The Arsenal at Springfield Study Guide

The Arsenal at Springfield by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Arsenal at Springfield," first published in 1845 in America, is considered by many critics to be Longfellow's most effective antiwar poem. The idea for the poem came on Longfellow's wedding trip to the famous arsenal in Springfield, Massachusetts, which supplied many of the guns used during the American Revolution. At the suggestion of his wife, Fanny, and inspired by the writings of his friend, the peace crusader Charles Sumner—who was also present at the tour of the arsenal—Longfellow wrote a poem that offered a desperate plea for peace. The many rows of guns in the arsenal, which in Longfellow's estimation resembled a pipe organ, provided a vivid image to launch his poem. In fact, many critics have commented on the effectiveness of the images in the poem, which offer a gritty tour through the ravaging effects of human war, as well as a preview of what a peaceful society could be like.

The poem was widely known in its time. Sumner was one of many engaged in a vigorous antiwar—and in some cases antislavery—debate, so Longfellow's poem was timely. The poet's reputation declined after his death, and the debate over the worth of his works still rages. Still, "The Arsenal at Springfield" forever commemorates the actual arsenal, which today is housed in the museum of the historic Springfield Armory. The arsenal is known as the Organ of Muskets—as a result of Longfellow's depiction in the poem. A current copy of the poem can be found in *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Selected Poems*, published by Penguin Classics in 1988.

Author Biography

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born on February 27, 1807, in Portland, Maine. His father, Stephen Longfellow, was a member of the Eighteenth Congress of the United States. In 1822, Longfellow enrolled in Bowdoin College, a new academic institution where his father was a trustee. However, Longfellow went against his father's wish, which was for his son to study law, and chose to pursue a literary career. A prolific writer, Longfellow published poems in several different publications while in school. In 1825, the poet was offered the position of chair of the new modern languages department at Bowdoin. In an effort to prepare for this post, Longfellow took a trip to Europe, which stretched into three years. From 1829 to 1835, the poet taught at Bowdoin, where he spent much of his writing time working on textbooks, essays, and other academic endeavors.

In 1835, Longfellow and his wife, Mary, pregnant with their first child, set off for Europe. However, later that year, Mary died of complications from a miscarriage, an event that greatly affected Longfellow. The poet soon gave up his academic publishing in favor of his poetry, and, in 1836, he accepted a teaching position at Harvard University. He renewed his former practice of publishing his poems in several different magazines. In *Voices of the Night* (1839) and *Ballads and Other Poems* (1841), Longfellow reprinted many of these poems. During this time, the poet was also trying, in vain, to win the hand of Frances Appleton in marriage. In 1843, however, Fanny relented, and the two were married. While they were on their honeymoon in Springfield, Massachusetts, the couple□along with their friend, public activist Charles Sumner□ visited the city's famous arsenal, where Fanny suggested that Longfellow write a peace poem. Struck by the way the rows of guns resembled a pipe organ, Longfellow used this idea as the dominant image in the resulting poem "The Arsenal at Springfield," which was first published in *Graham's Magazine* in May 1845 and gained a wider audience when it was included in 1846's *The Belfry of Bruges and Other Poems*.

Following the publication of several more works, including poetry, a novel, and even a verse drama, Longfellow resigned from his position at Harvard in 1854. It was not long afterwards that his prolific output slowed down. In 1861, Fanny Longfellow's dress caught on fire while she was sealing some memory bags with wax, and the poet was unable to save her; she died from her burns the next day. At the same time, the poet's attempts to put out the flames had given him massive burns on his face that almost killed him. In time, the poet recovered physically, although with permanent scars on his face, he hid for the rest of his life behind the bushy white beard that many came to associate with the poet. Longfellow died in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on March 24, 1882.

Poem Text

This is the Arsenal. From floor to ceiling,
Like a huge organ, rise the burnished arms;
But from their silent pipes no anthem pealing
Startles the villages with strange alarms.

Ah! what a sound will rise, how wild and dreary,
When the death-angel touches those swift keys!
What loud lament and dismal Miserere
Will mingle with their awful symphonies!

I hear even now the infinite fierce chorus,
The cries of agony, the endless groan,
Which, through the ages that have gone before us,
In long reverberations reach our own.

On helm and harness rings the Saxon hammer,
Through Cimbric forest roars the Norseman's
song,
And loud, amid the universal clamor,
O'er distant deserts sounds the Tartar gong.

I hear the Florentine, who from his palace
Wheels out his battle-bell with dreadful din,
And Aztec priests upon their teocallis
Beat the wild war-drums made of serpent's
skin;

The tumult of each sacked and burning village;
The shout that every prayer for mercy drowns;
The soldiers' revels in the midst of pillage;
The wail of famine in beleaguered towns;

The bursting shell, the gateway wrenched asunder,
The rattling musketry, the clashing blade;
And ever and anon, in tones of thunder
The diapason of the cannonade.

Is it, O man, with such discordant noises,
With such accursed instruments as these,
Thou drownest Nature's sweet and kindly voices,
And jarrest the celestial harmonies?

Were half the power, that fills the world with

terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and
courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals or forts:

The warrior's name would be a name abhorred!
And every nation, that should lift again
Its hand against a brother, on its forehead
Would wear forevermore the curse of Cain!

Down the dark future, through long generations,
The echoing sounds grow fainter and then
cease;
And like a bell, with solemn, sweet vibrations,
I hear once more the voice of Christ say,
"Peace!"

Peace! and no longer from its brazen portals
The blast of War's great organ shakes the skies!
But beautiful as songs of the immortals,
The holy melodies of love arise.

Plot Summary

Stanza One

"The Arsenal at Springfield" begins with a clear statement: "This is the Arsenal." By using such a blatant form of speech, Longfellow immediately establishes his setting. This is important to him, because he wishes to build on the setting: "From floor to ceiling / Like a huge organ, rise the burnished arms." The guns that reside in the arsenal are so numerous that they take up the entire wall space in the building. Furthermore, the "burnished," or polished, guns resemble an organ, in this case a pipe organ. A pipe organ is a large instrument that uses pressurized air, forced through rows of pipes, to create musical sounds. By saying that the collection of guns is like an organ, Longfellow is being metaphorical. A metaphor is a technique by which the poet gives an object a secondary meaning that does not normally belong to it. Longfellow does not mean that one could play music on the guns as one could on an organ. However, his reference to the organ invokes a powerful image in the reader's mind. Although he has not stated so explicitly, the reader can infer from the organ reference that the arsenal's guns are all standing upright, arranged in rows with their barrels sticking up□like the pipes of an organ. This is the power of Longfellow's metaphor.

