Another Night in the Ruins Study Guide

Another Night in the Ruins by Galway Kinnell

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

“Another Night in the Ruins,” by Galway Kinnell, is a poem about spirituality and creativity told in seven sections. It was first published in the *Paris Review* in the spring of 1966. Kinnell later included it in his poetry collection, *Body Rags* (1968), which was a finalist for the prestigious National Book Award. The publication of this volume marked a high point in Kinnell’s career as a poet; after this point Kinnell began to garner significant honors.

As a child, Kinnell loved the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson, but as a mature poet, he considered himself a follower of Walt Whitman. Scholars of American literature assert that modern American poetry stems either from the tradition of Walt Whitman or from Emily Dickinson. Whitman is clearly evoked in Kinnell’s passionate, sonorous style, and like Whitman’s work, Kinnell’s poems are concerned with spirituality, man’s relationship with the natural world, and social issues.

“Another Night in the Ruins” draws heavily from the natural and spiritual world as the narrator examines his own process of creativity. The ruins referred to in the title are the metaphysical ruins of former works residing within the narrator of the poem. The narrator is seeking a way toward growth or rebirth as a writer. By the end of the poem, he comprehends that the fire of creativity is not a tool to be controlled, and he knows instead his real work lies in trusting himself entirely to his creative passion.

Author Biography

Galway Kinnell was born February 1, 1927, in Providence, Rhode Island, to James Kinnell and Elizabeth Mills. He grew up in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and as a child, loved the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson. Kinnell was particularly drawn to the musicality and the loneliness that marked their works. In 1945, at age eighteen, Kinnell enlisted in the U.S. Navy. World War II ended that same year, and Kinnell returned home in 1946 to pursue studies at Princeton University. He graduated *summa cum laude* in 1948, alongside another future poet of fame, W. S. Merwin. Kinnell earned his Master of Arts degree from the University of Rochester in 1949.

Kinnell began his teaching career at the University of Chicago. After earning a Fulbright Fellowship, he lived and taught abroad, visiting universities in a variety of nations, including Iran, Australia, and France. Upon returning to the United States in the early 1960s, Kinnell became involved in the civil rights movement. He joined the Congress on Racial Equality (C.O.R.E.) in 1962. Kinnell's work with C.O.R.E. included assisting in voter registration and workplace integration in Louisiana, which led to his being arrested.

Kinnell was a poet-in-resident at various North American institutions, and he began winning awards soon after the publication of his first book, *What a Kingdom It Was* (1960). He won the National Institute of Arts and Letters Award as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1962. Kinnell's second book of poetry, *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock* (1964), continued to be one of his most popular, even after nearly five decades of his publishing poetry. *Body Rags*, the collection which includes "Another Night in the Ruins," was published in 1968. *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock* and *Body Rags* were both finalists for the National Book Award. Kinnell received a Rockefeller Foundation grant in 1968 and a National Endowment for the Arts grant in 1969. Another popular book by Kinnell is *The Book of Nightmares* (1971), which consists of a sequence of ten interrelated poems drawing on the poet's experiences as a civil rights activist and Vietnam War protester. Kinnell won another Guggenheim Fellowship in 1974 and a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 1984. His collection, *Selected Poems*, won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and the National Book Award in 1983. Kinnell served as the state poet of Vermont from 1989 through 1993. In 2002, he was honored by the Poetry Society of America with the Frost Medal for Lifetime Achievement.

Kinnell married Ines Delgado de Torres in 1965, and they had two children together, who are sometimes featured in their father's poems. Kinnell and de Torres divorced twenty years later. He founded New York University's esteemed creative writing program and taught there until his retirement. He held the Erich Maria Remarque chair in creative writing and was also chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. After retirement, Kinnell left New York City to live full-time in Vermont.

Plot Summary

Section 1: Lines 1–7

“Another Night in the Ruins” begins with a description of setting in the first two lines. It is nighttime and the narrator is outside, or looking outside, at a hilly landscape. Lines 3 and 4, “purple / of the eternal” is a light reference both to aristocracy and spirituality. Purple is a color traditionally reserved for royalty. In this phrase, Kinnell is evoking awe, which is then stirred by a casual bird that flies by in lines 4 and 5. The bird is of the mortal, secular realm, emphasized by the silly “‘*flop-flop*’” of its passing. The bird “crosses over” the hills in line 5, a turn of phrase that is also used colloquially to describe people who have died. This allusion to death is underlined by the frequent use of birds in death symbolism. Birds have been described as harbingers of death or as those who carry away the souls of the dead. In the last two lines of this section, the narrator says he is “adoring / only the instant,” a multilayered phrase referring both to the narrator’s admiration of the bird, of the nighttime hills, and of the amorphous presence of a higher being.

Section 2: Lines 8–16

The second section recalls an experience from nine years earlier. Nine is a number of significance and power in Western folklore because it is comprised of three threes (three also being an important number). Here the narrator remembers a trans-Atlantic flight. The airplane passes through a storm and the poet sees, as described in lines 13 and 14, a thunderhead in the shape of his brother’s face. The face is looking “nostalgically down” on the ocean as if it were a god looking down in its creation. This oblique spiritual reference reinforces those put forth in the first section. The layers of meaning here suggest the narrator’s close (even familial) relationship to his own deity; the love and sorrow inherent in nostalgia; the storm as reference to the biblical story of Noah wherein the Earth was flooded for forty days and forty nights.

