Deep Woods Study Guide

Deep Woods by Howard Nemerov

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Introduction

"Deep Woods" first appeared in *The Salt Garden,* Howard Nemerov's third collection of poetry, published by Little, Brown and Company, in 1955. Most critics agree that this book presented a turning point in the poet's focus and style, that it showed his poetic talent as unified and less rigid than the previous academic and heavily metered verse. "Deep Woods" is the final poem in the collection, and it aptly concludes a book in which the overall theme centers on Nemerov's fascination with how the human mind works, especially in comparison to the natural world. In his book, simply titled *Howard Nemerov,* critic Peter Meinke states that "Deep Woods" expresses the poet's "feeling about the hugeness and permanence of nature as against small impermanent man." This is a good description of the poem's central idea, but it does not address the manner in which Nemerov makes his point, and the manner is key to understanding it.

"Deep Woods" is a journey through history□mankind's history, as portrayed in literature, mythology, and factual accounts. At least half of the poem relies on allusions to events, both real and legendary, that occurred hundreds and thousands of years ago. Nemerov refers to fairy tales and forests where imaginary creatures live, to French painters and ancient Egyptian gods, even to Walt Disney, all to describe the difference between human activities and the deep woods of a New England forest. Other "characters" that crop up in the poem are minotaurs and unicorns, Jesus Christ, Hannibal, Old Testament folk such as Joseph, Mordecai, and Haman, and the allegorical figures Chaos and Pandemonium from Milton's *Paradise Lost* . In essence, "Deep Woods" is a smorgasbord of human history, all played against the backdrop of a quiet, dominating giant□nature in the form of deep woods.

Author Biography

Howard Nemerov was born in March 1920 in New York City. His parents were wealthy and influential in the city. His father served as president and chair of a prestigious retail store, and both parents were interested in art, theatre, philanthropy, and the social scenes of New York's finest. Nemerov was educated at the Society for Ethical Culture's Fieldstone School, where he excelled in academics and played on the football team's second string. Graduating from Fieldstone in 1937, Nemerov was accepted into Harvard University and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English four years later. Also in 1941, the United States entered World War II, and Nemerov joined a Royal Canadian unit of the American Army Air Force and then moved to the Eighth U. S. Army Air Force, based in Lincolnshire, England. He flew missions over the North Sea throughout the war and was discharged in 1945 as a first lieutenant. While in England, Nemerov met and married Margaret Russel, and after the war, they returned to New York, where he began a college teaching career and completed his first collection of poetry.

Over the years, Nemerov taught on some of the best English faculties in the country, including Bennington College in Vermont and Brandeis University in Massachusetts. He was a visiting lecturer at the University of Minnesota and a writer-in-residence at both Hollins College in Virginia and Washington University in Missouri. In 1963 and 1964, Nemerov was a poetry consultant to the Library of Congress, and from 1988 to 1990, he served as the third Poet Laureate of the United States. His writing spanned the fields of poetry, novels, short stories, drama, nonfiction, and criticism, and he received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim, the Frank O'Hara Memorial Prize, and the Pulitzer. He died of cancer at his home in Missouri in July 1991.

Because Nemerov spent his working and writing life in universities, he has often been called an academic poet. His poems do tend to be philosophical and highly intellectual in nature, but they are also witty, satirical, and often humorous. Those who have been critical of his work, laden with historical and mythological allusions, have also recognized the sharp puns and sudden bursts of contemporary insight that many of his poems contain. "Deep Woods" is full of intellectual pondering and allusions, but it is also representative of some of Nemerov's best work□that addressing nature and man's relation to it□and it is one of his most anthologized poems.

Poem Text

Such places are too still for history,
Which slows, shudders, and shifts as the trucks do,
In hearing-distances, on the highway hill,
And staggers onward elsewhere with its load
Of statues, candelabra, buttons, gold;
But here the heart, racing strangely as though
Ready to stop, reaches a kind of rest;
The mind uneasily rests, as if a beast,
Being hunted down, made tiredness and terror
Its camouflage and fell asleep, and dreamed,
At the terrible, smooth pace of the running dogs,
A dream of being lost, covered with leaves
And hidden in a death like any sleep
So deep the bitter world must let it be
And go bay elsewhere after better game.
Even the restless eye, racing upon
Reticulated branch and vine which go
Nowhere, at last returns upon itself
And comes into a flickering kind of rest,
Being lost in the insanity of line.
Line, leaf, and light; darkness invades our day;
No meaning in it, but indifference
Which does not flatter with profundity.
Nor is it drama. Even the giant oak,
Stricken a hundred years or yesterday,
Has not found room to fall as heroes should
But crookedly leans on an awkward-squad of birch,
The tragic image and the mighty crash
Indefinitely delayed in favor of
Fresh weaving of vines, rooting of outer branches,
Beginning again, in spaces still more cramped,
A wandering calligraphy which seems
Enthralled to a magic constantly misspelled.
It is the same, they say, everywhere.
But that's not so. These here are the deep woods
Of now, New England, this October, when
Dry gold has little left to change, and half
The leaves are gone to ground, and half of those
Rained into the leaf-mold which tenses in
The fastenings of frost; where the white branches
Of birch are dry bones airborne in assaults
Which haven't worked yet. This unlegended land
Is no Black Forest where the wizard lived

