After Raphael Study Guide

After Raphael by Lucie Brock-Broido

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Lucie Brock-Broido's "After Raphael" is the second poem in her third poetry collection, 2004's *Trouble in Mind*. It is a poem about grief and pressing forward in time. Having lost her parents, the speaker is faced with the process of grief, along with the realization that she herself is mortal. The same time that seems to stand still in deep sadness does not actually stand still and will take her along with it as it progresses. Then she too will grow old and will have to face the reality of her own death.

This poem is in many ways typical of Brock-Broido's style and voice. It is written in seemingly straightforward syntax but is complex in its thematic development and imagery. The poem reads naturally, but not casually. The subject of vulnerability and relationships is addressed introspectively, as is common in Brock-Broido's work.

Author Biography

Lucie Brock-Broido was born on May 22, 1956, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She completed her B.A. and M.A., both in 1979, at Johns Hopkins University, before earning an M.F.A. from Columbia University in 1982.

As a poet, Brock-Broido brings her complex, feminine voice to such topics as love, relationships, sorrow, culture, time, and art. Her style is spare, introspective, and symbolic, and she has been compared to Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, and Sylvia Plath. In addition to seeing her work published in literary journals and anthologies, Brock-Broido completed three published volumes of poetry: *A Hunger* (1988), *The Master Letters* (1995), and *Trouble in Mind* (2004), which includes “After Raphael.” *A Hunger* was reprinted three times between 1988 and 1994. Considering the many volumes of poetry published every year to a dwindling readership, this book was an impressive debut.

Brock-Broido taught poetry and creative writing. She was an assistant professor of poetry at Harvard (1988–1993) and directed its creative writing program for a year (1992–1993). She was also an assistant professor of poetry for Bennington Writing Seminars (1993–1995). Starting in 1993, she taught poetry at Columbia University, first as an associate professor and later as a professor and director. In 1995, she also served as visiting professor of poetry at Princeton University.

Brock-Broido’s poetry earned her critical acclaim and numerous awards and honors. Among these are a Grolier Poetry Prize in 1983, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship (1985, 1998), a Harvard-Danforth Award for teaching distinction (1989, 1990), *American Poetry Review*’s Jerome Shestack Poetry Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1996, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters’ Witter Bynner Prize for Poetry in 1996.

Plot Summary

In “After Raphael,” the speaker describes her grief and the process she goes through as she deals with it. She begins by wondering if it is possible to talk about grief and loss without confronting the danger of love. She goes on to explain that she lost her father first, and then her mother. The speaker describes this time of grief as a “strange storm,” after which her parents were “ruined down / From the boughs.”

The speaker says, “I am sick of not loving and not / Sleeping well, of wanting spleen.” Her description of her grief is that she has no one to love, that she is not sleeping well, and that she gravitates toward feeling melancholy. (The ancient Greeks believed in the four bodily humors, one of which was associated with the spleen and responsible for melancholy.) Next, the speaker describes sheep carrying on with their lives, eating contentedly and growing fat. The next image is of a clock icing over, suggesting that in her home (as opposed to the outside world where the sheep graze), time is coming to a halt.

The speaker separates herself from everyone else in the next few lines, where she explains that she alone can “read incisions sanserif” and imagine when the “ghostpipes bloom at night.” She goes on to comment that she can see the flowers “heathering the moors,” a clear reference to time passing and life growing. Then comes the title reference: she refers to her world as “post-Raphaelite.” She emphasizes that this life “*is true*.” Another reference to time occurs when she remembers that she was little and is now middle, meaning she is no longer a child but is in the middle years of her life. To finish this thought, she faces the realization that she will one day grow old. Perhaps her parents died of old age because she expects to die not suddenly, like the break in a falcon’s wing, but gradually. As she ages, she will not open and close in the rain like a flower.

Themes

Grief

The speaker begins the poem apprehensive about discussing her grief openly when she states, “Perhaps it isn’t possible to say these things / Out loud without the noir / Of ardor and its plain-spoken elegance.” She feels that being open about her private pain might be emotionally dangerous, reveal her vulnerability, and force her to confront truths she may be unprepared to face. Still, the next three sentences state plainly what her pain is: “First, my father died. Then my mother / Did. My father died again.” The speaker has lost her parents, and with no mention of siblings or other members of the family in the poem, the reader can assume that the speaker is an only child who now feels alone and perhaps abandoned.

