Bonnard's Garden Study Guide

Bonnard's Garden by Rick Barot

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Introduction

Rick Barot's poem “Bonnard's Garden,” like a Romantic painting, is filled with images of nature, such as flowers, vines, clouds, shrubs, birds, and deer. The meaning of the poem is obscure, and the language only hints at its subjects, as if the speaker is in a dreamlike trance—or, more accurately, as if the speaker were like the “sleepwalking girl” who wanders, unexpectedly, in and out of the poem. The work first appeared in the literary magazine *Ploughshares* in the Winter 2001-2002 issue and was then included in Barot's prize-winning first collection, *The Darker Fall*, published in 2002.

Like a majority of the other poems in Barot's collection, “Bonnard's Garden” is focused on a specific place. The place in this particular poem is described through beautiful imagery, depicting flora and fauna, mysterious intruders, and even a startling scream. In examining such places as gardens, street corners, and other outdoor scenes, Barot, as he has explicitly stated, better perceives himself. Although he often employs elements characteristic of Romantic poetry—such as the emphasis on nature and one's surroundings—and has stated that he is indeed drawn to poetry of the Romantic era, Barot refers to himself as a post-Romantic poet. His influences include William Wordsworth, the great eighteenth-century English Romantic poet; the Nobel Prize-winning Irish poet Seamus Heaney, who also emphasizes setting; and the novelist Virginia Woolf, whom Barot admires most for her acuity, especially as found in her diaries. Indeed, in “Bonnard's Garden,” Barot has produced an exercise in the construction of poetic language.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: Philippine

Nationality 2: American

Rick Barot, the author of "Bonnard's Garden," was born in the Philippines but grew up near San Francisco, California. He attended Wesleyan University, in Connecticut; the coveted Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa; and Stanford University, in California. Upon graduating, he began teaching poetry at Stanford, where he was a Wallace E. Stegner fellow. He next moved to the Pacific Northwest; in the early 2000s, he was working as an assistant professor of English at Pacific Lutheran University, in Tacoma, Washington.

When he first started college, Barot thought that he wanted to become a lawyer. Although he had been encouraged by teachers to follow a writing career, he thought that he needed to tackle something more academically challenging; passing English classes had always been easy, but he did not see that as a reason to make writing his life's work. However, in taking several literature classes as an undergraduate, he started to recognize an underlying passion. After he received encouragement from the author Annie Dillard, who taught one of his English classes, Barot finally took his first poetry-writing class, during his senior year. In graduate school, he began writing some of the poems that eventually were published in his first poetry collection, *The Darker Fall*, which contains "Bonnard's Garden."

In 2001, Barot received a poetry fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. The next year, *The Darker Fall* was published and won the Kathryn A. Morton Prize in poetry. Barot noted in an interview with Craig Beaven for the online literary journal *Blackbird* that writing *The Darker Fall* was like an apprenticeship for him: through the writing of the poems collected in that book, he learned the art of poetry. As of early 2006, Barot was working on a second poetry collection, which was to have an overall theme based on the mythological character Echo, who loved the sound of her own voice.

Plot Summary

Stanza 1

The first four-line stanza of "Bonnard's Garden" contains two punctuated phrases: each ends in a period, but neither is a complete sentence. The ornate language describes fragmented images, leaving the reader's imagination to fill in the empty spaces. The word "illuminated" could mean "lit up" or perhaps "made clearly understood." Jasmine and phlox are types of flowers; *turgid* means "swollen with fluid."

Stanza 2

The second stanza is a complete sentence. A "sleepwalking girl" has apparently placed a number of paper airplanes "on the vines," that is, presumably, on the "vine-dense walls" referred to in stanza 1. The planes are "wrecked" and "sodden," suggesting, perhaps, the presence of dew. The word "blooms" is repeated at the end of the stanza's third and fourth lines; no other rhyme structure is present.

Stanza 3

The third stanza, two complete sentences followed by two phrases, begins with paint curling out of tubes, implying the presence of an artist; the paint itself is compared to medication. In the stanza's second line, a male appears. Perhaps it is the artist in question, "In his first looking." This artist may be the one mistaking the paper airplanes for blooms, especially in that he looks with "too much hurry." This phrase may be connected with the first stanza's "illuminated page" with "busy edges," as the words "busy" and "hurry" both suggest rapid movements or clutter. In more peaceful images, on the other hand, additional flowers are compared to "candles," and the sky is compared to "bathwater."