Under a bent chimney and a thatch of straw;
45 Nor the hot swamp theatrical with snakes
And tigers; nor the Chinese forest on
The mountainside, with bridge, pagoda, fog,
Three poets in the foreground, drinking tea
(there is no tea, and not so many as three)□
50 But this land, this, unmitigated by myth
And whose common splendors are comparable only to
Themselves; this leaf, line, light, are scrawled alone
In solar definitions on a lump
Of hill like nothing known since Nature was
55 Invented by Watteau or Fragonard
In the Old Kingdom or the time of Set
Or before the Flood of Yao (or someone else
Of the same name) in the Fourth, or Disney, Dimension.
And this is yours to work; plant it to salt
60 Or men in armor who destroy each other,
Sprinkle with dragon's blood early in spring
And see what happens, epic or pastoral:
A sword in every stone, small minotaurs
Looking for thread, and unicorns for girls,
65 And Glastonbury thorns to make December
Bleed for the Saviour; the nightingale of Sarras
Enchants the traveler here three hundred years
And a day which seem but as a single day.
More probably nothing will happen. This
70 Place is too old for history to know
Beans about; these trees were here, are here,
Before king Hannibal had elephants
Or Frederick grew his red beard through the table
Or Mordecai hung Haman at the gate.
75
The other Ahasuerus has not spat
Nor walked nor cobbled any shoe, nor Joseph
So much as dreamed that he will found the Corn
Exchange Bank in the baked country of Egypt.
Not even those burnt beauties are hawked out,
80 By the angry Beginner, on Chaos floor
Where they build Pandemonium the Palace
Back in the high old times. Most probably
Nothing will happen. Even the Fall of Man
Is waiting, here, for someone to grow apples;
85 And the snake, speckled as sunlight on the rock
In the deep woods, still sleeps with a whole head
And has not begun to grow a manly smile.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-5

These opening lines set the scene for "Deep Woods." The speaker is apparently walking through a forest within "hearing-distance" of a highway where trucks roll by with their heavy loads. Notice the clever use of metaphor here, however. At first, it reads as though the trucks are the ones moving on with their loads "Of statues, candelabra, buttons, gold," and so forth. But "trucks" is plural, and what "staggers onward" with "its" load is singular. The reference here is to "history, / Which slows, shudders, and shifts." Therefore, the first comparison between mankind's history and the natural world is that humanity has been volatile and restless and full of tangible objects (statues, candelabra, etc.,) but the deep woods are "too still" for all that.

Lines 6-10

These lines compare the body's response to the forest and the mind's response to it. The speaker's heart, although "racing strangely," is able to reach "a kind of rest," but his mind rests "uneasily." Recall the poet's fascination with how the human mind works, for here he claims it is so intimidated by the deep woods that it is like "a beast, / Being hunted down." The only way the mind can survive is to let its "tiredness and terror" act as a "camouflage" so that it can go to sleep□in essence, play dead.

Lines 11-15

When the mind goes to sleep, it dreams. Carrying on the hunted beast metaphor, these lines say that while the dogs run past, the mind dreams "of being lost, covered with leaves." As long as it is unconscious, it is safe in a deep, death-like sleep. The mind's dormancy is so deep that the "bitter world" that would hunt it down just runs on by, made to "go bay elsewhere after better game." In general, this metaphor simply means that the human intellect is not capable of understanding the true depth of unspoiled nature, and so, it protects itself by trying to ignore the magnitude of a pure forest.

Lines 16-20

Like the heart and the mind, the human eye is also "restless" in the deep woods. It attempts to get a grasp on nature by following the pattern of vines entwined with branches. The "branch and vine" are described as "Reticulated," meaning they form a network throughout the tree, but they appear to "go / Nowhere," and the eye cannot find a beginning or an end. Giving up, the eye "returns upon itself," the way the vines do, and comes to a "flickering kind of rest." Nature's patterns are impossible to trace, leaving the eye "lost in the insanity of line."

Lines 21-23

Line 21 begins with an alliterative phrase (each word beginning with an "L") that will be referred to again in line 52. "Line, leaf, and light" describe three aspects of the deep woods that may seem simple but that are actually incomprehensible to the human mind. This inability to understand is implied by the word "darkness" placed just after the word "light." Light is in the natural world, but " *darkness* invades *our* day" (italics added) because human intellect is limited in its comprehension of true light. As grand as this sounds on the part of nature, the deep woods are not arrogant about it, nor do they even care. Rather, nature is indifferent toward mankind's shortcomings and does not inflate the situation "with profundity"□that is, with a pretense of deep meaning or profound feelings.

Lines 24-27

These four lines compare nature's nonchalance toward natural occurrences and the human tendency to dramatize things. An oak tree that has been struck by lightning does not make a big to-do of collapsing in some emotional or theatrical fashion, as "heroes should." Instead, the big oak is content to let its fall be broken by a group of birch trees so that it leans on them, still alive.

Lines 28-31

Line 28 describes the way human beings would act if they were in the same situation as the "stricken" oak. Like a Hollywood movie, the scene would be "tragic" and there would be a "mighty crash" at the end, for a human hero could not simply fall over and lean against someone else for support. But in the deep woods, such shallow fanfare is "Indefinitely delayed" because there are more important things going on than a hero meeting death in a blaze of glory. Those things are a "Fresh weaving of vines" and the "rooting of outer branches" from the fallen, but still living, oak. The tree's life is "Beginning again," even though it does not have as much room as before and even though there is little drama, in human terms, involved.

Lines 32-33

The second stanza ends with another reference to the lines occurring in nature, and this time they are compared to fine handwriting. The new vines and roots sprouting from the oak form a "wandering calligraphy," happy to weave this way and that without regard for proper spelling or other such human constraints. Nature's untraceable patterns are like "magic," something people cannot fully understand.

Lines 34-42

The opening of the third stanza is a more detailed version of the opening of the first. The scene is clearer here, as the speaker is specific about place and time. It is October, and he is walking through the woods in New England. The "Dry gold" leaves have changed about as much color and texture as they are going to, and many have already fallen from the trees and begun to decompose into "leaf-mold." The compost of dried leaves sometimes "tenses," or stiffens, when frost covers the ground, and the birch tree branches become brittle in the cold, like dry bones protruding in the air. The human-like "assaults" that these stiff arms seem poised to carry out "haven't worked yet" because in the deep woods human behavior does not happen. Line 42 ends with a reference to the forest as an "unlegended land," meaning that it is so primitive and so untouched by man that not even any legends or tales have been created about it.

Lines 43-49

These lines are allusions to the magical forests and their odd inhabitants that make up many fairy tales and folk legends. Again, the speaker stresses what the *real* forest is *not* by listing creatures and things mankind has invented for its imaginary woods: wizards, straw thatches, snakes, tigers, a pagoda, some fog, and poets drinking tea. Where the speaker walks, "there is no tea," and the ending of line 49□"and not so many as three"□is a whimsical play on the style of writing often found in fairy tales.

