Hospital Window Study Guide

Hospital Window by James Dickey

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Contents

Introduction

The strength of James Dickey's poetry lies in this southern writer's ability to turn a commonplace event into a moment of personal transcendence. His poems never simply lie flat on a page; instead, they shout with intense□sometimes shocking□imagery and action. Dickey's poems and his novels (most notably *Deliverance,* which became a major film in 1973) often present common people doing common things. But there is always a twist or a rise to an unexpected level that moves the persona and the themes into a realm far beyond what the simple action may imply.

In "The Hospital Window," the speaker has been visiting his gravely ill father in the hospital, and, as he leaves the building, he turns to wave toward the window that he believes is in his father's room. This is something that anyone might do in a similar situation. Once outside, however, the son experiences a rapturous moment of true understanding□both of his father's impending death and of his own resignation to mortality. So strong is this sudden transcendence beyond grief and pain that he stands in the middle of the street continuing to wave while traffic backs up and angry drivers begin blowing their horns. Even the honking horns become a part of the speaker's rising spirit and sense of euphoria, and he incorporates them into his dreamlike state, imagining that the loud noises can "blow down the walls of the world" and set the souls of the dying free. In this poem, the hospital window is much more than a pane of glass, and Dickey once again manages to turn a simple gesture into personal revelation.

Author Biography

Anyone who assumes that the biography of a poet is bound to be filled with a list of mundane academic positions and descriptions of a lofty, mostly sedentary lifestyle has not read a biography of James Dickey. This poet was a high school and college football player, a track star atVanderbilt University, a bow hunter, a guitarist, and a fighter pilot in both World War II and the Korean War. He was an advertising copywriter, novelist, actor, and teacher. And, of course, he was a poet□one whose adventurous, often daring, outdoorsman practices provided much fuel for his richly image-laden poems and prose.

James Dickey was born in 1923 in Buckhead, Georgia, a suburb ofAtlanta. He enteredClemson College in 1942 but enlisted in the Army Air Corps before completing his education. After the war, he transferred to Vanderbilt University inNashville, earning his undergraduate degree in 1949 and his master's in 1950. Working at advertising firms in both Atlanta and New York, Dickey began to fill his idle time with poetry writing, and, after meeting and developing a friendship with Ezra Pound, he began to work more seriously on his poetry. Within a few years, his poems were appearing in top American literary journals, and he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to study inEurope. This was the beginning of his long literary career, and he would go on to hold teaching and writer-in-residence positions at Rice University, the University of Wisconsin, George Mason University, and theUniversity of South Carolina, among others. James Dickey was still at the lectern in the English Department at South Carolina until five days before his death on January 19, 1997.

Poem Text

I have just come down from my father.

Higher and higher he lies

Above me in a blue light

Shed by a tinted window.

I drop through six white floors

And then step out onto the pavement.

Still feeling my father ascend,

I start to cross the firm street,

My shoulder blades shining with all

The glass the huge building can raise.

Now I must turn round and face it,

And know his one pane from the others.

Each window possesses the sun

As though it burned there on a wick.

I wave, like a man catching fire.

All the deep-dyed windowpanes flash,

And, behind them, all the white rooms

They turn to the color of Heaven.

Ceremoniously, gravely, and weakly,

Dozens of pale hands are waving

Back, from inside their flames.

Yet one pure pane among these

Is the bright, erased blankness of nothing.

I know that my father is there,

In the shape of his death still living.

The traffic increases around me

Like a madness called down on my head.

The horns blast at me like shotguns,

And drivers lean out, driven crazy□

But now my propped-up father

Lifts his arm out of stillness at last.

The light from the window strikes me

And I turn as blue as a soul,

As the moment when I was born.

I am not afraid for my father□

Look! He is grinning; he is not

Afraid for my life, either,

As the wild engines stand at my knees

Shredding their gears and roaring,

And I hold each car in its place

For miles, inciting its horn

To blow down the walls of the world

That the dying may float without fear

In the bold blue gaze of my father.

Slowly I move to the sidewalk

With my pin-tingling hand half dead

At the end of my bloodless arm.