The image is even more powerful since the metaphor gives the reader a meaning that is contradictory to the objects' original meaning. Guns are, by their very nature, used to create violence, whereas organs are usually found in peaceful settings, such as churches, and used to create melodies. In the next two lines, Longfellow elaborates on the fact that he is using a contradictory meaning: "But from their silent pipes no anthem pealing / Startles the villages with strange alarms." Anthems are a positive form of song meant to praise something or somebody, and they often have holy meanings. These guns, however, have "silent pipes" and offer no consolation or assurance. Likewise, for now, they will not inspire any "strange alarms," which happen when a startled village is attacked.

Stanza Two

However, the next line says that things are about to change. Says Longfellow, "Ah! what a sound will rise, how wild and dreary," indicating by the use of the word *will* that the peace is only momentary. Some "wild and dreary" tragedy is about to happen. At this point, it is possible to infer a time for the setting. Although some might guess from the start that the "Springfield" from the title is Springfield, Massachusetts, a famous town that helped supply guns to the American Revolution through its arsenal, this line confirms it. The guns from the first stanza are "burnished" and "silent," because they have never been used. The reader is getting a picture of the arsenal as it was in 1777 before the guns had been used. In this second stanza, Longfellow, writing from the 1840s but looking back to 1777 with the benefit of hindsight, can tell readers for a fact that once the "organ" starts to play, things are going to get bad.

He refers to a "death-angel," who will touch the "swift keys" of the organ. Normal organs are sounded through the use of a keyboard. However, for this organ of death, the keys are the triggers for the guns. Referring to these keys as "swift" underscores the fact that people are going to die quickly in the American Revolution. By using musical language such as "keys," Longfellow is sustaining the metaphor of guns as organs of death. In the next two lines, he magnifies this effect: "What loud lament and dismal Miserere / Will mingle with their awful symphonies! *Miserere* is French for "Have mercy," so these two lines are saying that cries for mercy of those who will be shot will be a form of music□which will blend in with the "awful symphonies" that the organ of death creates.

Stanza Three

In the third stanza, Longfellow builds on this idea, saying that these "cries of agony" and "the endless groan" will form an "infinite fierce chorus." These guns are not just going to kill a lot of people; they are going to uphold a tradition that has been going on "through the ages that have gone before us." Furthermore, the horrible music that will come from them will be made even more horrible from the "long reverberations," or echoes, of violence from times past.

Stanza Four

At this point, Longfellow goes back to the past to explore this violence in detail. He starts with the Saxons, members of a Germanic race of people who, along with the Anglos and the Jutes, staged a massive invasion of Britain in the fifth century. The Saxons fought with hammers, which Longfellow notes would ring on "helm and harness." The use of the ringing sound makes the depiction of the battle more intense and provides a fifth-century equivalent to the organ of death in Springfield. Longfellow continues his exploration of ancient battles by discussing the "Norseman's song," a roaring battle cry that tears through the "Cimbric" forest. The "Cimbric" people were a Germanic or Celtic people who were thought to have originated in Jutland, the continental portion of modern-day Denmark. The Norsemen, commonly known as Vikings, were another Scandinavian warrior culture, known for their boisterous battle songs. All of these sounds combine to help create the horrible music of battle, which is such a "universal clamor" that it extends over "deserts" to the land of the Tartars. Tartars, also known as Tatars, were a warrior race in the area of modern-day Turkey. Their "gong" is their particular contribution to the battle "music."

Stanza Five

Like the previous stanza, this stanza highlights other warrior cultures that have helped to contribute to the war song. The "Florentine," located in modern- day Florence, Italy, uses a "battle-bell" during conflicts. Likewise, the "Aztec priests," a particularly notorious warrior culture that was active in Mexico in the sixteenth century, stand "upon their teocallis" and beat their "wild war-drums made of serpent's skin." A "teocallis" was a

ceremonial space on the flattened and terraced top of a pyramid, which was used for rituals such as the beating of their war drums. In this case, their drums are made of "serpent's skin," an even more dangerous image, since snakes can be very deadly.

Stanza Six

In the sixth stanza, Longfellow stops his listing of warrior cultures and focuses specifically on the war sounds that create the awful music of a death organ. These sounds include the "tumult" created from ravaged villages, the "shout" that covers up every cry for mercy, the "revels" of the victorious soldiers who are in the midst of pillaging, and the "wail" of people who are hungry□a common side effect of war.

Stanza Seven

To these sounds of human suffering, Longfellow next adds sounds of various weapons from different eras in military technology. These sounds include "the bursting shell," explosive projectiles that can tear structures apart; the "rattling musketry," guns like those in the arsenal; "the clashing blade," or sword; and of course, as he emphasizes in the last two lines, the "tones of thunder" that accompany the firing of a cannon. This "cannonade" is a "diapason," a musical term that normally means a fixed level of sound. In other words, when people are at war with modern weapons like cannons, the assault is relentless; the "music" reaches a certain pitch and stays there.

Stanza Eight

In this stanza, Longfellow poses a question:

Is it, O man, with such discordant noises,
With such accursed instruments as these,
Thou drownest Nature's sweet and kindly voices,
And jarrest the celestial harmonies?

Here, Longfellow once again identifies all of the previous descriptions as "discordant noises." *Discordant* means "inharmonious," so Longfellow is saying that, while these war sounds are creating a form of "music," it is not a good one□it is not harmonious with the rest of human life. Longfellow questions the reader, asking if it is possible that, with these "accursed instruments," the reader□and all of human society□is drowning out the natural harmonies found in the sounds of nature. Longfellow takes it one step further in the last line, where he suggests that this "discordant" noise might be so destructive that it is jarring the "celestial harmonies." This refers to an ancient philosophy in which people believed that the heavenly bodies, or spheres, were arranged in such a perfect way that they created divine music. By suggesting that human fighting could throw off the celestial song, Longfellow is underscoring the fact that war has colossal consequences.

Stanza Nine

As if he is providing an answer to his own question from the previous stanza, Longfellow now makes a plea to stop the fighting. He poses a hypothetical situation: if "half the power that fills the world with terror" and "half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts" were reallocated, then humanity would not need "arsenals" or "forts." In other words, military campaigns and empires require enormous resources, which would be better spent in educating the human mind into a more peaceful condition.