Section 3: Lines 17–23

Having remembered his brother, the narrator dwells on him further in the third section of the poem. The narrator remembers, in line 18, his brother scoffing, “What good is the day?” Lines 19 through 21 describe a bonfire that lights the nighttime sky. This image is reminiscent of the lightning over the Atlantic Ocean in the second section. The fire imagery of the second and third sections in connection with the narrator’s brother invites an interpretation of the brother as a kind of fire god (for example, Zeus). The bonfire the brother speaks of is lit on “some hill of despair” although what causes the despair is not identified. Lines 22 and 23 introduce fear and excitement when the narrator’s brother explains that one must jump into the fire to keep it burning. Literally this implies suicide by self-immolation. (Self-immolation is an extreme form of protest in which a person

commits suicide in a public place by setting himself on fire and thus bringing attention to some injustice.) Figuratively, throwing oneself into the fire can be understood as giving into passion or even seeking release from despair through rash action.

Section 4: Lines 24–30

Line 24, the beginning of section 4, personifies the wind in the act of tearing “itself hollow.” Carrying on into line 25, the narrator places this harsh wind in the abstract location of “my ruins.” Ruined structures may be created by neglect over time and exposure to the natural elements, of which one is the wind. In this instance, the narrator refers to his own internal ruins, ravaged by a vicious wind. He then brings sound into this illustration with the words “ghost-flute,” which evokes the eerie whistle of a hard-blowing wind, particularly when it catches on an edge or whips through a hollow structure. The narrator is building, line by line, a cold, wintry, wind-swept scene that is old, aged. Lines 28 and 29 describe the “upside-down ravines” of snowdrifts which capture this howling wind and amplify it. These hollowed-out drifts also capture the narrator’s night-swept “ink-spattered feathers,” drawing forth layered imagery of quills and of an old bird that is black or has black markings. Ink is a reference to writing and to the color black.

Section 5: Lines 31–35

In this short section, the narrator stops to listen—to the wind, for an answer, for a message? “I hear nothing,” he reports in line 32. “Only / the cow . . . / of nothingness” has multi-layered meaning, referring simultaneously to the holiness of the cow (as exemplified in Hindi religion) and to its comical, mundane nature, a characterization more prevalent in the narrator’s own Western culture. The silliness of the cow “mooing / down the bones” in the middle of this solemn, reflective poem, is emphasized in the last two lines. The narrator is outside, pondering seriously and listening closely to the natural world, only to be struck by the humor of the lowing of a mere cow. Perhaps here the natural world is telling the narrator, whether he hears it or not, that life cannot be taken so seriously all the time.

Section 6: Lines 36–44

The narrator next sees a rooster but carries this imagery of another bird back to the serious and spiritual. He sees the rooster search for grain in the snow—what must seem an impossible quest to those who are not birds. The rooster finds his grain in lines 39 and 40 and “rips / it into / flames,” which returns the reader to the fire imagery of earlier. The last two lines describe fire coming from the rooster’s head. This strange image is another spiritual reference masked by the mundane. The mundane is the red fleshy cockscomb on a rooster’s head, which could figuratively be described as flames. Spiritually these lines are a reference to the fire in the head, a shamanistic description of one’s experience with the divine.

Section 7: Lines 45–53

The last section is the culmination of the previous six, drawing them together into a greater meaning than each had individually. In line 45, the narrator wonders “how many nights must it take”—not days, months, or years. This poem takes place at night and never departs from that setting. In like 46, the narrator uses the phrase “one such as me,” meaning a writer, as suggested earlier by the “ink-spattered feathers.” Line 48 describes the phoenix, a mythical bird that is reborn following its own fiery death. The narrator is coming to terms with the fact that humankind—such as writers—are not like the phoenix because humans are not magically reborn in the fire that consumes them. This leaves unanswered the question then of *what* humans are. The narrator now understands that immersion in the fire—which is the fire of creation—is a different type of transmutation than the phoenix undergoes. Instead of rebirth, a person *becomes* the flames, that is, the creator. Just as the Bible describes God’s creation of humankind as in His own image, so does Kinnell draw a similar circle in “Another Night in the Ruins”: the poet, the fire, and the poet’s works. His writing remakes him all the time, a never-ending cycle of change and expression.

Themes

Birds and Transcendence

Transcendence, a state beyond material constraints, is a term often used to describe the spiritual. In Kinnell's poem, landscapes of nighttime hillsides, ruined buildings, snowdrifts, and bonfires are populated by a bird flying by, a man, a cow, and a rooster. The narrator's outward observations turn inward to the ruined eaves of his inner self, where a different storm rages, a relentless wintry death. The narrator draws the strength to reconnect himself to creativity from the words of his brother and the example of the rooster. In an interview for *Contemporary Literature* with Thomas Gardner, Kinnell describes his fascination with bird imagery as the inevitable tension of the bird's liminal state: "like everyone, I experience the contest between wanting to transcend and wanting to belong."