I carry it off in amazement,

High, still higher, still waving,

My recognized face fully mortal,

Yet not; not at all, in the pale,

Drained, otherwordly, stricken,

Created hue of stained glass.

I have just come down from my father.

Plot Summary

Line 1:

The first line in "The Hospital Window" may be singled out for attention because it is used for both the beginning and the ending of the poem. The fact that the same line opens and closes this work gives it a circular motion, one that is very apt in a poem addressing living and dying, father and son, and the sense of roundness in human life□"ashes to ashes, dust to dust," so to speak. Literally, the speaker simply means he has just returned to street level after visiting his ill father on the sixth floor of the hospital. However, the son has also just "come down" from his father in the metaphorical sense, for he believes the dying man is starting to ascend into the heavens, far out of range of being reached.

Lines 2-6:

The lines that make up the rest of the first stanza introduce color and light into the poem, references that will be repeated throughout. The father lies "higher and higher" above the speaker, indicating a movement upward, and he appears to be ascending in a blue light, perhaps implying a soul floating through the sky. There is a mixture of the physical and the metaphysical in this stanza. Even though the words "higher" and "blue" may be used as metaphors, the last three lines simply tell the reader that the windows of the hospital are tinted blue and that the speaker has taken an elevator down six floors to reach the pavement. The language the poet uses, however, implies something more than a simple elevator ride, for the speaker claims to "drop" through the floors, and the floors are "white." It is as though the son has fallen from the purity and the sterility that surround the dying as they transcend earthly matters and physical objects.

Lines 7-10:

Line seven continues the son's perception of his father's movement toward heaven, or his drawing closer to death. Not only is there a sense of the dying man's upward motion, but the poem itself seems to ascend as well. This will become clearer as the speaker moves readers through his physical actions and his emotions as they rise toward the final stanza. He emphasizes his father's light, ethereal existence by contrasting it to his own on the "firm street." But as he crosses the roadway, he feels his "shoulder blades shining with all / the glass the huge building can raise." Here, an obvious question may be, why shoulder blades as opposed to just shoulders or back or head? The reason is most likely that shoulder blades imply angel imagery, for the wings of angels are depicted as attached to what would be human shoulder blades. With this description, Dickey continues to mix reality and metaphor, as well as compare the "concrete" world of the living to the spiritual, divine presence of those near death. While the realistic

indication is that the speaker can feel sunlight reflecting as heat on his back as he crosses the street, the angel imagery implies an otherworldly essence to the bright day.

Lines 11-12:

These two lines are rich with double meaning. On one hand□the literal hand□the speaker is saying that, as he crosses the street, he knows he is obligated to turn around and wave toward a window of the hospital that is in the vicinity of his father's room. It is a gesture of both love and duty, even though the son realizes that all the windows look alike, and chances are he cannot locate the exact one. Figuratively, though, there is much more going on. The word "must" is very strong, indicating a greater urge than dutiful obligation. Instead, the speaker is compelled to turn around, whether by his own accord or by some force that lies beyond him. The phrase "face it" refers to looking at the hospital, or "huge building" as described in the previous line, but "it" may be a much greater, more difficult object to face than a building. What the son must also turn around and face is his father's death and the fact that the ill parent will never emerge alive from the hospital that looms so large in his son's vision.

The twelfth line means, literally, that the son must find his father's window out of all the others, but the key word in the line is "pane." Spelled as is, it refers to a sheet of glass, or simply the hospital window, but, spelled *pain,* the meaning is just as valid and even more revealing. The speaker needs to attempt to separate his father's pain from all that is suffered by hundreds of other patients. But he understands that this endeavor is just as futile as trying to pinpoint one single window on the sixth floor out of all the others on the building's façade.