Stanza Ten

In this hypothetical new society, the tables would be turned. Whereas in the old society warriors like the Vikings and the Aztecs would be revered, in this new, peaceful society, they would be outcasts, and nobody would even want to speak their names, much less support their militant actions. In the last two lines of this stanza, Longfellow takes it even further, increasing from one warrior to an entire "nation." If a nation should dare exhibit violence toward another nation in this new society, it would "wear for evermore the curse of Cain!" Here, Longfellow calls on one of the classic stories of the Old Testament to support his case. The story of Cain and Abel is one of jealously and war-like rage. Cain becomes jealous when the Lord accepts an offering from Cain's brother, Abel, but does not accept an offering from Cain. As a result, Cain kills Abel. When the Lord finds out, he banishes Cain from civilization, giving him a mark that will discourage others from killing him. This eternal banishment will be the punishment of anybody who dares murder in this new, hypothetical, culture, Longfellow tells his readers.

Stanza Eleven

Now that he has sketched out his plan for the perfect, peaceful society, Longfellow moves on into the future and tries to paint that future as a reality. He takes the reader down "the dark future, through long generations." Here, in this distant future, "The echoing sounds" of the war music that has been played for millennia now "grow fainter and then cease." Instead of these "discordant noises," this future once again holds "sweet vibrations," which sound "like a bell." Invoking the Bible once again□this time the New Testament□ Longfellow says that he can "hear once more the voice of Christ say, 'Peace!'" By invoking both the Old and New Testaments, Longfellow is trying to underscore the fact that war is wrong and that both sections of the Bible will back him up on this idea.

Stanza Twelve

Longfellow starts this stanza with the word "Peace!" after ending the previous stanza with the same word. This emphasizes Longfellow's message, forcing the reader to sit up and take notice. Now that Longfellow has sketched out his dream of a peaceful society, he takes one more look at the death organ, which is quiet once again: "no longer from

its brazen portals / The blast of War's great organ shakes the skies!" At this point, although he has started out by discussing the organ of death at the Springfield arsenal, the "great organ" now refers to the collective instrument of death that has been forged throughout the countless battles like those described in the poem. Finally, at the end of the poem, Longfellow, having silenced the music of war, has freed up space for the "holy melodies of love," which are as "beautiful as songs of the immortals." Humanity may not be able to hear the music of the celestial spheres, but it has the ability to create melodies that are equally as beautiful, if it will just learn to focus on love, not war.

Themes

War

The theme that is most obvious in the poem from the beginning is war. Humans have been in countless wars in their history, and Longfellow samples some of these wars - from various points in humanity's past - to totally explore the brutality and horrors of war. When the poem starts, Longfellow introduces the arsenal at Springfield, which is quickly shown to resemble a ghastly type of musical organ. But this organ does not play an inspirational or spiritual "anthem." Instead, it offers a "wild and dreary" form of music, the music of brutality, suffering, and death. Longfellow describes the act of playing this organ - the guns - as if an evil force, a "death-angel" is playing "awful symphonies." When the poet starts to take the reader back "through the ages," he explains what forms some of these symphonies, invoking the Saxons, a Germanic race that - along with the Anglos and Jutes - invaded Britain. The Saxons used such basic weapons as a "hammer," which makes a ringing sound when it hits the metal "helm" or "harness" of a foe.

Besides actual violence, Longfellow also describes the auxiliary sounds of war, the songs, shouts, and drumbeats that announce a war is coming. These, says Longfellow, are still signs of war and so add to the "universal clamor" that has become the organ of war, as do the many advancements in military technology. From "the clashing blade," which has limited destructive power, humans have moved on to heavy artillery such as the "bursting shell" and the "cannonade," which can destroy ever-greater targets. However, these sounds are destructive to more than just humanity, Longfellow suggests. He poses a question to the reader, asking if it might even be possible for such "accursed instruments" of war to affect the divine music of the spheres.

Peace

It does not have to be this way, Longfellow says in the last four stanzas. Instead, he suggests that if "half the power, that fills the world with terror" and "half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts" were put to good use, then humanity would not need war. In this peaceful world, precious resources would go to education, redeeming "the human mind from error." More importantly, in such a peaceful society, the idea of war would be a taboo, and those who engaged in such acts would be punished severely. Longfellow is so passionate about this idea of peace that he uses the word "Peace!" twice in a row - at the end of stanza seven and at the beginning of stanza eight. Instead of war, Longfellow says, humanity should focus on love. Unlike the "discordant noises" of war, which could potentially jar the celestial harmonies, love's "melodies" would "arise" to join the celestial music. This future is more appealing to Longfellow.

Music

Whether he is talking about war or peace, Longfellow follows the theme of music. "War's great organ," "the celestial harmonies," and "Nature's sweet and kindly voices" are all described exclusively in musical terms. The war organ plays "awful symphonies," a "fierce chorus," which at times has "tones of thunder." This music travels "through the ages" in "long reverberations" to reach Longfellow's society. In addition to making the sounds of strife or peace sound like music, Longfellow also uses actual musical instruments within the poem, such as a "gong," "drums," and "a bell."

Style

Metaphor

The most obvious technique that Longfellow uses is metaphor. The organ of war comes to life from the moment he describes the guns as a musical instrument. This thought is compelling, especially since it is a contradictory metaphor. The idea of using a peaceful instrument to describe items that are used to create violence immediately engages the reader's attention. However, Longfellow takes it several steps further by sustaining the metaphor. The "huge organ" with its "burnished arms" takes on an even more sinister connotation when the "death-angel touches those swift keys!" Once this horrendous piece of death machinery is activated, the war organ seems to explode into the "awful symphonies," which drown out the "loud lament" of people who are suffering. As Longfellow takes his readers through the history of human warfare, he continues to speak in musical terms. There is a "fierce chorus" composed of "cries of agony" and an "endless groan." For the rest of the poem, Longfellow discusses the "endless" nature of this "fierce chorus" with several examples of the sounds of people suffering, weapons clashing, and barbaric victors celebrating their violent acts. All of these "musical" sounds serve to strengthen Longfellow's original metaphor of war as a giant organ that creates horrendous music.