Lines 50-54

These lines exalt nature to its supreme position over such supposed nonsense as folk stories. The woods are "unmitigated," or undiminished, "by myth," and nothing compares to their splendor except splendor itself. In line 52, the poet returns to the image of "leaf, line, light" to reiterate what is so splendid about the deep woods and he also returns to the metaphor of "line" as a type of calligraphy, this time "scrawled" in lines of sunlight ("solar definitions") across a hill.

Lines 55-58

The last four lines of the third stanza are filled with allusions in a kind of tongue-in-cheek jab at the human concept of man inventing nature. Jean Watteau and Jean Fragonard were eighteenth-century French painters known for their exotic landscapes and festive outdoor scenes. Further back in history, the "Old Kingdom" refers to Egypt around 2650-2134 B . C ., when the great pyramids were built and "Set" was the ancient Egyptian god of chaos, sometimes synonymous with Satan. The "Flood of Yao" is said to have destroyed much of southern China in 2700 B . C ., and "someone else of the same name" is perhaps a play on the pronunciation of "Yao," which is "you." The end of this stanza is definitely a play on contemporary mankind's superficiality with the sarcastic notion of nature being invented by Walt Disney. The "Fourth, or Disney, Dimension"

implies that time itself□generally considered the fourth dimension□is also foolishly thought to be controllable by the human mind.

Lines 59-62

If the "Yao" is truly an inference to "you," then line 59 continues the second-person address by stating to the reader, "this is yours to work." And what is it that is ours? Presumably the deep woods themselves, the earth, the trees, all of nature. These lines provide a kind of recipe or instructions for "growing" the natural world into mankind's own creation. First, it must be planted "to salt," or to preserve it, unlike "men in armor who destroy each other." Then, in springtime, "Sprinkle it with dragon's blood"□yet another reference to creatures in fairy tales and folklore. Line 62 is important in understanding the gist of the entire poem, for the idea of "what happens" is central to the difference between the human mind and the deep woods. At this point, what happens will be either "epic"□celebrating the feats of a legendary hero in a grand, elevated fashion□or "pastoral"□idealizing the simplicity and serenity of rural life.

Lines 63-68

These lines (and most of those in the remainder of the poem) contain a potpourri of allusions to mythological and historical people, places, and events. The point is simply to emphasize the superabundance of mankind's activities throughout history, eventually going back to the biblical beginning of the human race. First, the "sword in the stone" refers to the legendary King Arthur who, after being raised in seclusion, has to retrieve a sword wedged in rock to prove his true birthright. "Minotaurs / Looking for thread" alludes to Theseus of Greek mythology who is able to slay the half-man/ half-bull and then make his way out of the labyrinth by following the thread he had strung from the entrance. Unicorns look "for girls" because legend has it that the beautiful, virile horses with horns on their foreheads can be captured and tamed only by virgins. "Glastonbury thorns" are said to have grown from a staff that Joseph of Arimathea thrust into the soil when he arrived to Christianize England. The trees supposedly bloom each year on Christmas day, and their cuttings are believed to heal anyone who touches them on Christmas. Finally, the city of "Sarras," thought to be located in the Middle East, is where some believe the Holy Grail is hidden, and the town is often referred to as "Grail City." Many "travelers" have sought the Grail in Sarras and elsewhere.

Lines 69-74

The speaker here returns to the idea of something happening in the deep woods, something generated by man, and he concludes that "More probably nothing will happen." The reason is that the forest is older than history itself and has been left unscathed by human life. The "trees were here, are here" before the Carthaginian king Hannibal (c. 247-182 B . C .) led a pack of elephants along with his soldiers over the Alps to defeat a surprised Roman army. They were there before Emperor Frederick II of

Germany is said to have gone to sleep in a cave and slumbered so long that his beard grew around a stone table in the cavern while he dreamed of bringing peace to a disorderly world. And the deep woods existed, too, before Mordecai, a servant of God recalled in the Book of Esther, had the evil Haman hanged at the gate leading to the palace of King Ahasueres, thereby saving the Jewish nation that Haman wanted to destroy.

Lines 75-78

Here are two more allusions to religious history. Although King Ahasueres is not mentioned by name in line 74, his relation to Mordecai and Haman is implied, and, therefore, the poet can now say the *other* Ahasueres in line 75. "The other Ahasueres" refers to the story of the Wandering Jew, who, as the story goes, was a cobbler named Ahasueres during the time of Jesus. The cobbler was the one who shouted, "Crucify him!" as Jesus bore his cross to Calvary. When Jesus stopped to rest in front of Ahasueres's door, the cobbler refused to let him stay, forcing him to keep walking. After that day, it is said the Jewish Ahasueres began to roam the world, unable to find a home, and so are continuously wandering. The images of Joseph, the Corn Exchange Bank, Egypt, and the word "dreamed" all refer to a story from Genesis in which Joseph is asked to interpret a dream that the Egyptian Pharaoh keeps having about seven ears of good corn and seven ears of thin corn. Joseph claims that it means Egypt will have seven years of bounty followed by seven years of famine. He advises the Pharaoh to develop a plan of stockpiling corn from the bountiful years so that it will be available to help people make it through the lean years.

Lines 79-81

The allusions here are to Milton's *Paradise Lost* . Perhaps "burnt beauties" refers back to the good kernels of corn in the "baked country of Egypt" or perhaps it implies beautiful Egyptian women. Regardless, they are not "hawked out," or sold aggressively, by one who has just begun his journey into hell. Chaos is a great, dark gulf that separates the underworld from the heavens and Earth in Milton's tale. "Pandemonium the Palace" refers to Satan's home in hell.

Lines 82-84

The third reference to something happening is in lines 82 and 83, and this time the speaker is surer of his conclusion. Now he says, " *Most* probably / Nothing will happen" (emphasis added). The deep woods are so pure, so untouched by human activity that they are like the Garden of Eden before "the Fall of Man." The well-known apple that Eve ate has not even been grown in this virgin environment.