Stanza 4

The fourth stanza is one complete sentence. An almond tree is perhaps blooming, with the blossoms lending the tree the appearance of a fluffy white cumulus cloud. The narrator wonders whether the "spring had not allowed leaves," assigning a sort of personified power to the season. As the tree is "getting the light before everything else" and as "morning" was mentioned in the second stanza, the reader may infer that the scene is taking place at dawn.

Stanza 5

The fifth stanza contains one clear complete sentence and one somewhat confusing one. The �she� in question is likely the sleepwalking girl, the only female yet mentioned. This �she� asks how �beings� could survive in arctic waters. The inferred coldness of the arctic water is then juxtaposed with the phrase, �the pillow of heat on a chair,� where the �pillow of heat� seems to refer to the cat. The second sentence suggests that the girl may have asked another question, regarding the temperature of the cat's blood; that is, �the question brought to� might be restated as �the girl next asked about.�

Stanza 6

In the sixth stanza, the male returns. The first sentence, �His glimpse smudged,� may be another reference to his being an artist, as if his perception of something might be made unclear in the same way that an image on a page might be made unclear. In the stanza's second line, one of the characters, seemingly the male artist, is given a voice; he is speaking to someone, perhaps the sleepwalking girl. The words �dizzy� and �smudged� both indicate a lack of clarity. Next come �pink grasses� and �shrubs incandesced to lace,� that is, perhaps, grasses and shrubs whose dewy tips are glowing in various ways in the morning light. Given the narrator's attention to the texture of the scene, the word �tapestry� is perhaps used to indicate the fabric-like quality of a hillside, on which birds and deer can be found.

Stanza 7

In the seventh stanza, the sense of spring bounty is deepened. The flowers are in full bloom. The narrator associates being �fattened� and not �lean� with �prospering.�

Stanza 8

In the eighth stanza, the girl screams, with no reason given. At the same time, more calmly, she stirs with her finger the green water, perhaps of a pond. The sound of the scream is described as �breaking into his glimpse,� where the word �glimpse� is used for the second time in reference, seemingly, to the artist's surveying of the scene before him. The scream has a permanent effect on the artist, �subsiding to become a part of the picture� that he would seem to be then painting.

Stanza 9

The first line in the last stanza ties previous stanzas together: �Not the icy killing water� harks back to the �arctic water� mentioned in stanza 5 as well as to the �tadpole-water� of stanza 8. Thus, pond water teeming with life is set in opposition to

arctic water, which would seem to be too cold for most life. The next phrase, "But the lives there, / persisting aloft," may refer to either of those bodies of water. The last statement of the poem is an elaborate one: "Like the wasps held in / by a shut flower at dusk, by morning released, / dusty as miners, into the restored volumes." The wasps, trapped in flowers overnight, are perhaps being compared to the tadpoles, which spend the first part of their lives in water before growing to travel on land. "Volumes" could be a reference to books, which would connect with the initial mention of an "illuminated page."

Themes

Nature

Nature is prevalent in Barot's poem, in the title itself and throughout the piece. The garden is richly imagined, with phrases such as □jasmine starred / onto the vine-dense walls□ and □pink grasses.□ Barot's narrator wanders in and out of descriptions of the garden, ever returning to the blossoms and wild creatures inhabiting the landscape. As the precise meaning of the poem is somewhat obscure, due to the vagueness of the fragmented statements, the theme of nature most securely ties the pieces of the poem together; if nothing else, the reader will take from the poem a picture of Bonnard's garden. As such, the poem generally communicates soft emotions, as the reader contemplates spring warmth, perfumed air, and the abundance of colors and textures. Natural prosperity abounds; □nothing is lean,□ as everything is bursting out of the wraps and confines of winter, much like the release of the □wasps held in / by a shut flower at dusk.□ Nature calms the spirit of the poem, despite references to □busy edges□ that □have taken over,□ □wrecked□ airplanes, and □too much hurry.□ Much like the scream that breaks into the artist's □glimpse,□ all the jagged corners of distraction eventually subside □to become a part of the picture□ because of the soothing garden.

Spring

Barot's poem presents not just nature but a specific time in nature: spring, a time of rebirth and emergence, when flowers and trees are blossoming. Tadpoles are evolving, wasps are escaping, and paint □curls out of the tubes.□ The sun is rising, and the feeling of cold arctic temperatures is quickly replaced with the warmth of a cat. There is a sense of prosperity in the lilacs, and the tulips are endowed with love in the image of □fattened hearts.□ Life is brilliant and restored. The theme of spring weaves through the theme of nature, emphasizing the natural world at its grandest moment.