Imagery

While Longfellow is fleshing out this metaphor, he is also leaving the reader with some lasting mental images. The types of words that he chooses to use invoke images of extreme violence, brutality, and suffering. "On helm and harness rings the Saxon hammer," says Longfellow, and the reader can imagine a Saxon warrior bludgeoning somebody in the head or knocking the person off his horse. Longfellow also builds up images of powerful war chants. A "Norseman's song" is not just a song; instead, it "roars" through the forest, a weapon in itself. Likewise for the "Tartar gong," which is so powerful that the reader can imagine the noise traversing "deserts" like some huge sonic war boom. When Longfellow describes the human suffering that results from war, he gives the reader such images as a "sacked and burning village," a "prayer for mercy" drowning in an invader's shout, and "the wail of famine." These are all vivid and lasting images, as are the effects of a "bursting shell," a projectile explosive that can "wrench" a gateway from its original shape. Although the majority of the poem is composed of horrendous images such as these, Longfellow does offer some relief at the end, when he describes how things could be if people embrace peace, not war: "But beautiful as songs of the immortals, / The holy melodies of love arise." This image, of melodies taking on physical form and rising up□presumably to join the music of the celestial spheres□helps to take away the sting of the other negative images and to leave people with a hope for peace.

Rhyme

When one looks at the structure of the poem, the rhyme scheme becomes immediately apparent. In each stanza, every other line rhymes. In other words, the end word in the first line rhymes with the end word in the third line. Likewise, the end word of the second line rhymes with the end word of the fourth line. So, in the first stanza, the word "ceiling" rhymes with the word "pealing," and the word "arms" rhymes with the word "alarms." Although Longfellow uses this type of rhyme scheme in much of his poetry, it works particularly well in this poem. When a poet uses such a predictable rhyme scheme, in which every stanza follows the same pattern, it affects the way a reader reads or speaks the poem. Since the reader's mind starts to pick up on the rhymes, the poem takes on a singsong effect, much like that of a musical piece. Since Longfellow is using music as a metaphor for the horrors of war, this effect intensifies the reading experience.

Historical Context

United States War of Independence

Longfellow's poem is a plea for peace. However, instead of setting the poem in the modern day and talking about conflicts the world is currently facing, he chose to go back in time to 1777, when the fledgling American nation built its federal arsenal at Springfield. The new arsenal supplied many of the muskets that helped America win its freedom from England during the United States War of Independence (1775-1783). The war, which is also commonly known as the American Revolution, officially began in 1775. However, its roots can be traced back to 1763, after the conclusion of the French and Indian War (1754-1763) - the American phase of a much larger, worldwide conflict to establish territorial dominance in North America. Following Britain's victory, the British government, heavily in debt from its worldwide military campaign, decided that the American colonies should pay more taxes to help shoulder the load.

Subsequently, in 1764 the British Parliament passed a number of laws - collectively known as the Sugar Act - to raise taxes on sugar, molasses, and other commodities in the American colonies. However, the colonists, themselves struggling from an economic recession that resulted from the war, were opposed to the taxes. This was especially true since, unlike other British citizens, they had no representation in Parliament. Over the next decade, the British government continued to pass various taxation acts, and on April 19, 1775, the tension erupted into war when British forces killed several colonists. In 1776, the colonies declared their independence from Britain with the Declaration of Independence. On September 3, 1783, after several years of bloody battles, Britain signed the Treaty of Paris and acknowledged the independence of the United States.

War of 1812

Though Longfellow was not alive during the American Revolution, his life did span the first three wars in the new American nation. And though the nation initially only stretched to the Mississippi River, the boundary lines soon changed. From 1793 to 1815, Britain was fighting on and off with French forces in the Napoleonic Wars. Although America was neutral, in 1807 British naval forces began to impede American trade by blocking French ports, as well as by forcing American seamen into service in the British navy. America warned England to remove its blockades and stop the impressment of American sailors, but Britain was slow to respond. At the same time, a group of United States congressman, known as the War Hawks, pushed for war with Britain, in an effort to win more territory for the United States - specifically Florida - from Britain's Spanish allies. These factors culminated in a declaration of war from United States President James Madison on June 18, 1812. American forces were ill equipped to fight a war against Britain and Spain, although they did win some key battles. In the end, the war was a stalemate, although it helped to inspire confidence in the citizens of the fledgling American nation.

Mexican War

As the years passed and America began to build itself into an established nation, the quest for land continued. In 1845, the United States annexed Texas from Mexico. Texas had previously gained its independence from Mexico in 1836, and the citizens of Texas overwhelmingly voted to become part of the United States. However, Mexico and the United States disputed the actual borderline of Texas. In an effort to resolve this dispute - and buy more Mexican lands - President James Polk sent an emissary to Mexico. However, Mexico was not interested in losing more land and refused to see the emissary. Angry, Polk sent American troops to hold the disputed border area, which incited Mexican forces to attack. Although the area was disputed, Polk told the United States Congress that it was an attack on American soil, and on May 13, 1846, Congress authorized a war.

The Mexican War, also known as the Mexican- American War, was extremely one-sided, and America's more modern military easily won against Mexico's forces. The war, which ended on March 10, 1848, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, resulted in a massive increase in land for the United States. In addition to conceding its claim on the disputed Texas borderland, Mexico also sold the United States much of the territory in the current states of New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, Texas, and western Colorado, all for $15 million. However, even though the war was easily won, the American home front was largely divided. Many slave-holding southern states appreciated the new land, which could create more slave-holding states in the South; however, some in the northern states, especially those against slavery, opposed the war.

American Civil War

This division in thinking between northern and southern states increased over the next decade, especially surrounding the issue of slavery, an institution that Longfellow had spoken out against in some of his poems. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln - an antislavery candidate - was elected to the presidency. Southern states, which relied on slave labor to fuel their lucrative cotton industry, feared that Lincoln's intervention might hurt their business. As a result, from 1860 to 1861, eleven southern states, starting with South Carolina, seceded from the Union. The South tried to establish its independence, but when the Union failed to recognize the new Confederacy, war broke out. From 1861 to 1865, the American Civil War, also known as the War Between the States, consumed the lives of more than six hundred thousand Americans. It is, to date, the single most bloody fight that America has ever experienced.

Critical Overview

The critical reception of Longfellow has changed over time. When his poems were published during his life, he was revered for them. His inspirational verses and folk themes struck a chord with audiences in both America and Europe, both of which were undergoing rapid change. However, after his death in 1882, his reputation was not as good, and it has been a constant debate since then as to whether or not Longfellow is a great poet.

