hero and antihero of his own story in a culture that seeks to distance itself from the Old World, even as it tries to retain the social structure that makes that world possible. As a stalemate of conflicting Anglophobic and Anglophiliac impulses, it provides an extremely ambiguous fictional pathway to later American history.[1]

VIII. TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- One of Hawkeye's most insistent assertions is that he is "a man without a cross." Why is being "pure-blooded" so important to him? Research the history of racial anxiety in early America: why was "miscegenation" considered such a threat?
- Uncas and Major Heyward are both solitary men who fall in love with the Munro daughters. What do they have in common? How are they different? Consider the characters of both men as they are revealed by the different sisters with whom they fall in love.
- Consider the character of the itinerant singing master, David Gamut. What archetype of early American culture does he symbolize? Look at his character in light of Washington Irving's hero, Ichabod Crane. How is Cooper's Gamut a reworking of Crane? What does this reworking achieve?
- *The Last of the Mohicans* is often seen as a tribute to the doomed cultures of Native Americans. Research the history of Indian clearances in the eighteenth century. How historically accurate is Cooper's depiction?
- Cooper is considered the first American author, and *The Last of the Mohicans* is often read as the first truly American novel. What is American about it?

MARK TWAIN



[1] Tabitha McIntosh-Byrd, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 2000

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
(1876)

Mark Twain's publication in 1876 of his popular novel The Adventures of Tom Sawyer reversed a brief downturn in his success following the publication of his previous novel, The Gilded Age. Twain wrote The Adventures of Tom Sawyer while he and his family were living in Hartford, Connecticut, and while Twain was enjoying his fame. The novel, which tells of the escapades of a young boy and his friends in St. Petersburg, Missouri, a village near the Mississippi River, recalls Twain's own childhood in a small Missouri town. The friendship of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn is one of the most celebrated in American literature, built on imaginative adventures, shared superstitions, and loyalty that rises above social convention. Twain's American reading audience loved this novel and its young hero, and the novel remains one of the most popular and famous works of American literature. The novel and its characters have achieved folk hero status in the American popular imagination. Scenes such as Tom Sawyer tricking his friends into whitewashing Aunt Polly's fence for him, Injun Joe leaping through the window of the courthouse after Tom names him as Dr. Robinson's murderer, and Tom and Becky lost in the cave have become so familiar to American readers that one almost doesn't have to read the book to know about them. But the pleasure of reading The Adventures of Tom Sawyer has kept readers coming back to the novel for over a century.

Beyond the fact that The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is fun to read, there is another reason for the novel's contemporary popularity: It introduces the character of Huckleberry Finn, who, with the publication of Twain's 1884 novel, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, would become one of the greatest characters in American literature.

I. PLOT SUMMARY

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer depicts the life of an imaginative, troublesome boy in the American West of the 1840s. The novel is intensely dramatic in its construction, taking the form of a series of comic vignettes based on Tom's exploits. These vignettes are linked together by a darker story that grows in importance throughout the novel — Tom's life-threatening entanglement with the murderer Injun Joe.

Vignettes

The novel opens with a stern Aunt Polly searching for her nephew Tom in order to punish him. The reader, also looking for Tom, is introduced to the basic elements of his

life — exploits and punishments. Aunt Polly finds Tom, and he and his half-brother Sid are presented to readers as contrasting versions of boyhood. Tom is the prototypical appealing bad boy while Sid is the obnoxious goodie-goodie. The reader is on Tom's side from this point onward.

The story moves through a series of chapter-length vignettes featuring Tom and his richly imaginative life. These include the most famous scene in the novel, and arguably the most famous scene in American literature — whitewashing the fence. Sentenced to re-paint Aunt Polly's fence, Tom is desperate to get out of it by any means necessary. He spends the day persuading a series of local boys that whitewashing is fun. This "reverse-psychology" is so convincing that the boys not only beg to take over, they actually bribe him with their most treasured possessions. At the end of the day Tom is loaded with this juvenile largesse, and is rewarded by Aunt Polly for a job well done.

The episodic structure continues with scenes of mock warfare, the appearance of Becky Thatcher — with whom Tom falls instantly in love — and a thematically important episode in which Tom imagines and stages his own death scene. A Sabbath School episode shows Tom using his largesse to barter for the paper equivalent of 2000 successfully memorized verses, and he presents them to the teacher to get his reward. His real ignorance is quickly and embarrassingly exposed.

Next readers are introduced to a boy who will become — in a later novel — one of the most important characters in American fiction: Huckleberry Finn. Huck is a sort of comic figure in his clown's outfit of discarded adult's clothes. After talking to Huck, Tom goes to school, where he "courts" Becky Thatcher. They get engaged, but Tom mentions a prior relationship and Becky is devastated. Hurt, Tom takes out his frustration by playing Robin Hood with a friend. Here readers discover that his inability to learn simple Bible verses is due to lack of interest, since he is capable of memorizing whole pages of his favorite books.

Injun Joe

When Tom and Huck go to the town cemetery, the story that threads the novel together begins. In a scene straight out of the novels Tom loves, Injun Joe and Muff Potter enter the graveyard with young Dr. Robinson in order to "snatch" bodies. While Tom and Huck watch, Injun Joe attacks the doctor, and the men fight. After Muff is knocked unconscious, the scene climaxes with the grisly stabbing of Dr. Robinson. The boys run away, and Joe makes Potter believe that he is the murderer.

From this point, the shadow of Injun Joe hangs over Tom's adventures. The boys decide not to tell anyone for fear of reprisals, and they swear in blood to stay silent. Tom's depression over the murder deepens when Becky refuses to forgive him. The discovery of Dr. Robinson's body "electrifies" the village, and Tom and Huck go to the crime scene. They watch as Muff is arrested and confesses to the murder.

Their consciences troubled, both boys try to appease their guilt over Muff's false arrest by taking the condemned man food and gifts. Convinced that he is unloved, Tom decides to take up a life of crime. Together with Huck and Joe Harper, he decides to live out another of his favorite stories and become a pirate. They raft away and watch as a search is conducted for drowned people. Tom realizes that the "drownded people" are themselves — the town thinks that they are dead. Tom has gotten his earlier wish: he will be able to witness his own funeral. After sneaking home and watching his heartbroken

Aunt, Tom makes his plans, and the boys make a dramatic entrance in the middle of their own funerals.

The trial of Muff Potter grows closer, and Tom gets into more scrapes, culminating in a heroic act in which he saves Becky from punishment and she forgives him. The happiness does not last; the trial is now due. In a dramatic turn, Tom is called to the stand by Muff's lawyer. As he exonerates Muff, Injun Joe flees from the building. Though Tom is terrified at first, time passes and it seems less likely that Joe will come back for revenge. Tom returns to his favorite occupations, and he and Huck go searching for buried treasure in a haunted house. While the boys hide in the loft, two strangers enter the building; one of them is Injun Joe in disguise. The men have stolen money, and while they are burying it they find more — thousands of dollars in gold. They take it and leave, Joe vowing to get his revenge. The boys decide that the target of Joe's revenge must be Tom himself.

The boys decide to track down the "treasure" and go in search of Joe. They find him at a tavern, and Huck begins his surveillance of the men. Tom, however, is distracted by a newly-returned Becky and her plans for a picnic. On the day of the excursion, Becky arranges to stay at a friend's house. After eating, the village children decide to play in the caves. As they play, the story returns to Huck, on watch for Injun Joe. He follows Joe and his partner out of their lair and listens as Joe explains who the real object of his revenge is: the Widow Douglas. The widow's husband had once had Joe horsewhipped, and he has decided to "slit her nostrils." Panicking, Huck runs for help. Some townsmen scare off the villains, but fail to catch them. Huck tells them that one of the villains is Injun Joe, but keeps quiet about the treasure.

It is not until the next day that the village realizes that Becky and Tom are missing. A desperate search through the caves begins and Tom's wish to stage his funeral seems to have come terrifyingly true this time. In a "flashback" readers find out what has happened. Wandering away from the others, Tom and Becky become lost in the caves. As their supplies run out and they search for an escape route, they narrowly miss bumping into Injun Joe, who is hiding in the caves. Scared, they retreat, and Becky seems near death.

Next, the novel jumps to celebrations in the village — the children have been found. Through the narrative device of Tom telling his story to his family, we learn that the children escaped when Tom found a side route out. Weeks pass and the children begin to recover, while Injun Joe seems to be forgotten. Tom is told that the caves have been sealed up for two weeks, and the horrible truth becomes clear. Joe is still in there. When the doors to the caves are opened, Injun Joe's dead body is found lying at the entrance.

Tom and Huck realize that the treasure is in the caves, and they retrieve it. They return to an excited crowd, and the Widow Douglas announces that she plans to adopt Huck. Tom blurts out that Huck is rich. The story is told, and the money is invested for them, while poor Huck is civilized almost to death. Escaping back to his old life, he can only be enticed back by Tom's promise that they will be "robbers" together, for which they both need to be respectable. With that promise of further adventures, the novel closes.

II. CHARACTERS

Aunt Polly

The sister of Tom and Sid's dead mother, Aunt Polly has taken in both boys to live with her and her daughter Mary. Aunt Polly loves Tom but is both exasperated and amused by him. She is always shaking her head and wringing her hands over his behavior, but her soft heart prevents her from punishing him very strictly.

Widow Douglas

Huck Finn saves the Widow Douglas from Injun Joe when he overhears Injun Joe's plans to mu-tilate her and enlists the help of the Welshman and his sons to protect her. A pious and good-hearted woman of St. Petersburg, the Widow Douglas later takes Huck Finn into her home with the intention of "civilizing" him.

Huckleberry Finn

Referred to by the narrator as both the "juvenile pariah of the village" and as a "romantic outcast," Huckleberry Finn is "cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers" of St. Petersburg and secretly admired by their children. The son of the town drunkard, who is usually absent from the village and thus from his parental responsibilities, Huck sleeps in hogshead barrels or on doorsteps, wears castoff men's clothing, swears, smokes, and lives by his own rules. Huck and Tom Sawyer are good friends because, although Tom is "under strict orders not to play with" Huck, he admires Huck so much that he disobeys Aunt Polly's orders and secretly finds ways to play with his outcast friend. Viewed by adults as being "idle and lawless and vulgar and bad," Huck actually possesses a conscience and a heart. When he goes to the Welshman to report Injun Joe's threats against the Widow Douglas, he admits to the older man that he worries about his character and the way he is perceived by others. He confesses that "sometimes [he] can't sleep much, on account of thinking about [his bad reputation] and sort of trying to strike out a new way of doing." Huck saves the Widow Douglas from Injun's Joe's revenge, and she in turn takes Huck in and attempts to "civilize" him, with clean clothes and church and polite manners. But Huck is miserable under her protective care and runs away, explaining later to Tom, "It's awful to be tied up so."

Joe Harper

Tom Sawyer's "bosom friend," Joe is a member of Tom's pirate gang and as such calls himself "the Terror of the Seas." When the "pirates" run away on a short-lived pirating adventure, Joe is the first to admit to homesickness.

Injun Joe

Known as a "half-breed," meaning he is half white and half Native American, Injun Joe is the villain of the novel and a force of evil in St. Petersburg. He is an angry, vengeful, amoral man who thinks nothing of robbing Hoss Williams's grave, killing Dr.

Robinson, stealing gold, or threatening old widows and young boys. Injun Joe's name, which is an abbreviated slang pronunciation of "Indian Joe," shows that his identity is so closely tied to his being a Native American that the townspeo-ple — and the narrator — cannot think of him except in terms of his being an Indian. When Injun Joe, Muff Potter, and Dr. Robinson are in the cemetery to rob Hoss Williams's grave, Injun Joe begins to argue with Robinson about money. He points out that years before, Robinson had treated him poorly when he was in need, and he tells Robinson, "I swore I'd get even with you if it took a hundred years. Did you think I'd forget? The Injun blood ain't in me for nothing." The inhabitants of St. Petersburg appear to be basically decent, good people; yet Injun Joe represents a dark force among them, embodying the possibilities of human evil.

Mr. Jones

See The Welshman

Amy Lawrence

Tom was in love with Amy before Becky Thatcher arrived in St. Petersburg.

Mary

Tom Sawyer's cousin, Mary is Aunt Polly's daughter and treats Tom sweetly, patiently helping him learn his Scripture verses and get dressed up for church.

The Model Boy

Hated by all the boys in town, the Model Boy is "the pride of all the matrons" because he is so polite and well-behaved.

Willie Mufferson

See The Model Boy

Muff Potter

Set up by Injun Joe to take the blame for Dr. Robinson's murder, Muff Potter is disreputable enough to be a believable murderer. Unable to recall what really happened on the night of the murder because Dr. Robinson had knocked him unconscious in a scuffle, Potter denies killing the doctor. Out of guilt for their secret knowledge of the truth, Tom and Huck are kind to Potter when he is in jail, and in spite of his mortal fear of Injun Joe, Tom finally tells the truth about the murder at Potter's trial, resulting in Potter's freedom.

Dr. Robinson

Dr. Robinson is killed by Injun Joe after they set out together on a midnight grave robbery. Tom and Huck are silent witnesses as Injun Joe takes revenge on the young doctor for having insulted him five years before.

Ben Rogers

Ben is the first boy Tom dupes into whitewashing Aunt Polly's fence for him.

Sid Sawyer

Tom's younger half-brother, Sid is "a quiet boy" with "no adventurous, troublesome ways," and so he and Tom do not get along with each other. Sid takes pleasure in tattling on Tom when Tom had gotten into mischief.

Tom Sawyer

Mischievous but lovable, Tom Sawyer is a fictional character so well known that he has become a folkloric figure. Even those who have not read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* may be familiar with the episodes in which Tom tricks his friends into whitewashing his aunt's fence for him, spies on his own funeral, acts as the surprise witness against Injun Joe at Muff Potter's murder trial, and gets lost in the cave with his beloved Becky Thatcher. Tom's Aunt Polly takes good care of Tom and his half-brother Sid, although often Tom exasperates her when he gets into trouble. He sneaks out his window at night to go on adventures with his friend Huck Finn, believes in superstitions, and yearns to lead what he sees as the exciting life of a pirate or robber. He can't sit still in church or in school and always finds some diversion, such as watching a bug, to make the time pass more quickly. Tom is happiest when he is off having thrilling adventures with his friends: searching for buried treasure, running away for a few days to a sandbar in the Mississippi River in a game of pirates, or hiding in the cemetery at midnight. He adores Becky Thatcher, the new girl in town, and shows off to get her attention. Tom is a boy of strong emotions and great imagination, and in spite of his mischievous ways he has a good heart: his rescues of Becky when she is heading for trouble with the schoolmaster and of Muff Potter when he is on trial for murder show that Tom knows the right thing to do.

Becky Thatcher

Becky is the new girl in town, daughter of the "august" Judge Thatcher. When Tom sees Becky for the first time, with her blue eyes and "yellow hair plaited into two long tails," he falls in love with her immediately, forsaking his old love, Amy Lawrence. At Becky's picnic, Tom and Becky become lost together in the cave and are missing for five days. During their ordeal inside the cave, Becky fears for her life and depends upon Tom for reassurance and support.

Judge Thatcher

Becky Thatcher's father, Judge Thatcher is a respected county judge, brother to St. Petersburg's lawyer Thatcher.

Rebecca Thatcher

See Becky Thatcher

The Welshman

The Welshman listens carefully to Huck when Huck reports that he has overheard Injun Joe's threats of injuring the Widow Douglas. The Welshman and his grown sons hurry out to investigate the trouble and later welcome Huck back into their house, a rare experience for the outcast Huck.

III. THEMES

Friendship

Children's friendships are at the center of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Tom's family — Aunt Polly, Mary, and Sid — does not always appreciate him and does not figure into his rich imaginative life. However, Tom's friends — Joe Harper and Huck Finn in particular — look up to him precisely because he is so imaginative and adventurous. The boys see each other as they want to be seen, and together they create an exciting world of intrigue and adventure. The friendship between Tom and Huck especially is highlighted in the novel. Tom admires Huck for his freedom from adults' rules, and he knows that his association with Huck makes him appear daring, an image he relishes. Tom also cares about Huck, concerned that he is alone in the world. When the boys return from their pirating adventure to attend their own funerals, Tom and Joe are smothered with affection by their families while Huck stands awkwardly alone, with no one to welcome him home. Tom points out to Aunt Polly that "it ain't fair. Somebody's got to be glad to see Huck." Tom and Huck share a deep belief in superstitions and a love of adventure, imagining themselves as pirates and robbers in partnership with one another. Tom is so loyal to Huck that he repeatedly disobeys Aunt Polly's orders not to play with Huck, and Tom proudly announces to the schoolmaster that he was late for school because he was playing with the forbidden Huck, even though he knows he will be punished for it. The boys often use dramatic conventions to represent their loyalty to one another. For example, after they secretly observe Injun Joe's murder of Dr. Robinson in the cemetery, Tom writes an oath that "they will keep mum about this and wish they may drop down dead in their tracks if they ever tell and Rot." Tom and Huck then sign the oath with their own blood.

Because Tom is a child of the community, and thus assured of adult protection, he feels safe enough to testify against Injun Joe in Muff Potter's murder trial. But Tom keeps secret Huck's knowledge of the same situation, because Huck fears Injun Joe's retaliation and knows he is without serious protection. Huck and Tom's friendship rises above the social conventions of St. Petersburg. They are friends because each likes the other for who he is, and it matters little to either that their society frowns upon their friendship.