Art

The theme of art is most obviously presented through the image of the painter. Given that he has tubes of paint, the reader can logically assume that he also has an easel, paintbrushes, and a palette. The artist is seeking to capture on the canvas all the riotous colors and forms that are speaking to him, as well as his own emotions. The poet, of course, is engaging in the same exercise when creating his poem. The medium is different, but the poet likewise uses his tools□words, language, and syntax□to create images. He, too, is searching for objects outside himself that reflect the emotions he holds inside. This pattern might also be recognized in nature itself, which can be seen as another form of art: mere seeds and buds are transformed into works of flora and fauna. Poem, painting, and nature can all be seen as creative works of great imagining.

Style

Free Verse

□Bonnard's Garden□ is written in free verse, meaning that no regular meter is present; that is, the poet has not arranged his words in such a way as to produce a rhythmic flow. For coherence of form, the lines are all of similar length, with each stanza consisting of four lines, but no other structure exists. Similarly, the lines do not rhyme. If the poet were to read the work aloud, he would most likely allow the lines to flow subtly into one another, perhaps as if reading delicate, well-crafted prose.

Language as Art

In the foreword to Barot's collection *The Darker Fall*, the poet Stanley Plumly describes Barot's skill at creating art through his use of language, whereby a given portion of one of his poems is in essence an □implicative, animated still life.□ That is, his work consists of small portraits of scenes featuring clusters of various elements. The lines of □Bonnard's Garden□ can therefore be looked upon as sketches, such that the reader should not necessarily dig too far into the words, looking for meaning everywhere. Rather, the meaning of the poem more likely lies somewhere in the poem's greater picture□the sum of the collage of small sketches. Using his skill with language, Barot creates images that readers can visualize; his brushstrokes are words and phrases. His paint is his well-tuned vocabulary and his keen understanding of exactly which word will make an image appear best. Plumly also refers to Barot's musicality, in that each line of the poem has similar weight, just as each measure of a song, to which the listener must pay attention for the same amount of time, has similar weight.

Softening Metaphors

The metaphorical descriptions within this poem begin with the paper airplanes, which are seen as blooms, and the artist's paint, which is seen as ointment. Both of these metaphors turn the original objects into things that carry with them a sense of healing. From the minor tragedy of the destroyed paper airplanes comes something beautiful and pleasant; from the chemicals and water or oil that constitute the paint comes an ointment, a salve or balm that is used to heal. Further, the sky is like □bathwater,□ where a soak in warm water is certainly restful and relaxing. The cat changes from an animal into a soft □pillow of heat.□ Finally, the sound of the girl's scream first becomes something that can be seen, □breaking into his glimpse,□ and then subsides □to become a part of the picture.□ That is, the sound is transformed into something that the artist paints into his picture, subduing it. These various metaphors soften the poem's edges of harshness, much like an impressionist painter typically softens the edges of real objects, obscuring flaws in order to emphasize beauty.

Place

The poem has a firm sense of place: Bonnard's garden. Readers are never told who Bonnard is, but Barot is undoubtedly referring to the French painter Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), who thus may also be the man present in the poem. Bonnard's garden, like every garden, with flowers and weeds, bushes and trees, animals and insects, is a place in which one revels in the beauty of the season, losing oneself in the elements. The garden is captured on canvas by the painter and through words by the poet. Indeed, like a painter, the narrator of the poem concentrates on the place, watching what is happening, paying attention to whatever demands his focus, and filling his images with emotion.

Historical Context

Romanticism

The Romantic movement originated in the late eighteenth century in Germany and England. Whether in art, literature, music, or philosophy, emphasis was placed on the imagination, the natural world, the emotions, and simplicity. In literature, Romantic authors are noted for their subjectivity and individualism; the solitary life reigns over society life as subject matter, and freedom from rules is very important. As such, Romanticism contrasts with the classical and neoclassical eras, which stressed more formalized language filled with classical allusions that only the elite could understand. Romantic influences can indeed be seen in Barot's poem, with its emphases on the natural environment, simple images, and private life.