Lines 85-87

The last three lines of "Deep Woods" complete the idea of nature's purity and its ability to ignore the entire history□real and fabled□of mankind. Here, the "snake," a symbol of Satan who entered the creature in order to tempt Eve, "still sleeps with a whole head / And has not begun to grow a manly smile." In other words, the snake is just a snake, sunning itself on a rock. In the deep woods, Satan, Eve, and the rest of humanity are nowhere to be found.

Themes

The Limits of Human Perception

The primary theme of "Deep Woods" is the shortfall of a human being's ability to perceive nature in its purest form. Although many people believe they are in tune with the natural world and can spiritually connect with animals, trees, oceans, stars, and so forth, this poem is about the more immediate response of an individual confronted with nature here and now. In the first stanza, the person walking through the woods must deal not only with the awe he feels in such overpowering surroundings but also with his physical reaction to it. His heart races, his mind feels like a hunted beast, and his eyes try desperately to trace the path of a vine winding through the branches, but they cannot. Instead, they become "lost in the insanity of line."

The idea of "line," along with "leaf, and light," represents nature's purity, beauty, and enigmatic qualities□those that make it difficult to understand and keep it out of reach of human perception. Adding to the perplexity of the observer in the woods is nature's "indifference." While humans insist on exact answers and clear motives, nature is content to have "No meaning in it." Whereas people seek drama and heroic actions, "the giant oak" is satisfied not "to fall as heroes should" but quietly to regenerate its life with new vines and branches, even as it leans among a group of birch trees. This behavior is puzzling to mankind. People find it difficult to go about their daily lives oblivious to their surroundings and the actions of loved ones, friends, neighbors, co-workers, government officials, movie stars, famous athletes, leaders of enemy nations, and any other human being capable of eliciting a response in the individual. In the quest to perceive nature as it really is, mankind keeps looking for the "tragic image and the mighty crash," but that is not how it really is in nature. Rather, the deep woods where the speaker walks is an "unlegended land," one that defies interpretation and is not diminished by past or present events. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the human's limited perception is that nature's "common splendors are comparable only to / Themselves," leaving mankind in the dark, helpless to comprehend the deep woods.

Humanity's Troubled Past

A lesser, but still poignant, theme in "Deep Woods" is humanity's troubled past, presented in the poem in sharp contrast to nature's nonchalance and *un* troubled existence. The speaker that guides the reader through the deep woods also guides us through the travails of human history, both legendary and actual. Although some of the allusions are too benign or questionable entities□the wizard of the Black Forest, Chinese poets, French painters, Walt Disney, and unicorns□far more describe violent, often evil events and participants since the biblical beginning of mankind. The "flood of Yao" is likened to Noah's flood and supposedly killed thousands in southern China. The "time of Set" recalls a time when some people worshipped chaos and demonic power and perhaps reflects cults that have sprung up over the centuries adhering to black

magic and Satanic ritual. Nearly all of Nemerov's allusions in "Deep Woods" have religious connotations, typically describing stories of pain and sorrow and sin. The poet was known to be of strong Jewish faith, and his high intellect complemented profound meditations on the biblical past. He does not neglect the New Testament in this poem, referring to the crucifixion of Christ twice with the Glastonbury thorns that "make December / Bleed for the Saviour" and the "other Ahasuerus" who mocked Jesus on his way to Calvary. The story of Mordecai and Haman may be interpreted as a tale of the good guy coming out on top, but it is still a tale of violence and death, if not murder. As though thrown in for good measure, the reference to Hannibal points to historical events, without religious connotation but still reflecting mankind's history of war and aggression.

"Deep Woods" ends with an allusion to Satan's descent into hell, having lost his home in paradise after defying God, and with a final allusion to the biblical "Fall of Man." In the last two lines, the list of humanity's troubles is offset by the portrayal of nature's serenity and innocence. This scene is strikingly, and intentionally, different from all that comes before it.

Style

Nemerov's "Deep Woods" is constructed in blank verse, with nearly every line written in unrhymed iambic pentameter. Though blank verse can generally refer to any unrhymed poem, most often the lines contain five two-syllable feet with the first syllable accented, the second unaccented. If the poem is read through slowly, tapping out each syllable with a finger, the number of syllables adds up to ten per line with an accent pattern of TA-da, TA-da, TA-da, and so forth. This poem is more relaxed in style than Nemerov's earlier work, and the ideas are presented in a more direct manner than those demonstrated through strict adherence to line number and rhyme scheme. Describing the poems in *The Salt Garden,* critic Ross Labrie, in his book *Howard Nemerov,* says the poems' "lines are less jagged than had been the case earlier as Nemerov begins to settle into a flexible blank verse, the frequent use of enjambment giving rise to the sort of graceful fluidity that is characteristic of his mature work." (In poetry, enjambment is the continuation of a syntactic unit from one line to the next, with no pause. For example, in "Deep Woods," there is no pause between lines 4 and 5, 6 and 7, 9 and 10, etc.). Considering the complexity of Nemerov's work, it is beneficial to the reader that the poet began to write in a more direct, loose manner so that the intellectual ideas are not made more elusive by a difficult style.

Historical Context

Written in the middle of one of the most kaleidoscopic decades in American history, "Deep Woods" includes almost as much hodgepodge reflecting on mankind's history as one would need to describe the 1950s□almost, but not quite. This decade is difficult to define in terms of any one great scientific invention, social movement, war, art or entertainment development, political action, or technological advancement. *All* these things and more occurred, causing the 1950s to stand alone in an era of innovation and changing attitudes.

After World War II, Americans in particular were anxious to keep the economic boom provided by the conflict growing ever stronger and to avoid the miserable conditions of the pre-war depression. World War II also taught Americans that science could have a greater impact on the lives of ordinary citizens than they had ever imagined. The atomic bomb brought a mixture of fear and pride to many individuals and would pave the way for the "Red Scare," McCarthyism, and air raid drills that all became a part of the culture of the 1950s.