Lines 13-15:

The sun's reflection on windows is a common sight, but the windows in Dickey's poem are exceptional for each one "possesses the sun." This strong verb is in keeping with the poem's rising passion, a fervor that is echoed in much of the language and emotion. The windows also play a prominent role in the imagery of whiteness and light that runs throughout the poem, acting as vehicles that reflect purity and allow transcendence to occur. The sun is like a candle flame for it seems to burn "on a wick" in each pane of glass. Line 15 is arguably the most vital one in the poem, for it marks the beginning of the revelation that the speaker will experience later on, and it indicates his first wave toward his father. But it is not just an ordinary wave, for he does it "like a man catching fire"□a simile reflecting the speaker's urgency, passion, and need. Note that he doesn't wave like a man on fire□which may connote pain or hopelessness□but like a man catching fire, a phrase that is used to describe something exciting, finally getting underway.

Lines 16-18:

These lines continue the flame-in-the-window metaphor, as well as the references to color. The windowpanes are "deep-dyed" with their blue tint and they "flash" with the sun's reflection. Behind the windows, all the hospital rooms are white, but they begin to "turn to the color of Heaven." The color of heaven, in this case, is blue, like the skies above, and the white walls of the rooms appear to turn azure as the sunlight falls upon them through blue-tinted windows. Physically, these concepts are accurate□hospital rooms are typically white and colored glass makes other objects appear colored when light passes through it. But, figuratively, the white rooms turn to the color of heaven because many of the ill people within them are closer to dying.

Lines 19-21:

The three adverbs that make up line nineteen (along with the conjunction "and") describe the patients in the hospital. They are physically weak and emotionally grim, but they return the wave "ceremoniously" even though they don't know the person waving from the street, or, perhaps, because that person could be one of their own relatives. The signal of friendliness is automatic even after sincerity has been lost. The speaker sees dozens of waving hands, but he cannot recognize faces for they are hidden "inside their flames," or behind the sun's reflection on the glass. The word "flames" here most likely represents each dying person's own luminosity and passion as he or she approaches the final moments of life.

Lines 22-25:

Line 22 picks up on the same word-play as line twelve with the use of the word "pane." In the earlier line, the son needed to know his father's "one pane from the others," and in line twenty-two he notices that "one pure pane among" all the others is bright with reflected sun, but there is no hand waving behind it. Instead, he envisions only the "erased blankness of nothing." Recognizing how close his father is to dying, the speaker assumes that the window from which no one waves is his parent's, for he claims, "I know that my father is there." After this line, there is a stanza break, indicating the possibility that the man has already passed away. This ambiguity is intentional, but it is quickly explained in the following line that begins the fifth stanza: "In the shape of his death still living." Now it is clear that the father is alive, but the son acknowledges that he is in "the shape of his death."

Lines 26-29:

Not since line eight has there been any mention of the speaker's actual whereabouts, and, when last noted, he had started to cross the street. It is not unlikely for readers to get caught up in the rich imagery of the windows, the light, the flames, and the colors and forget all about where the son is waving from. Dickey works his poem like a well-

crafted novel, complete with rising action and asides that pull readers away from the immediate placement of the speaker. Line 26 brings back reality. The speaker has stopped in the middle of the street to turn and wave to his father. He stands there waving as cars slow down to get around him, and he thinks of the traffic as a "madness called down" on his head. The meaning of madness may be twofold here. On one hand, the scene in the street is chaotic, with horns blowing "like shotguns" and drivers leaning out of their windows to yell, "driven crazy." On the other hand, madness is what the speaker is beginning to feel within himself as he moves toward both an acceptance and an understanding of human mortality.

Lines 30-34:

Line 30 shifts the action back to the hospital room where the dying man, propped up in his bed, "lifts his arm out of stillness at last." The scene becomes surreal as the son, still standing among heavy traffic and angry drivers, is struck by the light from the window in his father's room. While much of the poem incorporates spiritual themes and imagery, lines 30 through 34 reveal an unquestionable religious experience on the part of the speaker. He is truly touched by the light□in the biblical sense□ and he feels as though he has turned "as blue as a soul." Recall that the white rooms in the hospital had turned "the color of Heaven" (or blue), and now the speaker, too, is brilliantly azure like the heavenly skies. He believes that he is as immaculate and untarnished as he was at birth and that the light from his father's window has cleansed him of his human impurities. These lines play a vital role in the rising action of the poem, for they act as the culmination of the speaker's hold on reality before he tips over into the surreal frenzy of transcendence.