"The Arsenal at Springfield" was originally published in *Graham's Magazine* in May 1845; it was reprinted at the end of 1845 in *The Belfry of Bruges and other Poems*, a volume that technically has a copyright date of 1846. As for the poem itself, it is widely known that the poem was not Longfellow's idea. As Cecil B. Williams notes in his 1964 book, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, the poet's second wife, Fanny, was "at least partly responsible" for the writing of the poem. As Williams explains, on the Longfellows' "wedding journey in 1843, they visited, among other places, the arsenal at Springfield, Massachusetts, with the result, Fanny said, that 'I urged H. to write a peace poem.'" Likewise, as Thomas Wentworth Higginson notes in his 1902 book, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, Fanny sometimes "suggested subjects for poems."

Fanny was not the only inspiration for the poem, however. As Higginson notes, on the trip to the arsenal, Longfellow and his wife were also joined by "Charles Sumner, just then the especial prophet of international peace." Sumner was a noted crusader for peace, and, as George Lowell Austin notes of the poem in his 1888 book, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Life, His Works, His Friendships*, a large influence on the poem. Austin, who had known Longfellow, recounts a conversation in which the poet told him that "The Arsenal at Springfield" "was suggested by reading Mr. Sumner's eloquent address on 'The True Grandeur of Nations.'"

As for the poem itself, critics have given it mixed reviews. Some, like Edward Wagenknecht, liked the poem. In his 1986 book, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Poetry and Prose*, Wagenknecht calls it an "admirably constructed poem" and says that it "is perhaps Longfellow's most effective plea for peace." However, others, like Newton Arvin, in his 1855 book, *Longfellow: His Life and Work*, have faulted the poem somewhat. Says Arvin, the poem "is only half successful if only because the anti-war theme is developed so fully in direct rhetorical terms." Still, in the end, Arvin approves of the poem, since it "takes off from a fine image□the burnished gun-barrels at the Arsenal rising to the ceiling like the pipes of a huge and ominous organ." Many other critics have been struck by the vivid imagery of the war organ.

In 1916, during World War I, George Hamlin Fitch notes in his essay, "Longfellow: The Poet of the Household," that the poem is "an eloquent plea for peace." In addition, citing the current state of affairs in the world, Fitch says that Longfellow's verses "have special force at this time when more than half the civilized world is engaged in the most destructive war ever known." However, not all critics praised the poem. The most scathing review comes from George Saintsbury, whose 1933 essay, "Longfellow's

Poems," notes that while he likes many of Longfellow's verses, he did not like "The Arsenal at Springfield." Says Saintsbury, the poem "is a piece of mere claptrap, out of harmony with some of his own most spirited work, and merely an instance of a cant common at the time."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Longfellow's manipulation of structure, tenses, and sounds to emphasize his antiwar message in his poem.

When one reads "The Arsenal at Springfield" for the first time, Longfellow's plea for peace is obvious. The gritty images from past wars send a very clear statement that Longfellow wants peace. Some critics, like Newton Arvin, have criticized the poem for this fact. In his 1855 book, *Longfellow: His Life and Work*, Arvin notes that the poem "is only half successful if only because the antiwar theme is developed so fully in direct rhetorical terms." However, once readers dig into the structure of the poem and start to see the ways in which Longfellow has magnified the effect of his poem, they can see that it is this blatant quality that makes the poem so powerful. Instead of forcing the reader to dig deeply for the meaning, a requirement when reading some other poems, Longfellow's poem embraces its meaning. And in the end, even Arvin approves of the poem, since it "takes off from a fine image - the burnished gun-barrels at the Arsenal rising to the ceiling like the pipes of a huge and ominous organ."

At first sight, the entire poem appears to be uniform in structure. Each of the twelve stanzas contains four lines, and the poem uses a rhyme scheme in which the even and odd lines in each stanza rhyme with each other. However, even though the stanzas are standardized, the actual poem can be broken down into sections, based on what Longfellow is trying to achieve in each one. The first stanza is set off on its own, a description of the Springfield arsenal when it is completed and waiting for action. The collective guns sit "Like a huge organ," waiting to be played. In stanzas two and three, this "organ" bursts into activity, as it is played by the "death-angel," and the resulting "symphonies" are anything but pleasant. In fact, they are "awful." In stanzas four through seven, Longfellow increases the uncomfortable quality of his verses. Instead of reading about nameless "cries of agony" and other generic forms of suffering like he does in stanzas two and three, Longfellow now gets very specific, detailing the sights and sounds of violence in various warrior cultures, such as the "Norseman" and the "Aztec." The next stanza, stanza 8, also stands on its own, just as stanza 1 does. Longfellow does this intentionally because he wants to draw attention to it. In this stanza, Longfellow poses his question:

Is it, O man, with such discordant noises,
With such accursed instruments as these,
Thou drownest Nature's sweet and kindly voices,
And jarrest the celestial harmonies?

With this question, Longfellow suggests that war is so dangerous that it can destroy nature and even rock the heavens themselves. However, the structure over these four lines is somewhat odd for a question. In particular, the "Is it" seems to stick out, so it forces the reader to slow down and take notice of what comes after it. If the "Is it" were removed and the question mark were changed to a period, the statement would read

more clearly. However, Longfellow does not want to make a statement. Instead, he would rather lead the reader - under the guise of a question - to adopt his view, that war is destroying both heaven and Earth. The question mark is important for another reason, too. Since Longfellow is posing a question in this stanza, the reader will expect him to answer it. In fact, he does in the next two stanzas, in which he outlines how life could be in a peaceful society. The first of these stanzas in particular contains the overall message that Longfellow is trying to convey with his antiwar poem:

Were half the power, that fills the world with
terror,
Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and
courts,
Given to redeem the human mind from error,
There were no need of arsenals or forts:

If people will focus half of the power and wealth in the world on education, humanity will learn from its mistakes and will not need war anymore. Stanza 10 develops this idea even more. In this hypothetical society where peace rules, a "warrior's name would be a name abhorred," and any nation that dares attack another would "wear for evermore the curse of Cain!" In the final two stanzas of the poem, Longfellow imagines that he is traveling far into the future, "through long generations," to see this peaceful community come to life. When he hears the voice of Christ proclaiming the peace, he is joyous. In this future community, humanity will not need the "blast of War's great organ," which no longer "shakes the skies." Instead, "the holy melodies of love," which Longfellow notes are as "beautiful as songs of the immortals," prevail.