The decade began with the United States involved in another overseas conflict, this time in Korea, where American and South Korean troops battled Chinese and North Korean troops over control of the entire country. At the end of the Second World War, Korea was divided at the 38th parallel, the northern half becoming communist, the southern half an ally of the United States. Although the division was intended to be temporary□only until a national election could be held□skirmishes began to break out along the dividing line, turning into all-out war by 1950. When an armistice was finally signed in 1953, a demilitarized zone was established at the 38th parallel, and the country remained divided. This confrontation with communism established America's role as the "policeman" for the world, with the determination to stop the spread of communism a rallying cry for American involvement in other nations' internal affairs. This, in turn, led to the arms race and the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, points of contention that would last throughout the decade and beyond. For some, the fear of communism became fanatical, and Americans accused other Americans of being closet communists. Most famous was Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin who publicly announced the names of those he thought to be disloyal to the American government, including many Hollywood stars and other well-known people. The practice of publicizing accusations without regard for evidence became known as "McCarthyism."

The 1950s were not only tumultuous years on the political and military fronts, but also in health care, social reform, technology, and entertainment. In medicine, vaccinations for some of the deadliest childhood diseases, including polio and measles, were discovered, and birth control pills were introduced, although they were not available to women in the general population until 1960. Prior to the 1950s, segregation was common in schools, churches, public transportation, the work place□virtually all aspects of day-to-day living□but by the end of the decade, the federal government had adopted measures for desegregation, especially in schools. This movement, too, would find

greatest impact in the next decade, but the seeds of sweeping changes in civil rights were sewn in the 1950s. Although television was already around prior to 1950, this was the decade that sent the new medium to incredible heights of popularity. Programs were broadcast nationally for the first time, and Americans flocked to stores to purchase TVs in much the same way that later generations would send computer sales skyrocketing. Jet airlines and turnpikes changed the way□and the speed□that Americans traveled, and microwave ovens and fast food became fashionable, although Mom's home cooking still topped the dinnertime list in the nuclear American household.

In entertainment, the 1950s saw the birth of rock and roll and a breakdown in the color barrier between musicians and their audiences. Young whites attended concerts and bought the records of black groups the same as they did for white groups, and there was an overall sense of independence, rebellion, and good times brought on by the music that kids loved and parents feared. In literature, "Beat" poets and storytellers read their stream-of-consciousness, off-the-wall work in smoky coffee shops and wine cafes, some, such as Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, becoming famous in the Beat generation. Painters, dancers, and photographers, too, embraced spontaneity in their art, throwing off traditional crafting and style much to the chagrin of the older followers of structured, well-defined art.

How Nemerov fit into this decade of James Dean, rock and roll, and poetry set to the beat of bongo drums is not easy to say. Evidence in his own work suggests he carried on as usual, probably not offended by the fast, unbridled turn of events, but not very strongly influenced by it either. He continued to produce highly intellectual poetry, fiction, and criticism while the tumultuous 1950s turned into the even more revolutionary 1960s. But in that decade, too, he maintained the Nemerov style.

Critical Overview

For some readers and critics of poetry, Nemerov's work has always been highly regarded, and for others it has taken awhile to get there. Those who received it well in the beginning only mildly complained that the poetry was a bit too derivative of earlier, popular poets, especially Robert Frost. But the harsher critics faulted it for a different reason, as Ross Labrie explains in his book *Howard Nemerov* : "A further reason for the belated recognition of Nemerov's worth can be found in his quiet and resolute resistance to sentimentality and in his forthright pursuit of complex forms." Labrie goes on to say that "his subject matter has appeared to many to be overly erudite and esoteric" and that his reputation "was of a cloistered academic who spent a lot of his time in trying to perfect obsolete forms of prose and verse."

By the mid-1950s, Nemerov had loosened his "obsolete forms" and gained more appreciative readers. As Peter Meinke notes in his own *Howard Nemerov,* "It is in *The Salt Garden* (1955) that Nemerov first unifies his talent. . . . This book, praised by virtually all critics, had the misfortune to run up against *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens,* which swept the literary awards of 1955." Of course, Nemerov went on to win his own literary awards and is today one of the most often anthologized poets in American collections.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Hill is the author of a poetry collection, has published widely in poetry journals, and is an associate editor for a university publications department. In the following essay, she argues that, while allusions are effective literary devices and can add much to a poem, "Deep Woods" is overdone with them, detracting from its quality and strength.

Howard Nemerov's "Deep Woods" may indeed be in keeping with the poet's profound, highly intellectual style and subject matter, but this time it appears he has "out-Nemerov'd" himself. This eighty-seven-line poem could end at line 42 and be much more effective in letting its remarkable early imagery stand alone to make the point. The addition of allusion after allusion piled on top of one another in the second half of the poem serves only to diminish the strong metaphors relied on in the first half. All the references to historical and legendary people, places, and events fall in such rapid succession that their placement seems helter-skelter, much overdone.

The first half of "Deep Woods" is both eloquent and unusual in its presentation of specific, physical imagery. How picturesque it is to describe something as ambiguous as history in terms of concrete objects, such as trucks passing by on a highway. The verb series "slows, shudders, and shifts" is accurate in describing a big, heavy rig moving down the road but remarkable in portraying humanity's past as unsettled and ominous. The metaphor continues with the word "staggers" and leads into the comparison of history to the reaction of the human body when faced with something completely non-historical. The speaker claims that the deep woods are "too still for history," but they certainly evoke a response in people. Nemerov calls out three poignant parts of a human being□the heart, the mind, and the eye□that are particularly affected by the quiet beauty and power of nature. The extended metaphor of the mind as a hunted beast is on target in describing the panic and confusion an individual feels in the midst of something too awesome to understand. This passage is easily understood, and many readers have probably known the feeling firsthand. Nemerov rounds out the first stanza with more strong imagery, and this time it is the eye that is restless and racing. Again, he uses a depiction of the natural environment to show the human response to it. The "Reticulated branch and vine which go / Nowhere" actually go *everywhere,* making their twining and meandering impossible to trace. In awe, the eye gives up, coming to "a flickering kind of rest" that really is not restful at all. Instead, it is in a suspended state of tension, much like the heart and mind, unable to grasp nature, and so becomes afraid of it.