Lines 35-37:

Although the specifics of the son's metaphysical revelation are not spelled out, his sudden elation seems to stem from what many human beings consider a religious experience. Whether it is a feeling of having contact with a divine presence or an unexpected and swift comprehension of something mysterious (the proverbial light bulb going off in the mind), the speaker in Dickey's poem responds euphorically to it. He says, in all honesty, "I am not afraid for my father." It is as though he has witnessed life after death and knows his father has no reason to fear dying□that there is indeed a better place to go after leaving earth. There is now a stronger bond between the father and son than has ever existed, for the older man has apparently experienced the same revelation: "Look! He is grinning." But before we are allowed to celebrate the dying man's new-found happiness, Dickey once again throws up a road block at the end of the stanza: the phrase "he is not" seems to contradict the words preceding it that tell the reader that the father is smiling. The he is/he isn't confusion is again quickly cleared up with the first line in the seventh stanza, which turns out to be the conclusion of the thought begun at the end of the sixth. Now it is clear that the father is grinning and that "he is not / afraid for" his son's life, either.

Lines 38-41:

In these lines, the tension increases as the speaker emphasizes the dangerous situation he has put himself in, and yet neither he nor his father expresses any fear. The scene is chaotic as drivers come to a halt because of an apparent madman standing in the middle of the road waving his hand frantically toward the hospital. As the son continues his transcendence to a higher level of awareness, he begins to envision the physical objects around him in a new way. Drivers gun their engines and threaten him, but he continues to "hold each car in its place." Instead of finding their loud horns frightening, he decides he is "inciting" them for good reason.

Lines 42-44:

These lines explain why the son is provoking the angry drivers into blowing their car horns. He believes the noise can "blow down the walls of the world" and release the souls of the dying into the heavens. Dickey again refers to the color blue, describing his father's gaze as "bold blue." The meaning of this phrase can be taken two different ways□ either the dying man's gaze is both blue and bold or the color has become a very bold shade of blue. Both possibilities work in the poem, for the notion of something becoming "bold" is consistent with the intensified action and heightened emotion.

Lines 45-49:

The movement of the speaker in these lines is very visible to the reader. His slow retreat to the sidewalk is in keeping with the oblivion he has experienced since walking into a busy street and stopping traffic. It is as though he is now dazed by all that has happened and feels only the tingling sensation that comes with a limb that has "gone to sleep." His waving arm has become like a detached object, something so odd and separate that he must "carry it off in amazement." Even though the strange limb aches and is "half dead," it continues to wave "high, still higher."

Lines 50-53:

With the climax of the action now over, the speaker (and the language of the poem) slows down and unwinds. He acknowledges that his face is "recognized," possibly meaning that he thinks his father has spotted him from the window, but, considering the religious transcendence he has just experienced, he could also mean that his face is now recognized by God. His thoughts are still in flux, for he first describes his face as "fully mortal," then immediately contradicts the description with "Yet not; not at all." The next string of adjectives□ "pale, / drained, otherworldly, stricken, / created"□depicts the hospital window's blue tint with words that directly oppose its previous description. What was before "deep-dyed" and "the color of Heaven," reflecting the sun as though "it burned there on a wick," is now weakened, nearly exhausted. The poem's language, as well as its persona, has gone through a frenzied euphoria and now exhibits the typical

down-spiraling after-effect. The glass is now "stained" instead of "tinted," insinuating the religious experience again, since stained glass is often associated with houses of worship.

Line 54:

As noted earlier, "The Hospital Window" ends the same way it begins. This line brings the speaker, his father, and the poem full circle. But these words forming the last line carry more metaphorical weight than they did as the first line. It is very unlikely that an elevator ride down to street level has anything to do with the ending. Instead, the sense of spiritual awakening and transcendence beyond mortality fill this line with meaning. The "father" mentioned may certainly refer to the speaker's own parent who is nearing death, but it may also imply a heavenly father with whom the speaker has just had an intimate encounter.