Barot has himself specifically referred to the influence of the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850). Wordsworth's "To the Cuckoo" features images from nature similar to those in "Bonnard's Garden." In general, Wordsworth's main focus in writing was on nature, children, and the poor. Unlike his predecessors, he believed in using common language in poetry rather than an obscure vocabulary that only poetic scholars would understand. He also believed that poetry should be infused with the poet's emotions. In his time, Wordsworth was known as a nature poet, deriving so much poetic imagery from the local landscape that tourists were known to flock to the Lake District to see the area's beauty for themselves.

Other Literary Influences

Barot's poem is focused on a particular place, which is fully and lushly described. The poet has mentioned that this emphasis on place was in part inspired by the writing of Seamus Heaney (1939-). A Nobel Prize-winning poet from Northern Ireland, Heaney writes poems that deal with his surroundings. The Nobel Foundation cited his "works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past." In his Nobel lecture, Heaney stated that he found poetry most exciting when it offered a direct representation of the world.

Barot has also cited the insights of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), one of the foremost writers of the twentieth century, as a source of inspiration. Woolf's work is labeled both modernist and feminist, and her style of writing was considered experimental in her day. Her thoughts on writing and the writing life are elucidated in the extended essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), in which she examines the difficulties presented to women of her generation when they attempted to develop their skills as writers.

Pierre Bonnard

Bonnard's Garden was undoubtedly inspired by the French artist Pierre Bonnard, who is known for his love of color, especially as exemplified in his landscape paintingswhich often featured private spaces such as gardens. Bonnard began his painting career in Paris in the 1890s, joining a group of artists who referred to themselves as the Nabis, which in Hebrew means prophets. Bonnard's work, which included paintings, illustrations, stained-glass windows, and posters, is said to have been heavily influenced by the French painters Paul Gauguin and Claude Monet. Gauguin's influence is particularly noticeable in the bright colors favored by Bonnard, while Monet's impact can been seen in the brushstrokes used by Bonnard in his later years. Indeed, toward the end of his career, Bonnard's intense colors took over his subjects, with his works becoming more and more abstract. One of his most important works is *Dining Room on the Garden*.

Critical Overview

Neither Barot's poem "Bonnard's Garden" nor his collection *The Darker Fall* has received much critical attention. One reviewer, Brian Phillips, writing for *Poetry*, compliments Barot's competence as a writer but believes that something is lacking in his work. While he finds no "bad" poems in Barot's collection, he also fails to find a "really good one." Indeed, Phillips finds that Barot's expertise in writing "a certain kind of poem" cannot be challenged, but he sees an absence of risk taking, as the poems feature "steady retreats from the desperate and uncharted." Phillips concludes that Barot might have been seeking approval in presenting this first collection of poems, a "condition" that does not give birth to good poetry.

In his foreword to Barot's first collection, Stanley Plumly praises the poet's relationship with language. Plumly observes,

The first responsibility of poetry is, of course, language. . . . Those who believe in language as an end see language as the end of the experience. Others, like myself and Rick Barot, who believe in language as a means, understand it to be the means to another end, perhaps meaning, perhaps the language of the experience.

Plumly calls Barot's first collection "a brilliant example of language as means, as an art nearly flawless in its transformation of emotional and actual sources," adding that Barot "never permits the anxiety of the content to out speak the scrutiny of his form." Plumly finally discusses the inherent weight of Barot's writing:

Gravity is what gives Barot's poems their quiet beauty. Gravity of the elegy and the love poem, the meditation and celebration, is what secures the lines of the interconnections, the weaves, the overlappings, and the leaps this poet is so fond of.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Hart is a published writer and former teacher. In this essay, she closely examines the language of Barot's poem, which appears to be the author's dominant focus.

Barot's poem □Bonnard's Garden□ was published in his first collection, which he once described as a type of apprenticeship; that is, the poems were exercises in which he practiced the language and form of poetry. In the collection's foreword, the poet Stanley Plumly states that the □first responsibility of poetry is, of course, language.□ Plumly goes on to say that Barot's poems are prime examples of the use of language □as a means□ in itself. He also refers to Barot's □linguistic skills□ as demonstrative of his □metaphorical and musical intelligence.□ Barot has mentioned that he sometimes writes a stanza and then puts it away; after time has passed, he might write another stanza, possibly matching it to one previously written. In this way, a poem will come together. Considering these notions of how Barot writes, one can examine □Bonnard's Garden□ to determine how these elements work and whether certain passages exist where they do not.