The scene is set in the first section when the narrator observes a lone, last bird "crosses over," wording which is suggestive of the threshold between the living and dead. The airplane of the second section is a man-made bird and, again, the narrator experiences a moment of wonder, faced with a thunderhead that bears a resemblance to his brother, looking down on the lightning-illuminated ocean. The third section goes right to the heart of the narrator's impending transformation. Here, his brother tells him of a bonfire that "can light the great sky" with the condition that the bonfire's fuel is man himself. Section 4 draws a parallel between the bird images and the narrator. This section is set in the narrator's internal landscape, which he describes as in ruins. In line 30, the narrator writes, "our torn wings, our ink-spattered feathers," an illusion to quills, to writing, as well as age and the avian. The fifth section lacks bird references, but this section is intended as a pause, a breath, in the cadence of the poem. The last two lines, "mooing / down the bones," suggest pagan transcendence, when a pagan high priestess draws down the moon, or goddess, into her own body for a short time. The rooster of section 6—that finds a grain in the snow and eats it up, symbolic of inspiration—marks the turning point of the poem, when the narrator finally understands what his brother told to him nine years before. "Flames / bursting out of his brow" is both a description of the rooster and also a description of a transcendent state of inspiration and creativity. The narrator communicates his understanding to the reader in section 7. He alludes to the phoenix, the mythical bird that ages, dies, burns, and is reborn from its own ashes. Now that he understands his own road to transcendence, he no longer unrealistically expects to burn and be reborn like a phoenix. His transcendent burning is not a tool for achieving creativity but rather the creative act itself.

Fire and Creativity

"Another Night in the Ruins" is rich in imagery drawn from the natural world, a common element in Kinnell's poetry. The four elements of earth, air, water, and fire are invoked in this poem, another nod toward pagan spirituality, which reveres the natural world. Earth

is the “hill of despair” and the metaphysical ruins. Air is represented by the birds in the poem, the plane over the Atlantic, and the wind that “tears itself hollow / in the eaves of my ruins.” Water is present in the Atlantic Ocean and the snowdrifts. Fire is present in the bonfires and suggested in the ashes of the phoenix, the flames of creativity so central to Kinnell’s thesis. In the revelation of the final stanza, the narrator understands that he is not in control of what he creates but must instead submit to the chaos of conception: “to open himself, to *be* / the flames.” The rooster ripping apart the grain it has found illustrates inspiration striking all of a sudden, both majestic and frightening. The narrator is haunted by his own, internal ruins of “torn wings,” darkness, “snowdrifts,” “ghost-flute,” and wind. These ruins drive the narrator toward introspection and change. The narrator exists in darkness, the darkness of ruin and age. In seeking rebirth—creativity—the narrator is drawn toward fire and light. “On some hill of despair / the bonfire / you kindle can light the great sky.” Even the lightning of the second section is a kind of fire although the narrator cannot be a part of it and looks on from afar, as a man to his god. Ultimately, the flames of creativity in Kinnell’s poem are not flames of a passionate activity but rather the energy of being: “his one work / is / to open himself, to *be* / the flames.”

Style

Imagery

Imagery is a literary device that uses information drawn from the five senses (sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing) to create a picture in order to convey meaning. Kinnell anchors this poem with images. Rather than leave the night to a mere absence of light, he colors it and gives it life: “haze darkening on the hills,” “lit up / by lightning bolts.”

Flight is another reoccurring image. In the first section the narrator describes a bird flying at dusk, and then in the second section, he is in an airplane over the ocean. Wings and feathers are mentioned at the end of the fourth section and a rooster is the central image of the sixth section (although roosters are not necessarily known for flight). Flight and birds come together in the seventh, section where the narrator describes a bird flying out of its own ashes and then realizes that for man to go “up in flames,” he must become one with the fire.

Kinnell uses some images in a more abstract way. “Purple / of the eternal” seems to refer to the dusky color of the sky at the beginning of night, when the last rays of the sun are dying on the horizon, leaving behind dark, richly colored hues. Similarly, “Adoring / only the instant” may describe the focus of the bird flying past, which appreciates the beauty of the brief moment of dusk before night arrives. This phrase may also refer to the narrator’s own feelings as he looks out on this scene, caught up in the fleeting beauty. Another abstract image in Kinnell’s poem is “ghost-flute / of snowdrifts.” This image draws on the senses of hearing, touch, and sight. The “ghost-flute” is the eerie sound made by the fierce wind. “Snowdrifts” refers to a winter of the spirit when things are at rest or have aged past a time of usefulness, of reproductive ability. “Mooing / down the bones” is a comical reference to the pagan ritual of drawing down the moon, wherein the high priestess enters a trance and is temporarily inhabited by the goddess. Kinnell is also referring to the musical instrument known as bones, usually made from a pair of cow or bull ribs. Imagery is extremely important in poetry, which may rely less on the narrative line and more on the feelings evoked by the author’s choice of words to convey certain sensory impressions.

Meaning of Title

The title of this poem, “Another Night in the Ruins,” is important to consider because it adds a whole other level of meaning. In using the word “another,” Kinnell is drawing attention to the fact that the narrator’s struggles are ongoing. The narrator has been here before and was likely unsuccessful in previous attempts to understand how to rise up out of his own ruins. The word “night” again emphasizes the time in which the poem is set. It is the light of understanding, of inspiration, of renewed vigor for creative work that shines through this nighttime meditation. These figurative forms of illumination are represented by the lightning and the bonfire, which are set against a backdrop of

darkness. The “ruins” of the title anticipates the ruins mentioned in the fourth section. These are the narrator’s psychological or emotional ruins, probably connected to creative writing as suggested in the “ink-spattered feathers” mentioned at the end of the same section. The hope suggested in this title, which seems full of despair, is that this time something will be different and the narrator will not go through this again. He sees this hope fulfilled in the last section when he finally understands the process by which his creative transmutation can be achieved with success.