She introduces an image of an apple tree after the “strange storm” of the first pangs of grief. The storm “ruined down” her parents from the boughs, leaving apples everywhere on the ground. This image communicates despair. The apples represent the fruits of a living tree that, now torn from the tree, are dead. They are no longer part of the living tree but have been cast violently to the ground. The speaker’s grief at this point is not a peaceful one, but a confusing and maddening one. Despite her calm tone, the speaker is undergoing intense turmoil.

The speaker’s grief causes her to feel cut off from anyone she might love, and her broken heart is unlikely to love right now. Further, she cannot sleep, a common occurrence in times of depression or other strong emotions. Her sleeplessness is underscored when she later describes the ghostpipes (small white flowers) blooming at night with such abundance that they cover the moors. Her grief makes it impossible for her to sleep: she looks out her window at sheep in the day and flowers at night.

Mortality

Connected to the theme of grief is the theme of mortality. The speaker is grieving because she has been forced, apparently before she was ready, to confront the reality that the people she loves are mortal. Left behind when her parents die, she has no choice but to carry on with her life. She is a witness to the cycle of life, and her first reaction to it is a broken heart.

But as the poem continues, the speaker brings in images from nature—an apple tree, sheep, a falcon, and night-blooming flowers—all of which are also subject to a finite lifespan. The image of the flowers is carried out in the final two lines, which describe a flower opening and closing in light rain. The speaker personalizes the cycle of life when she observes, “I was little; I am middle. Will I not / Grow old?” At this point in the poem, she has moved from her encounter with her parents’ mortality to considering her own. She is akin to the apple tree, the sheep, the falcon, and the flower in that she too is part

of the mortal world. The poem ends with this thought just dawning on her, as one realization in her grief.

Memory

When the speaker refers to the fact that her parents have died and a “strange storm” followed, she does so in the past tense. It is not until the ninth line that she moves into the present tense. This shift indicates that a period of time has passed between the first wave of grief and the present, although she is still moving through the grieving process. This shift is significant because it lets the reader know something about the speaker’s perspective. This is not a poem about how it feels just after having lost a loved one; instead, it is a poem about the memory of that severe pain and the ongoing search for peace in the aftermath. Her memory of her parents is important and her grief is deep, and her memory of the initial pain of loss is so difficult that she begins the poem wondering if there is an appropriate way to discuss the subject at all.

Brock-Broido makes another important point about memory in the statements, “First my father died. Then my mother / Did. My father died again.” There is no indication as to how much time elapsed between the speaker’s father’s death and her mother’s death. What is important is that her mother kept her father’s memory alive, directly and indirectly. As long as her mother was alive, the speaker could continue to relate to her father through her memories of their family life together. But the mother also kept the father’s memory alive directly when she talked about him or referred to her own memories of their years together. Once the speaker’s mother died, those last connections to her father died with her. And there is no one else, but the speaker herself, to keep those memories fresh and present. At this point in the speaker’s grieving process, memory is a source of pain and sorrow instead of comfort and reassurance.

Style

Free Verse

Free verse is written in a free style without the restraints of meter, rhythm, or rhyme. Lines may be of any length, contain complete or incomplete thoughts, and feature whatever structure the poet deems best for his or her purpose. In using free verse, many poets incorporate literary or structural devices as they see fit. Walt Whitman, for example, is known for his use of parallelism in his free verse.

In “After Raphael,” Brock-Broido depicts grief and the realization that can occur during it through free verse. “After Raphael” demonstrates how she creates a style that is natural without seeming undisciplined. Brock-Broido’s free verse in this poem is divided into irregular couplets, with the exceptions of lines 3 and 8, which stand alone for emphasis. Although Brock-Broido chooses to structure her poem this way, the structure is not arbitrary. Each couplet offers a self-contained thought, even when the sentence extends into the next couplet. For example, she writes, “All the Suffolk sheep stand still, eating / More, becoming fat and,” then the next couplet picks up the thought with “Legible.” At first glance, it may appear that she has divided the lines for the sake of the structure at the expense of meaning, but if that were the case, she would have pulled “legible” up to the end of the line above it. Instead, by separating that word, she suggests a pause in thought, which is followed by an unexpected word choice. The structure of the poem supports the natural flow of thought from the speaker.