In the first stanza of Barot's poem, the reader arguably encounters the musicality of improvisational jazz□as if walking into a concert performance by the trumpeter Miles Davis or the saxophonist John Coltrane that is already under way. In traditional jazz, a melody, or head, is provided before the musicians start improvising. This not only gives the players a base from which to build their improvisations but also allows the audience to hear that base, which in turn helps them follow the improvisations. If a person were to walk in on a concert without hearing the original melody, the mind would have difficulty grasping that original form; the notes might seem entirely random. The first stanza of Barot's poem feels much the same: rather than a base of complete sentences, the reader finds only fragments. One wants to ask, What is this □illuminated page,□ with its □busy edges?□ What are the roles of the jasmine, phlox, and oranges? The reader might feel as if the phrases are being carelessly thrown out; the phrases are beautiful, the collections of words are creative, and the flow of the beat is smooth, but what do the lines mean?

The question might then be, Must a poem have meaning? Is □metaphorical and musical intelligence□ enough? The first stanza might be read as a sketch. The aural and visual resonance of the language is clearly poetic; can the rational mind be content with that fact? An □illuminated page□ with □busy edges□ is a playful image, and □The flesh of each chilled turgid□ is interesting to pronounce. Thus, the reader may view the first stanza as an abstract painting. The image might be abnormal, but the colors and forms are intriguing. When a professional artist paints an abstract picture, the skill is evident, and the feat could not be easily reproduced by a layperson. Perhaps further analysis is unnecessary; the audience can appreciate the work and move on.

The second stanza of □Bonnard's Garden□ makes more sense, allowing the reader to more easily visualize the scene and understand what is occurring. A sleepwalking girl made paper airplanes, which were eventually somehow wrecked and lodged on vines;

after a rainfall, perhaps, or a dewy evening, the soaked paper airplanes were mistaken for the blooms of flowers. Those images are easy to grasp, and with its steady flow and carefully placed words, the passage certainly sounds like poetry. Yet nothing bridges the first and second stanzas□or the second and third. All that ties the various images together is the garden: the reader finds flowers and fruit in the first stanza, vines and blooms in the second, and dandelions and irises in the third. The setting is secured□and perhaps no more is necessary.

Nevertheless, the third and fourth stanzas have an additional bridge: the artist, who stands and looks around in the third stanza as he squeezes out his paint. In the fourth stanza, he sees a blossoming almond tree capturing the first light. The fifth stanza, however, breaks the established connections, as it can only truly be linked to the sleepwalking girl and the artist, the two people mentioned in this poem. The girl asks a question, with someone□presumably the artist□present to answer. If this stanza features a theme, it is temperature, as both cold and heat are mentioned. This stanza alone feels as though it does not take place in the garden; the setting is night, a time usually not reserved for gardens, and no depictions of nature are offered. Arctic water and the cat's blood are discussed, but they are distant, not forcefully present, as with the flowers in previous and subsequent stanzas.

The sixth stanza is also somewhat removed, but nature again offers a link. The artist also returns, in the form of the pronoun □his.□ The artist's presence is not very clear. In fact, something about his look is smudged, and the word □dizzy□ is used; the artist appears to be either seeing things that are not there or painting a scene that leans toward the fantastic. He sees pink grasses, glowing shrubs, and animals disappearing into the landscape. The words are twisted in this stanza more than anywhere else, especially with the remark, □His glimpse smudged,□ and with the fragmented statement □As in: it's about time / I made you dizzy.□ The feelings that arise are similar to those stirred by the first stanza.

The seventh stanza is deep into the garden again, with beautiful words that conjure springtime images so real that the reader can touch them. Indeed, when the poem is deep in the garden□that is, when it returns to the melody that serves as the base for improvisation□no bridge is necessary, as the occasional gaps are not so worrisome. The phrases portray wonderful sketches of garden patches, and that is enough. They are grounded, rather than floating around half-finished; they are planted firmly in the focused place around which the poem revolves.

The girl and the artist return in stanzas 8 and 9, though with little added clarity. Indeed, the eighth stanza begins with a mystery: the girl screams, with no explanation given as to why. Is the water cold? Was she bitten by a tadpole when she stirred her finger in the pond? No one runs to her rescue. She does not scream again. Readers might hear the scream, and it might send a chill down the spine, but it does not appear to bother the artist, who incorporates the sound into his painting. Or does he? The sound subsides □to become a part of the picture.□ The word □picture□ here calls to mind the canvas, paints, and brushes, but the reference could be to the whole garden and everyone in it. Then, the reader might ask again, must clear meaning be present? Imagining the sound

of the scream being absorbed into the picture is in many ways pleasing and familiar. The natural world around the girl and man is perhaps so full that the sound is simply swallowed. So much is happening within the scene that the noise is just one more small element□one tiny fraction of a very large picture.