Themes

Objective Observer

One recurring theme in James Dickey's poetry is the idea of the main persona as an objective observer. At first, it may appear absurd to include "The Hospital Window" in this category, for this poem's general premise□a son and his dying father□would speak of anything but objectivity. And yet, Dickey is a poet who can make the ironic seem natural and who can take his speaker to extremes without getting him helplessly tangled in a bizarre setting or in the emotional plot of the work.

In "The Hospital Window," the glass itself is a barrier between the speaker and his father. Not only is it a physical separation, but the window also serves to take the son mentally further away from the dying man and the crowd of angry drivers as well. Within the glass, he sees "blue light," the sun that seems to burn there "on a wick," the "bright, erased blankness of nothing," and a "pale, / drained, otherworldly, stricken, created hue." As each of these appearances evolves, so do the emotions of the speaker, and he describes each thought as though he were the only one who needed to understand its significance. At no point does he express grief over the fact that his father is dying. Instead, he very objectively gives an account of the events that take place after he has visited the patient, and these events depict a speaker who is in his own world commenting from the narrow perspective of that world. He reports on his transcendence from its beginning ("Now I must turn round and face it") to its end ("Slowly I move to the sidewalk") and does so with great intensity and clarity, but without falling into a subjective, distorted lamentation of his father's or his own sorrow. Although the dying man seems to experience a parallel spiritual uplift along with his son in the street, the two men remain distinctively apart throughout the revelation.

Solitary Experience

Closely related to the theme of the objective observer is the recurring idea of solitary experience by the personae in Dickey's poetry. This means that the speaker often goes through life-changing moments without sharing the occurrence with other characters in the poem and without trying to make anyone else feel what he/she is feeling. In "The Hospital Window" the persona, or the son of the dying man, reaches an emotional and spiritual epiphany in his life while standing among hundreds of other people□people who are in their cars trying to get around him and who are angry at his presence in the street. But instead of reacting rationally to their feelings of hostility and amazement, the speaker responds as though he is completely alone with his own euphoria.

For the first half of the poem, the speaker does not even acknowledge that there is a public present, other than the pathetic patients in the hospital who wave feebly as a reply to his own fervent salute from the street. Not until the fifth stanza does he mention that the "traffic increases" around him, and at that point it comes as a surprise to the

reader that he is actually in the middle of a busy roadway. The son is so caught up in the mounting tension of his own experience that he ignores the reality of everyday existence□horns blasting "like shotguns" and drivers leaning out, "driven crazy." Throughout the second half of the poem, the speaker fluctuates between his transcendence to a higher realm of understanding and the lowliness of life on the street, but he uses the lowliness to further his move into the metaphysical. He declares that "the wild engines stand at my knees" and that "I hold each car in its place" while their horns "blow down the walls of the world" as though they, too, play a part in the revelation taking place.

This aloneness or solitary experience on the part of the speaker serves to heighten the strangeness of the situation as well as the intensity of the son's mind-set. If he were as typically concerned as anyone may be while standing in the middle of a busy street with cars piling all around him, the poem could not deliver the strong sense of otherworldly understanding and personal excitement that it does. The point is made in the lines, "Slowly I move to the sidewalk / With my pin-tingling hand half dead / At the end of my bloodless arm. /I carry it off in amazement," which describe the emotional state of the speaker. He is truly alone, in spite of the crowd, and makes his own experience more visible by not recognizing the presence of those who exist in reality.

Religious Transcendence

While the theme of religious transcendence is interwoven with the poem's other themes, a brief, separate mention of it is not undue, considering the weight it carries in Dickey's work. Whether it stems from the poet's southern upbringing, or any particular church affiliation, or even a need for personal enlightenment, the fact is that many of his personae go through a spiritual crisis and/or revelation. In "The Hospital Window," the son's transcendence of normal responses (grief, pain, sorrow, etc.) is evident in his easy ability to overcome fear in the midst of what should be a frightening situation. The point Dickey makes is that a moment of otherworldly recognition and understanding can supercede any mortal hindrances that normally crop up during times of strange occurrences and hopeless longing. The speaker in this poem knows that both he and his father are mortal, and, yet, religious transcendence allows him to proclaim that "I am not afraid for my father / he is not / afraid for my life either."