Compare this first stanza to the third, beginning with line 43. Suddenly the imagery is not so concrete or easily understood. Now the references are to Black Forest wizards, something called the "hot swamp theatrical" with snakes and tigers thrown in, and a Chinese forest "with bridge, pagoda, fog," and three poets drinking tea in the foreground. As if this scene is not odd enough, line 49 adds further confusion by completely contradicting line 48□"(there is no tea, and not so many as three)." Starting with line 51, there is a promising return to good, clear imagery with the "common splendors" of the deep woods and their "leaf, line, light . . . scrawled alone" in sunshine

across a hillside. The promise, however, is unfulfilled because suddenly the allusions come back in full force. Crammed into the last four lines of the third stanza are references to French painters Watteau and Fragonard, Egypt's Old Kingdom, the god Set, the Flood of Yao, the Fourth Dimension, and Walt Disney. This motley list may contribute surprise to the poem, but it does nothing to complement the solid visual details of its beginning.

Going back to the second stanza, the reader can see how it continues the crisp imagery of the first. The initial mention of "Line, leaf, light" follows directly from the notion of seemingly endless vines woven into the branches of the trees and the brilliant patterns created by sunlight upon leaves in the forest. The highlight of this stanza is the comparison between a fallen human hero and a giant oak tree stricken, presumably, by lightning. Here again, the metaphor is impressive and highly comprehensible. The forest handles its wounded with beautiful, but tenacious, simplicity. The oak tree has a desire to carry on, even in less than heroic conditions, and is content to rejuvenate its life with a "Fresh weaving of vines, rooting of outer branches," all for the humble sake of "Beginning again." Human beings, on the other hand, would rather be dead than humble. Line 28, "The tragic image and the mighty crash," brings to mind scenes of noble heroes in movies, television shows, paintings, even epic novels and poems, as brave soldiers, kings, and lovers meet death gladly, falling as they "should." Contrasted against the depiction of the oak tree leaning "crookedly" but still alive, these images speak for themselves in getting the poet's message across: the gulf between the deep woods□one of nature's purest forms□and the human intellect is so great that they approach death, as well as life, very differently. Now move on to the fourth stanza and try to imagine the same, strong visuals based on the descriptions found there.

The last stanza, unfortunately, follows the pattern of the third in its series of allusions, some remotely related and others seeming to come out of nowhere. It begins with references to the King Arthur era, mentioning men in armor, dragons, and swords stuck in stone. Quickly, though, there is a shift to mythological beasts in the form of minotaurs and unicorns. Then, just as quickly, the allusions shift to religious history, mixing stories from both the New and Old Testaments. The connection between Glastonbury thorns, relating to the crucifixion of Jesus, and the city of Sarras, where some people say the Holy Grail is hidden, may not be far-fetched, but the next concrete allusion is to King Hannibal and his pack of elephants-turned-warriors. This "connection," the reader may rightfully think, *is* far-fetched.

In lines 73 through 78, the allusions change as much as they did in the last four lines of the third stanza, moving from Emperor Frederick II of Germany and his long, red beard to Mordecai and Haman from the Book of Esther to "The other Ahasuerus" who, at once, alludes to the king that Mordecai and Haman knew and to the man who became better known as the Wandering Jew. Next, the shift is to the Book of Genesis and the story of Joseph, an Egyptian Pharaoh, and a stockpile of corn. That this string of references is made up of such diverse people and events is further complicated by the fact that many readers are simply not familiar enough with them to understand who or what they were. While a serious reader of poetry may expect occasionally to pull out dictionaries, encyclopedias, or, nowadays, a computer connected to the Internet, most

do not relish the idea of researching line after line of esoteric allusions. For the not-so-serious reader, a poem like "Deep Woods" is quite a turn-off□the second half, anyway.

Not surprisingly, the poem ends with yet another literary reference, this time to Milton's *Paradise Lost* . Evidently, the tie-in here is simply to the biblical story of the "Fall of Man," but the best part of the ending has nothing to do with this allusion. Instead, it is the portrayal of the snake, "speckled as sunlight on the rock / In the deep woods." This description is a return to strong, solid imagery, depicting a part of the natural environment in highly visible fashion. The reader can *see* the creature sleeping peacefully on a rock, much the same way one can see intertwining vines and branches, a giant oak leaning into a group of birch trees, and the dry, gold leaves of a New England October. These images are the strength of the poem. The god Set, Walt Disney, unicorns, and King Hannibal fall far short in evoking such vivid pictures in the mind. And "Deep Woods" would have been better without them.

Source: Pamela Steed Hill, Critical Essay on "Deep Woods," in *Poetry for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Mowery has a Ph.D. in literature and composition and has written extensively for the Gale Group. In the following essay he considers the tension that comes from creating an identity for the "Deep Woods."

"Nemerov is a very easy poet to read: you like him immediately. He always gives you something to think about," wrote James Dickey in 1961. Some of Howard Nemerov's earlier poems tended to be more abstract, but the later ones show a shift into what Peter Meinke calls "the simplicity of a highly educated man." These include the poems in the volume *The Salt Garden,* among them "Deep Woods."

At first the poem is reminiscent of the poetry of the New England poet Robert Frost, especially his "Stopping by a Woods on a Snowy Evening." In that Frost poem, the narrator stops in a quiet woods and watches the "woods fill up with snow." (The speaker or narrator in a poem is the persona, the voice telling the tale. It may or may not be the poet.) He wonders whether the owner will care if he watches. The only sound in these woods is the gentle wind and the sleigh bells shaken by his curious horse. For Frost, the woods were a very special place, well known by the narrator, a place he had visited often on his way home. The narrator takes a few moments to stop and enjoy the beauty of the dark woods before remembering that he has "Promises to keep." Frost's briefly descriptive approach to this poem is what some writers have called rustic. (In poetry this connotes a simple, unsophisticated approach to the wording but not necessarily to the meanings derived from them.) The editors of *The Literature of the United States* said, "For the most part, [the] bookish influences seem less important than those of the poet's inheritance and environment." Indeed, his poetry does have the feel of the country more than the library.