Historical Context

Civil Rights Movement

Kinnell was involved with the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s, when “Another Night in the Ruins” was first written and published. The civil rights movement lasted from approximately the mid-1950s until the end of the 1960s and was characterized by protest, civil disobedience, litigation, and other forms of social unrest that pushed for people to have equal standing under the law regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. At this time, throughout the United States, blacks and whites were segregated in many schools, jobs, and businesses. Although black people were emancipated from slavery following the end of the U.S. Civil War in 1865, many were so impoverished and still ill-regarded by white people that they were systematically treated as second-class citizens. In May 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. This crucial decision had a huge impact because many school districts across the country were not integrated. When Little Rock, Arkansas was pressed to integrate in 1957, the governor, Orval Faubus, called in the National Guard to prevent nine black students from entering a white school that they had sued for the right to attend. President Eisenhower intervened by dismissing the National Guard and bringing in U.S. Army soldiers to escort these nine black students to and from school and between classes.

Events escalated quickly after this Supreme Court ruling as high emotions erupted into action and reaction. A young black teenager, Emmett Till, was beaten and shot to death in Mississippi in August 1955 for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus to a white passenger in December 1955, leading to a two-week bus boycott and the U.S. Supreme Court decision that segregated buses were unconstitutional. Following the successful Montgomery bus boycott, many civil rights protestors adhered to the strategy of non-violent protest. Sit-ins were frequent in the 1960s. Black people sat at lunch counters, in museums, in libraries, and other segregated public places, and when they were forcibly removed and arrested, they brought public attention to their cause. Many sit-in protestors asked judges for jail and no bail so as to put the financial burden of their arrest on the government by taking up jail space. Non-violent protestors also went on freedom rides across the southern states to take a stand for desegregation of bus terminals but were met with more dangerous reactions as the buses were sometimes attacked by people who believed in segregation.

In June 1963, President John F. Kennedy submitted his civil rights bill to Congress, which President Johnson saw passed in 1964. In 1965, the U.S. Congress passed the Voting Rights Act to eliminate poll taxes, literacy tests, and other methods of discrimination at the polls. One effect of these changes was that, in twenty years, the United States went from having barely one hundred elected black officials to over seven thousand. While the civil rights movement was caused positive change, few minorities

living in the United States in the early 2000s would claim that the struggle for equal rights was over.

Vietnam War

Vietnamese nationalists (the Viet Minh) struggled for freedom from their imperialist occupier, France, in the First Indochina War (1946–1954). The Viet Minh were successful in their campaign against France, but their country quickly fractured into a northern communist state and southern anti-communist state once the French left. These two factions fought for control over all of Vietnam, leading directly from the First Indochina War into the Second Indochina War (1954–1979), known in the United States as the Vietnam War. What started out as a brutal civil war developed into an international outlet for cold war battles between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, also known as a proxy war. U.S. troops were present in Vietnam as early as 1950, but it was not until 1965 that large numbers of soldiers were deployed to aid the Viet Cong army of South Vietnam.

The warfare in Vietnam was unlike anything the U.S. military had previously encountered. Instead of clashes between large numbers of troops with an obvious winner and loser, the Viet Minh employed guerilla tactics. They attacked in small, mobile units, relying on surprise, knowledge of the landscape, and disguise. The U.S. military adapted, making wide use of chemical defoliants in an effort to expose the North Vietnamese forces, a choice that rendered much of the country's land dangerously toxic and infertile for years to come. The Vietnam War polarized Americans back in the United States. A significant number of people protested U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, which eventually led to Congress cutting off aid to the South Vietnamese in December 1974. American troops were brought home, leaving South Vietnam vulnerable to the well-organized North Vietnamese army. The war ended on April 30, 1975, when Saigon, the southern capital, was taken by the Viet Minh.

The legacy of the Vietnam War is painful, in part because of the high numbers of casualties. The war was not restricted to Vietnamese territory and ranged far into the neighboring countries of Laos and Cambodia. Numbers of dead and wounded are still debated but can be estimated at 300,000 dead among the South Vietnamese and its allies out of a combined force of 1.2 million soldiers; and 600,000 dead among the North Vietnamese and its allies out of a combined force of 520,000. The harshest statistic is the one million civilians of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia who died. Then, too, the chemical defoliants, particularly the dioxin-containing Agent Orange, are alone responsible for the poisoning four million people, half a million birth defects, and significantly increased risk for various cancers. Veterans of the Vietnam War often also suffered from debilitating post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Critical Overview

Kinnell has had an illustrious career as a poet from the very start, quickly coming to the attention of critics, such as Selden Rodman, as “the future of American poetry” with greats such as Robert Frost and E. E. Cummings aging. Kinnell’s first volume, *What a Kingdom It Was*, was published in 1960. Rodman, reviewing for the *New York Times* was laudatory in describing Kinnell’s epic “The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World”: “I do not hesitate to call this the freshest, most exciting, and by far most readable poem of a bleak decade.” Four years later, when Kinnell’s second book of poetry, *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock*, appeared, critical reception was still enthusiastic. In a review for the *New York Times*, De Witt Bell discusses how this new work displays “a new subtlety, depth and simplicity” and summarizes his review by describing this book as “memorable.” Kinnell’s style is often traced back to Walt Whitman, especially for its quality of inner reflection. Michael Goldman, writing for the *New York Times*, reviews Kinnell’s third collection, *Body Rags*, alongside a volume by the esteemed Robert Bly. Goldman gives a positive review, remarking on Kinnell’s “growing reputation as a superior lyric poet.”