Imagination

Tom Sawyer's imagination rules his life and shapes his world. He takes every opportunity to make a game of life, embarking on such romantic endeavors as digging for buried treasure or organizing his friends into a band of pirates with names like "the Black Avenger of the Spanish Main," "Huck Finn the Red-Handed," and "the Terror of the Seas." Perhaps not always completely original in their imaginings, Tom and his friends play Robin Hood by reciting dialogue that they have memorized from the book. Although he claims to reject many of the rules of the adult world, Tom has his own clear rules about how pirates must behave, what social class robbers must come from, and how certain superstitions work. His imaginings may free him from his rulebound world, but they often place him in another such world. His imaginative world and his "real" world — the mundane life of St. Petersburg — do not often collide. Yet when these two worlds do collide — such as when Tom and Huck witness the murder in the cemetery, and when Tom realizes how badly he hurt Aunt Polly when he ran away to play pirates, and when Tom and Becky's adventure in the cave turns life-threatening — Tom is able to understand the limits of imagination. In each case, Tom's empathy for another person — Muff Potter, Dr. Robinson, Aunt Polly, Becky — causes him to realize that he needs to stop pretending and deal with the situation at hand.

Truth and Falsehood

The first words Tom Sawyer speaks in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* are a lie. Aunt Polly is looking for Tom and shouting his name, and when she finds him hiding in the closet and asks him what he is doing, he replies, in an obvious lie, "Nothing." She points to the jam all over his mouth and hands and asks what it is, and he replies, "*I* don't know, aunt," another obvious lie. Tom is thus introduced as a mischievous boy who gets into trouble, although Aunt Polly's laughter upon Tom's escape from her disapproval shows that his lies and disobedience are essentially unimportant to her. Tom lies frequently throughout the novel, mostly about where he's been or what he's been doing, and mostly to avoid getting into trouble. However, when telling the truth really matters, Tom knows he must not lie. When he first returns home after his pirating adventure, he feels bad about having hurt Aunt Polly by scaring her with his long absence, so he lies to her about having had a dream about her when he was away on his pirating adventure. When she later discovers that the story of the dream had all been a lie, Tom realizes that "what had seemed like a good joke before, and very ingenious merely looked mean and shabby now." His conscience prods him finally to tell her the truth of what really happened. But this time, Aunt Polly doesn't believe him, and she refuses to until she finds the piece of bark in his jacket pocket with the note to her on it that he had said he had written. Tom's conscience again leads him to tell the truth when he decides he must help Muff Potter. Because he cannot in good conscience let Potter be convicted of Dr. Robinson's murder, Tom decides to be a witness at Potter's murder trial, even though he knows by doing so he places himself in some danger with Injun Joe. In spite of the ease with which lying comes to him, Tom's conscience and his ability to tell the truth when he should place him in stark contrast to Injun Joe. Injun Joe, a man without a conscience and thus capable of evil, lies and misrepresents himself for the purpose of personal gain.

IV. STYLE

Point of View

The novel's narration is third person, limited omniscient, with Tom Sawyer as the central consciousness. This means that the story is told about Tom's world and is particularly focused on him by a narrator who is able to understand the motivations and feelings of some of the characters. This point of view earns the reader's amused admiration of an unlikely hero. Tom is a mischievous boy, an orphan, who cares nothing for school or church or any other polite social conventions but instead spends most of his time pretending that he is a pirate or a robber, sneaking out his window at midnight to have secret adventures with his friends in places like cemeteries, and entirely likely to have in his possession objects like dead cats. Tom Sawyer's character is a realistic portrayal of a young boy who gets into trouble constantly, trying the patience of the adults around him while making them smile. The novel's point of view makes Tom sympathetic by showing how he often feels guilty or sorry or brave. A more objective narration of Tom's antics — one that does not look into his mind — might make him seem only naughty and tiresome. The glimpses into his often noble intentions as he conjures up his schemes serve to temper his character: he is not a bad boy, just an imaginative one.

Setting

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is set in the 1840s, mainly in St. Petersburg, Missouri, a small fictional village where everyone knows everyone and the people are unsophisticated. When Judge Thatcher, the county judge, visits the village church during the Sunday service, the children are fascinated, impressed that he has come from "Constantinople, twelve miles away — so he had traveled, and seen the world." Yet in spite of their lack of worldliness, the people of St. Petersburg attempt to keep up "civilized" practices such as having their children memorize Scripture passages and recite poems and other readings at school on Examination Evening. The adults of the village watch out for each other's children: when Tom and Becky are discovered to be lost in the cave, the entire town turns out to help search for them.

St. Petersburg is a true community. Even the threat of evil, embodied by Injun Joe, is squelched by the human desire to help others. For example, Huck swallows his fear of Injun Joe and goes to the Welshman to help save the Widow Douglas, and the Welshman gladly goes to the Widow's aid. In this safe world, Tom Sawyer can feel secure in his human connections but also free to exercise his imagination. St. Petersburg mirrors Twain's childhood home of Hannibal, Missouri. St. Petersburg, like Hannibal, is situated along the Mississippi River, a source of transportation, beauty, and power. The river's presence near St. Petersburg makes the boys' pirate adventure possible and reminds them of the great world beyond their tiny village.

Realism

Realism involves the portrayal of characters and situations that appear to be drawn from real life. In the nineteenth century, realism often involved characters and settings that were ordinary and far from genteel. While *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* takes a somewhat romantic view of childhood in general — full of freedom and imaginative adventures — most of the children in the novel are themselves not romanticized. Tom and his friends get dirty, spit, sneak around behind their elders' backs, and carry around dead cats. Although he can also be charming and appealing, Tom lies to Aunt Polly, shows off to gain Becky Thatcher's attention, scratches himself when his clothes itch, and tricks his friends into doing his work: in short, he is human, possessing flaws and weaknesses. Twain's illustration of both sides of Tom — the appealing and the exasperating — makes Tom more realistic. Huck Finn's character, too, is shown in some depth, which also makes him more realistic. Huck is romanticized by many of the other children in town, as they envy what appears to be his utter freedom from rules and constraints. However, he has moments when he worries about his status in the world and wishes he weren't such an outcast, and his dark moments make him more real.

V. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Gilded Age

Mark Twain's 1873 novel, *The Gilded Age*, which he wrote in collaboration with his Hartford neighbor Charles Dudley Warner, gave its name to the mood of materialistic excess and cynical political corruption that started with the Grant administration in 1869 and prevailed in the 1870s and beyond. To be gilded is to be coated in gold, so the phrase "The Gilded Age" refers directly to the opulent tastes and jaded sensibilities of America's wealthy during this period. The appearance of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* during the Gilded Age represents a nostalgic look back at a simpler, less expansionist and less industrialized time in American history.

Expansion was a major theme of American society in the post-Civil War period. When the war ended in 1865, the United States was bigger, more powerful and richer than ever before, and it continued to grow. The way post-war Americans behaved and saw themselves was different: as a group they possessed greater energy, greater ambition, and a greater sense of potential. The American economy was becoming increasingly more industrialized. The transcontinental railroad was built, immigrants from Europe were pouring into the cities, westward expansion was occurring, and new farming technologies made it possible for farmers to grow more crops more successfully. The population was growing rapidly, helping to create a large labor pool, and labor unions were on the rise. The growth of industry, supported by the war and the demand it created for supplies, created enormous wealth for many Americans. Powerful businessmen such as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and J. P. Morgan built their companies — U.S. Steel, Standard Oil, and Morgan Bank, respectively — into multimillion-dollar enterprises and became known by their detractors as "robber barons." The very wealthy flocked to summer vacation colonies like Newport, Rhode Island, where they built huge summer "cottages" that often were opulent mansions. Money and power were equated with each other during this period, and some of the rich and powerful were not above political corruption. At the time, U.S. senators were elected by the state legislators rather

than by the voting public, and it was not uncommon for a legislator to accept bribes for electing a wealthy man's senator of choice.

However, not every American during this period was wealthy or able to vote; many Americans remained disenfranchised and poor. Women did not yet have the right to vote, and the women's suffrage movement had been underway for years. Black Americans also could not vote, and beginning at the end of Reconstruction in the 1870s, the legal apparatus that kept blacks separate from white society came into being, as Jim Crow laws were enacted by Southern states in an effort to suppress blacks. The Ku Klux Klan also began its brutal work in this period, with its goal of frightening and murdering Southern blacks into submission. The U.S. Army's main opponent during this time was Native Americans, who were being suppressed and forced onto reservations. So while the Gilded Age, as it is now called, was about controlling the population and exploiting the land and other resources, all in the service of expanding the power of American culture and society, many Americans remained powerless.

American Literature of the 1870s

American literature following the Civil War began to reflect Americans' new sense of nationalism and diversity. Realism dominated the literary scene, as the arts began to portray ordinary people in their everyday lives. The three major literary figures of the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century — Twain, Henry James and William Dean Howells — did much to bring realism into the forefront of American letters. In the 1870s alone, Twain published *The Gilded Age* (1873) and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), along with many other shorter works; James published his first two popular and successful works of fiction, *The American* (1877) and *Daisy Miller* (1878); and Howells, while he published several novels during the 1870s, achieved more success as the powerful editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, the most influential literary magazine of the time. Howells was a friend and editor to both Twain and James, whose bodies of work could not be more different from each other.

Twain's work from this period brought him wide popularity: it is mostly humorous, focusing on characters who are typically uncultivated and not part of the Eastern establishment. In contrast, James's work, which was never especially popular with the reading audience, subtly probes the social conventions that shape the world of the wealthy, educated, and civilized American. Howells saw the genius in both writers and their work and helped to guide them in their careers.

While Twain and James were the best-known and most influential writers of their day, many other writers and styles of writing were also emerging in the 1870s. The nation's expansionist mood was reflected by the proliferation of regional, or "local color," writers, who wrote about their own corners of the rapidly growing nation. Local color writing, another form of realism, generally sought to preserve through fiction the small-town ways that were being threatened by industrialization. By the 1870s, writers such as Bret Harte, Joel Chandler Harris, and Sarah Orne Jewett had begun publishing their work on the West, the South, and New England, respectively. In the next ten to twenty years, Kate Chopin, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Charles W. Chesnutt, and Hamlin Garland would add their regional voices — New Orleans, New England, the South, the Midwest — to the mix.

VI. CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Often discussed alongside its critically acclaimed and more popular sequel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is generally thought by critics to be artistically a lesser work than *Huckleberry Finn*. Yet in spite of its shortcomings as a work of art, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has remained popular around the world throughout the more than 120 years since its publication in 1876. Twain himself called this novel his "hymn to boyhood."

About Twain in general, Henry Nash Smith says that "there can be no doubt that Mark Twain was an artist of the people. His fresh handling of the materials and techniques of backwoods storytellers is the clearest example in our history of the adaptation of a folk art to serious literary uses." Walter Blair discusses in his article "*Tom Sawyer*" the novel's sources, both autobiographical and literary. Twain is widely known to have used people and places from his childhood in the writing of *Tom Sawyer*, and Blair also shows in his article that "Literary influences shaped both incidents and the over-all pattern of *Tom Sawyer*." In his 1960 book *Mark Twain*, Lewis Leary refers to the fact that upon its publication, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* "placed Mark Twain once more at the head of best-seller lists." Leary states, "Probably no more continuingly popular book has ever appeared in the United States." Leary discusses the con-struction of the novel, claiming that although it seems "loose and shambling there is artistry in it also [and] perhaps because [Twain] worked long over it, this first independent novel is better constructed than any he was to write again."

Granville Hicks writes in *The Great Tradition* (1935) that *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* starts out as seeming to be more than just a boys' book. Hicks believes that the novel begins as "a fine and subtle portrayal of the Missouri frontier." However, Hicks goes on to say that Twain's artistic powers were limited and that the book ends "in the tawdry melodrama of conventional juvenile fiction." In short, Hicks feels that Twain's book does not deliver on its promise. In *Mark Twain: An Introduction and Interpretation*, Frank Baldanza claims that Twain's reputation "is based firmly on the unparalleled achievement of his books about boys," namely *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Baldanza calls *Tom Sawyer* "a delightful book," one that "gives a genial and warmhearted backward glance at boyhood in Missouri" yet that also is "a serious and adult book." Baldanza sees the seriousness of the novel in the fact that "in the moral sphere, both Tom and Huck pay plentifully for their natural desires and impulses." John C. Gerber, in his book *Mark Twain*, acknowledges that "*Tom Sawyer* may not have the art or the profundity of *Huckleberry Finn*, but as an idyll of boyhood it has no peer anywhere." Gerber defends *Tom Sawyer* as a portrait of "boys as they are" and as a comic work. Like so many other critics, Gerber highlights the book's broad popularity, pointing out that *Tom Sawyer* "has been translated into over two dozen foreign languages and its sales, domestic and foreign, extend into the millions." According to Gerber, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is second in popularity among Twain's books only to *Huckleberry Finn*.

Contemporary criticism about both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* often looks at the treatment of race and racism in these novels and the world they portray. While *Huckleberry Finn* has become controversial in some circles because of its use of language that degrades African Americans, *Tom Sawyer* does not offend in the same way,

perhaps because slavery and its implicit racism exist more in the background of this novel than they do in *Huck Finn*. Shelley Fisher Fishkin points out in *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* that "the Hannibal of Twain's youth, like the St. Petersburg of both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, was a slaveholding society; but only in *Huckleberry Finn* would this fact struggle to the foreground. The world of childhood fantasy, play, and adventure had preoccupied him in *Tom Sawyer*." Fishkin sees none of Twain's growing "moral indignation" in *Tom Sawyer*, and she speculates that "Twain may have suspected that to recreate the boyhood pastoral of *Tom Sawyer* effectively, he had to suppress that troublesome thing called a 'conscience' that had begun to make him ask some difficult questions — such as whether that boyhood world was not so 'innocent' after all."

VII. CRITICISM

Tabitha Mcintosh-Byrd

McIntosh-Byrd is a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania. In the following essay she explores the ways in which Mark Twain's Adventures of Tom Sawyer *can be read as a powerful critique of American identity.*

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is an extremely difficult work to approach analytically because it is so embedded in the reader's own childhood. It is read in classrooms throughout the English-speaking world, and has become iconographic of childhood itself — especially American childhood. Indeed, this has been its reception from its initial publication. The first review, written by William Dean Howells in 1876, called it "a wonderful study of the boy-mind" which exists beyond the control or comprehension of adult society. His comments appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* before the book was even published, and thus set the framework for the way in which the novel would be read. Clemens himself did not read his book this way, a fact that is suggested by his initial conviction that the story was written for an adult audience. Though his wife persuaded him to publish it as a children's book, Tom Sawyer's story can still be recovered as a novel for adults — a savage satire on adult hypocrisy and American cultural identity.

Tom Sawyer is generally read as the first truly American novel: a cathartic attempt by Clemens to write his own childhood and the childhood of America into a coherent literary whole. His success is attested to by the timeless status of Tom as a sort of "Every-Boy" for American culture — the literary epitome of the ingenuity, imagination, and pluck which form the basis of America's understanding of its own national character. In this reading, Tom's flouting of authority is a paradigm for American self-determination in the face of tyranny, his character expressing the intrinsic essence of freedom from tyranny and restraint. If we accept this and then look more closely at the structural motifs and internal parallels of Clemens' novel, a very different picture of the national character begins to emerge. The novel, like the village in which it is set, seems to be bathed in perpetually fair weather and sunshine. There is, however, always a darker side. Just as the sunshine of the village is belied by the dank, labyrinthine caves, so the novel has deeper and more disturbing resonances than are at first apparent.

To find this darker side, we must start by questioning the validity of Howells' distinction between the adult and the child mind in the novel. Are Tom's behavior, responses, needs, and follies *really* any different from those of the adults around him? In two early scenes this distinction would seem to be untenable. The first is the Sabbath School scene where Tom's "wily fraud" wins him a Bible. Several direct parallels are made here between the behavior of the adults and the children. Faced with the unexpected appearance of a guest of honor, adults and children alike respond with the same show of self-importance:

Mr. Walters fell to "showing off". The librarian "showed off". The young lady teachers "showed off". The little girls "showed off" the little boys "showed off" and above it all the great man sat and beamed for he was "showing off" too.

The only thing that differentiates the individuals in the Sabbath School is the method with which they express the same desire to be noticed. This series of comparisons suggests that public altruism, making spit-wads, enforcing discipline, and fulfilling the duties of public office should all be understood as essentially the same act. More subtly, the language that Clemens uses to describe Tom's actions in this episode is insidiously reflective of the adults that surround him. Tom's successful and hard-nosed bartering for the chits that will win him a Bible is described in the language of the adults' economy. In this way, the chits become "certified checks," which represent "warehoused" knowledge on the "premises" of Tom's brain. Judge Thatcher encourages him to say that he would rather have this "warehoused" knowledge than "any money" he could be offered, which draws the analogy tighter. Tom's gathering of this paper "wealth" is done to elevate himself above his peers and impress the powerful. If this wealth performs the same function in the adults' economy as it does in the children's, then the acquisition of money is being presented as foolish, egotistical, and childlike.

The second incident again takes place in church. Bored during a long service, Tom falls back on teasing a pinch-bug and then watches with smothered amusement as it torments a stray poodle. Despite their public show of faith and piety, the adults of St. Petersburg partake of exactly the same feelings:

Other people, uninterested in the sermon, found relief in the beetle and they eyed it too the whole church was red-faced and suffocating with suppressed laughter.

Just as the Temperance Tavern in the village contains a secret and squalid whisky-drinking den, so the church-going community hides its secret boredom beneath a show of public faith. Just as Tom goes to church because his Aunt compels him, so the villagers go to church because the need to appear acceptable to their peers compels them. In this insistent parallel, the motivations of human beings are presented, again, as identical in essence. The desire to show off and the compulsion to go to church are both shown to be expressions of the same need to be accepted. Further, because it is the adults' own need that compels them, they are shown as more willfully self-deluded. After all, the children have no choice but to be told what to do. The adults give up their own pleasure on purpose.