Symbolism

Symbolism occurs in literature when a word stands for a recognizable object and for something else. For example, the Christian cross is a cross and also symbolizes the crucifixion of Jesus. Many poets who write spare verse rely on symbolism to imply additional meaning in the literal object, and Brock-Broido is no exception. As she describes her speaker’s struggle with grief and mortality, she introduces symbols to allow the reader to understand the content at a deeper level. She describes the first wave of grief as a “strange storm,” which effectively describes the unreal quality of going through grieving for parents. It is strange because it is not at all an everyday occurrence or one for which she could have prepared. It is also a storm because it is chaotic and intense and generates feelings of helplessness in the face of something bigger than she is. Brock-Broido’s apple tree symbolizes not just a family tree, but a family from which its fruit has been torn away and ruined. The tree represents the family that they used to be, one that was living, vibrant, and inviting. The storm, however, knocks all the fruit to the ground, cut off from life and ruined. The fruit seems to symbolize family members, memories, or anything else good that comes from the family. Now that her parents have died, the tree is bare.

The sheep symbolize life going on just outside the speaker's window. She can see them, blissfully unaware of her pain. The clock symbolizes the speaker's pain. Brock-Broido describes the clock as freezing, as if the speaker's pain is causing time to come to a standstill. She does not want time to keep ticking because it takes her further from the ones she loves. Interestingly, it is just the crystal (or face) of the clock on which the ice crystals form. In reality, time is still passing even though the speaker does not see or acknowledge it. The clock's face is described as long, symbolizing the speaker's emotional state.

Sounds

Brock-Broido uses alliteration and assonance in "After Raphael." Alliteration is the repetition of identical consonant sounds at the beginning of words. Examples of alliteration are, "Perhaps it isn't possible," "strange storm," and "Suffolk sheep stand still." Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds within words, and Brock-Broido uses it in "out loud without," "sleeping . . . spleen," "long-faced clock," and "grow old." Another literary device that relies on sound is the internal rhyme of "I was little; I am middle." In the midst of flowing free verse, the sudden interjection of a sing-song rhyme brings the reader's attention to it. This is the moment the speaker realizes the passage of time in her own life from the past to the present, and she begins to think about time passing from the present to the future.

Allusion

Allusion is any reference to something outside the literary work itself, to a person, event, or other literary work. The use of allusion assumes that the writer and the reader share the same frame of reference, and in that context, combining the allusion in the current work to the subject to which it refers allows for certain associations to be made. In "After Raphael," Brock-Broido refers to the Renaissance painter Raphael. Like other Renaissance painters, Raphael used perspective correctly in his paintings to create the illusion of space and depth even on flat surfaces. In some cases, the paintings were located in a certain place and the perspective in the painting corresponded to the architectural features of the room where the painting was displayed. In the immediate throes of grief, the speaker may feel that she has lost the perspective that made her feel like she knew where she was standing and where she was headed. Her perspective seems to be gone; her grief is large and engulfing. It is so large that it fills the space around her, including the objects she sees out her window (such as the sheep and the flowers at night) and the space in her own home (such as the clock face). Once she endures the pain and some time goes by, she will regain her perspective, and her sense of loss will get smaller as it recedes into the past.