This is in strong contrast to the intensely descriptive poetry of Nemerov, whose works are filled with literary references and imagery from many facets of life and history. The combination of the images of kings, mythological creatures, and everyday events creates the impression that every event is significant no matter what it is. The falling oak in the woods and the Glastonbury thorn bush are equally important. (The latter is a famous thorn tree that stood for many years in front of St. John the Baptist's Church in Somerset, England. It was famous for its red Christmas blossoms, which, to some, were symbolic of the Blood of Christ.)

But this is not to say that Nemerov's poetry is too esoteric to be enjoyed. Peter Meinke said that Nemerov's poetry, especially that of *The Salt Garden,* is marked by the attempt "to convey the substance of his meditations clearly." As a result, some of Nemerov's work makes severe demands on the reader to assimilate large quantities of seemingly random information in order to come to an understanding of the poetry. Commenting on his own creative abilities, Howard Nemerov once said (as quoted in Perkins's "The Collected Nemerov"), "I hate intelligence, and have nothing else." His use of the intellectual imagery creates the unique impression of the woods in this poem. It is not a stuffy creation but one of craft and stimulating experiences. Julia Randall says in her

article, "Nemerov does not seek to impose a vision upon the world so much as to listen to what it says. . . . [H]is . . . virtue . . . is not to diminish the mystery of the world but to allow it to appear without the interposition of a peculiar individuality."

In the two poems mentioned here, Frost's snow-filled woods is an unnamed yet well-known place in the countryside. Because Frost is spare in his descriptions, the reader is free to create an image of the woods depending on his or her own experiences and imagination. Therefore, these woods will seem more familiar to the reader.

Similarly, the "deep woods" is a place created by Nemerov in the reader's imagination, but it is drawn from "listening" to the many references to history and the arts. But this is an unknown place, a "mystery of the world" that remains without an identity. In spite of the attempts to create a specific image of the woods, including the lines "These here are the deep woods / Of now, New England, this October," these woods are an enigma, an "unlegended land." But it still is the task of the poet, through the narrator, to give the woods an identity, a legend.

Beneath the serene facade of "Deep Woods" is a restless and impatient narrator, whose "mind uneasily rests" dreaming of being lost, and whose "restless eye" scans the branches and vines trying to read the misspelled calligraphy, yearning for a solution to the mystery of the tangled undergrowth. Nearby, the trucks struggle noisily to climb a hill on their way to deliver their load of trinkets. Elsewhere, dogs bay, running "after better game." Even when the "tragic image and the mighty crash" of the great oak are delayed by the birches, it waits impatiently "to fall as heroes should." This restlessness contrasts with the calm woods of Frost. There, the narrator watches snow fall before moving on to meet his schedule without any sense of urgency or impatience; here in Nemerov's poem, the combined events create a cacophony of urgent noises.

The result of impatience is an increase of tension. There is tension born of the conflict between the woods that "are too slow for history" and the frenetic attempts to decipher the riddles in the woods. The eye scans its surroundings trying to read a misspelled message and comes away with "No meaning in it, but indifference." It comes to a "flickering kind of rest." The woods are "yours to work" and after sprinkling it "with dragon's blood," "you" wait for something to occur, but "more probably nothing will happen." Even the efforts of the birch branches' "assaults which haven't worked yet" contribute to the frustration.

Moreover, there is a tension in the manner in which the speaker identifies the woods. It is a process of identification by negation: The reader is told what the woods are not. They are not the Black Forest; they are not Chinese fog-covered woods; they are not the woods waiting for someone to come along and plant apples in them. At the start of section three, there is a hint of the woods' identity: "It is the same, they say, everywhere. / But that's not so. These here are the deep woods / Of now, New England, this October." Nemerov hints that his woods are the same as the woods of Frost. "But that's not so." Frost's woods are rustic, simple, snow-covered; Nemerov's are intellectually burdened, complex, noisy.

Frost's woods are well known to the narrator and, by implication, to the reader. The narrator seems to have passed through them many times. He knows who owns them. But Nemerov's woods are not known. They are "unlegended," "unmitigated by myth;" they are a "place [that] is too old for history to know beans about." It is a prehistoric place before apples grew and "the Fall of Man" occurred. In contrast to the simple ways Frost defined his woods, the woods in "Deep Woods" are described in the intellectual ways that Nemerov claimed to hate so much.

There is one final piece to the puzzle to help explain the process of defining the deep woods. Brian Jones said that "The theme of thought struggling continuously to master [the] world is a dominant one in his [Nemerov's] work." Combined with Meinke's remark that Nemerov was fascinated by the workings of "man's mind," it is an easy step to see the woods as a symbol for the ruminations of a human mind. A human being is born as a *tabula rasa,* a blank slate, on which will be written the sum of that individual's experiences. Out of those experiences then comes the identity of the person. Since everyone will have a different set of experiences, everyone will be unique. But the individual must act. For the woods of "Deep Woods," the speaker tries to identify the acts that will define them.

The speaker in "Deep Woods" makes many attempts to define the woods from the process of negation to claims that it is a New England woods. These attempts are massed in a free-association manner, drawing images from the arts, history, and theology. The woods may be "like nothing known since nature was invented by Watteau and Fragonard." They are "comparable only to themselves." The woods are older than Hannibal, or Frederick, or Mordecai. The woods are "yours to work," to sprinkle with blood and to wait see if anything will happen, "epic or pastoral." The multitude of images is symbolic of the mental processes of someone trying to find a solution to a puzzle of the definition of the woods. But the woods lack an identifying quality, as the Black Forest has. It is the goal of the search in the poem.