The fact that both of these scenes take place within the church is indicative of an implicit critique of the role of religion in St. Petersburg culture that threads throughout the text — a critique that finds its main expression through the subtle development of the role of books within the text. Again, this is created through a series of oblique parallels. Tom's relationship to books and the Book (the Bible) is contrasted throughout. While he

cannot successfully commit a single verse of the Good Book to memory, he has whole pages of his favorite books memorized. The deliberate juxtaposition of these failures and feats of memory suggests a basic similarity among all of the books in question — a sneaky way, as it were, of suggesting that all of the books in question are nothing more or less than fiction. With this juxtaposition firmly established, Tom's relationship to fiction becomes more understandable as satire. Just as the adults of the church act out their public lives in accordance to the teachings of the Book, so Tom acts out his public life in accordance with books. The charity that the village women want to posthumously extend to Injun Joe is thus performance, in the same way that Tom's posturing and playing is a performance of his favorite stories. The language of the Bible pervades the language of the adults and the language of adventure novels pervades Tom's language. The comparison that this provokes, like the comparisons between adult and child public behavior, devalues and deflates the self-importance of adult life.

There are darker aspects to these parallels. The single most important aspect of Tom's vivid fictions is that they are all actualized during the course of the novel. Tom is saturated in the lore of swashbuckling, Robert Louis Stephenson-style adventures. This is harmless until one by one his obsessions take form in village life. Tom dreams of piracy and buried treasure. Lo and behold, there is an actual theft and real buried treasure hidden by a man who, like Tom's pirates, wears a patch over one eye. Tom fantasizes about a literary-romantic version of his own funeral. By the end of the novel his real funeral has only been averted by luck. Tom stages and provokes mock-battles and wars. Almost immediately he is witness to an actual fight, with real bloodshed, resulting in a horrible murder. If we maintain the implicit conjunction between the Bible and Tom's books, this can be read as a very serious critique of the abuses of religion. Tom's utter belief in fiction shapes the world around him for the worse, and by extension, the adults' utter belief in the Bible is shown to warp the world in which they live. Biblical stories and romantic yarns become one and the same thing — both of them foolish and dangerous when they are acted out.

Ultimately, then, the reader is forced to ask questions that have painful answers. What does it mean if, as so many readers and critics have said, Tom is, in some essential way, America; if his story is America's story, and his character America's own? When we look at the bare bones of Tom's life and the evidence outlined above, it means that Clemens' America is an orphan country of unknown origins that begins — like the novel — in *media res*. It has no history and no future, existing in the framed bookends of the author's comments at the beginning and end of the tale. As he says:

It being strictly the history of a *boy* it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a man.

If Tom is America, then America too will never have a "man's history." In place of history it has only narrative — fictions and performances through which it lives out a permanent pre-adolescence with no possibility for maturity. The adults of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* are as childish as the children are adult — there is no distinction to be made, and hence no maturing wisdom to be counted on. We open where we end — in the middle of a fiction, with the end of an adventure and the start of a new one. In this disturbing world, the danger of these imagined adventures, as Tom's story so vividly illustrates, is that every last one of them comes true. Writing in the 1870s in the aftermath of the Civil War, Clemens has set his novel in the 1840s. Tom's blustering aggression, his

acting out of battles, and his fascination with death and heroism become far less amusing when we keep these dates in mind. Seen through this lens, the book becomes a savage indictment of a coun-try that has brought itself to the brink of death because it is infatuated with vainglorious stories of heroism, battle, and divine sanction. What is more, because it has learned nothing from its experiences, it is — like Tom — doomed to repeat them.[1]

VIII. TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Research white Americans' attitudes toward Native Americans in the mid-19th century. Does Injun Joe's status as evil incarnate reflect the popular view of Native Americans in that period?
- Consider the life of Huckleberry Finn in terms of today's standards: How would a homeless child, the son of an alcoholic who has essentially abandoned him, be treated in the United States today? What factors in Huck's world make it possible for him to live as he wishes, sleeping outside in barrels and on doorsteps and wearing rags? How can Twain romanticize a child like Huck, and why would Huck not be considered romantic in today's society?
- The role of women in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* seems to be that of a civilizing force: Aunt Polly trying to teach Tom how to behave, the Widow Douglas taking Huck in to "introduce him to society," the young ladies on Examination Evening reading essays with titles such as "Religion in History" and "Filial Love." Research attitudes toward women in 1840s American culture. What kinds of tasks were white women expected to fulfill, and what was their role in helping to shape their world?
- In the 1840s, Missouri represented the American frontier. What did this mean? What form of government existed for Missouri then, and how was it enforced? What attitudes did people "back East" have about those who had moved out West to the frontier, and how did the frontiersmen and women see themselves?

[1] Tabitha McIntosh-Byrd, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1999.

JACK LONDON

White Fang
(1906)

When *White Fang* was published in 1906, Jack London was the most widely read writer in the United States and was also popular in Europe, thanks to his second novel, *The Call of the Wild* (1903). (London had become, as well, the first millionaire American author.) The two novels are related in that while *The Call of the Wild* tells the story of a dog who becomes wild and leads a wolf pack, *White Fang* is the life story of a wolf who comes, after many hardships dealt him by both man and nature, to live a dog's life with a loving master. Both novels, along with scores of London's short stories, are set in the land the author called simply "The North" — the Yukon Territory to which he once traveled as a gold prospector.

Though not considered the literary equal of *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang* was an immediate commercial success and continues to be popular a century after its initial publication. In its unblinking portrayals of nature's unforgiving harshness, of humankind's capacity for both shocking brutality and unconditional love, and of the struggle for survival that is common to all life, *White Fang* is classic London.

I. PLOT SUMMARY

Part 1 — the Wild.

1: the Trail of Meat

Two men, Henry and Bill, are hiking through a spruce forest in the far North. It is deep winter. Snow covers the ground. The temperature is far below zero, and it is light only for a few hours each day. With the men is a team of six sled dogs. On the sled, along with equipment and supplies, is a coffin that holds the body of a man called Lord Alfred. Henry and Bill are taking the body to Fort McGurry. They constantly hear wolves howling, and they know that the nearly starved wolves are tracking them in hopes of killing them for food.

After the men make camp for the night, Bill feeds the dogs. He later tells Henry that seven dogs, not six, came to be fed. The men realize that one was a somewhat tame wolf. That night, one of their dogs disappears, lured away and eaten by the wolves.

2: the She-Wolf

The next morning, the men set off with the five remaining dogs. That evening, the tame wolf again comes to eat, but Bill sees her and drives her off. The following morning, another dog is missing. As the men camp the next evening, the wolves come closer. The men wish they could shoot at them to scare them away, but they have only three cartridges left. They decide that the tame wolf must actually be a dog. Bill tries to secure the dogs so that they cannot leave the camp, but that night a third dog disappears. Bill begins to be extremely anxious, convinced that the wolves will eventually kill all the dogs and then him and Henry. The She-Wolf, as the tame one is called, appears on the trail in daylight, and that night the wolf pack crowds closer than before to the camp.

3: the Hunger Cry

That night, no dogs are lost. But the next day, the sled overturns in an accident. While the men work to right the sled, the tame wolf lures one of the dogs away. Bill, unable to leave the dog to its fate, sets off with the gun to try to save it. Henry hears Bill fire all three shots and then hears sounds that tell him that the wolf pack has killed both the dog and Bill. After helping the two remaining dogs pull the sled briefly, Henry makes camp and a large fire. The wolves threaten him all night, and he is unable to sleep.

The next morning, Henry rigs a way to pull the coffin up into a tree so that the wolves cannot get it. Then he and the two dogs set off. Henry makes camp early and spends the night fighting off the hungry wolves with burning sticks. The next night, the wolves take the two remaining dogs, and Henry has to jump briefly into the fire to escape them. Just as an exhausted Henry is resigned to death, a group of men arrives with dogs and sleds. They drive away the wolves and ask where Lord Alfred is. Henry tells them that he is dead, his coffin in a tree for safety, before falling into a deep sleep as the men put him on a sled to take him to the fort.

Part 2 — born of the Wild.

1: the Battle of the Fangs

The novel follows the movement of the desperately hungry wolf pack after it leaves Henry. After running all day and night, the pack finds and kills a large moose — plenty of food for the forty wolves. The pack rests and then gradually splits into smaller and smaller groups. The She-Wolf, who had run at the head of the large pack, is left with three males. The oldest of the three, called One-Eye, kills the other two in a fight and becomes the She-Wolf's mate. They hunt together and learn to steal rabbits from snares set around an Indian camp.

2: the Lair

It is April. The She-Wolf finds a lair and has five cubs. The male hunts for himself and brings food to his mate.

3: the Gray Cub

Four of the cubs are reddish like their mother. One, the fiercest, is a gray male, like his father. After some weeks, One-Eye is unable to find food, and the She-Wolf can no longer provide milk for the cubs. Four of them die, but the gray cub survives until One-Eye brings food again. Then, One-Eye is killed by a lynx. The She-Wolf, who has resumed hunting while her cub stays in the lair, finds One-Eye's remains. She also finds the lynx's lair, where she knows that there are kittens.

4: the Wall of the World

One day, the cub's instinctive fear of leaving the lair is overcome by curiosity. The cub tumbles down the slope just outside the cave's entrance. Exploring, he finds a nest of small ptarmigan chicks and eats them. When the ptarmigan hen returns, he fights with her until she drives him away by pecking his nose. He finds a stream and is swept up in it but quickly begins to swim. Finally, he is attacked by a weasel and escapes death only because his mother hears the struggle and rescues him.

5: the Law of Meat

The cub begins to leave the lair daily and remembers all the lessons of his first outing. Then, for a time, neither the cub nor the She-Wolf finds food. In desperation, the She-Wolf raids the lynx's den, eating all but one kitten and taking it to her cub. Soon after, the lynx comes to the wolves' lair, and there is a terrible fight. The She-Wolf kills the lynx, but she is badly hurt, and the cub is wounded. Both recover, however. The cub begins to hunt with his mother and learns the law of meat: "EAT OR BE EATEN." The cub greatly enjoys hunting and eating, and also their rewards, the feeling of a full stomach and a nap in the sun.

Part 3 — the Gods of the Wild.

1: the Makers of Fire

One day, the cub goes to the stream to drink and sees five Indians — the first humans he has seen. The men see the cub. One of them approaches the cub, whose instinctual awe of humans prevents him from running away. But when the man tries to pick him up, the cub bites. The man hits him, and the cub cries out, bringing the She-Wolf to his rescue.

One of the Indians, Gray Beaver, recognizes the She-Wolf as the former pet of his now-dead brother. He calls her Kiche and says that she is the offspring of a dog and a wolf and that she ran away to find food during a famine. Kiche lets Gray Beaver pet her, and Gray Beaver declares that Kiche is now his. He names the cub White Fang. Gray Beaver ties up Kiche, and White Fang stays close to her.

Soon, about forty more Indians and many dogs carrying packs arrive. Some of the dogs attack Kiche and White Fang, but the Indians rescue them. When the Indians move to another camp, a child keeps Kiche on a lead, and White Fang follows.

2: the Bondage

A puppy called Lip-Lip, larger and more used to fighting than White Fang, becomes his nemesis. Eventually, Gray Beaver knows that Kiche has become too tame to run away, so she is no longer tied. However, soon Gray Beaver gives Kiche to Three Eagles, who is leaving the rest of the group. White Fang swims after the canoe that is taking his mother away, and Gray Beaver comes after him and beats him severely. That night, when White Fang cries for his mother and wakes Gray Beaver, the man beats him even harder. White Fang longs to return to the wild, and he stays in camp only because he hopes his mother will return. Gray Beaver never pets White Fang but does not beat him as long as he obeys, and Gray Beaver also protects the pup from aggressive dogs and makes sure that he gets food. White Fang quickly learns that obedience prevents beatings.

3: the Outcast

Lip-Lip and other young dogs continually gang up on White Fang, possibly because they sense that he is three-quarters wolf. This makes White Fang mean and a good fighter. One day, he kills a dog. The tribe wants to kill White Fang, but Gray Beaver will not allow it. White Fang becomes an outcast; the other dogs will not allow him to be part of the pack, and the humans revile him.

4: the Trail of the Gods

In the fall, the Indians break camp. White Fang understands that they are leaving and that his mother will not return to him now. He hides in the woods until the Indians are gone, planning to return to the wild and ignoring Gray Beaver's calls. After a night alone, however, he longs for the companionship and food provided by humans. He runs for forty hours without stopping, following the Indians' trail. Exhausted, White Fang crawls to Gray Beaver, sure that he will be beaten. Instead, Gray Beaver gives him food and keeps the other dogs from taking it away. On this night, White Fang becomes tame.

5: the Covenant

It is December, and White Fang is eight months old. Gray Beaver, his wife, Kloo-Kooch, and his son, Mit-sah, take a trip. Gray Beaver drives a sled pulled by adult dogs, and Mit-sah has a small one pulled by White Fang and other pups, including Lip-Lip. White Fang remains solitary and fierce. His law is "to oppress the weak and obey the strong." White Fang feels no affection for Gray Beaver, and Gray Beaver shows none toward White Fang, but the two are companions who benefit each other.

6: the Famine

The following April, White Fang is one year old, and he returns with Gray Beaver and his family to the village. Now White Fang, because of his wolf heritage, is bigger and stronger than the young dogs that once bullied him. One day, White Fang meets Kiche in

the village. He bounds toward her happily, but she does not remember him. She has a new litter, and she attacks White Fang, fearing that he may hurt her cubs. White Fang is confused but accepts the rebuff and withdraws.

When White Fang is three years old, a famine comes, and he leaves the tribe to hunt for food in the wild. He meets Kiche again, who has gone back to the lair where White Fang was born to give birth again. Because of the famine, once again only one of her cubs is alive. Soon after this, White Fang meets the famished Lip-Lip and kills him. Then he finds Gray Beaver's people, who have moved their village and now have plenty of food. Gray Beaver is not at his tent, but Kloo-Kooch welcomes White Fang happily.

Part 4 — the Superior Gods.

1: the Enemy and His Kind

When White Fang is almost five years old, Gray Beaver takes him on a long trip to Fort Yukon. It is 1898, the time of the gold rush. Gray Beaver spends months trading at the fort. White Fang spends his time attacking and killing dogs that arrive on the steamboat that brings prospectors from the south. Some of the local men find it entertaining to watch these fights.

2: the Mad God

The fort's cook, a cruel man called Beauty Smith, loves to watch White Fang attack and kill the dogs from the steamboat. Beauty uses whisky to beguile a reluctant Gray Beaver into selling White Fang to him.

3: the Reign of Hate

Beauty Smith keeps White Fang chained up and teases him cruelly to make him as mean as possible. He does this both because he enjoys it and because he is preparing to use White Fang in staged dogfights, a favorite form of gambling and entertainment at the fort. White Fang kills every dog set against him — sometimes two at a time — but is sometimes wounded. Beauty Smith even forces White Fang to fight wild wolves and a lynx, which Indians trap for this purpose. White Fang's reputation for ferocity grows to the extent that Beauty Smith travels around with him in a cage, and people pay money just to watch Beauty enrage White Fang by poking him with sticks.

4: the Clinging Death

Finally, White Fang is forced to fight a bulldog. It is too short for White Fang to attack in his normal way. Eventually, the bulldog manages to lock its jaws into White Fang's neck and refuses to let go, working to chew through to White Fang's throat and kill him. After long minutes of flailing and trying to dislodge the bulldog, called Cherokee, White Fang is on the verge of death. Beauty Smith is furious that he is about to lose money, so he enters the cage and savagely kicks White Fang.

Suddenly, two men arrive. One of them rushes into the cage and attacks Beauty Smith, hitting him so hard that he does not get up and screaming that all the men

watching the dogfight are beasts. The two newcomers then try for several minutes before finally prying the bulldog's jaws from White Fang's neck. White Fang, his eyes glazed, is very close to death. Weedon Scott, the man who attacked Beauty Smith, gives Beauty one hundred and fifty dollars and says that he is buying White Fang. Beauty protests, but Scott threatens him and leaves with White Fang. Scott is a gold mining expert from California, and the man with him is Matt, his dog musher.

5: the Indomitable

Back at their cabin two weeks later, Weedon Scott and Matt have White Fang, who has somehow survived, on a chain. Matt tells Scott that White Fang is at least part dog and has been trained to pull a sled. They hope to rehabilitate White Fang, but when they unchain him, he immediately kills one of their dogs and bites both men. With deep regret, the men are about to shoot White Fang, feeling they have no choice. But White Fang's knowing fear of the gun and his quick dodge when he sees it convinces them that the wolf is smart enough to be rehabilitated.

6: the Love-Master

White Fang knows that the dog-killing and the man-biting that he has just done are serious crimes, and he expects to be savagely beaten but is beyond caring or running away. He is confused when Scott repeatedly comes outside the cabin, talks gently to him, and gives him meat. Eventually, White Fang takes meat from Scott's hand. When Scott first pets him, White Fang is sure that the man is going to hurt him. In time, though, White Fang comes to trust Scott and Matt. Scott becomes his master, and White Fang desires to please him, so he never attacks the sled dogs and in fact soon becomes the lead dog.

Part 5 — the Tame.

1: the Long Trail

The time comes for Weedon Scott to return to California. He feels that he cannot take White Fang and plans to leave him with Matt, but White Fang cries pitifully. The men lock White Fang in the cabin as they leave for the steamboat, but when they arrive, they find White Fang on the boat's deck, bleeding from having crashed through the cabin's window. Scott takes White Fang home to California.

2: the Southland

Weedon Scott lives on a large country estate in the Santa Clara Valley with his extended family. As soon as White Fang arrives there, the family and their dogs, including a sheepdog named Collie, begin adjusting to him — and vice versa.