Historical Context

Brock-Broido's poem is named after the Renaissance artist, Raphael Sanzio. Raphael was born in 1483 in Urbino, Italy, to an artist named Giovanni Santi. Raphael first learned painting from his father, but after his death, Raphael went to study under Perugino, a celebrated artist. It was here that Raphael learned from the masters so well that his work was difficult to distinguish from theirs. In 1504, Raphael traveled to Florence to see the works-in-progress of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. He stayed there for four years, combining his mastery of Perugino's techniques with what he was learning from the works of Da Vinci and Michelangelo. While in Florence, Raphael was commissioned to paint holy family portraits for private patrons, many of which are considered masterpieces in modern times. Some of them feature only the Madonna and child, and it may be these paintings to which Brock-Broido's speaker in "After Raphael" refers. These beautiful renditions of families, including the mother and child, are the longed-for image of the speaker who is now orphaned. Because the speaker in the poem is grieving her parents, the reference to the "post-Raphaelite world" may refer to the loss of the union of parent and child as depicted in some of Raphael's paintings.

Raphael's work includes portraits, altarpieces, and frescoes. Raphael came to be regarded as one of the most important artists of the Renaissance. Scholars often point to his work, along with that of Da Vinci and Michelangelo, as representing the best of the High Renaissance (the time roughly between 1500 and 1525, considered by many scholars to be the pinnacle of Renaissance art). Perhaps the speaker in "After Raphael" means to evoke the burst of artistic expression of Raphael's time and his central position in it. Raphael may be a symbol for expression and growth, and after her parents' deaths, the speaker feels that such times are past.

Raphael's work can be seen in many places in Italy, including in the Vatican, which contains his famous fresco, "School of Athens." In works such as "School of Athens," his use of linear perspective creates the illusion of a huge space opening to the sky on a flat wall above a door. What is important about this perspective (to the Renaissance painters and to Brock-Broido's speaker) is that it allows the artist to portray accurately the way people and things are arranged spatially. Things that are far away are depicted as smaller, for example. Raphael died in 1520, and his body was buried in the Pantheon in Rome.

Critical Overview

“After Raphael” is the second poem in the collection *Trouble in Mind*. Critics praised the collection for its elegance, imagination, and range of emotion. They found Brock-Broido’s handling of loss in the poems to be honest, moving, and startling. In *American Book Review*, Catherine Daly had this to say about *Trouble in Mind*:

What is poetry? In her third slim volume, Lucie Brock-Broido continues to answer that question with decorate verse and heightened language. Brock-Broido’s poems are *ars poetica*—they are about poetry—but they are also about a life devoted to poetry, or a life converted into poetry, or poetry as a living, and therefore perishable, gesture.

Daly notes the influence of Wallace Stevens in this volume, adding that Brock-Broido “has used her own understanding of his poetic as the poetic in this volume of poems.” Daly concludes, “*Trouble in Mind* is about the hall of mirrors that is writing poetry about the self as well as about poetry.” Jahan Ramazani of *Virginia Quarterly Review* finds *Trouble in Mind* reveals the influence of Wallace Stevens, William Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Commenting on the melancholy mood of the volume, he writes, “For all the unrelieved despair of Brock-Broido’s poems, the darkness visible of this volume is curiously resplendent.”

A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* hails the volume as “gorgeous and mournful, ornate and deeply felt.” The reviewer concludes that Brock-Broido is a “poet who finds renewed languages for the recurrent dilemmas such [melancholic] hearts contain.” In *Library Journal*, C. Diane Scharper remarks that Brock-Broido’s poems are so personal and specific to her vision that they “are sometimes inaccessible.” A *New Yorker* reviewer observes that Brock-Broido introduces dramatic, tragic characters alongside ordinary loved ones in the volume. The reviewer concludes that while lesser poets fail at elegiac verse, “in Brock-Broido’s hands it yields great conceptual and syntactical variety.”

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Bussey holds a master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, she explores the theme of time in Brock-Broido's "After Raphael."

Lucie Brock-Broido's "After Raphael" relates the grief experienced by a woman who recently lost her mother after having already lost her father. The speaker feels alone and orphaned, even though she is an adult. The speaker moves from describing her sense of pain and loss to the realization that one day, she will also grow old and have to face her own mortality. What ties these themes of grief and mortality together is time, a subject that is a subtle undercurrent running through the poem. Brock-Broido addresses it through imagery and the speaker's feelings.

The clock simultaneously represents time, which the speaker perceives to be standing still, and the speaker herself, who is also 'long-faced' (sad) and frozen by her own inability to move forward.