Style

"The Hospital Window" is a free verse poem with elements of meter and rhythm dispersed throughout. Dickey's early poetry□primarily the first three collections, *Into the Stone, Drowning With Others,* and *Helmets*□are actually less free than his later work, but still avoid heavy rhyming and overdone alliteration. He was, however, fond of the anapest, or a metrical unit containing two short syllables followed by a long one. One example of this form of meter in "The Hospital Window" is in the first line: "I have just□." Read the phrase aloud and note how the word "just" seems longer, how the voice tends to stretch it out more than the words "I have," which are pronounced more quickly. Try it with other anapests from the poem, such as "six white floors," "the firm street," "In the shape," "Lifts his arm," and "And I turn."

In his preface to *The Early Motion,* a volume published in 1981 containing the poems from *Drowning With Others* and *Helmets,* Dickey had this to say about how these early works came about: "These poems emerged from what I call a night-rhythm, something felt in pulse, not word. How this anapestic sound was engendered by other poetry, good or bad ... I cannot say, except ... I have always liked heavy recurrence of stress." He went on to say about the collection containing "The Hospital Window": "In the poems of *Drowning With Others* I edged toward the end of sound over sense, toward the foreordained hammering of ultra-rhythmical English, and tried to make the concepts, images, and themes of my life conform to what the night-rhythm had caused to come through me." This so-called night-rhythm is evident in lines that are not only rhythmical but that use alliteration (like-sounding consonants and vowels) as well. Examples from "The Hospital Window" include, "Still feeling my father ascend," "my shoulder blades shining," "the bright erased blankness of nothing," and "To blow down the walls of the world / That the dying may float without fear."

The general construction of this poem is methodical in that it consists of nine stanzas, each with six lines of similar length. While it is officially composed in free verse, the poetic style incorporated by Dickey (the anapests, alliteration, and rhythm) is subtle. As is the case here, many poems would be weaker if their structure was more obvious, and Dickey was a poet who did not let the structure intrude.

Historical Context

The 1960s will long be remembered as one of the most tumultuous times in the history of theUnited States, as well as in many places throughout the world. Drastic changes in lifestyles, cultural expectations, personal views on drugs and sexual freedom, and a host of other revolutionary ideals served to create both excitement and tension in Americans, young and old. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, when James Dickey was back from the Korean War and writing the poems that would appear in his first volumes of work, everything from music and clothing to civil rights and economics was in flux. Young Americans were not the only ones celebrating newfound freedom and an anything-goes means of expression. So too were the middle-aged and older members of the creative set□artists, musicians, dancers, writers,Hollywood producers, and poets. In an article entitled "James Dickey: The Whole Motion," originally published in the *Southern Review* (1992) and later included in a collection of essays edited by Robert Kirschten called *"Struggling for Wings": The Art of James Dickey,* critic and poet Richard Tillinghast describes the culture in which Dickey began writing:

Dickey came of age during a cultural moment when poets' reputations were often founded as much on the excesses of their personal lives as on the quality of their work. When one surveys the lives of Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Allen Ginsberg, Randall Jarrell, Elizabeth Bishop, Theodore Roethke, and Anne Sexton, one gets the impression that mid-century American poetry somehow, with great difficulty, managed to get written between gin-fueled one-night stands in motel rooms and recovery periods in mental hospitals and drying-out spas, in an atmosphere of extreme emotional and mental states and strikingly unconventional behavior.

Dickey himself was no stranger to unconventional behavior, and colleagues could tell stories of his antics, from motel room parties to bow-hunting trips throughoutGeorgia without having to think too hard. But the decade of the 1960s was not all revelry and come-what-may. It was also a time of great sorrow and violence. A year after the publication of *Drowning With Others,* President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and, in 1968, both Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., lost their lives to gunmen. In 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis nearly caused nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States, and American involvement was intensifying inVietnam. In 1963, four black Alabama schoolchildren were killed when a bomb exploded during Sunday services at a Baptist church inBirmingham, and race riots became commonplace in cities throughout the country. As the war in Southeast Asia escalated, antiwar protests grew stronger and more violent on college campuses across the country, and, in 1969, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators showed up in Washington, D.C. as a part of the "New Mobilization Committee to End the War inVietnam." American involvement, however, would continue another six years. The last year of the decade brought some positives to the public's attention. Neil Armstrong placed the first human footsteps on the moon, the Woodstock Music Festival in New York brought thousands of people together to enjoy peace and love (often translated into drugs and sex), and a booming American economy employed a record number of workers. In the end, one can only look back on the 1960s as a time when stability gave

way to revolution and change often happened for the sake of change, when no better reason was evident.