3: the Call of Kind

White Fang lives a good life on the estate and comes to love Weedon Scott so much that he allows the man to wrestle and play with him. When his master is horseback riding and breaks his leg, White Fang runs home and alerts the family. After this, even the servants, who have been unable to overcome their fear and distrust of White Fang, accept him warmly. In the fall, Collie lures White Fang into the woods to mate.

4: the Sleeping Wolf

A murderer who was sentenced by Judge Scott, and who has threatened to kill the judge for revenge, escapes from prison and disappears. Weedon's wife, without letting anyone else know, begins to let White Fang into the house each night to sleep by the front door. When the convict, Jim Hall, sneaks into the house one night, White Fang attacks and kills him, but Hall shoots White Fang several times. The household awakes, and Judge Scott calls not a veterinarian but his own doctor for White Fang. The doctor works on White Fang for an hour and a half and says that his chances for survival are miniscule.

Out of love and gratitude, Judge Scott goes so far as to call a doctor from San Francisco, and the women of the house take care of White Fang as if he were their child. White Fang, wrapped in casts and bandages, lies immobilized for weeks and dreams of his past — many bad dreams, and some good ones of the wild — as he slowly regains life.

Finally, the day arrives to remove the last cast. With great effort, White Fang is able to walk a little, venturing out to the lawn and, after a rest, on to the stable entrance, where Collie is with her puppies. The puppies frolic and climb on White Fang, full of curiosity, and the old wolf rests.

II. CHARACTERS

Bill

Bill, along with Henry, appears in Part One of the novel. Bill and Henry are taking the body of Lord Alfred to Fort McGurry. When the two men are threatened by hungry wolves that kill some of their sled dogs, Bill becomes increasingly anxious and convinced that the wolves will eventually kill them. When the wolves lure one of the dogs away during the daytime, Bill rashly follows with the gun to try to save the dog even though it is extremely dangerous and almost certainly futile. The wolves kill both the dog and Bill.

Collie

Collie is a sheepdog who lives at Weedon Scott's estate in California. When White Fang first arrives there, she badgers him mercilessly, following her instinctual enmity against wolves. White Fang does not harm her, even when she attacks him, partly because he understands that Scott values her and partly because it is against his nature as a wolf to harm a female of his own kind (or, in this case, of a closely related kind).

After time has passed, though, Collie leads White Fang into the woods to mate with her. In the novel's last scene, when White Fang has finally recovered from his

gunshot wounds enough to hobble outside, he sees Collie with their puppies and allows the puppies to clamber over him as he rests.

Dick

Dick is a deerhound and a pet of the Scott family. When White Fang first arrives at the Scott estate, Dick chases him, which White Fang, because of his experiences, interprets as a deadly attack. The only thing that prevents White Fang from killing Dick is Collie's intervention.

Jim Hall

Jim Hall is a murderer who was convicted in Judge Scott's court and who has vowed to take revenge on the old judge. When Hall escapes from prison, he goes to the Scotts' estate to take his revenge but is attacked and killed by White Fang. However, Hall manages to shoot White Fang several times, wounding him gravely.

Henry

Henry is Bill's companion on the trip to Fort McGurry with Lord Alfred's body. While Bill becomes unhinged by the threatening wolves, Henry remains calm and manages to survive until unexpected help arrives.

Kiche

Kiche is called the She-Wolf in the first part of the novel, when she is living in the wild with other wolves. Readers learn her name later when she rejoins the Indians with whom she had previously lived.

In Part One, Kiche is with the wolf pack that threatens Henry and Bill. She is somewhat tame and enters the camp to try to get food when Bill feeds the dogs. It is also Kiche who lures the dogs away from the camp at night so that the other wolves can kill and eat them.

After the pack is driven away from Henry and finally finds food, Kiche mates with an old wolf named One-Eye. All of her cubs except one die in a famine, and the one survivor is a gray male who will become known as White Fang. One day Kiche hears White Fang's cries and runs to rescue him, and she and the Indian Gray Beaver recognize each other. Kiche allows Gray Beaver to pet her and to tie her up until she has again become tame enough to stay with the Indians willingly.

Kiche is the offspring of a dog and a wolf, a mating arranged by Gray Beaver's now-dead brother, and therefore White Fang is one-quarter dog.

Kloo-Kooch

Kloo-Kooch is Gray Beaver's wife. She provides perhaps the only moment of affection that White Fang experiences among the Indians, when White Fang returns to the Indians after a famine and receives a warm welcome from her.

Lip-Lip

Lip-Lip is a puppy who lives with the Indians and who was born in the same year as White Fang. He is a bully and constantly picks fights with White Fang, which is the first step in White Fang's becoming a mean and solitary animal.

Matt

Matt is Weedon Scott's musher, who helps Scott rescue White Fang from the bulldog and then rehabilitate him. It is Matt who recognizes that White Fang is part dog and has been trained to pull a sled.

Mit-Sah

Mit-sah is Gray Beaver's son. When White Fang is still a puppy, he helps pull Mit-sah's child-size sled when the family goes on a trip.

One-Eye

One-Eye is an old but smart male wolf who wins the right to mate with Kiche by killing his two rivals. White Fang is the sole surviving cub from this litter.

Salmon Tongue

Salmon Tongue is one of the Indians who is with Gray Beaver when they discover White Fang and Kiche.

Alice Scott

Alice is Weedon's wife. When she hears that Jim Hall has escaped from prison, she begins to let White Fang into the house each night after the rest of the family has gone to bed. This precaution saves the family's lives.

Beth Scott

Beth is one of Weedon's two sisters, who lives at the estate with the rest of the extended family. She lovingly helps care for White Fang after he saves the family from Jim Hall.

Judge Scott

Judge Scott is Weedon's father, a retired judge who lives at the estate with the rest of the extended family. He is hesitant to trust White Fang but willing to admit that he was wrong when White Fang proves himself. When White Fang saves the family from Jim

Hall, the judge is so grateful that he calls the best doctors, rather than veterinarians, to care for White Fang.

Mary Scott

Mary is one of Weedon's two sisters, who lives at the estate with the rest of the extended family. She lovingly helps care for White Fang after he saves the family from Jim Hall.

Maud Scott

Weedon Scott's six-year-old daughter. White Fang understands how precious the children are to his master, and he learns to enjoy their petting.

Weedon Scott

Weedon Scott is a mining expert from California who comes to the Yukon for a short time. He comes upon the scene of the dogfight at which White Fang is about to be killed by a bulldog and is at the same time being brutally kicked by Beauty Smith. After rescuing White Fang, Scott asks his musher, Matt, how much an animal in White Fang's condition is worth. He then pays Beauty Smith the money and takes White Fang against Smith's wishes.

Scott rehabilitates White Fang through consistent gentleness, kindness, and affection, even though White Fang bites him the first time he has an opportunity. When he must correct White Fang, he does so with words, not blows, except on one or two occasions when the situation is extremely serious. White Fang becomes so attached to Scott that he crashes through a window to avoid being left behind when Scott returns to California. Scott relents and takes White Fang home with him, and he is rewarded when White Fang saves the family from a murderer.

Weedon Scott Jr.

Weedon is the elder Scott's four-year-old son.

She-Wolf

See Kiche

Beauty Smith

The cook at Fort Yukon, Beauty Smith is an ugly, cruel man. He goes to great lengths to persuade Gray Beaver to sell White Fang to him and then abuses White Fang to make him as fierce as possible. Beauty's goal is to win money by entering White Fang in dogfights, which he continues to do until Weedon Scott intervenes.

Three Eagles

Three Eagles is one of the Indians who is with Gray Beaver when they discover White Fang and Kiche. A short time later, Gray Beaver gives Kiche to Three Eagles, who takes her with him on a long trip.

Weedon Scott's Mother

Her name is not mentioned, but she lives with the rest of the extended family at the estate.

III. THEMES

Nature Versus Nurture

The overarching theme of the novel is that heredity and environment each contribute to White Fang's fate. London comes down on the side of nurture as being the more powerful force. White Fang's nature is malleable, and he adjusts to whatever conditions his environment presents in order to survive. Under the abuse of Beauty Smith, White Fang becomes a killer seething with hate; under the loving hand of Weedon Scott, he becomes a gentle pet.

While this theme is woven throughout the novel, it is stated explicitly in these lines:

White Fang grew stronger, heavier, and more compact, while his character was developing along the lines laid down by his heredity and his environment. His heredity was a life-stuff that may be likened to clay. It possessed many possibilities, was capable of being moulded into many different forms. Environment served to model the clay, to give it a particular form. Thus, had White Fang never come in to the fires of man, the Wild would have moulded him into a true wolf. But the gods had given him a different environment, and he was moulded into a dog that was rather wolfish, but that was a dog and not a wolf.

Survival of the Fittest

The novel portrays two worlds, the world of nature and the world of humans. In both these worlds, all life is subject to the law of the survival of the fittest. Famine is well known to both humans and animals, and when it comes, the weak, the sick, and the old die. When the Indians have no food to give the dogs, the dogs return to the wild and try to stay alive until the famine passes. If they succeed, and if they find their old masters again, they often return to human society. But when hardship comes, it is every man, woman, child, dog, wolf, and pup for himself or herself. Relationships are based on mutual benefit, not on affection.

In the last section of the novel, White Fang enters a kind of paradise where the law of survival of the fittest has been superseded by the law of love. Weeden Scott rescues him at the moment when the law says he should die, and from that moment on White Fang lives in a radically different kind of world. The world of love, however, is one that most creatures never experience and one that White Fang reaches only after much extreme suffering — only because a kind man happens to come along at just the right

moment, only because he was born with enough intelligence to be rehabilitated, and, above all, only because he has been tough enough to survive until that moment.

IV. STYLE

Omniscient Narrator

The narrator of *White Fang* is omniscient, which is a challenging choice for a writer and a fascinating one for a reader when the main characters are animals. Repeatedly, the narrator confidently describes the thoughts and feelings of dogs and wolves and explains how they experience the world. The best extended example of this comes when White Fang, as a small cub, leaves the lair for the first time. He has thought of the cave entrance as a strange wall that his parents have the power to walk through. Then one day his curiosity outstrips his fear, and he approaches "the wall of the world." The narration of his first outing begins:

Now the gray cub had lived all his days on a level floor. He had never experienced the hurt of a fall. He did not know what a fall was. So he stepped boldly out upon the air. His hind legs still rested on the cave-lip, so he fell forward head downward. The earth struck him a harsh blow on the nose that made him yelp. Then he began rolling down the slope, over and over. He was in a panic of terror. The unknown had caught him at last. It had gripped savagely hold of him.

The narrator goes on to describe in great detail how White Fang learns to distinguish what is alive from what is not alive, how he learns to interpret what his eyes are telling him about how far away things are, what he experiences when he steps into a stream and the current grabs him, and so on. There is no way for readers to know how accurate these descriptions are, but it is clear that they are based on long, close observation of canines, and they succeed in making the novel's animals complex and compelling characters.

Figurative Language

London makes frequent use of several kinds of figurative language. The novel's first sentence contains an example of personification: "Dark spruce forest frowned on either side the frozen waterway."

There was a hint in it of laughter, but of a laughter more terrible than any sadness — a laughter that was mirthless as the smile of the Sphinx, a laughter cold as the frost and partaking of the grimness of infallibility.

Such figurative language enriches the descriptions throughout the novel and makes the faraway landscape and the special terrors of the North more real to readers by relating them to more familiar, universal realities.

One figure of speech that is especially prominent in the novel is antonomasia, in which the name of an office or role is substituted for a person's actual name. A common example of the technique is the use of "the Bard" to refer to Shakespeare. In *White Fang*, when the narrator speaks of men as they are viewed by dogs and wolves, he calls them "the gods." London writes several times that canines see humans in roughly the same way

that humans see their gods. He even establishes a hierarchy of gods, making the claim that canines recognize white men as "superior gods" compared to Indians. This recognition is said to be based on the canines' comprehension that the white men in the story have more power than the Indians.

V. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Naturalism

Jack London, along with Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, and others, is considered one of the premier writers of the naturalist style of American literature. Naturalism emerged in France in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and held sway in the United States between about 1900 and 1918, when World War I ended. It developed out of scientific ideas that were popular at the time, especially Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Naturalist writers were interested in the closely related idea of determinism, which holds that the fate of an individual human or animal is determined by the interplay of heredity (nature) and the environment (nurture) in his or her life. These writers often created everyday characters and then subjected them to extreme circumstances to show how innate traits and life circumstances combined to create their destinies. In Crane's classic naturalist novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), the extreme circumstances are provided by war. In *White Fang* and other fiction by London, they are provided by the harsh conditions of life in the far North. Several times in *White Fang*, London points out to readers that if a certain circumstance had been altered in a small way — for example, if the Indians who first tamed White Fang had camped across the river the night he ran to rejoin them, as they had first planned to — the wolf's fate would have been completely different.

London's naturalist fiction is especially interesting because many of his works feature animals as characters. This allows London to examine nature both in its wild state, untouched by human civilization and complications, and as it is affected by human intervention. In fact, *White Fang* portrays wolves both in the wild and relating to a range of different human cultures and temperaments, showing how each one affects the wolves. This, along with the novel's objective, detailed style, makes it an exemplar of naturalism.

Conservation

When *White Fang* was published, conservation of the wilderness was much on Americans' minds. Theodore Roosevelt, the most conservation-minded president the United States has ever had, was in the White House. He expanded the United States's national forests by more than 150 million acres. Roosevelt's friend John Muir, the founder of the Sierra Club and the United States's most famous conservationist, was publishing books about his visits to America's wild places and at the same time working for their protection. After centuries of expansion from the East Coast to the Pacific, Americans were for the first time realizing that although their nation was vast, its wilderness and resources were not unlimited and needed to be conserved and protected.

In addition, as more Americans moved to cities and as life became increasingly industrialized, the idea of the wilderness became more captivating. Americans and

Europeans alike loved to read stories of adventures in wild places, and this undoubtedly contributed greatly to the popularity of London's fiction.

VI. CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The most noteworthy fact about criticism of *White Fang* — and of London's work in general — is the lack of it. In his day, London was considered a popular, not a literary, author. More recently, his novels have most often been classified as young-adult literature. As a result, literary publications and scholars have had little interest in London and his work. In addition, London's works featuring animals as main characters have received even less attention than others. *The Call of the Wild* has garnered some interest for the sheer power of its hold on the reading public and because it is the premier novel of its kind. *White Fang*, as a later and lesser novel, has largely been ignored.

Critic Maxwell Geismar does mention *White Fang* in his *Rebels and Ancestors: The American Novel, 1890 – 1915* but judges it inferior to *The Call of the Wild* because of what he views as a sentimental ending:

It was only when White Fang was rescued from these extremes of cruelty and terror, to become "the blessed wolf" of a gracious California estate in the Southland, a perfect pet of an aristocratic gentry, that London succumbed to the sentiment which spoiled another beautiful little parable of the instinctual life.

Mary Allen, in her *Animals in American Literature*, seems to agree:

What the author intends as the virtue of adaptation comes across instead as the case of a character who sells out, at least so it seems to the American reader. The case for civilization is apparently viewed differently in Europe, however, where *White Fang* outsells *The Call of the Wild*.

A comment in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, published in multiple volumes during and shortly after London's life, sums up the literary establishment's view of London. In an entry on London's contemporary Richard Harding Davis, the editors declare that Davis "had what Jack London lacked utterly, literary traditions, poise, a certain patrician touch, and an innate love of the romantic." Clearly, the establishment was not ready to embrace London's style, which Allen calls "a realism that revolutionized popular fiction in the 1900s."

As if the disdain of literary critics were not enough, London even suffered a complaint from the White House. According to Allen, after reading *White Fang*, President Theodore Roosevelt, an outdoorsman and adventurer himself, claimed that an incident in which a lynx kills a wolf was a "gross falsifying of nature's records." London insisted on the authenticity of his account.

VII. CRITICISM

Weedon Scott is, in London's term, "the love-master" to Beauty Smith's "mad god." The unique element of Scott's character is selflessness, the sacrifice of his own best interest for that of another. Henry was kind to Bill in spite of the fact that Bill's weakness threatened Henry's survival. But Henry had no choice, because he had no escape from

Bill. Bill was a part of his environment that he had to accept, along with the wolves and the cold. Scott represents a greater good because he chooses to make White Fang his responsibility, and he chooses knowing that he is taking on a killer. After rushing into the middle of a dogfight — putting himself in danger not only from the dogs but from a furious Beauty Smith — and struggling to save White Fang, Scott then pays a small fortune for a wolf who is nearly dead. There is nothing in it for him. Two weeks later, the moment Scott unchains a recovering White Fang, the wolf kills one of his sled dogs and bites both Scott and his musher, Matt. Instead of anger, Scott feels deep regret at the thought of shooting White Fang as a hopeless case; he seizes on White Fang's next action, a knowing dodge when he sees the gun raised, as a reason to believe that the wolf is intelligent enough to be redeemed after all. In coming days, Scott is willing to risk being attacked again to win White Fang's trust.

And yet, there is this: After Scott has taken White Fang back home to California, he sometimes takes him into town, where a trio of dogs harass White Fang mercilessly. White Fang has learned not to attack dogs, and so he soaks up their abuse for Scott's sake — until one day Weedon Scott, the icon of unconditional love, addresses this injustice, not by speaking to the dogs' owners or by taking some other civilized measure, but by giving White Fang permission to kill the dogs. White Fang does so with dispatch, and of course the townspeople henceforth make sure that their dogs do not bother him. Scott's solution is as effective as it is shocking to readers who thought they knew him. This makes Scott very much like people we have all known, people whom we think we know completely, who one day suddenly do something that makes us recoil and shrug our shoulders and add a question mark to what we have written in our hearts about them. Even people who make unconditional love a habit are not perfect.