The effect of the poem's structure is one of a slow buildup, moving the organ from a standstill, into action, then into more specific and increasingly horrible visions. By the time the reader reaches the question, in which Longfellow poses the possibility that war could have drastic consequences even beyond those already mentioned, the reader is primed to hear Longfellow's real message. This real message, located in stanzas 9 and 10, is the central focus of the poem and is the blatant message that Longfellow hopes to emphasize even more.

In addition to manipulating the structural breakdown in the poem to build up to the message, Longfellow also employs tense shifts to underscore the importance of stanzas 9 and 10. For most of the poem, Longfellow speaks in the present tense. "This is the Arsenal," he says when the poem starts off. With few exceptions, Longfellow maintains the present tense throughout the poem, drawing his readers directly into the conflicts that are described. Regardless of whether these conflicts are from the past, Longfellow wants his readers to feel them as if they are in the present so that they are harder to ignore. If something is in the past, nothing can be done about it, but when it is in the present, it must be dealt with. Since the present tense is the dominant mode in the poem, when Longfellow deviates from this pattern, it is noticeable. The only stanzas that do not use the present tense are stanzas 2, 9, and 10.

The second stanza is in the future tense, describing a sound that "will rise," once the organ is played. Why does Longfellow use the future tense here? It is important to establish the setting of the poem. Although readers may recognize that the arsenal is in Springfield, Massachusetts, they may not realize that Longfellow is taking them to the arsenal before it was used in the American Revolution. If the action took place in 1845, the poem would be less exciting because there were no wars going on, and so the arsenal would be relatively inactive at that time. Instead, with the benefit of hindsight, Longfellow is describing the calm moment before the storm of revolutionary war. While Longfellow needs to place this stanza in the future tense to properly establish the time of the poem, he does not want to stay there, and he jumps into the present tense starting with the next stanza: "I hear even now the infinite fierce chorus." From this point on, he does not return to the present tense until stanzas 9 and 10 - the main message of the poem. Just as the structure of the poem builds up to these two stanzas, which provide Longfellow's hypothetical society, the tense shifts again from present to future tense. Once again, instead of burying his intentions, Longfellow is underscoring his message as much as possible.

He places this emphasis on stanzas 9 and 10 in one other way: through the manipulation of sounds. The poem is saturated with sound. Playing off the idea of an organ that creates death and suffering instead of music, Longfellow then finds corresponding sounds that reflect this grim organ and sprinkles these sounds throughout the poem. At various times, the war organ produces a "fierce chorus." Some of the many sounds in this chorus include "cries of agony," a song that "roars," a "battle-bell," the "wail of famine," and "tones of thunder" created by a cannon. These sounds are so pervasive that even when the pipes of the organ are technically "silent," Longfellow makes mention of an "anthem" and "strange alarms." In fact, there is only one spot in the poem that includes no sound references - stanzas 9 and 10. Instead, the poet focuses on his plea for peace. Though the sounds have served their purpose up until stanza 9, providing graphic images to make his readers uncomfortable, by the time readers reach stanza 9, Longfellow is ready to talk straight to them, without relying on sounds to get their attention. Because the rest of the poem is saturated with sounds, the lack of sounds here does get the reader's attention.

Although Longfellow was criticized by some for his blatant antiwar message in "The Arsenal at Springfield," that was exactly his point. He did not want to bury his message within thick, literary language that needs to be deciphered. Instead, he planted his message - his blueprint for a peaceful society - in stanzas 9 and 10 and then manipulated the structure, tenses, and sounds to draw the most attention to these two stanzas.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "The Arsenal at Springfield," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Sakuda holds a bachelor of arts degree in communications and is an independent writer. In this essay, Sakuda discusses how Longfellow makes expert use of rhyme, meter, and imagery to express his feeling on social issues.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published "The Arsenal at Springfield" in *The Belfry of Bruges and Other Poems* in 1845. In his time, Longfellow was a much-loved and popular poet. For the most part, everyone easily understood and accepted his poems. Today, Longfellow is remembered for his most popular poems, which include "Evangeline," "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," and "Hiawatha." These entertaining and approachable poems are verse narratives depicting historical figures and events. "Evangeline" tells the sad story of an Acadian maiden, separated during the expulsion of French settlers by the English in Nova Scotia, who searches for her true love, only to find him years later dying on a hospital bed. However, Longfellow also used his popularity and literary genius to express his feelings and opinions about social issues of the day. "A Psalm of Life" contains images of Longfellow's grief over the death of his first wife. "The Arsenal at Springfield" is Longfellow's statement on the horrors of war. His poems are often full of dynamic historical imagery and a swinging meter, making them vivid and lively to read.

Longfellow was born in Portland, Maine in 1807 and was descended from well-established New England families. Cecil B. William's book, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, credits the poet's father, Judge Stephen Longfellow, with strongly encouraging his son's academic lifestyle. Williams also notes that Longfellow's mother, Zilpah Wadsworth Longfellow, "was fond of poetry, and music." Longfellow was educated at Bowdoin College in Maine and then became a professor of modern languages there. He later held the same position at Harvard. In addition to family influences, Williams feels that growing up in the major seaport of Portland affected Longfellow's poetry. Williams writes in *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* that "Probably much of his facility for verse rhythms came to him through his responsive listening to the lapping of the waves and the sighing of the wind in the lofty pines nearby."

Longfellow experienced death first-hand when his first wife, Mary Potter Longfellow, died due to complications from a miscarriage. He learned how to appreciate life because of his loss. Longfellow's religious faith sustained him during his period of grief. This faith along with his sense of loss over Mary's death shaped Longfellow's feelings about death of any kind - even the senseless deaths of wartime. During his career, Longfellow wrote numerous volumes of poetry and prose. As a professor of modern languages, Longfellow traveled to England and Europe and was fluent in several languages. Longfellow's historical imagery in "The Arsenal at Springfield" reflects his European influences.

Longfellow had strong beliefs about the sanctity of all human life. In his book, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Poetry and Prose*, Edward Wagenknecht notes that while Longfellow participated in many sports growing up, he had a strong distaste for blood

sports of any kind. He opposed capital punishment and faithfully followed the Unitarian Church. These strong beliefs shaped Longfellow's poetry and inspired him to write such moving works as, "A Psalm of Life," which depicts his grief over the loss of his first wife and his "peace poem" "The Arsenal at Springfield." Again, Wagenknecht states in *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Poetry and Prose*, "He felt the nearness of God in both nature and human life, and it was because God informed it and manifested Himself through it that life was sacred to him."