Finally, in the last stanza, the narrator mentions □icy killing water.□ Each of these three words has connections to other parts of the poem. □Icy□ refers back to the arctic waters; the □killing□ can abstractly suggest the wrecked airplanes; and □water□ is mentioned in stanza 5, when temperature is discussed, and in stanza 8, in which the girl stirs the pond water. Thus, overall, the poem contains several bridges. Some are stronger and more obvious than others□but none, in fact, truly clarify the poem's meaning. The poem is ruled by the language, not by the bridges, as the language creates the images imposed on the reader's mind. Indeed, Barot's poem can be most fully enjoyed in emphasizing those images, even if they sometimes float around with no strings attached to the rest of the poem. Trying to muster a unified meaning, on the other hand, might take a leap of intellectual faith.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on □Bonnard's Garden,□ in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Topics for Further Study

Sit in a garden□yours or a public one□and write sketches of what you see as if you were painting still-life portraits. Do not worry about creating a story, instead concentrating on the images that you are creating with words. Give life to your sketches, so that when you read them in front of your class, your classmates will be able to envision what you saw.

Choose one of the stanzas in Barot's poem and paint or draw a picture to illustrate it.

Choose a poem from Seamus Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* and compare it to Barot's □Bonnard's Garden.□ In an essay, consider how they are alike and how they differ. Which poem presents a more unified meaning? Which poet creates more realistic images? Present your findings to your class.

Lead a class discussion regarding the significance of the □sleepwalking girl□ in Barot's poem. Consider the following questions: Why do you think he included her in the poem? Is she the person who is said to have asked about the arctic water? How might she be related to the artist? What is the connection that she and the wrecked paper airplanes have to the rest of the poem? What is the significance of her scream? Finally, does the presence of the girl add to or detract from the overall quality of the poem?

What Do I Read Next?

Virginia Woolf's diaries, which were published in four volumes after her death, have been a particular inspiration to Barot. Woolf's husband, Leonard, culled extracts from her diaries and collected them in *A Writer's Diary* (1936).

Seamus Heaney, winner of the 1995 Nobel Prize for Literature, is another of Barot's favorites. As with Barot, language and place are important elements in Heaney's work. To compare the two, read one of Heaney's first collections, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966).

William Wordsworth has been a third influence on Barot's writing. Like "Bonnard's Garden," Wordsworth's "Upon Westminster Bridge" focuses on a specific place. This poem as well as works by Wordsworth's contemporaries can be found in *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (1939).

Barot's writing is often compared to that of Elizabeth Bishop, who was independently wealthy as an adult and spent most of her time traveling around the world and writing about what she saw. Her first collection, *North and South* (1946), focuses on her time spent in Florida.

Introducing Romanticism (2000), by Duncan Heath, offers insight into all aspects of the Romantic movement, focusing on the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century.

Further Study

Auden, W. H., ed., *The Portable Romantic Poets: Blake to Poe*, Penguin, 1977.

This collection provides ample material for an overview of English and American Romantic poets.

Hagedorn, Jessica, *Burning Heat: A Portrait of the Philippines*, Rizzoli, 1999.

Rick Barot was born in the Philippines. Addressing the topics of religion, culture, food, and lifestyles, Hagedorn, a published novelist also from the Philippines, takes her readers on an intimate trip through the country, exposing its contradictions as well as its beauty.

Kooser, Ted, *The Poetry Home Repair Manual: Practical Advice for Beginning Poets*, University of Nebraska Press, 2005.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and U.S. poet laureate (2004-2005) Kooser draws from the classes he was teaching at the University of Nebraska. His advice tends to be practical, suggesting that poetry should, above all, make sense. He takes his readers through poetic devices and forms and makes the writing of poetry enjoyable.

Lowy, Michael, Robert Sayre, and Catherine Porter, *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*, Duke University Press, 2002.

For students of literature, this book contains a unique exploration of what the authors see as a protest of the modern industrial era through the basic tenets of Romanticism. They follow a trail from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, exploring the prominent writings of each era therein.

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The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Poetry for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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