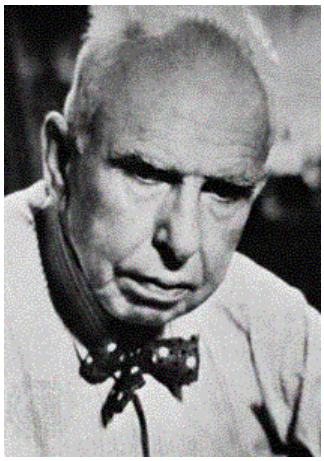
There is one more human who is White Fang's master, the Indian Gray Beaver, and he is the one whom London fails to elevate above stereotype. Although he is not cruel, he is portrayed as being incapable of showing affection toward White Fang. The relationship between the two is strictly pragmatic: Gray Beaver provides food and protection and does not beat White Fang as long as he obeys; White Fang helps pull Gray Beaver's son's sled and guards his family and his property. The two have made a covenant, to use London's word, but after five years Gray Beaver breaks the covenant, and it is whiskey that makes him do it. He at first refuses to sell White Fang to Beauty Smith, but Beauty Smith, the least of all white men, finds it easy to manipulate Gray Beaver. He at first gives him whiskey and then sells him whiskey until the considerable amount that Gray Beaver has earned by trading at the fort is gone. By that time, Gray Beaver is addicted to alcohol and, drunk and broke, finally turns White Fang over to Beauty Smith in return for still more whiskey. He beats White Fang severely when the wolf tries to escape Beauty's tortures and return to him, and he leaves the fort, and the story, to return, ruined and shamed, to his village. Gray Beaver is a stock character, lacking individuality and vitality. London's portrayal of White Fang's Indian master is a distracting weakness in an otherwise strong supporting cast.[1]

[1] Candyce Norvell, Critical Essay on *White Fang*, in *Novels for Students*, Gale, 2004.

VIII. TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- *White Fang* tells the life story of the title character, but London chose a somewhat unexpected starting point and ending point for his story: The entire first section of the novel centers on the life of White Fang's mother before White Fang is born, and the story ends before White Fang dies. Discuss what reasons London might have had for these decisions and whether you think they are effective or not.
- In parts of western Canada and Alaska, dogsleds are still an important method of transportation. Do research to learn where dogsleds are still in use and what the lives of the dogs and the people who use them are like.
- The rights of animals — both domesticated and wild — and what constitutes acceptable treatment of them is an issue that is often debated today. The legal status of animals is changing as some lawmakers, attorneys, and activists push for increased protection of animals from human abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Discuss the issue of animal rights and humane treatment as it relates to the novel. Should laws protect animals from abuse such as that suffered by White Fang? If so, how should people who break these laws be punished? Should laws prohibit people from owning wild animals?
- Do research to learn about wolves and wolf-dog hybrids. Find out how accurate and realistic London's portrayal of White Fang was. Could an animal that is three-quarters wolf really become as tame as White Fang did?
- Using place names mentioned in the novel as your starting point, do research to learn more about the Native Americans mentioned in the novel. What tribe would they have been part of? What was their culture like? Do they still live in the area today?
- The novel is set just before and during the Yukon gold rush of 1898. Learn more about this event. How did it start, how long did it last, and how did it impact the settlement of the area?

HERMAN THEODORE DREISER



An American Tragedy
(1925)

Theodore Dreiser's massive novel *An American Tragedy* was published in December 1925 in two volumes. Coming in the middle of Dreiser's long career, it was the first novel to earn him fame and wealth, though not the first to be controversial.

An American Tragedy is a detailed portrayal of the dark side of the American Dream — the story of what can happen when an ordinary man's desire for wealth and status overwhelms his moral sense. Dreiser built the novel around a real-life crime after spending years researching incidents in which men murdered women with whom they had been romantically involved but who had become inconvenient for one reason or another (often because of an unwanted pregnancy, as in the novel). Dreiser chose as his starting point the case of Chester Gillette, who drowned his pregnant girlfriend in a New York lake in 1906. Like the novel's Clyde Griffiths, Chester Gillette was electrocuted for his crime.

An American Tragedy is widely considered Dreiser's best novel and an important work of American naturalism. Naturalism, which began in Europe and flowered in America, is a literary style that explores the premise that individuals' fates are determined by a combination of hereditary and environmental constraints that leave no room for free will or true individual choice. Some scholars and critics consider *An American Tragedy* one of the greatest American novels of any style or period.

I. PLOT SUMMARY

Book 1

An American Tragedy opens on a summer evening in Kansas City, Missouri, in the early years of the twentieth century. Dreiser introduces twelve-year-old Clyde Griffiths along with his family: his father, Asa, and mother, Elvira, poor evangelists who run a mission in a shabby part of the city; and his two sisters and one brother. From the beginning, Clyde is antagonistic toward his parents' beliefs and activities. He is entranced by the material world that his parents shun. As a teenager, Clyde gets a series of jobs in increasingly glamorous settings — from streetcorner (as a newsboy) to department store

basement to drugstore to upscale hotel — that take him farther and farther from his parents' dingy life. All the while, Clyde daydreams about his rich Uncle Samuel who owns a factory in Lycurgus, New York.

In his bellhop job at the Hotel Green-Davidson, Clyde makes friends with other young men whose desires match his own. Together they indulge in alcohol, prostitutes, and other illicit pleasures. Clyde lies to his parents about his activities.

Clyde has a relationship with Hortense Briggs, a coarse girl who uses her sexuality to manipulate Clyde. The two go on a car trip with friends. A young man named Willard Sparser has stolen the car and, driving recklessly, he hits and kills a pedestrian, flees the accident scene, and finally crashes into a pile of lumber. Clyde runs away from the crashed car to avoid sharing responsibility for these crimes.

Book 2

Book 2 opens three years later. Clyde is now living in Lycurgus. He fled to Chicago after the car accident and, at his job at the Union League Club, encountered his wealthy uncle, who was on a business trip. Samuel Griffiths gave his nephew a job in his shirt factory.

Clyde's cousin Gilbert resents him. Being the nephew of the factory owner makes Clyde the social superior of the workers, but most of his relatives see him as an inferior. Clyde is briefly attracted to a lascivious factory worker named Rita Dickerman. When his uncle promotes him, though, he shifts his sights higher. He meets and is infatuated with the wealthy and beautiful Sondra Finchley; but she is out of his reach. Clyde then begins an affair with Roberta Alden, a poor but pretty and sensitive factory worker.

Clyde soon loses interest in Roberta. Meanwhile, Sondra pretends that she is attracted to Clyde, using him to punish Gilbert for acting cool toward her. Clyde hopes to marry Sondra, and she develops some degree of real interest in him. Roberta soon finds that she is pregnant and presses Clyde to marry her.

Desperate at the thought of losing his opportunity for wealth and status, Clyde agrees to marry Roberta but instead plans to kill her. He takes her out in a boat intending to capsize it and make Roberta's drowning look like an accident. Things do not happen as Clyde has planned. He changes his mind about killing Roberta, and when the boat overturns and hits Roberta on the head, it really is an accident. Roberta comes to the surface and cries out for help, but Clyde does not help her.

Book 3

Clyde flees the scene of Roberta's death, but circumstantial evidence, including letters to Clyde from both Roberta and Sondra, leads to his arrest for first-degree murder. Sondra leaves town, and her identity is never publicly revealed. Samuel Griffiths hires attorneys for Clyde, and they devise a complex defense strategy for a client whom they view as extremely inept. Clyde lies to everyone, including his attorneys, about his intentions and actions.

After a long trial, a jury finds Clyde guilty. His mother's efforts to have his death sentence over-turned or commuted fail. Clyde tells the truth about his plan to murder Roberta to only one person, the Reverend Duncan McMillan. When McMillan shares this

confession with the governor, Clyde's last hope is extinguished. Clyde is executed. He goes to the electric chair bewildered as to why McMillan was not willing to lie for him. Clyde also dies unsure of the extent of his own guilt and of the line between truth and untruth, reality and fantasy.

II. CHARACTERS

Roberta Alden

Roberta is a poor, shy, somewhat naive girl who works in the factory where Clyde is a supervisor. She is prettier and more sensitive than most of the "factory girls," but these qualities do not help her prospects in life; her poverty and her position as a factory worker consign her to a low position in society.

Although Roberta hopes to improve her lot in life by getting an education and by marrying as well as she can, she repeatedly breaks the rules of social conduct. She talks with the foreign workers at the factory, which is considered taboo. She enters into a romantic relationship with Clyde, her supervisor, which is also taboo. Then, she has a sexual relationship with Clyde, breaking not only society's moral code but her own.

When Roberta becomes pregnant, she first tries to get an abortion and then considers killing herself. Finally, she coerces Clyde into agreeing to marry her. Clyde, however, decides to murder her instead and lures her to an outing on a lake, where she drowns.

Titus Alden

Roberta's father, Titus Alden is a poor farmer. He wants revenge for Roberta's death.

Alvin Belknap

Belknap is Clyde's defense attorney. It is Clyde's wealthy uncle, Samuel Griffiths, who hires Belknap.

Hortense Briggs

Hortense is an attractive but coarse Kansas City girl who manipulates Clyde's emotions to get him to buy things for her.

Burton Burleigh

The assistant district attorney in Lycurgus, Burleigh tampers with evidence in Clyde's case to ensure that he is convicted of first-degree murder.

Rita Dickerman

Rita is a promiscuous girl who pursues Clyde in Lycurgus.

Sondra Finchley

A wealthy and beautiful young woman who lives in Lycurgus, Sondra personifies all the things Clyde values and desires: money and luxuries, social status, and a life of carefree pleasure. Clyde so desperately wants Sondra and all that she possesses that he plots to murder Roberta when Sondra shows an interest in him.

When Clyde arrives in Lycurgus, Sondra quickly and correctly sizes him up as a poor relation of the local Griffiths, and she has no interest in him. However, when she becomes upset with Clyde's cousin Gilbert, she decides to feign interest in Clyde to irritate Gilbert. For reasons that are a mystery to her, Sondra develops some degree of real attraction to Clyde. Though she is young, she is sophisticated and careful enough to be suspect of these feelings for an unlikely suitor. In spite of the attraction she feels, she

always maintains a certain teasing distance between herself and Clyde, and she never really treats him as an equal. Clyde, on the contrary, responds to Sondra's interest by being willing to sacrifice everything in order to gain her.

When Roberta drowns and Clyde is arrested, Sondra leaves town. Because of her father's wealth and position, her name is never made public during the trial. She writes Clyde one last letter, expressing some sympathy for him, but she types the letter and does not sign it, maintaining her social and emotional distance from him.

Asa Griffiths

Asa is Clyde's father, a poor evangelist who, with his wife, runs a mission and preaches on the streets of Kansas City. Asa is dull and ineffectual; he does not understand human nature or society, and he does not know how to respond to the tragedies that befall his children.

Bella Griffiths

Bella is the daughter of Samuel and Elizabeth Griffiths, Clyde's uncle and aunt. She is gregarious and willing to help Clyde enter her social circle.

Clyde Griffiths

The novel's main character, Clyde is driven all his life in pursuit of his idea of the American dream. He is materialistic and pleasure-seeking, and he lacks any strong moral center. He is willing to lie and to indulge in unethical and illegal behavior in pursuit of his goals, and he repeatedly runs from difficulties, especially those he creates for himself. For Clyde, there is no clear line between reality and fantasy, right and wrong. To escape his sordid life, he daydreams of wealth and luxury. To live with his acts of cowardice, he rationalizes them.

The son of poor, shabby evangelists, Clyde, even as a child, is much more attracted to the material than to the spiritual. As a teenager, he gets a series of jobs, from drugstore clerk to hotel bellhop, designed to take him out of his parents' world and into a society that revolves around money and pleasure. A dreamer, Clyde has vague hopes of being catapulted to wealth and status by some happy accident or beneficent relationship. It never occurs to him that he might gain all he wants through some combination of hard work and ingenuity. Clyde is too weak-willed to be the master of his own fate, so he dreams that circumstances will somehow transport him to a better life.

When Clyde runs into his rich uncle, Samuel, in Chicago, it seems that his dreams have begun to come true. Samuel Griffiths gives Clyde a job in his factory in upstate New York. Clyde's entry into upper-class society is not as automatic as he expects, but eventually he does gain the favor of the wealthy and beautiful Sondra Finchley. Clyde sees Sondra as his ticket to the life he has always wanted. So desperate is he to gain money and status through her that he plans to murder Roberta, his pregnant girlfriend, so that he can avoid scandal (the scandal of abandoning the woman he has impregnated and of having an illegitimate child) and be with Sondra.

Although Clyde has planned Roberta's death, when it comes it is as much a product of chance and circumstance as it is of Clyde's will. Clyde is actually trying to apologize to Roberta for striking her when he inadvertently overturns the boat and it hits Roberta's head. True to character, Clyde at this moment chooses to run away; although Roberta cries out to him for help, he swims away and lets her drown.

Clyde is captured, convicted of first-degree murder, and electrocuted, although he testifies that Roberta's drowning was an accident. He rationalizes that it is true to say it

was an accident because Roberta's death did not happen exactly has he had envisioned it. Even in the last moments of his life, the line between truth and untruth — between reality and fantasy — is blurred in Clyde's mind.

Elizabeth Griffiths

Elizabeth is Clyde's aunt (Samuel's wife). She invites him to dinner out of a sense of obligation.

Elvira Griffiths

Elvira is Clyde's mother. She runs a Christian mission along with her husband. She stands by Clyde and tries to get his sentence commuted even though she doubts his innocence. Once Clyde's fate is sealed, his mother's desire is to see to the salvation of his soul, and she sends a minister to see him. In spite of her son's death, her faith in a kind and merciful God is unshaken.

Esta Griffiths

Esta is Clyde's older sister. She runs away with a touring actor, who makes her pregnant and then deserts her.

Gilbert Griffiths

Gilbert is Clyde's cousin, the son of Samuel and Elizabeth. He is not as good-looking as Clyde, and he resents Clyde's intrusion into the life of his family and into their business.

Russell Griffiths

Russell is the son of Clyde's sister Esta and the actor who deserts her. He looks much like Clyde, and Clyde's parents adopt him.

Samuel Griffiths

Samuel Griffiths is Asa's brother and Clyde's uncle. He is a successful businessman in Lycurgus, New York. When he meets Clyde in Chicago, he feels a familial obligation to his nephew and gives him a job in his factory in New York.

Oscar Hegglund

Oscar is one of Clyde's fellow bellhops at the Green-Davidson Hotel. He provides Clyde with opportunities to experience worldly pleasures that are new to him.

Fred Heit

The county coroner, Heit is the first person to suggest that Roberta may have been murdered.

Reuben Jephson

Jephson is Belknap's law partner. It is Jephson who comes up with the strategy the attorneys will use to defend Clyde. This complex and ultimately unsuccessful strategy is based on the premise that Clyde is too cowardly and inept to plan and carry out a murder. Jephson assures Clyde that he will be found innocent.

Orville W. Mason

Mason is the politically minded, self-serving district attorney who succeeds in getting a first-degree murder conviction in Clyde's case.

Reverend Duncan Mcmillan

McMillan is a good man who wants to save Clyde's soul but also contributes to his death. Clyde confides in McMillan that he intended to murder Roberta. McMillan later tells this to the governor, who, based on the information, refuses to commute Clyde's sentence. Clyde does not understand why McMillan did not lie for him, and McMillan feels some guilt over his role in Clyde's death.

Thomas Ratterer

Thomas is a bellhop at the Green-Davidson Hotel, along with Clyde. He eventually helps Clyde get a job at the Union League Club in Chicago, where Clyde runs into his wealthy uncle, Samuel.

Willard Sparser

Willard is a friend of Oscar Hegglund. He steals a car and, driving recklessly, hits and kills a girl. Clyde is a passenger in the car and runs from the scene along with the others to avoid taking responsibility for the death.

III. THEMES

The American Dream As Illusion

The idea of the American Dream is that all Americans have the opportunity to improve themselves economically and socially. In America, it is said, a person's circumstances at birth place no limit on his or her potential; people can make of themselves whatever they choose and rise as high as they are willing to climb.

If Dreiser's message in *An American Tragedy* can be summed up in a sentence, it is: the American Dream is a lie. Dreiser creates a microcosm of America by introducing characters that represent every stratum of society and every point on the spectrum of humanity. Then, he shows that their lives reflect the opposite of the American Dream. Clyde Griffiths, the Everyman at the center of the novel, cannot make of himself anything other than what he was when he was born: poor and not particularly perceptive or resourceful. When he sees the glittering material things and the pleasures that comprise success, he desires them but lacks the attributes that would allow him to attain them legitimately. In addition, the deck is stacked against him; the "haves" are devoted to keeping the "have nots" in their place. Because of this, most of his wealthy relatives do not accept him as their equal.

Clyde becomes so obsessed with having what his own shortcomings and other people's prejudices prevent him from attaining that he is willing to commit murder for the sake of obtaining his dreams. Dreiser's point is not at all that Clyde comes to a bad end because he is a bad person. To the contrary, Dreiser conveys that Clyde comes to a bad end because he is an average person who believed in the American Dream and tried to make it come true.

While *An American Tragedy* is Clyde's story, Dreiser drives home his point in the lives of all his other major players. Roberta, whose dreams of improving her lot are much more modest than Clyde's, hopes to marry a man who is her social superior and, as a result, ends up dead. The "haves," Gilbert and Sondra, are born not only rich but also possessing a cleverness about manipulating their environment that is lacking in Clyde and Roberta. The "haves" easily retain the wealth and privilege to which they were born.