The first indication that time is going to be important in the poem occurs when the speaker decides to go ahead and talk about her grief and then sets it up with a chronology. In lines four and five, she states, "First, my father died. Then my mother / Did. My father died again." The words "first," "then," and "again" all denote sequence relationship to time. The speaker is in effect offering a timeline of the loss of her parents. The reference to her father dying again indicates that the father's memory had been kept alive through her mother. Memories are a critical element for spanning human experience through time, creating connection to the immediate and distant past. In this case, the mother's memories of the father and the speaker's memories of her father *with* her mother have allowed her to close up, to a degree, the time since she lost her father. She still has the mother's memories to comfort and encourage her. But when her mother dies, she feels that she has lost her father again on this other level. She loses all relationship with her parents, and she no longer has the benefit of interacting with the people whom she has known the longest. The way the speaker talks about her parents strongly suggests that she loved and respected them very much. In all likelihood, she continued to see her mother and probably came to her for advice and companionship. While she was alive, the mother surely offered her husband's perspective on things, too. So through her ongoing close relationship with her mother, the speaker was able to have the advantages of being parented when she needed it and having her oldest friendship when she needed that. Upon her mother's death, she lost the security, the friendship, the wisdom, and the sense of belonging. Now she has only her own memories, with no living connection beyond herself to connect her present self to her past self.

The next passage is stated in the past tense, so it is the speaker's telling of another memory. This time, the memory is of her experience when she was first hit with the loss of her parents. To her, it was a storm that decimated an apple tree, symbolizing her family. Trees are often used to represent families (as in family trees) because they have roots that go deep down and provide stability and history, while also displaying branches and leaves that indicate multidirectional life and generation. One root or one branch can be the source of numerous other outgrowths that represent entire families or, as in the case of this poem, a single individual who has a place in the tree but does not generate another branch. The speaker's break between lines 7 and 8 indicates a pause, either so she can decide what she wants to say or so she can collect herself emotionally. Either way, the memory of the tree is one that remains important to her. And both interpretations show that the speaker's utterance is spontaneous. Because it evokes such an emotional response from her, the reader can tell that this painful memory is preventing her from taking solace in pleasant memories.

After describing the tree, the speaker moves into the present and reveals her feelings directly. She is tired of feeling the way she does and of not being able to have what she wants. She longs for peace and rest, but instead she is lonely and melancholy. This is a very subtle use by Brock-Broido of time, but it indicates plainly the speaker's present. In the present, the speaker is emotionally stuck. Understandably, when the speaker looks out her window, she notices sheep standing still. This is very much a present-tense image, so present that time seems almost to have slowed down. The sheep are still. This leads into a direct reference to time when the speaker imagines that ice is forming inside her home, even on the face of a clock. The clock simultaneously represents time, which the speaker perceives to be standing still, and the speaker herself, who is also "long-faced" (sad) and frozen by her own inability to move forward. That the speaker says "the ice assembles / *Even* on the crystal of the long-faced clock" (italics added) indicates that the ice may be moving from the inside out. The emotional paralysis that she feels is beginning to affect her external reality. She now projects the inability to move to her home, imagining that the very objects that personalize her living space have become victims of her grief. She is emotionally trapped by time; she grieves the past, is stuck in the present, and cannot figure out how to move into the future.

The speaker's sleeplessness is another example of how time is at a standstill in her world. She is unable to adhere to a normal routine of waking and sleeping hours, and the hours of the day begin to meld together into a constant span of time. Without the clear night and day demarcation, people often lose track of time and feel that time is moving slowly. The speaker's thoughts turn from night-blooming ghostpipe flowers to a realization that the world in which she lives "*is true*." From here, she comes to a new realization, transitioned through the line, "I was little; I am middle." Now she understands that she is no longer a daughter, the youngest in the family. Her parents are gone, she is an adult, and she is now being taken by time toward her own mortality. She asks herself, "Will I not / Grow old?" Just as she is alone in her grief, she considers that she must face mortality alone. That does not mean that she is resigned to living out the rest of her years alone, and perhaps she will seek out new relationships or even pursue having a family of her own. These are issues outside the scope of the poem, but

the speaker's gradual acceptance of reality and her place in time give relevance to such considerations.