Shortly after his marriage to Fanny Appleton, Longfellow wrote "The Arsenal at Springfield." While on their honeymoon trip in 1843, Longfellow and his wife toured the Springfield Armory. Built in 1777, The Springfield Armory remained a munitions facility until 1968. At the time of Longfellow's visit, the armory contained racks for storing the M1861 musket. These racks in the Storehouse contained 2,000 guns each. The sheer magnitude of such a display reminded Longfellow and his bride of a huge pipe organ. According to Williams in his book, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, Fanny urged her husband to write a peace poem and he created "The Arsenal at Springfield." Williams remarks that "Fanny seems to have been even more of a pacifist than he was, but his lifelong belief in biblical 'faith, hope, and charity' made him readily responsive."

Longfellow used the elegiac form in writing "The Arsenal at Springfield." The poetic form consists of a four-lined stanza in iambic pentameter rhyming on alternate lines. Longfellow's use of this form of poetry is appropriate since the word elegiac expresses mourning or sorrow. Elegiac comes from the word elegy, which means a poem or song composed especially as a lament for a deceased person. Longfellow is using "The Arsenal at Springfield" to express his sorrow and grief over civilization's penchant for war, especially in the poem's most famous stanza: "Were half the power, that fills the world with terror / Were half the wealth bestowed on camps and courts / Given to redeem the human mind from error / There were not need of arsenals or forts."

Longfellow also uses historical references and images to create vivid pictures for his readers. In discussing *The Belfry of Bruges and Other Poems*, Wagenknecht states in *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Poetry and Prose* "The shifting between past and present is very characteristic of Longfellow in general but especially in this collection." "The Arsenal at Springfield" is full of such historical images. In the fourth stanza, Longfellow references the great Norsemen of Scandinavia, the Cimbri of Germany, and the Tartars of Asia. All these tribes were known for their war-like culture of invasions and domination. In the next stanza, Longfellow gives the reader the sounds of war. He speaks of the Florentines who wheel out a battle bell during combat. This bell, called a Martinella, rallied the knights during the Florentine and German battles in 1260. Longfellow mentions the Aztecs as they beat their war drums on their pyramidal temple mounds called teocalli.

Perhaps the most vivid pictures from "The Arsenal at Springfield" come from the poem's sixth stanza: "The tumult of each sacked and burning village / The shout that every prayer for mercy drowns / The soldiers' revels in the midst of pillage / The wail of famine in beleaguered towns." Longfellow's words allow the reader to picture the flames and smell the acrid smoke of a burning village. Readers can hear the shouts as soldiers

carouse and plunder in the midst of the chaos. He also casts a pall of sorrow as the reader learns of the famine that inevitably follows war. Longfellow uses these powerful pictures to elicit strong emotions. He wants readers to understand the devastation and wastefulness of war - and they do.

In addition to the vivid pictures Longfellow creates, he fills the next stanzas with religious references. He mentions the biblical character Cain, who murdered his brother in jealousy and anger. Longfellow compares warring nations to the fighting brothers, Cain and Abel. Longfellow believes human life is sacred. Just as people abhor the murder of human beings in anger, Longfellow believes people should abhor the warrior who murders in the name of battle or conquest. As Augustus H. Strong states in Wagenknecht's book, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Poetry and Prose*, "I know of no poet who has written so little that is professedly Christian and whose poetry is notwithstanding so shot through with Christian spirit."

Longfellow opens "The Arsenal at Springfield" with grim images of weapons stacked high, "like a huge organ, rise the burnished arms;" and the angel of death playing, "those swift keys!" He then references the 51st Psalm with the word: Miserere. This is from the opening line of the Psalm, "Miserere mei, Deus" (Have mercy upon me, O God). From this bleak beginning, Longfellow leaves the reader with words of comfort and hope at the poem's conclusion. As in previous stanzas, Longfellow uses his skill to invoke images of sight and sound. He juxtaposes his previous images of death, war-drums, and anguished cries with images of light, "sweet vibrations," and music. Instead of the battle-bell mentioned in the fifth stanza, readers hear Christ's pure, bell-like voice say, "Peace!" Instead of the sounds of, "The bursting shell / The gateway wrenched asunder / The rattling musketry, the clashing blade" from the seventh stanza, Longfellow gives the reader images of sweet sounds, "But beautiful as songs of the immortals, the holy melodies of love arise." This consistent and fitting use of imagery characterized Longfellow's style and endeared him to his readers. As Cecil Williams writes in his book, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* "He is hardly the most figurative of poets, yet his similes, metaphors, personifications and symbolism are abundant enough to lend an extraordinary imaginative quality to many of his poems." "The Arsenal at Springfield" is no exception.

As in Longfellow's day, war still haunts modern civilizations. Its horrors continue to shock and sadden. Longfellow opposed war both because of his religious convictions and because of his deep love for his fellow man. This love was evident in the depth and breadth of his poetry. Longfellow used his skill as a writer to unite his fellow man and to show what wonderful accomplishments they can create. Williams comments on Longfellow's love for both his art and his fellow man in his book *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*:

A patriot, he wanted his country to recognize literature
and to encourage it, but he did not believe that
literary art is primarily national. Rather it is universal
and each nation can contribute most by understanding

first the general nature of humankind and
then its own special nature.

Through his powerful poem, "The Arsenal at Springfield," Longfellow strives to show humankind the wastefulness and anguish of war. He uses vivid images to draw the reader into the poem and to speak to the reader on an emotional level. Longfellow ends the poem with a vision of peace, a vision of a world where the pipe-organ of muskets is forever silent. Just as in 1845, war still haunts the world today, and Longfellow's poem lives on with a voice for these times.

Source: Tamara Sakuda, Critical Essay on "The Arsenal at Springfield," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Topics for Further Study

The American Revolution earned the United States independence from Britain. Research one other culture from any period in history that has successfully won its independence from another nation through military conflict. Compare this conflict with the American Revolution, paying special attention to the types of military strategies used to win each conflict.

When Longfellow wrote his poem, America was experiencing a strong antiwar movement. Compare the attitudes toward war in the 1840s with the Vietnam antiwar movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. What were the positive and negative effects of each movement?

Choose a modern nation, other than the United States, that is currently embroiled in a military conflict. Research the background of the conflict, then use a map to plot out the major events that led to the strife. Finally, write a short prediction of how you feel the conflict may end, using your research to support your claims.