In Dreiser's America, the American Dream is an illusion. Each person's fate is decided before he or she is born. Attempts to move beyond one's circumstances at birth lead to disaster.

Moral Ambiguity

Morality is far from black-and-white in *An American Tragedy*. The most glaring example of moral ambiguity is in the novel's central event — Roberta's death. Although the jury's verdict is clear, the degree of Clyde's guilt is ambiguous, both in readers' minds and in Clyde's. While he coldly planned Roberta's murder, Clyde did not carry out his plan. The chain of events that led to Roberta's death really was an accident. Clyde's only purposeful act was to swim away after she cried for help. While it is clear that he should have tried to help her, it is not at all clear that he could have. He is guilty, but just how guilty is clear to no one.

Dreiser also telegraphs moral ambiguity through his religious characters, working from the premise that religion purports to set the highest moral standards. Clyde's parents are evangelists who shun worldly goods and attitudes for "higher" values. However, their lives are pathetic and ineffectual. They are unable to protect their daughter from betrayal and abandonment or their son from the electric chair. Perhaps even more telling, their lives of sacrifice and self-denial have not inspired even their own children to follow their example. Dreiser seems to say that renouncing the material world has no better results than embracing it.

Reverend McMillan provides a particularly poignant example of moral ambiguity. He is a well-meaning man who visits Clyde in prison hoping to save his soul. Trusting McMillan's intentions, Clyde admits to him what he has told no one else: that he did plan to murder Roberta. McMillan at first feels happy that he has helped Clyde "come clean." But, later, McMillan directly contributes to Clyde's death. The governor who could commute Clyde's sentence asks McMillan if Clyde is truly guilty, and McMillan tells him of Clyde's confession. McMillan's revelation leads to the execution of a man, who, while certainly guilty, may not be guilty of first-degree murder. McMillan's adherence to a high moral standard does not necessarily bring about a just result. In addition to ending Clyde's life, it also causes Clyde to go to his death regretting that he ever trusted anyone. Even McMillan is aware of this and later questions his action.

IV. STYLE

Naturalism

Many scholars consider *An American Tragedy* the defining work of American naturalism, and the novel does incorporate all the hallmarks of the naturalist movement.

Naturalism emerged in France in the 1870s and 1880s in response to new philosophical and scientific ideas, especially Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Émile Zola defined the movement in France. It flowered in the United States from the final years of the nineteenth century through World War I and into the 1920s. The standard-bearers of American naturalism, in addition to Dreiser, are Stephen Crane, Jack London, Frank Norris, O. Henry, and poet Edgar Lee Masters.

At the core of naturalism is determinism, the idea that an individual's course in life is wholly determined by some combination of animal instinct, heredity, and environment. The individual will is said to be incapable of operating outside the influence of these powerful forces. As in Darwin's theory, only those who are genetically suited to their

environment will survive and prosper — a principle most often expressed as "the survival of the fittest."

Naturalist writers portray these principles by creating ordinary characters, placing them in extraordinary or challenging circumstances, and narrating their reactions in a dispassionate, reportorial style. Thus, Dreiser draws Clyde as an Everyman who is motivated by animal instincts (the drive for sex and for a desirable mate, for example). His challenge is that he is born poor in a society that values only money and the pleasures it can buy. The child of weak, ineffectual parents, Clyde is not equipped by heredity to succeed in this environment, where people compete for power, position, and wealth. He is not "fit," and his destiny is failure. The same is true of his female counterpart, Roberta. The children of the wealthy and powerful, however, inherit not only wealth but also the attributes they need to master their environment. Therefore, they succeed, usually with very little effort.

Doubling

Dreiser liberally uses the technique of doubling throughout *An American Tragedy*, creating doubles for both characters and events.

To highlight the contrasts between the lives of the poor and those of the rich, Dreiser creates his significant characters in pairs: Clyde's upper-class counterpart is his cousin Gilbert, and Roberta's is Sondra; Clyde's parents have doubles in his aunt and uncle; and so on.

Adding to the novel's complexity, Dreiser also pairs each significant character in the first part of the book (in Kansas City) with a double who appears later (in Lycurgus). Very early in the story, Clyde's sister Esta is seduced, impregnated, and abandoned by a traveling actor. Much later, Roberta appears as her double, seduced, impregnated, and abandoned in the most terrible and final way by Clyde, who is also an itinerant (neither from nor permanently settled in Lycurgus) and also an "actor" (a deeply and consistently dishonest man who lies about everything from his family background to his murderous intentions). In Kansas City, Clyde has a relationship with a woman of loose morals named Hortense Briggs; her counterpart in Lycurgus is Rita Dickerman.

Dreiser provides events in pairs as well. One striking example is that, in Kansas City, Clyde runs away from the wreckage of a car in which he has been a passenger and which has hit and killed a pedestrian. The double for this event is Clyde's swimming away from the capsized boat and Roberta as she cries for his help.

The doubling of events serves several purposes. First, the earlier event in each pair is a fore-shadowing of the later one. Second, the doubling creates a predictable pattern and symmetrical structure for the novel. The perceptive reader comes to expect the second beat — a sensation similar to waiting for the other foot to fall. Third, the doubling of characters and events conveys Dreiser's message that Clyde cannot escape his predetermined fate. People and events are the same in Lycurgus and in Kansas City. Clyde may flee from one city and state to another, but he cannot bring about any meaningful change in his life. He is hemmed in by fate, and the many doubled events and characters of the novel seem to wall Clyde in, leaving him no room for escape.

V. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Roaring Twenties

The 1920s are variously known as the Roaring Twenties, the Jazz Age, and the Dance Age. They were a time of both success and excess. More Americans were rich than ever before, thanks to a booming stock market, rising land values, new inventions, and new ways of producing goods that made things affordable to more Americans. Even average-income Americans began to acquire conveniences that had been either unavailable or unaffordable just a few years before: cars, radios, indoor plumbing, electric refrigerators and washing machines, and more.

With so much money around and so many things to buy, many Americans focused on getting rich and having fun. Young women called flappers flouted traditional restrictions. They wore short skirts and short hair, and they spent their time dancing, going to movies, and drinking liquor. The use of illicit drugs and alcohol, illegal during Prohibition (1920 – 1933), surged along with the stock market.

The America of the 1920s produced countless young men like Clyde Griffiths, who found themselves excited by and obsessed with a world that glittered with a thousand new pleasures. Some of these young men — even some who, like Clyde, were born poor — did get rich, through some combination of intelligence, ambition, resourcefulness, hard work, and luck. Many others did not. Some who did not become fabulously wealthy nevertheless did well. The arts and sports thrived along with industry; writers (including Dreiser, of course), musicians, movie stars, and baseball players earned fame with their talents.

Not everyone got rich or famous, or even lived better than they had before. Farmers (like Roberta's father in the novel) struggled, as the prices they could get for their crops dropped. This was partly because the end of World War I meant less demand for food. The military downsized drastically and needed less food for troops, and European nations were able to begin growing their own food again. New mechanized production processes also threw many people out of work and into poverty.

The 1920s was a time in which American society rearranged itself. Some people made great gains, others suffered loss and deprivation, and few ended up where they had started.

VI. CRITICAL OVERVIEW

At every moment from the publication of *An American Tragedy* to the present, the novel has had both staunch supporters and vocal detractors. Consistently, supporters have noted the importance of the novel's themes and the power of the story, while detractors have criticized the philosophy that underlies the story and the author's prose style.

When *An American Tragedy* debuted in 1925, it was a bestseller and a critical success. Even some critics who had panned Dreiser's previous novels praised this one. Stuart Sherman was a critic of the New Humanism school, which held that society brings out the best in people and helps them curb animal instincts. This philosophy was contrary to that of Dreiser and the naturalists. In spite of this philosophical opposition and his harsh criticism of Dreiser's earlier work, Sherman lauded *An American Tragedy* for its

effective presentation of a worthy theme. Most of Dreiser's fellow writers, who were faithful in defending him from critics throughout his career, also praised *An American Tragedy*. H. G. Wells dubbed it "one of the very greatest novels of this century," according to the article *Theodore Dreiser*, by Philip L. Gerber, in the Twayne's United States Authors series. Similar accolades came from H. L. Mencken, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and other contemporaries.

New York Times reviewer Robert L. Duffus wrote that, while "the story is far too long," still,

"Mr. Dreiser gives us as fine and haunting a study of crime and punishment as he or any other novelist has written in America." The novel, he concluded, "demands attention."

Dreiser and *An American Tragedy* remained in favor until the 1930s, when some critics turned against the author's work because of the author's endorsement of communism (which, it must be acknowledged, is reflected in this and other novels). This politically based criticism continued throughout the rest of Dreiser's life. In addition, academics of the New Criticism school, which emphasized the importance of correct and elegant use of language, denounced Dreiser's prose style. *Atlantic* magazine writer Michael Lydon, in a 1993 piece that praises Dreiser highly, acknowledges the long history of complaints about his prose. Lydon quotes Arnold Bennett as having said in 1930 that "Dreiser simply does not know how to write, never did know, never wanted to know." Even Dreiser's supporters acknowledge certain weaknesses in his prose but minimize their importance. Alfred Kazin, in his introduction to *The Stature of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Survey of the Man and His Work*, quotes Saul Bellow's defense of Dreiser: "I think that the insistence on neatness and correctness is one of the signs of a modern nervousness and irritability. When has clumsiness in composition been felt as so annoying, so enraging?" Kazin agrees with Bellow, concluding that "what counts most with a writer is that his reach should be felt as well as his grasp, that words should be his means, not his ends." Kazin notes his concurrence with Malcolm Cowley's statement, "There are moments when Dreiser's awkwardness in handling words contributes to the force of his novels, since he seems to be groping in them for something on a deeper level than language."

Dreiser's politics have become less an issue over time, and while there is still some disagreement about the quality of his writing, his reputation is strong and secure. Lydon writes in his *Atlantic* article, "Justice to Theodore Dreiser":

As the centenary of Dreiser's emergence approaches, it is time to drop the barbs and acknowledge, without reservation, that Theodore Dreiser is an immortal, a giant who stands with Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and James among Americans. Except for O'Neill and Faulkner, Dreiser's contemporaries stand in his shade.

VII. CRITICISM

Candyce Norvell

Norvell is an independent writer who specializes in literature. In this essay, Norvell argues that Dreiser's own life is perhaps the strongest argument against his worldview as expressed in his novel.

The worldview that Dreiser sets forth in *An American Tragedy* is the deterministic view that a person's fate is sealed from birth, determined by his or her particular heredity and environment in tandem with the animal instincts that affect all humans. This philosophical and literary view is based on the observation of Charles Darwin and other scientists that only those animals that are born with attributes that make them well-suited to their environment are able to survive and thrive. This idea is often referred to as "the survival of the fittest."

Hence, Clyde Griffiths and Roberta Alden are destined to fail in their attempts to better themselves economically and socially. Born poor and powerless, they will die that way, and they can do nothing to change this. In fact, it is their efforts to improve their circumstances that bring about their deaths. It is as if nature punishes them for trying to subvert that natural order.

This worldview was not one that Dreiser merely explored in the novel; it pervades his work, and it was the driving force in his personal philosophy and political views.

Because the world is vast and highly diverse, it is not surprising that people hold wildly divergent ideas about it. Arguments can be made for and against any number of conflicting worldviews because examples can be found to support virtually any generalization one cares to make. One can offer convincing arguments against the worldview expressed in *An American Tragedy*. Nor does this completely invalidate the deterministic view. What is surprising, though, is that one rather powerful argument against the novel's worldview is the life of its author. Dreiser's own life is a clear contradiction of the explanation of human life and society offered in the book.

Like Dreiser's other novels, *An American Tragedy* contains many autobiographical elements. Dreiser, like Clyde, grew up poor. If anything, his circumstances were even more dire than those of his fictional counterpart. His family was not only poverty-stricken, it was combative and unstable. The household splintered, regrouped, careened from one place to another. Although religion played a role, as it does in Clyde's family, in Dreiser's family that role was no more predictable or dependable than anything else in the child's world. There was no emotional or moral center.

Dreiser modeled Clyde's parents partly on his own. His father was disabled and inept; his mother played the martyr. The episode in which Clyde's sister Esta is seduced, impregnated, and abandoned by an actor mirrors a similar event in the life of one of Dreiser's sisters. Like Clyde's family, Dreiser's family spawned multiple scandals.

Clearly, Dreiser's heredity — one of the three legs on which his theory of determinism stands — did not mark him for success in the competitive, fast-changing, industrialized society into which he was born. He did not even get a solid education, partly because of his family's instability and partly because of his own unwillingness or inability to profit from formal education. So far, Dreiser looks very much like Clyde Griffiths, the character he invented to show the futility of efforts at economic and social self-improvement.

The similarities do not end in family background or childhood. Like Clyde, Dreiser had a strong sex drive and lacked an equally strong moral orientation that might have controlled it. Dreiser was unfaithful not only to his wife but to his mistresses. In a dozen different ways, Dreiser flouted social convention and generally accepted ethics. He plagiarized the work of fellow writers (poetry and journalism, not fiction). He aligned himself with communism, a political system that the vast majority of Americans

condemned. By behavior as well as by birth, then, Dreiser seemed destined for failure. Indeed, for lesser offenses than his own, he punishes his characters in *An American Tragedy* because that is what his worldview predicts: Those who break the law of the jungle, whether the jungle is a jungle or a small town in New York or American society at large, pay the price. Clyde's relationship with Roberta makes them both lawbreakers, as he is her superior at the factory. Clyde is even more drastically out of line in his relationship with Sondra, by far his social and economic better. These missteps lead to bigger missteps with increasingly greater consequences. Clyde and Roberta are out of their depth (the latter in a literal as well as figurative sense). They lack the inborn wit and self-control to manipulate events to their benefit, and the results are disastrous.

Not so in real life. While Dreiser's worldview predicts that the author should come to as bad an end as does the character with whom he shares so much, that is not at all what happened. In spite of Dreiser's lack of formal education or credentials, he was able to build a successful career as a journalist. Rather than being denied opportunity because he was poor and uneducated, rather than being punished severely for his moral misdeeds, Dreiser found editors who were willing to hire him based solely on his ability to write articles that readers liked. Neither nature nor human prejudice leapt up to foil him. When he decided to write fiction, publishers were willing to read and publish his work. Eventually, Dreiser became wealthy by doing what he liked to do and by writing what he wanted to write. *An American Tragedy* was turned into a successful Broadway play, and Dreiser got what was at the time a fortune for the film rights to the book. His fellow writers, many of them higher born and better educated, not only welcomed him into their midst but praised his work effusively.

Where, in this real-life story, is the hopelessness and futility, the inexorable working out of cruel forces of determinism, found in the fictional one? Dreiser's life is an embarrassment to his worldview.

The next question, then, is why did Dreiser hold, and promote in his writing, a worldview that so baldly contradicted his own experience of the world? Many scholars have answered that all the success and money that eventually came to Dreiser failed to erase his bitter memories of childhood poverty, instability, and humiliation. Perhaps he repeatedly recreated them in his fiction as a way of making the world acknowledge his own earlier suffering. Perhaps he was more altruistic than self-centered and wrote this way to call attention to the similar suffering of others. In any case, by his very success, he did not help his cause of convincing others that human beings are pawns to nature and the merciless law of the jungle. In the long run, life and the American society that he indicts in *An American Tragedy* were both kind to Dreiser. He rose from beginnings that were shabby both materially and intellectually to become one of the most acclaimed writers of his generation. He lived well, and when he died, in Hollywood, the epitome of all that glitters, he was buried among other celebrities in Forest Lawn cemetery. He could hardly have been more successful.

There was one thing — one fact in Dreiser's life that casts a slight shadow over his gleaming achievements. He was denied first the Pulitzer Prize and later the Nobel, in spite of the fact that many of his influential contemporaries thought he deserved one or both. Interestingly, the man who in his fiction portrayed the futility of trying to change fate campaigned for the prizes, especially the Nobel. His personal correspondence provides a record of his unsuccessful attempts to gain the Nobel Prize, and these efforts

provide, in a limited sense, a parallel to Clyde's desperate efforts to win the similarly unattainable Sondra Finchley.

Dreiser did not get everything he wanted, and quite possibly he did not get everything he deserved. To acknowledge that he was denied one success in a life studded with successes is hardly to capitulate to his view that fate is merciless and immutable. In the world as it really is, against all odds and his own mindset, Theodore Dreiser got money, fame, and the respect of his peers. In the fictional world Dreiser created, Clyde Griffiths got the electric chair. Given that the real man and the fictional man started so similarly but ended so differently, nature and society have cause to complain that they have been slandered in *An American Tragedy*. Surely, things are not all that bad.

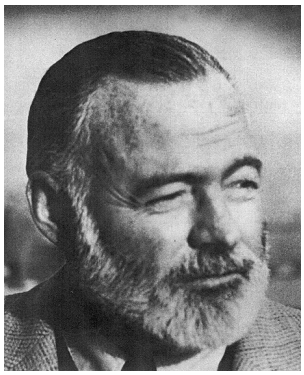
In a 1993 *Atlantic* article, Michael Lydon describes Dreiser as "the great gawk of American literature the poor-born, ill-educated German-American Hoosier from Terre Haute, an oaf with mud on his shoes who invaded the drawing rooms of the genteel " According to Dreiser's world-view, he should never have gotten in.[1]

VIII. TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- At one point during the writing of *An American Tragedy*, Dreiser thought of entitling it *Mirage*. Why do you think he considered this title? Which of the two titles do you think better suits the book, and why?
- Do you agree with the jury that convicted Clyde of first-degree murder? Why or why not? If you disagree, what crime, if any, was Clyde guilty of, and what punishment did he deserve?
- Do some research to learn about the crime on which Dreiser based his book. Discuss similarities and differences between the true story and the fictional one, and speculate about why Dreiser made the changes he did.
- Do some research to learn about life in the United States in the early 1900s. Compare what you learn to Dreiser's portrayal. Does the author provide an accurate, balanced portrayal of this period of history?
- Learn about the writer Horatio Alger and read one or more of his stories. Write an essay explaining how Alger's view of American life differs from Dreiser's. Tell which author's view is more like your own, and explain why you share this view.