Thomas Lask describes *The Book of Nightmares* as Kinnell’s “most integrated book, a work of one mood.” Lask’s review describes an ever-maturing poetic voice, unafraid “to look at the underside of society.” In another review of the same book, M. L. Rosenthal is cautiously positive, finding fault in a heaviness of the book that “needs stripping down.” In conclusion, Rosenthal nonetheless enjoyed *The Book of Nightmares*: “the real power of his book comes from its pressure of feeling, its remarkable empathy and keenness of observation, and its qualities of phrasing—far more than from its structural thoroughness or philosophical implications.”

Kinnell’s retrospective, *The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World: Poems 1946–64*, was published in 1975 and reviewed by Christopher Ricks for the *New York Times*. Ricks writes: “The best of Kinnell, which is very good, comes when he resists the expected humorlessness of rural-piety poetry,” a summary of the poet’s early career. Kinnell’s award-winning *Selected Poems* was published seven years later. Morris Dickstein, in his review, gives a glowing description of Kinnell’s growth as a poet, concluding that Kinnell “has not been seduced by modernist obfuscation, technical cleverness or earnest, thin-lipped confessional self-display.”

New York Times reviewer, Michiko Kakutani, writes eloquently of Kinnell’s mid-1980s volume, *The Past*, noting that it is a further development and refinement of Kinnell’s previous works: “An awareness of the evanescence of things suffuses the poems in this volume.” Harold Beaver also gives *The Past* a good review and is clearly unsurprised at the poet’s continued success: “Always there is this landscape with figures. Always the landscape embodies emotion without a hint of pastoral extravagance or natural fallacy.” An anonymous reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* gave an inviting review of Kinnell’s collection of poetry, *Imperfect Thirst*. The reviewer comments that some of the poet’s “remarks to himself are needlessly self-referential” but that “his voice is unsurpassable” and covers a broad territory of expression and subject matter.

Ned Balbo, writing for *Antioch Review*, celebrates the breadth of Kinnell's poetry in his review of *A New Selected Poems*: "Kinnell continues to write superbly of heartbreak and affirmation, his vision clear and language supple." In 2006, Kinnell published his twelfth collection, *Strong Is Your Hold*, which includes a poem about the events of September 11, 2001, titled "When the Towers Fell." An anonymous review for *Publishers Weekly* writes, "Occasionally the poet veers too far toward silly, snapshot moments, but for the most part Kinnell injects the mundane . . . with meaning and passion." In all, critics generally praise Kinnell's work as it evolved through many books of poetry.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Ullmann is a freelance writer and editor. In the following essay, she discusses the relationship between creativity and spirituality in Kinnell's poem "Another Night in the Ruins."

"Another Night in the Ruins," by Galway Kinnell, examines a writer's struggle with creativity, and the perils and assurances inherent in the creative process. The narrator of the poem is a writer who, like Kinnell, draws inspiration from the natural world and seems driven to distraction by his own naturalist spirituality. In section 6, he watches a rooster find a grain—the inspired thought—and "rips / it into / flames. Flaps. Crows. / Flames / bursting out of his brow." Even before this direct illustration of inspiration is presented, the narrator is concerned with the nighttime hilly landscape and birds, both real and figurative. One bird he watches flying through the twilight. Another is part of himself, a tattered bird with "ink-spattered feathers." The final bird of the poem is the phoenix, mentioned indirectly in the last section. A phoenix is a mythical bird that dies a fiery death and then rises, reborn, from its own ashes.

The central conflict of this poem is in the narrator as he comes to grips with what he must do to grow as a creative individual.

Fire imagery is an important component of Kinnell's poem. This fire is not a fire of permanent destruction but one of creation and change. What the narrator struggles to understand over the course of the poem is that, like the real thing, his symbolic fire, and its resulting creations, are not controllable by man although fire is a tool of creation. In classical mythology, fire was a divine gift that man was given. The narrator comes to realize that he must give himself up wholly to the flames of his creativity for it to be fully unleashed and thrive. Through this magnificent process, he is lifted from depression and the ruins of old projects and previous failed attempts fall aside. Thus he can be born anew to new ventures, new productivity.

Kinnell also alludes to spiritual and religious symbolism throughout "Another Night in the Ruins." Flames bursting from the brow of the rooster is not only indicative of the catalytic moment of inspiration but also of the spiritual phenomenon known as fire in the head. Fire in the head refers to being touched by a divine spirit. It is not strictly possession because the deity does not take over. The person is instead sharing his mortal body, an experience that could be both intoxicating and terrifying. The central conflict of this poem is in the narrator as he comes to grips with what he must do to grow as a creative individual. Early in the poem, in section 3, as well as at the end, in section 7, the narrator is concerned with the idea that he has to give himself up to the flames. The flames he is talking about are those of his own passion and creativity. He is unsure about throwing himself in, as his brother told him to do. But then he reflects upon the wintry ruins of his former work and the mundane nothingness looming before him.