Today, America is engaged in a debate about whether the portrayals of violence in television, movies, and other media should be censored. Those who want censorship believe that these portrayals of violence have a desensitizing effect on children, which may be leading to the increased violence in schools. Research both sides of this debate, including the legislation that may aid or hinder each side from reaching its goals. Using this information, give an argument for either side in the form of a newspaper-style editorial.

Choose a war that has taken place sometime over the past five hundred years and research the economic and social effects that the war has had on the participating nations. Imagine that you are living in one of these nations at the time. Write a journal entry that describes how you feel about the conflict and how your life, and the life of your family, has been affected.

Traditionally, wars have drastically affected the tone of the artistic works produced at the time, as writers, artists, filmmakers, and other artists try to document, support, or protest the conflict. Research other nonliterary works that have either a war or peace theme. Choose one of these artworks and compare it with "The Arsenal at Springfield."

Compare and Contrast

Late 1770s-Mid 1780s: Outraged by massive taxation without representation and seeking to gain their independence from Britain, the colonies in America band together to fight against the British in the struggle known as the American Revolution.

1840s: Anxious to gain more land for the young American nation, President James Polk helps to instigate a war with Mexico by sending troops into a disputed borderland. The American victory results in a substantial increase in lands for the United States, although not all Americans support the conflict.

Today: Following unprovoked attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, America leads an international war against terrorism. The military conflict, centered in Afghanistan, has wide support from the American public.

Late 1770s-Mid 1780s: Neither of America's initial ruling documents□the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation□ address the issue of slavery.

1840s: The issue of slavery increases in importance, and the country becomes largely divided into northern abolitionists and southern slaveholders. In 1842, Longfellow publishes *Poems on Slavery*, a collection that proclaims slavery to be evil and warns of a future conflict over slavery.

Today: Although discrimination is illegal, it still exists in certain areas, and many still fight to ensure equal rights for all, regardless of race, color, creed, or gender.

Late 1770s-Mid 1780s: The federal arsenal at Springfield is built in 1777. In 1786, as a protest against high taxes from the state of Massachusetts, Daniel Shays, a local farmer, leads more than a thousand farmers in a months-long attack on the arsenal. Although the attack is ultimately repelled, the conflict, known as Shays's Rebellion, does inspire changes in Massachusetts tax law.

1840s: Longfellow immortalizes the arsenal with his poem "The Arsenal at Springfield."

Today: The arsenal, today known as the Organ of Muskets as a result of Longfellow's poem, is displayed in the museum of the historic Springfield Armory.

What Do I Read Next?

War poetry was common in many of the ancient societies of Europe, but no writer is more well-known or revered than Homer, a Greek poet who is believed to have lived during the eighth century B.C. Homer's epic poems, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, have helped to form a basis for all of Western poetry and, many argue, Western literature in general. *The Iliad*, in particular, which details events of the Trojan War, is a good example of the type of heroic war poetry that antiwar poems like "The Arsenal at Springfield" rebelled against.

Longfellow's *Evangeline*, originally published in 1847, is one of his best-known works. Like "The Arsenal at Springfield," the narrative poem details the effects of war, in this case on two lovers who are separated by the politics of the French and Indian War.

While military technology has advanced rapidly over the last two millennia, military theory often has not. *The Art of War*, a military strategy book written by Sun Tzu in Japan roughly 2,500 years ago, is still used today to demonstrate everything from military tactics to how to get ahead in the business world.

Henry David Thoreau, a contemporary of Longfellow's and also an antiwar activist, chose to go to jail instead of paying taxes that would support the Mexican War. Although Ralph Waldo Emerson paid the debt and Thoreau ended up spending only one night in jail, that night transformed Thoreau. He wrote about his experiences in jail and his antiwar beliefs in his essay "Civil Disobedience," which was first published in 1849 as "Resistance to Civil Government."

Leo Tolstoy's massive novel, *War and Peace*, was originally published in Russia in six volumes from 1863 to 1869. Although the book requires a significant amount of time to read, the rich landscape and vivid characters that Tolstoy paints warrant the effort. Although the book tackles epic themes such as the grand scale of the Napoleonic wars, it also offers portraits of just about every aspect of human experience.

Further Study

Apfel, Roberta J., and Bennett Simon, eds., *Minefields in Their Hearts: The Mental Health of Children in War and Communal Violence*, Yale University Press, 1996.

This book collects firsthand accounts from mental health professionals who have worked with children exposed to war and violence. Contributors include psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, who address the issues faced by children in war zones and other violent environments and who discuss the types of interventions and treatments that are used in these situations.

Collopy, Michael, and Jason Gardner, eds., *Architects of Peace: Visions of Hope in Words and Images*, New World Library, 2000.

Collopy and Gardner combine stunning photographs of seventy-five of today's most prominent peacemakers with quotes and stories from the public figures themselves. From Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama to Carlos Santana and Maya Angelou, this volume offers a sweeping view of the various efforts that are being made to achieve peace in the world.

Godwin, Joscelyn, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth: Mysticism in Music from Antiquity to the Avante-Garde*, Inner Traditions International, 1995.

This book examines the powerful effect that music has on people and explores the underlying metaphysical reasons for these effects.

Leckie, Robert, *From Sea to Shining Sea: From the War of 1812 to the Mexican War, the Saga of America's Expansion*, HarperPerennial, 1994.

Leckie examines this rich period in America's early history as an independent nation. The shape of the modern continental United States was largely determined by the end of the Mexican War, and the book offers many anecdotes that illustrate the major events during America's territorial growth and highlights the major people involved in the expansion.

LeShan, Lawrence, *The Psychology of War: Comprehending Its Mystique and Madness*, Helios Press, 2002.

Although it was first published in 1992,this book was brought back into print after the terrorist bombings in September 2001. LeShan is a former military psychologist, and his study demonstrates why people choose to fight wars and why military conflicts happen so frequently. The new edition includes a new introduction that comments on the war on terrorism.

Underwood, Francis H., *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, Haskell House, 1972.

Underwood's biography of Longfellow gives a thorough overview of the poet's early life, his academic pursuits, and his studies abroad. The book also offers in-depth studies of several of the poet's better-known works and includes genealogies, correspondence, and a bibliography.

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Wagenknecht, Edward, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Poetry and Prose*, The Ungar Publishing Company, 1986, pp. 76-77, 198, 213, 215.

Williams, Cecil B., "Household Lyrics, Ballads, Odes, Elegies, Sonnets," in *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, Twayne Publishers, 1964, pp. 27, 29, 129-47, 192, 196.

BOOKRAGS

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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:

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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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