[1] Candyce Norvell, Critical Essay on *An American Tragedy*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY



The Old Man and the Sea
(1952)

When *The Old Man and the Sea* was published in 1952 to wide critical acclaim, it had been twelve years since Ernest Hemingway's previous critical success, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. His major writing effort during the intervening period, *Across the River and Into the Trees*, published in 1950, had been widely dismissed as a near-parody of the author's usual style and themes. *The Old Man and the Sea*, however, was a popular success, selling 5.3 million copies within two days of its publication in a special edition of *Life* magazine. A few complaints about the stilted language of some of the Spanish transliterations came from critics. Some also found Santiago's philosophizing unrealistic. Nevertheless, the story won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1953. A year later, Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Nobel committee singled out the story's "natural admiration for every individual who fights the good fight in a world of reality overshadowed by violence and death," (noted Susan F. Beegel in "Conclusion: The Critical Reputation of Ernest Hemingway"). Although Hemingway's writing continued to be published, much of it posthumously after the author's suicide in 1961, *The Old Man and the Sea* is generally considered by many to be his crowning achievement. The work was especially praised for its depiction of a new dimension to the typical Hemingway hero, less macho and more respectful of life. In Santiago, Hemingway had finally achieved a character who could face the human condition and survive without cynically dismissing it or dying while attempting to better it. In Santiago's relationship with the world and those around him, Hemingway had discovered a way to proclaim the power of love in a wider and deeper way than in his previous works.

I. PLOT SUMMARY

An Unlucky Boat

The Old Man and the Sea tells the story of Santiago, an aging Cuban fisherman, who alone in his small boat faces the most difficult fight of his life against an enormous marlin. At the beginning of the short novel, Santiago has lost his fisherman's luck; he has gone eighty-four days without catching a marketable fish. Even his closest friend, a village boy he taught to fish, has left him to work on another boat. The local fishermen

make fun of Santiago or feel sorry for him, but he himself remains hopeful and undefeated. Every day he rises early, prepares his skiff, and rows far out into the Gulf Stream in search of marlin.

Though ordered by his parents to work on a luckier boat, the boy still loves Santiago, and he visits the old man's simple shack when he can. Once married, Santiago now lives alone in increasing poverty. He has little to eat, and frequently must rely on the boy or others in the village to bring him food and clothing. As they share their meals, Santiago and the boy discuss baseball and the important players of the period, especially "the great DiMaggio." The old man tells of his early life working on ships that sailed to Africa. When he sleeps, Santiago dreams of being young again and seeing "lions on the beaches in the evening."

The Truly Big Fish

Early one morning the old man rises, shares coffee with the boy, and sets out for the far reaches of the fishing grounds. He passes all the other fishermen, who stop to work "the great well," the point where the ocean drops off suddenly to seven hundred fathoms. He watches for flying fish or other signs of bait that might signal the presence of larger fish. Soon he catches a small albacore and, using it for bait, quickly hooks something very large. Though he pulls as hard as he can on the line, Santiago cannot move the great weight on the other end. The big fish refuses to surface and begins to swim out to sea, towing the skiff behind it.

Eat it so that the point of the hook goes into your heart and kills you, he thought. Come up easy and let me put the harpoon into you. All right. Are you ready? Have you been long enough at table?

"Now!" he said aloud and struck hard with both hands, gained a yard of line and then struck again and again, swinging with each arm alternately on the cord with all the strength of his arms and the pivoted weight of his body.

Nothing happened. The fish just moved away slowly and the old man could not raise him an inch. His line was strong and made for heavy fish and he held it against his back until it was so taut that beads of water were jumping from it. Then it began to make a slow hissing sound in the water and he still held it, bracing himself against the thwart and leaning back against the pull. The boat began to move slowly off toward the north-west.

Alone and unable to release the tightening line, Santiago struggles to hold onto the fish. Without the boy to help him, he knows that either he or the fish will die from this. His body is old but still strong, and he maintains his grip on the line despite his age and increasing discomfort. After several hours, night falls, but he never considers giving up. He realizes that he will need to eat to keep up his strength, and as the sun begins to rise the next day he consumes one of the small tuna he caught the day before.

During the second day, the great fish surfaces just long enough for Santiago to see him. The sight of the great marlin, "two feet longer than the skiff," inspires the old man. He remembers a time in his younger days when he arm wrestled a man in a Casablanca tavern. The match began on a Sunday morning and lasted the entire night, ending the following morning when Santiago forced his opponent's hand to the wood. Night comes

again and the old man realizes that he needs to sleep. He wraps the line around his shoulders and cramps his body against it. Then he sleeps and dreams of the lions.

When Santiago wakes it is still dark, though the moon has come out. While he was sleeping, the great fish has risen to the surface, and now Santiago can hear the marlin thrashing and jumping in the distance. As the old man gathers all his strength to hold onto the line, the marlin begins to circle the boat, and Santiago knows he has won. After several turns, the fish pulls closer, brushing the sides of the boat, and the old man, seeing his chance, drives his harpoon into its side. With a final struggle that sends spray over the entire skiff, the fish dies, its dark blood staining the blue water.

Destroyed But Not Defeated

Now many miles out to sea, the old man lashes the great fish to the side of his skiff and sets his small sail for home. After about an hour of smooth sailing, however, his luck runs out. A shark, following the trail of blood left by the huge fish, bites into the body, taking a large piece of flesh. Santiago manages to kill the "dentuso" with his harpoon, but he realizes that more sharks will follow. He begins to wonder whether he committed a sin in killing the great marlin, but before he has time to decide, the sharks close in. Fighting a hopeless battle, the old man kills several of the large "galanos" before he loses first his harpoon and then his knife. By the time the skiff reaches the village, little remains of the great fish but the head and skeleton.

Convinced that he "went out too far" and bears responsibility for the loss of the fish, the exhausted Santiago returns to his shack and falls asleep. The fishermen in the village marvel at the mutilated fish; at eighteen feet, it is the largest marlin they have ever seen. The boy brings the old man food and fresh clothes and watches over him as he sleeps.

II. CHARACTERS

Bodega Proprietor

Although he is unnamed in the story, the bodega proprietor serves the important function of representing those in the village who show their respect and admiration of Santiago by supporting him — in this case, by giving Santiago free coffee and newspapers.

Female Tourist

Although she has only one line in the story, the unnamed female tourist is important since in her mistaking the carcass of the marlin as that of a shark, she acts as a foil for Santiago's extraordinary knowledge of the sea.

Manolin

Manolin is a young man, based on someone Hemingway knew in Cuba who was then in his twenties. In the story, however, Manolin is referred to as "the boy." Like Santiago, Manolin comes from a family of fishermen and has long admired Santiago as a

masterful practitioner of his trade. Although Manolin's father has forbidden him to go fishing with Santiago because of the old man's bad luck, Manolin nevertheless continues to visit Santiago and to help him in whatever ways he can. Manolin shows great concern for Santiago's health, especially after he sees how Santiago has suffered in catching the big marlin. As a mark of his friendship and respect for Manolin, Santiago has given him certain responsibilities from an early age, such as fetching bait and carrying the lines. By contrast, Manolin's own father only belittles his son's relationship with Santiago.

Even though Manolin appears only at the beginning and the end of the story, he is an important character. Manolin's conversations with Santiago, and Santiago's longing for the boy's company when he is alone, reveal the character of both men. Santiago is seen as a loving, patient, and brave man, both proud and humble, who accepts and appreciates life, despite all its hardships. Manolin is shown to be someone who loves and respects Santiago, and who realizes that he can learn things from the old man that he cannot learn at home.

Manolin undergoes an important change between the beginning and end of the story. At the beginning he still defers to the wishes of his parents that he not accompany Santiago fishing since the old man's luck has turned bad. By the end of the story, however, Manolin has resolved to go with the old man, lucky or not, in spite of his parents' wishes.

Manolin's Father

Manolin's father forbids Manolin from going out with Santiago after the old man's fortieth day without a fish. By the end of the story Manolin decides to disobey his father out of his love for Santiago.

Pedrico

As a friend of Santiago, Pedrico helps the old man by giving him newspapers. After the old man's return from the sea, despite his wounds and exhaustion, Santiago remembers to carry out his promise to give Pedrico the head of the fish carcass.

Santiago

Santiago is an old fisherman of undetermined age. As a young man he traveled widely by ship and fondly remembers seeing lions on the beaches of East Africa. His wife died, and he has taken her picture down because it makes him sad to see it. Now he lives alone in a shack on the beach. Every day he sets forth alone in his boat to make a living.

When the story opens, Santiago has gone eighty-four days without catching a single fish. As a result, he is pitied and regarded by the other fishermen as unlucky. Santiago is still respected by some, however, because of his age and his perseverance. He is a very experienced fisherman who knows well the tricks of his trade, including which fish to use as bait.

Santiago also loves baseball and occasionally gambles. He identifies with Joe DiMaggio, the great center fielder for the Yankees in the 1940s and 1950s. Santiago admires how DiMaggio, whose father was a fisherman, plays in spite of bone spurs in his

feet that cause him pain whenever he runs. As an old man, Santiago must also cope with the physical demands of his job in the face of the infirmities of his aging body. Yet he suffers without complaining, and it is this stoic attitude that has won him much respect in the community.

Santiago is not a religious person, but he does think about the meaning of life, and his religious references show that he is very familiar with Roman Catholic saints and prayers. Through the au-thor's revelation of Santiago's own thoughts, and the conversations between Santiago and his relatively young companion, Manolin, readers come to sense that despite his setbacks and shortcomings, Santiago remains proud of himself, and this makes his humility both touching and real. Though he strives to attain the most he can for himself, Santiago also accepts what life has given him without complaint.

This largeness of vision also allows Santiago to appreciate and respect nature and all living creatures, even though he must kill some of these creatures in order to live. For example, the old man recalls how he once hooked, brought in, and finally clubbed to death a female marlin, while her faithful mate never left her side once during the ordeal. "That was the saddest thing I ever saw," the old man comments. "The boy was sad too and we begged her pardon and butchered her promptly."

Hemingway first wrote about the true incident upon which his story is based in an article entitled "On the Blue Water: A Gulf Stream Letter" for the April 1936 issue of *Esquire* magazine. The actual incident took only two days; the fisherman, "half crazy" and crying, was picked up by others after fighting the sharks; and half the carcass was still left at the end. Hemingway's intentions in creating the character of Santiago may perhaps best be seen in examining how the author altered the true events to shape his telling of *The Old Man and the Sea*.

In Hemingway's later version, Santiago's hooking the fish, hauling it to the boat, fighting the sharks, and then bringing it home takes three days and is completed in heroic fashion with no outside help. Nothing remains of the fish at the end except its skeleton. No mention is made of the fisherman's state of mind other than that he wants to fish again as soon as he can.

Hemingway's changes clearly make Santiago more of a single heroic and tragic figure who fights alone, loses almost everything, and yet still is ready to meet life again. Thus, after a night's sleep and a promise from Manolin that from now on they will fish together, Santiago is making plans not just to resume his life but to strive even harder next time. Similarly, Hemingway turned an anecdote about a piteous, helpless fisherman into a parable of man's tragic but heroic struggle not merely to survive but, as fellow Nobelist William Faulkner expressed it, to endure.

III. THEMES

Эрнест Ҳемингуэй асари “Чол ва Денгиз” да тасвирланган мавзулар

The Human Condition

In his novella about a fisherman who struggles to catch a large marlin only to lose it, Hemingway has stripped down the basic story of human life to its basic elements. A single human being, represented by the fisherman Santiago, is blessed with the

intelligence to do big things and to dream of even grander things. Santiago shows great skill in devising ways to tire out the huge fish he has hooked and ways to conserve his strength in order to land it. Yet in the struggle to survive, this human must often suffer and even destroy the very thing he dreams of. Thus Santiago cuts his hands badly and loses the fish to sharks in the process of trying to get his catch back to shore. Yet the struggle to achieve one's dreams is still worthwhile, for without dreams, a human remains a mere physical presence in the universe, with no creative or spiritual dimension. And so at the end of the story, Santiago, in spite of his great loss, physical pain, and exhaustion, is still "dreaming about the lions" — the same ones he saw in Africa when he was younger and would like to see again.

Love

Against the seeming indifference of the universe, love is often the only force that endures. This force is best seen in the relationship of Santiago and Manolin, which has endured since Manolin's early childhood. Over the years, Santiago has taught Manolin to fish and given him companionship and a sense of self-worth that Manolin failed to get from his own father. Manolin in return shows his love for Santiago by bringing him food and by weeping for him when he sees how much he suffered in fighting the marlin. Manolin also plans to take care of Santiago during the coming winter by bringing him clothing and water for washing.

Santiago's love, of course, extends to other people as well. He loved his wife when they were married, though when she died he had to take down her portrait because it made him feel lonely. Similarly, even in his suffering he thinks of others, remembering his promise to send the fish head to his friend Pederico to use as bait. Santiago's love also extends to include nature itself, even though he has often suffered at its hands. His love for all living creatures, whether fish, birds, or turtles, is often described, as is his love for the sea, which he sees as a woman who gives or withholds favors. Some of the younger fishermen, in contrast, often spoke of the sea as a "contestant" or even an "enemy."

Youth and Old Age

The comparison and contrast of these two stages of human life runs throughout the story. Although Santiago is obviously an old man, in many ways he retains a youthful perspective on life. For example, he is a keen follower of baseball, and admires players like Joe DiMaggio and Dick Sisler for their youthful skills and abilities. His friendship with Manolin is also based partly on Santiago's fond recollections of his own youth. For example, he recalls the time he saw the lions on the beach in Africa or when he beat a well-known player in a hand-wrestling match that lasted all day. His repeated wish that the boy were in the boat is not made just because that would make it easier to fight the fish. He also misses the boy as a companion with his own youthful perspective. Yet Santiago does not admire all youth indiscriminately. For example, he contrasts his own attitude toward the sea as a woman with that of "some of the younger fishermen, those who used buoys as floats and had motorboats," who think of the sea as a male enemy who must be defeated. By the same token, Santiago is aware that not everything about old age is attractive to youth. For example, he keeps from Manolin the knowledge that he doesn't care very much about washing or eating on a regular basis. Santiago is also very

aware of the disadvantages of old age. Although he retains much of his youthful strength, for example, he knows that at his age he is no longer able to fight off the sharks that attack his fish. Yet in the end, despite his defeat, Santiago is still able to plan his next fishing expedition and to dream again of the lions who perhaps represent to him the strength and the freedom of youth.

Luck Vs. Skill

Many people believe in the concept of destiny, a concept in which spiritual forces and luck are combined. When one is lucky, it is considered a sign that one has the spiritual qualities to succeed. By the same token, when one has been unlucky, as Santiago is considered after eighty-four days of not catching any fish, he is dismissed by Manolin's parents as *salao*, "which is the worst form of unlucky," and therefore someone to avoid. Santiago himself believes to some extent in the concept of luck. He senses that his eighty-fifth day of fishing will be a good one and wants to buy that number in the lottery. Later in the story, when his big fish has already been half-eaten by sharks, he says he would pay "what they asked" for some luck "in any form."

Earlier in the story, however, before he has caught the big fish, Santiago reflects that "It is better to be lucky [than unlucky]. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready." In this reformulation of the luck-vs.-skill question, Santiago is clearly favoring skill. This preference is shown by his actions throughout the novel, from the way he gauges the strength of the fish by the pull on the line to the manner in which he calculates and conserves his own strength for the battle he knows lies ahead. After his defeat he says the boy should not fish with him because "I am not lucky anymore." Yet Santiago quickly changes his mind about going out with Manolin when the boy says that "we will fish together now, for I still have much to learn." Toward the end, Santiago asks himself "[W]hat beat you" and answers "Nothing. I went out too far." So in the end, Santiago finds that it is matters of judgment and skill that determine success, not luck.

IV. STYLE

Point of View

All novels use at least one point of view, or angle of vision, from which to tell the story. The point of view may be that of a single character, or of several characters in turn. *The Old Man and the Sea* uses the omniscient, or "all-knowing," point of view of the author, who acts as a hidden narrator. The omniscient point of view enables the author to stand outside and above the story itself, and thus to provide a wider perspective from which to present the thoughts of the old man and the other characters. Thus at the beginning of the tale, the omniscient narrator tells us not only what Santiago and the boy said to each other, but what the other fishermen thought of the old man. "The older fishermen looked at him and were sad. But they did not show it."

Setting

The Old Man and the Sea takes place entirely in a small fishing village near Havana, Cuba, and in the waters of the Gulf Stream, a current of warm water that runs north, then east of Cuba in the Caribbean Sea. Hemingway visited Cuba as early as 1928, and later lived on the coast near Havana for nineteen years, beginning in 1940, so he knew the area very well. The references to Joe Dimaggio and a series of games between the Yankees and the Detroit Tigers in which Dimaggio came back from a slump have enabled scholars to pinpoint the time during which the novel takes place as mid-September 1950. As Manolin also reminds readers, September is the peak of the blue marlin season. The story takes three days, the length of the battle against the fish, but as Manolin reminds the old man, winter is coming on and he will need a warm coat.