The rooster arrives and shows him that fire is, indeed, the way. In giving himself to the fire of creativity, the narrator recognizes that “his one work / is / to open himself.” Fire is transformative: That which it burns can never be restored. This irreversibility need not be looked upon as destructive, which is the narrator’s fear. Fire is not a tool for him to master but a conduit through which he must move to become both tool and master.

Creativity begins with inspiration, a word whose roots are traced to breath. One of the definitions for inspiration has religious connotations of divine truths revealed to prophets. The etymology of the word, inspiration, is traced back to Hellenic times when the oracles of the gods—for example, Apollo’s oracle at Delphi—would receive divine messages from vapors that mysteriously rose from the earth. Inspiration, in the more secular sense, occurs as a result of friction between ideas. This friction will eventually result in a spark (the inspired thought), which evolves into a new idea. Inspiration, for many creative people, is the easy part. Often they have more ideas than they have time to realize those ideas in an art form. Following inspiration, the work at shaping one’s new idea begins, and this is when creativity comes into play. Metaphorically speaking, structures are built—buildings that will eventually wear, ruin, and tumble down, as seen in the narrator’s internal ruins described in section 4.

Religion is a system of belief centered on the existence of a deity or of the human soul. Spirituality is a broader term, encompassing all that is intangible in human existence but requiring no specific belief system. Kinnell frequently expresses a spiritual inquisitiveness and sensitivity in his poetry, and “Another Night in the Ruins” is no exception. Here, the narrator’s faith in his spirituality provides the means by which the narrator can map a way through his fear and become aligned with his creativity once more. After all, creativity is a part of spirituality. Origin stories are often a major aspect of religious belief. In these stories, the creation of the entire world and all of its creatures is explained, often in terms of divine expression. Set apart from animals, people are said to share in this mysterious power to create.

According to anthropological research, record of artistic expression first appears during the Upper Paleolithic period, approximately 40,000 years ago and when it does appear, it occurs in many places. As of the early 2000s, anthropologists continued to ponder *why* Upper Pleistocene hunters and gatherers created beautiful objects and images (for example, cave paintings, ivory carvings, and shaped stone beads). These things did not help them procure food as better tool technology would. One theory holds that prehistoric men and women may have developed spiritual beliefs at this time. They thus perhaps believed that these art works were spiritual aids for food procurement and for their protection.

Thus, creativity and spirituality are linked and together may have across the centuries been understood as capable of improving the human condition. For the narrator of this poem, creativity is a matter of concern to him as a writer; spirituality concerns him as a human. Throughout the poem, the narrator is probing his spiritual side for answers to his fears and uncertainties about the creative process. In sections 1 and 2, the narrator observes the natural world with awe. He watches a lone bird fly at dusk, “adoring / only the instant.” The thunderhead in section 2 is a further sign of the narrator’s spiritual link

with the natural world. It is not until section 3, however, that the link between the narrator's creativity and his spirituality is revealed. Here the narrator remembers his brother's advice about coping with depression. His brother tells him that the inspiration, "the bonfire / you kindle," is the easy part: "To make it burn," when creativity comes into play, is the difficult part because "you have to throw yourself in." This surrender is an act of faith in one's ability to be creative.

The narrator's brother's advice was given nine years ago and, from the use of the word "another" in the title and from the ruins of section 4, it is clear the narrator either did not understand his brother or has failed to have faith in his own creativity. In section 5, the narrator continues to watch and listen to the night-darkened world, seeking inspiration. But he confesses, "I hear nothing." Coming upon a rooster in section 6, though, the narrator observes it picking through the snow for a grain. The snow is symbolic of death or sleep while the seed represents new life. Here the narrator finally understands inspiration as the rooster "finds / it. Rips / it into / flames." The fire the narrator has avoided all this time thus returns, and now, in section 7, he understands the role fire plays and his job in the creative process. He realizes he is not like the phoenix, born again from his own ashes after throwing himself into the bonfire of his inspired ideas, but rather, "his one work / is / to open himself, to *be* / the flames." To "open himself" means that he relinquishes control of his creativity to the idea itself; however, "to *be* the flames" also implies that in becoming one with the fire, the narrator will direct the transformation of his idea. It is a paradox worthy of classical literature: in order to control his creativity, he must give himself up to it completely.

Source: Carol Ullmann, Critical Essay on "Another Night in the Ruins," in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Adaptations

- An audio recording of “Another Night in the Ruins” is available at http://archive.salon.com/audio/the_paris_review/2001/04/30/lunch_three/ from the online magazine *Salon*. The reading, which lasts nearly eight minutes, was recorded in April 2001 as part of *Salon*’s celebration of National Poetry Month and also includes the poems “The Milk Bottle” and “The Frog Pond.”

- *Galway Kinnell* is a compact disc that captures Kinnell’s 1980 reading from his collection *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*. The CD is 58 minutes long and includes an introduction by Allen Planz. It can be ordered at http://www.poets.org/ from the Academy of American Poets store.

- An audio recording of Kinnell’s famous poem “After Making Love We Hear Footsteps” is available at http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15927 which is the website of the Academy of American Poets. The recording was made on March 18, 1980, at the Guggenheim Museum.

- Video of Kinnell reading “After Making Love We Hear Footsteps,” is available at Bill Moyer’s *Fooling with Words* series website, http://www.wnet.org/foolingwithwords/main_video.html which is a multi-poet project produced on PBS. This video was recorded at the 1998 Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival and aired on PBS on September 26, 1999. A videocassette of the series is available at http://www.films.com.