This is a fresh new place that will define its essence in terms of its own existence. Existentialist philosophy asserts that "existence precedes essence." Briefly, this means that an individual is nothing except what he or she makes of himself or herself through a series of choices of actions. Therefore, the individual's essence is the accumulation of those acts. Likewise, the final definition of "Deep Woods" depends solely on accumulation of the references the narrator makes and the active involvement of the reader with those references. The woods are not dependent on other places for identity, nor are they dependent on artists to give them an identity. They are the woods "whose splendors are comparable only to themselves" and whose identity is unique unto itself.

Source: Carl Mowery, Critical Essay on "Deep Woods," in *Poetry for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Adaptations

There have been several recordings of Nemerov taped by the Library of Congress, including "Language, Nonsense and Poetry" (1989), "The Poet and the Poem" (1990), and "Professor Gifford Interviews Howard Nemerov" (1990).

Nemerov recorded a seventy-four-minute tape while reading at the New York Poetry Center in 1962. A two-cassette collection was also recorded in 1962 by Jeffrey Norton, simply titled "The Poetry of Howard Nemerov." These items most likely contain a good deal of material from *The Salt Garden* since the book was published only seven years earlier.

Topics for Further Study

Choose one person or event alluded to in "Deep Woods" and find out all you can about your subject. Write an essay explaining the person's or event's significance in history and tell why Nemerov may have selected the allusion for this poem.

Write a poem from the perspective of the "giant oak" that leans against the birch trees instead of falling "as heroes should." What would the oak think of the human being passing by in the woods? How would it describe its own situation?

Read Robert Frost's poem "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" and write an essay comparing it to "Deep Woods." Other than the obvious difference in length, how does the Frost poem contrast to Nemerov's? In what ways are the two similar?

Howard Nemerov had a famous sister, also in the arts field. Find out who she was, what her profession was, and write a brief biography of her life.

Compare and Contrast

1953: Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, accused of cold war espionage, are executed. The Rosenbergs had been found guilty of conspiring to leak atomic bomb secrets to the Russians, but the accusations were controversial, and today many Americans believe their death sentences were a miscarriage of justice.

Today: Robert Philip Hanssen, a counterintelligence specialist and FBI veteran, is accused of selling secrets to Russia for $1.4 million in cash, diamonds, and deferred money. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.

1955: Disneyland, part of the empire that Walt Disney built, opens in California, the first theme park in America's history of leisure.

Today: The Walt Disney Company is a multibillion dollar entertainment giant, operating theme parks all over the world, including Great Britain, Japan, France, and Australia.

1959: Anthropologist Louis Leakey finds the skull of "Nutcracker Man" in Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, suggesting that human evolution began on the continent of Africa, not Asia.

Today: In Ethiopia, a freshly unearthed skull and jawbone provide scientists with new details about the human ancestor called "Nutcracker Man"; other digs at the same site have turned up remains of a direct human ancestor, *Homo erectus,* suggesting that the two species may have coexisted in the same area.

What Do I Read Next?

A Howard Nemerov Reader, published in 1991, is a collection that includes some of the writer's best poems, short stories, essays, and the comic novel *Federigo; or, the Power of Love* . For the full scope of Nemerov's writing talents, this book is an excellent source.

Guy and Laura Waterman were known for their writings on preserving natural habitats and living in harmony with the environment. After her husband's death in 2000, Laura Waterman released a special edition of their book, *Wilderness Ethics: Preserving the Spirit of Wildness* . In this call-to-action book, the Watermans describe what they call nature's spiritual dimension, its fragile, untamed wildness, which is being destroyed by over-management and carelessness.

There are many versions of John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* but for the average reader who is not an expert on religious history, the *Norton Critical Edition* is one of the best. The full title of the paperback printing, published in 1993, is *Paradise Lost: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, and Sources Criticism (Norton Critical Edition),* edited by Scott Elledge. This is a lengthy book, but more than half of it is a collection of various literature, excerpts, and footnotes that are vital to understanding this remarkable piece of literature.

How the human mind works has been the topic of countless books and magazine articles, and psychologist Bernard Baars's *In the Theater of Consciousness: The Workspace of the Mind* is a recent example of an interesting approach to the subject. Published in 1997, the book shows how consciousness works like a theater stage in which thoughts and perceptions are examined by an inner audience. It is highly readable and contains exercises for the reader that demonstrate the phenomena he is explaining.

Further Study

Duncan, Bowie, ed., *The Critical Reception of Howard Nemerov,* The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1971.

This book contains an excellent collection of essays on both Nemerov and his work. The essays cover thirteen publications, including *The Salt Garden,* with an extensive bibliography at the end.

Harvey, R. D., "A Prophet Armed: An Introduction to the Poetry of Howard Nemerov," in *Poets in Progress,* edited by H. B. Hungerford, Northwestern University Press, 1967, pp. 116-33.

In this article, Harvey concentrates on the themes of war, nature, and city life, presenting an interesting discussion on the same themes found in "Deep Woods."

Mills, William, "Nemerov as Nature Poet," in *The Stillness in Moving Things: The World of Howard Nemerov,* Memphis State University Press, 1975, pp. 97-118.

In this essay, Mills explores the symbolism of the woods in "Deep Woods," especially their capacity as a "source of peace."

Nemerov, Howard, *The Collected Poems of Howard Nemerov,* University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Collected works always provide a good, thorough sampling of a writer's works, allowing readers to see changes in style, subject matter, and quality over the years.

□, *Figures of Thought: "Speculations on the Meaning of Poetry, and Other Essays,*" Godine, 1978.

Known as much for his thoughts on poetry as for writing it, Nemerov provides some interesting insight into his own work and others in this collection of essays. Although the theories here are accessible to any reader, the serious poetry student would find the book most helpful in getting to know the poet and his craft better.

□, *Journal of the Fictive Life,* Rutgers University Press, 1965.

This is as close to an autobiography as Nemerov wrote. It is actually a scribbled record of his thoughts as he tried to write a novel. The journal itself was a hit with readers for its humor, intellectual depth, and readability.

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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.

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□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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