Structure

Like the three-day epic struggle itself of Santiago against the fish, Hemingway's story falls into three main parts. The first section entails getting ready for the fishing trip; then the trip out, including catching the fish and being towed by it, which encompasses all of the first two days and part of the third; and finally the trip back. Another way of dividing and analyzing the story is by using a dramatic structure devised by Aristotle. In the opening part of the story, or rising action, the readers are presented with various complications of the conflict between the other fishermen's belief that Santiago is permanently unlucky and Santiago and the boy's belief that the old man will still catch a fish. For example, readers learn that some of the other villagers, like the restaurant owner Pedrico, help Santiago, while others avoid him. The climax of the story, when Santiago kills the fish, marks the point at which the hero's fortunes begin to take a turn for the worse. This turning point becomes evident when sharks start to attack the fish and leads inevitably to the resolution (or denouement) of the drama, in which Santiago, having no effective weapons left to fight the sharks, must watch helplessly as they strip the carcass of all its remaining meat. Perhaps showing the influence of modern short story writers, however, Hemingway has added to the ending what James Joyce called an epiphany, or revelation of Santiago's true character. This moment comes when the author implicitly contrasts the tourist's ignorance of the true identity of the marlin's skeleton to Santiago's quiet knowledge of his skill and his hope, reflected in his repeated dreams of the lions on the beach, that he will fish successfully again.

Symbolism

A symbol can be defined as a person, place, or thing that represents something more than its literal meaning. Santiago, for example, has often been compared to Christ in the way he suffers. His bleeding hands, the way he carries the boat mast like a cross, and the way he lies on his bed with his arms outstretched, all have clear parallels in the story of Christ's crucifixion. In this interpretation of the story, Manolin is seen as a disciple who respects and loves Santiago as his teacher. In this context, the sea could be said to represent earthly existence. Humans, as stated in Genesis, have been created by God to have dominion over all other living creatures, including the fish in the sea. Yet humans like Santiago still suffer because of Adam and Eve's original sin of eating the apple from the tree of knowledge. Santiago, however, says he does not understand the concept of sin. Santiago can also be seen more broadly as a representative of all human

beings who must struggle to survive, yet hope and dream of better things to come. Hemingway himself does not seem to mind if his characters, setting, and plot have different meanings to different readers. He once said that he "tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things."

V. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Cuba and the United States in the Early 1950s

Relations between Cuba and the United States were generally friendly during most of the 1950s, as they had been since 1934. That year marked the end of the Platt Amendment, which had given the United States the right to intervene in Cuba's affairs. United States' ownership of many Cuban sugar mills, however, was a continuing source of dispute. In 1952, President Prio Socarras was overthrown in a military coup by General Fulgencio Batista y Zalvidar. Batista had previously ruled as dictator from 1933 to 1940, and would rule again until 1959, when he was overthrown by Fidel Castro. Despite Hemingway's move to Ketchum, Idaho, soon after Castro and his supporters overthrew the Batista regime, Hemingway had supported both the overthrow and what he called the "historical necessity" of the Castro revolution.

Cuban Culture

Cuban culture during the first half of the twentieth century was marked perhaps foremost by an ambivalent view toward the Catholic Church. Unlike other Latin American countries, church and state in Cuba were constitutionally separate during this period. Because of its long Spanish heritage, however, Cuba was still dominated by Catholic cultural influences. The result was a contradictory situation in which 85 percent of the population called itself Catholic, but only 10 percent actually practiced the faith. The effect of these circumstances are seen many times in *The Old Man and the Sea*. For example, when Santiago battles the marlin, he says, "I am not religious, but I will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys that I should catch this fish, and I promise to make a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Cobre if I catch him." Later after he has killed the fish, Santiago wonders if it is a sin to hope that he will make it back to shore with the fish's meat intact, but he quickly dismisses the thought. "Do not think about sin," he thought. "There are enough problems now without sin. Also I have no understanding of it."

Cubans, like other Latin Americans, place a high value on the innate worth of the individual. Success in life is defined under the code of *per-sonalismo* as the achievement of one's spiritual potential or personal destiny rather than one's financial or career status. Thus Santiago is respected as a skilled and unique individual even though he has not caught a fish in three months. As seen through the eyes of Manolin and the omniscient narrator, Santiago is a heroic and majestic figure who, like Odysseus or Christ, has undergone a great ordeal and provides a model to emulate.

Machismo, or maleness, is an important male goal in traditional Latin American society. *Machismo* is ideally developed in several ways, including military, athletic, and intellectual exercises, and sexual prowess. Most men are not expected to live up to the *machismo* ideal in practice. Yet by cultivating these powers, one can approach being the

ideal man. Santiago, for example, is admired because of his physical power of endurance. He takes great pride in having in his youth defeated a powerful Negro in an all-day hand-wrestling contest in Casablanca. Santiago also places a high value on mental qualities like his self-confidence and his vast knowledge of the "tricks" of fishing. Santiago is so confident of these qualities that he can bet "everything [the fish] has against only my will and my intelligence." It has often been noted that in his own life, Hemingway also strove to challenge himself intellectually through his friendships and writing, as well as physically, through boxing, war service, hunting, fishing, and bullfighting. Although Hemingway is sometimes criticized for what is interpreted as an attraction to violence for its own sake, it is not hard to understand why the Latin American belief in *machismo* appealed to the author.

VI. CRITICAL OVERVIEW

The early critical reception of *The Old Man and the Sea* upon its publication in 1952 was very favorable, and its reputation has been generally high ever since, notwithstanding negative reactions in the 1960s by critics like Kenneth Lynn and Philip Young. Yet what the critics have seen worthy of special note in the story has changed noticeably over the years.

The early reviews of Hemingway's first novel since the disastrous reception two years earlier of *Across the River and into the Trees* especially praised the central character, Santiago. In his original 1954 evaluation of the book which Gerry Brenner included in *The Old Man and the Sea: The Story of a Common Man*, Philip Young wrote, "It is the knowledge that a simple man is capable of such decency, dignity and even heroism, and that his struggle can be seen in heroic terms, that largely distinguishes this book." In his book *Ernest Hemingway: Critiques of Four Major Novels*, Carlos Baker noted that critic Clinton S. Burhans saw in Santiago "a noble and tragic individualism revealing what a man can do in an indifferent universe which defeats him, and the love he can feel for such a universe and his humility before it." *The Old Man and the Sea* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1953 and played a large role in Hemingway's being honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

Though several posthumous volumes of his fiction would follow in the 1970s, Hemingway's suicide in 1961 was the occasion for a major, and perhaps less inhibited, reevaluation of his work. Philip Young's *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* was one of the most influential of these. According to Young's "wound theory," Hemingway's entire life and art was an attempt to master the traumatic event of his wounding in World War I. To do this, said Young, Hemingway evolved a "code" by which his heroes sought to live. As Young described this hero code, it was a "'grace under pressure' made of the controls of honor and courage which in a life of tension and pain make a man a man and distinguish him from the people who follow random impulses, let down their hair, and are generally messy, perhaps cowardly, and without inviolable rules for how to live holding tight."

In his life and his heroic struggle against the fish, Santiago fits Young's definition. His pride in his physical strength, still noteworthy in his old age, is shown in his fond recollection of the time he beat a "giant" in an all-day hand-wrestling match in

Casablanca. In his mental suppression of physical pain, Santiago also reminds the reader of Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* and Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*.

Young's "wound theory" and "code hero" concepts continued to influence much of Hemingway criticism in the 1960s and 1970s, despite the posthumous publication during this period of nine new volumes of Hemingway's fiction and nonfiction, including his Toronto newspaper dispatches, his high school literary efforts, his poetry, *A Moveable Feast* (a nonfiction collection of acid-witted accounts of Hemingway's days in Paris as a young writer in the 1920s), and *Islands in the Stream*. In fact, as Susan F. Beegel has pointed out, "the idea of the code hero would smother the originality of lesser critics and stifle alternative views for a long time." The best source of basic facts about Hemingway's life, however, remains Baker's 1969 biography, *Ernest Hemingway*.

Though the Hemingway "industry" of posthumous publications, memoirs of old friends, and newsletters and annuals of Hemingway critics continued to mount, it was not until after 1986, with the publication of *The Garden of Eden*, that Young's theory began to be replaced in most critical readers' minds by Kenneth Lynn's "theory of androgyny," or the state of having both male and female characteristics, as described in Lynn's influential psychoanalytic biography, *Hemingway*. According to Lynn, Hemingway's androgyny was partly the result of his mother's having dressed Ernest as a toddler in girl's clothes that were identical to his older sister's. In *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny*, Mark Spilka sees Santiago's androgyny as a typical example in Hemingway's late fiction of the "return of the repressed" female side of the author's personality.

The androgyny theory allows readers to view Santiago, and indeed Manolin, from a wider perspective. Many people see, for example, that while women themselves play only a small role in the novel, nevertheless, the sea itself is regarded as feminine in Santiago's eyes, unlike some of the other younger fishermen in the story, who regard the sea as a male enemy to be conquered. Santiago describes the sea (*la mar*), like a woman, as "something that gave or withheld great favours." Hemingway also describes how Manolin cries not once, but twice, after seeing the old man's condition soon after he returns to shore. This is perhaps more significant than it may appear, because Manolin, although called "the boy," is actually at least twenty-two years old as noted by Bickford Sylvester in "The Cuban Contest of *The Old Man and the Sea*." A critic laboring under the more rigid notion of the code hero would probably expect Manolin, as a full-grown man, to keep his emotions held in check.

No matter through which prism the reader analyzes Hemingway's great sea story, it seems there will always be new revelations to find. Beegel notes that new areas for study may be found in Hemingway's ecological consciousness or the multicultural background of several of his novels. And with the increased use of the computer to analyze prose text and style, who knows what other discoveries await the Hemingway scholars of the future.

VII. CRITICISM

Carl Davis

In the following essay, Davis, an associate professor of English at Northeast Louisiana University, describes The Old Man and the Sea *as a brilliant, deceptively*

simple work that expresses the author's most fundamental beliefs about what it means to be a person. The work might also be seen as an expression of the author's personal struggle with thoughts of suicide.

From its publication in 1952, *The Old Man and the Sea* has played an important role in defining and confirming Ernest Hemingway's position as a major voice in twentieth-century fiction. Long famous for his short stories and the early novels *The Sun Also Rises* in 1926 and *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929, Hemingway built his public image upon that of his wounded, isolated heroes. His passion for bull fighting, fishing, and big game hunting inevitably led him to dangerous places and activities. He covered the Spanish Civil War as a reporter and later served as a war correspondent during World War II. By the 1950s, he was at the height of his fame, living on a small estate or *finca* in Cuba and playing out his role as "Papa" Hemingway, the white-haired, white-bearded symbol of virility and intellectual heroism. With the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea*, a taut, technically brilliant short novel, his reputation as a master craftsman of prose narrative was reaffirmed. More importantly, however, the story of Santiago, the isolated old man who fights a great fish for three days, seemed to bring together all the major elements of Hemingway's life and work. Indeed, it remains a concise expression of what it means for Hemingway to live and act as an individual in the modern world.

On first glance the most striking aspect of *The Old Man and the Sea* is its combination of compression and depth. Like many of Hemingway's early stories, the novel takes full advantage of the author's widely imitated prose style — a mixture of simple sentence structures, limited adjectives, and spare but suggestive description. As he himself explained in his examination of bullfighting in *Death in the Afternoon*, good writing should move like an iceberg, only one-eighth of which appears above the water. The writer who truly knows a subject should be able to leave much of the content unstated, and the reader will "have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them." Accordingly, *The Old Man and the Sea* offers a deceptively simple surface story of an aging fisherman who catches a great fish only to lose him to marauding sharks. The fable-like simplicity of the plot, however, suggests that the story may yield broader symbolic meanings.

One such symbolic interpretation of the novel focuses upon the ancient and often repeated pattern of a hero confronting a natural force. In this reading, Santiago the fisherman is more than just a poor Cuban hoping to break his streak of eighty-four days without a fish. He represents the skillful, courageous individual who willingly undergoes a test of character against an equally worthy opponent. The sea, the feminine and possibly maternal "la mar," becomes the site of his encounter with nature itself. Far away from the other fishermen and even further from any sort of civilized society, Santiago must test his own strengths alone and without help. Not even the boy he has taught to fish can be present at such a moment. Like the bullfighter or the soldier in battle, the old man struggles as though against his own death. However, to catch his "brother," as he calls him, is not to prove himself better than the fish, only its equal. Indeed, Santiago's failure to save the dead marlin from the sharks serves to reaffirm his limits as an individual and remind him of the need for humility in the face of nature's power.

Santiago's actions suggest that he is more than just a courageous individual, however. He also shows great concern for the quality of his work and the precision of his

actions. As tutor to the boy, he fills the archetypal or mythic role of the master craftsman who not only represents the height of artistic skill but also upholds the ethical standards of heroic action. He stands above the other fishermen both in terms of experience and skill, but he is also marked, set apart as the one for whom fishing has become more than just a livelihood:

"Who is the greatest manager, really, Luque or Mike Gonzalez?"

"I think they are equal."

"And the best fisherman is you."

"No. I know others better."

"*Que va*," the boy said. "There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you."

Like the "great DiMaggio" whose father was also a fisherman, Santiago stands alone in the level of his commitment to his craft and in his role as the hero who must test himself against his own frailty. His defense against the randomness of experience is precision. Unlike the other fishermen who let their lines drift with the current, Santiago keeps his "with precision. It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready." The value of such a method is confirmed by the presence of the great fish. Just as Santiago goes "far out" beyond the lesser ambitions of the other fishermen, he finds the great fish not simply because he is a better fisherman but because, in a symbolic sense, he deserves it. His "religious" devotion to the precision of his craft has made it difficult for him to catch ordinary fish, reserving him instead for the extraordinary, mythic creature whose quality equals Santiago's "purity."

Such a deep concern with the quality of Santiago's actions reflects Hemingway's own concern with style, both in writing and in behavior. In much of his work, heroic characters face dangerous and even impossible situations as a test of their devotion to an unwritten code or method of behavior. The more courageous the act, the greater its beauty, clarity, and ethical purity. The same can be said of Hemingway's own prose style, which aims to reproduce the uncluttered grace and control of the bullfighter or the boxer. In fact, Santiago's struggle with the great fish may also reflect Hemingway's own difficulties in writing the story itself. The act of catching the great fish only to lose it in the end may suggest the combination of triumph and failure that comes with attempts at artistic perfection.

This fundamentally religious dimension to Hemingway's thinking appears even more forcefully in the novel's many allusions to Christianity and Christ in particular. The name, Santiago, for instance, is Spanish for Saint James, himself a fisherman, like Christ, the symbolic "fisherman" for souls. Also like Christ, Santiago undergoes a test and a type of "crucifixion" when the sharks attack the marlin: "'*Ay*,' he said aloud. There is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands into the wood." Yet Santiago's suffering does not appear to lead to any sort of traditionally Christian resurrection. At the novel's end he is not reborn, literally or spiritually. Though he admits his fault in going too far out, he is simply tired and empty. He acknowledges his weaknesses but upholds the quality of his actions and his "brotherhood" with the fish: "'Half fish,' he said. 'Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went out too far. I ruined us both. But we have killed many sharks, you and I, and ruined many others. How many did you ever kill, old fish? You do not have that spear on your head for nothing.'"

The combination of triumph, endurance, and loss that *The Old Man and the Sea* offers says a great deal about the Hemingway of 1950s. Shortly after the novel's publication Hemingway was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1953. The following year, he received the Nobel Prize for literature for his life's work, though many acknowledge that the success of *The Old Man and the Sea* played a crucial role in the decision. About this same time, however, Hemingway suffered serious injuries in two separate plane crashes in Africa and was even reported dead by many newspapers. For the next seven years he lived in deteriorating health on his ranch in Ketchum, Idaho. In 1961, his ability as a writer severely compromised by his physical problems, Hemingway killed himself. Whether viewed as an act of courage or surrender, such a choice by the author of *The Old Man and the Sea* was no surprise. As the critic Earl Rovit speculates, "Having chosen to do battle with nothing less than eternity on a day-to-day basis, it may have been his way of complying with the rules insofar as the rules required the unconditional surrender of one of the combatants."

Viewed in light of Hemingway's long-held interest in suicide, *The Old Man and the Sea* might also be the author's way of thinking through the ethical and philosophical problems of taking his own life. In this respect, the fish, already a symbol of death in general, becomes the representation of the writer's self, his identity as a living thing. To wrestle with and conquer this "other" identity suggests a measure of self-control, a way of reaffirming your strength as an individual. To lose such a conquest to the attacks of voracious sharks under-mines any certainty the individual might have gained from such a victory. Thus suicide, as a method, suggests the ultimate sort of self-control, a removal to safety beyond the mouths of the sharks, an ironic self-taking that precludes the attacks of others.

It is in the context of such crucial issues that *The Old Man and the Sea* continues to evoke comments and questions from its readers. It presents a fundamentally human problem in graceful form and language, proposing not an answer to the limits of individual existence but a way of facing those limits with dignity and grace.[1]

VIII. TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Throughout *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago expresses his feelings about nature. Today, the protection of our natural environment is often in the news. Do some research on environmental issues and write an essay comparing Santiago's attitude about nature to modern theories of environmentalism. Would Santiago be considered an environmentalist today?
- Manolin undergoes a change between the beginning and the end of the novel. What do you think causes this change? Find specific examples from the story to support your opinion. Then write an essay comparing the "old" Manolin from the beginning of the story to the "new" Manolin who has emerged by the end.
- Most of Ernest Hemingway's heroes are young men, but Santiago, as the title reveals, is an old man. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story from an older person's perspective? How might the story have been different if the hero had been a young man? Present your ideas in an essay and use examples from the text to support your conclusions.

[1] Carl Davis, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1999

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