Moving from the image of a broken falcon's wing that destines the bird to death, the speaker considers the opening and closing of flowers. This final image invites the speaker back into the normal flow of time because flowers open and close, usually according to the rising and setting of the sun. Unlike the speaker, they close at night to rest so they can open up for the sun in the morning. Even the flowers are part of the cycle of time every day, and the speaker is finally beginning to identify with that reality. The natural images throughout the poem serve to remind her that nature is in tune with time and change, and by realizing she is part of those cycles (even though it means the cycle of mortality), the speaker has hope of reconnecting with the world.

Source: Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on "After Raphael," in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Topics for Further Study

• Using magazines, photocopies from books, printed images from the Internet, or pictures you create yourself, gather all of the images found in Brock-Broido's "After Raphael." You may want to add images you think are indirectly related to the poem (for example, one of Raphael's paintings). Create a collage with all of your images, making sure to incorporate a copy of the poem in your collage.

• "After Raphael" ends with the speaker's realization that she, too, is subject to the passage of time. She faces her own mortality when the poem ends. Based on what you know of the speaker, how do you think she will handle this realization? Write a poem in the style of Brock-Broido using the same speaker. Your poem should express how you think the speaker feels about her own limited time.

• Research in books or online the paintings and frescoes by Raphael. Choose between one and three that you think offer some insight into Brock-Broido's poem. Put together a slide show on your computer that shows the painting(s) you have chosen and explains how they shed light on the poem.

• "After Raphael" expresses pain without being overly emotional. Do you think there is more going on beneath the surface, or do you think this is representative of where she is in the grieving process? Choose three music selections that support your reading (or readings) of the poem and burn a CD. Create a CD cover with notes explaining your selections, and choose whatever cover art you think would be appropriate.

• Through books, articles, and therapy, psychologists help people understand and cope with grief. Research what they say about grief, and determine how the speaker is doing. If you can find enough information specific to the experience of losing one's parents as an adult, consider that in your analysis of the speaker. Write a report from the perspective of a researcher in which you evaluate the speaker's progress. You may want to give her a name to make the report easier.

What Do I Read Next?

- Robin Behn's *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets who Teach* (1992) provides strategies for aspiring poets to develop their technique with the guidance of numerous writing teachers. The book contains ninety exercises, along with essays to help would-be poets hone their craft.

- In 1988, Brock-Broido's debut collection, *A Hunger*, was acclaimed by critics and poetry lovers alike. Her subjects include analysis of time and American culture.

- *The Master Letters* (1995) is Brock-Broido's second collection of poetry. Based on three letters written by Emily Dickinson, this collection contains echoes of Dickinson while it puts forth Brock-Broido's unique poetic imagination and voice.

- *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (1990) provides readers with a basic understanding of Stevens' poetic vision and voice. Wallace Stevens inspired some of Brock-Broido's writing.

Further Study

Black, Sophie Cabot, *The Descent: Poems*, Graywolf Press, 2004.

Sophie Black is a modern poet whose work shares recurring themes and stylistic elements with Brock-Broido's work.

Chapman, Hugo, Tom Henry, Carol Plazzotta, et al., *Raphael: From Urbino to Rome*, National Gallery, 2004.

Raphael's life and influences are discussed with the purpose of showing his development as an artist. The book includes more than ninety of his works, many in British collections.

Levy, Alexander, *The Orphaned Adult: Understanding and Coping with Grief and Change after the Death of Our Parents*, Perseus Publishing, 2000.

Drawing on his personal experience and that of numerous other adults who have lost their parents, psychologist Alexander Levy offers explanation and reassurance so that other adults will know what to expect and how to care for themselves in coping with this particular type of grief. He also discusses how this experience often causes people to evaluate their own mortality.

Roberts, Neil, ed., *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

Roberts compiled important and representative poetry from English-speaking writers all over the world. He presents here a wide range of styles, points of view, and cultural traditions in this volume of modern poetry.

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Review of *Trouble in Mind*, in *Publishers Weekly*, Vol. 250, No. 51, December 22, 2003, p. 54.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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