- *Galway Kinnell* is a compact disc produced by the Poetry Archive. It is 54 minutes long and includes nineteen tracks of Kinnell reading his poetry. This recording, available for purchase from http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoet.do?poetId=2637 was made on July 11, 2005, at the Audio Workshop in London, produced by Richard Carrington. The Poetry Archive made four of the poem tracks available for preview: “Blackberry Eating,” "Oatmeal," "First Song,” and “Lastness (section 2).”

- The hardcover edition of Kinnell’s 2006 volume of poetry, *Strong Is Your Hold*, includes a compact disc audio recording of Kinnell reading all the poems published in this book, as well as related anecdotes. This collection and its accompanying CD, published by Houghton Mifflin, are available from book retailers.

Topics for Further Study

• Creativity is a central focus for Kinnell in “Another Night in the Ruins.” Write a poem in at least three sections that explores your ideas about creativity. As a class, have a poetry slam during which class members read their poems aloud.

• Kinnell is a renowned New England poet. In small groups, select poems by other New England poets and stage a dramatic presentation of these poems complete with costumes, props, and interpretive acting. Write a couple of paragraphs explaining why you selected these pieces and submit these to your teacher.

• What images stand out in your mind when you read “Another Night in the Ruins”? Write a short story or play whose action is based on what you see happening in Kinnell’s poem.

• Two of the major subjects in Kinnell’s poem are spirituality and creativity. Write an essay that examines the link between spirituality and creativity. Trade essays with another student. Do you agree or disagree with what your classmate wrote? Discuss your opinions and reasons in small groups.

• Select another poem by Galway Kinnell and read it. Create a visual interpretation of that poem using whatever medium you prefer: paint, collage, drawing, sculpture, or other media. Write a short paragraph explaining your piece and put your work on display along with the paragraph you wrote and a copy of the poem you are interpreting. How is this poem different from and how is it the same as “Another Night in the Ruins”?

• Choose one of the spiritual references in Kinnell’s poem to research, making sure to select from a religious tradition other than one with which you are already familiar. Write a research paper explaining this reference in full, including its origin and contemporary application. Examples from his poem include: flood stories; wicker man; holy bovine; drawing down the moon; fire in the head; and the phoenix.

• What environment speaks to you like the night-dark hills speak to Kinnell in this poem? It could be a place near where you live or someplace you’ve visited. It could be on a large scale or very specific and minute. It could be peaceful or it could be stimulating. Write a personal essay describing this place in detail and why it is important to you.

• Birds play an important part in the imagery of Kinnell’s poem. Alone or in small groups, take a walk in the woods or a nearby park and count the number of birds you see as well as the different varieties of birds. Observe their behavior, coloring, and calls (binoculars help). Compare your observations to a field guide when you return from your walk. How many different birds could you identify? Write a brief essay describing what you saw.

- Choose six or more of your favorite poems and make digital audio recordings of them on the computer. If possible, enhance the tracks with some music or sound effects (but do not forget that the poems are the central focus). Make a CD compilation of your poems and trade them with your classmates or even share them with the whole school.

- In this poem, Kinnell uses a rooster to describe the moment of inspiration. If you were Kinnell, which kind of bird would you have chosen? Why? Is it local or exotic? Write a short essay describing this bird and why you like it better than Kinnell's rooster, paying special attention to your bird's place in other literary works.

Compare and Contrast

• **1960s:** The U.S. military is involved in the Second Indochina War, known to Americans as the Vietnam War. Many Americans protest U.S. military involvement in the conflict and oppose mandatory military service (known as conscription or the draft). Young men are drafted right out of high school; some go to great lengths to avoid being sent to Vietnam, including fleeing to Canada, enrolling in college, or claiming conscientious objector status.

• **Today:** The U.S. military has been all-volunteer since 1973, although there is an attempt in 2003 to pass legislation reinstating the draft. The United States is involved in a long, drawn-out war in Iraq, which starts as a mission to recover weapons of mass destruction and overthrow Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein but dissolves into a debilitating civil war. No weapons of mass destruction are found, but Hussein is executed in 2006. As in the Vietnam War, the conflict has no easy solution that is acceptable to the United States, but many Americans are clamoring for U.S. troops to withdraw and return home.

***

• **1960s:** The civil rights movement in the United States is at its peak and centered on equalizing the rights of people regardless of race. On August 28, 1963, more than 200,000 protestors gather in Washington, D.C., to take part in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his famous “I Have a Dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

• **Today:** Popular perception is that the civil rights movement was successful, but many non-whites, religious minorities, and other marginalized citizens would argue that the struggle for equal rights in the United States is far from over. According to statistics available from the U.S. census, poverty rates in 2004 are 9 percent for whites, 10 percent for Asians, 22 percent for Hispanics, and 25 percent for African Americans. The fact is segregation continues despite laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, religion, age, sex, or handicap.

***

• **1960s:** Popular poets include Allen Ginsberg (“Howl”), Denise Levertov (*Here and Now*), Frank O’Hara (*Lunch Poems*), LeRoi Jones (*Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note*; he later changed his name to Amiri Baraka), W. S. Merwin (*The Drunk in the Furnace*), Adrienne Rich (“Rape”), Robert Lowell (*For the Union Dead*), and Robert Creeley (*For Love*).

- **Today:** Popular poets living today include some of the same as those who were popular in the 1960s. Others are Maya Angelou (*Still I Rise*), Billy Collins (*The Trouble with Poetry*), Gwendolyn Brooks (*Blacks*), Rita Dove (*Mother Love*), Marilyn Hacker (*Desesperanto*), Jim Harrison (*Saving Daylight*), Mary Oliver (*Thirst*), and Saul Williams ("Not in My Name").

***

- **1960s:** Popular opinion holds that religion is in decline in the United States although statistics do not support this contention. Social and cultural issues such as civil rights, women's liberation, increased drug use, and the conflict in Vietnam cause Americans to ask the question, "Is God Dead?"—the title of a *Time* magazine article published in 1966.

- **Today:** According to a 2002 study conducted by the Pew Research Center, the United States is one of the most religious countries in the developed world with 59 percent of Americans reporting that religion is very important in their lives.

What Do I Read Next?

• *Leaves of Grass* (1855) is Walt Whitman's major work. Whitman continuously revised and republished this book until his death in 1895. Whitman, along with Emily Dickinson, is considered by scholars to be one of the parent-figures of the American poetic traditions. Kinnell regarded Whitman as one of his major influences.

• Kinnell's *The Book of Nightmares* (1971) is a sequence of ten related poems, which Kinnell was inspired to write after his experiences in support of the civil rights movement (including being arrested) and protesting the Vietnam War.

• *Judevine* (1991), by David Budbill, is a collection of poetry centered on the characters that inhabit the fictional rural town of Judevine, Vermont. Budbill is renowned for capturing local dialect, expressions, and personalities. *Judevine* was made into a play and an opera.

• *After Frost: An Anthology of Poetry from New England* (1996), edited by Henry Lyman, is a collection of poems from thirty New England poets, including Robert Frost, Galway Kinnell, Sylvia Plath, Donald Hall, and Louise Glück.

• *The Poems of Francois Villon* (1977) is translated by Kinnell from the original French. Villon is a fifteenth-century poet and thief, who composed his verse in prison and chose to write about the underworld he lived in rather than the more acceptable courtly ideals.

• *Robert Frost's New England* (2000), by Betsy and Tom Melvin, is a photographic guide to Frost's poetry. The book presents photographs chosen to convey some scenes Frost describes in his poems. Poems and photographs are presented side by side.

Further Study

Kinnell, Galway, *Body Rags*, Houghton Mifflin, 1968.

In his third collection, Kinnell is concerned with mortality and the material world. This volume collects some of his most frequently anthologized poems, including “Another Night in the Ruins,” “The Bear,” and “The Porcupine.”

———, *Walking Down the Stairs: Selections from Interviews*, University of Michigan Press, 1978.

Through selections from his own interviews, Kinnell shares his thoughts on his work and poetry in general.

Nelson, Howard, ed., *On the Poetry of Galway Kinnell: The Wages of the Dying*, University of Michigan Press, 1988.

In this volume, Nelson has collected reviews and articles—both flattering and scathing—about Kinnell, his books, and his individual poems. Critics include Joseph Bruchac, Tess Gallagher, Donald Hall, and Harold Bloom.

Zimmerman, Lee, *Intricate and Simple Things: The Poetry of Galway Kinnell*, University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Zimmerman examines six volumes of Kinnell’s work, observing a paradox of conflicted desires which informs Kinnell’s verse. Zimmerman’s dynamic writing makes this critical study a comfortable book to read.

Bibliography

Balbo, Ned, Review of *A New Selected Poems*, in *Antioch Review*, Vol. 59, No. 1, Winter 2001, p. 121.

Beaver, Harold, “Refuge in the Library, on the Farm and in Memories,” in *New York Times*, March 2, 1986, p. BR14.

Bell, De Witt, “Wonders of the Inner Eye,” in *New York Times*, July 5, 1964, p. BR4.

Dickstein, Morris, “Intact and Triumphant,” in *New York Times*, September 19, 1982, p. 33.

Goldman, Michael, “Joyful in the Dark,” in *New York Times*, February 18, 1968, p. 12.

Kakutani, Michiko, “Mortality and Love,” in *New York Times*, November 2, 1985, p. 15.

Kinnell, Galway, “Another Night in the Ruins,” in *Selected Poems*, Houghton Mifflin, 1982, pp. 67–68.

Kinnell, Galway, and Thomas Gardner, “An Interview with Galway Kinnell,” in *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Autumn 1979, p. 427.

Lask, Thomas, “The Makers and Their Works,” in *New York Times*, September 1, 1971, p. 35.

Pew Global Attitudes Project, *Among Wealthy Nations . . .: U. S. Stands Alone in Its Embrace of Religion*, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 19, 2002.

Review of *Imperfect Thirst*, in *Publishers Weekly*, Vol. 241, No. 39, September 26, 1994, p. 57.

Review of *Strong Is Your Hold*, in *Publishers Weekly*, Vol. 253, No. 41, October 16, 2006, p. 34.

Ricks, Christopher, “In the Direct Line of Whitman, The Indirect Line of Eliot,” in *New York Times*, January 12, 1975, p. 241.

Rodman, Selden, “A Quartet of Young Singers,” in *New York Times*, September 18, 1960, p. BR50.

Rosenthal, M. L., “Under the Freeway, In the Hotel of Lost Light,” in *New York Times*, November 21, 1971, p. BR77.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Poetry for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

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:

Editor, Poetry for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331–3535