"The Hospital Window" is not necessarily set in the 1960s, for its exact place and time are indeterminate. The only fact about its setting is that it is some time after the development of elevators, automobiles, and high-rise hospitals. The events of the poem could have taken place at anytime, anywhere. Sons have always suffered the loss of fathers, and spiritual transcendence has always been a possibility for human beings. The poem itself transcends a need for specific time and place, for it would have made no difference if Dickey had mentioned the name of a city or the year in which his father died. Not all his poems are ambiguous in this way, and some depend on a reader's knowledge of certain historical dates and events□especially regarding World War II□for greater understanding. But "The Hospital Window" carries themes that are universal, and to reach for some cultural influence or specific historical motivation in its creation would be too long a stretch.

Critical Overview

James Dickey was an American poet fortunate enough to realize his popularity with the public and high regard from his colleagues while he was still living. From the publication of his early volumes of poetry to the best-selling novel and movie, *Deliverance,* to the collections of more recent poetry and the novel he was working on when he died all were well received by most critics, fellow poets, and scholars over the years. Dickey's use of intense language, his unique perspectives on common events, and his willingness to take on controversial subjects in his work made him one of the most talked about writers in contemporary literature. Critic Benjamin DeMott, writing for the *Saturday Review,* stated that Dickey's poetry has a "feeling for the generative power at the core of existence. A first-rate Dickey poem breathes the energy of the world, and testifies to the poet's capacity for rising out of tranced dailinesshabitual, half-lived life into a more intense physicality...." Not surprisingly, Dickey was a recipient of numerous awards for his works, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Book Award, and a National Institute of Arts and Letters Award.

Of course, every popular figure has his or her detractors, and Dickey was no exception. Those who criticized his poetry and prose most often called attention to the abundance of violence it contained and the tendency toward taboo or "uncomfortable" topics. Because so many of his poems and novels dealt with "man in a natural state," many critics translated that into the writer's own uncivilized, primitive endeavors and accused Dickey of romanticizing violence. But these voices were not nearly as loud as those of his fans, and most readers accepted the subject matter as an exploration of all sides of human nature as opposed to just a shielded glance at what most people would rather not see.

"The Hospital Window" itself has not been singled out very often for critical attention, but the collection that contains it, *Drowning With Others,* is a part of the body of work that many scholars consider Dickey's strongest. The early books and the later volumes that compiled the poems from them tend to be signature pieces, containing the works most often found in anthologies and taught in literature classes. And while some writers may lose readers when they switch from one genre to another, Dickey simply picked up more with the publication of *Deliverance*perhaps the strongest testament to his ability as a writer in any form.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
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Critical Essay #1

Hill has published widely in poetry journals and is the author of a collection entitled In Praise of Motels. *In the following essay, she contends that the speaker of "The Hospital Window" has no choice but to be alone in his experience with spiritual transcendence.*

"The Hospital Window" is a poem that takes readers inside the mind of a man trying to deal with the impending death of his father. This scenario may conjure up several typical images that accurately describe what he must be feeling□grief, great sorrow, even fear and anger. But this poem goes a step further in the realm of human response to a tragic event. The persona here experiences a sudden and overwhelming happiness, and he does so in a very unlikely place□the middle of a busy street. The oddity of his unforeseen euphoria, however, is not the main idea behind Dickey's poem. What is even more noteworthy is that the speaker is alone with his feeling even though he stands among a throng of angry drivers blowing their horns at him. To achieve the type of metaphysical or religious transcendence that overpowers his emotions, he has no choice but to experience it completely within his own mind.

The first two stanzas of the poem do not indicate anything unusual about the son's attitude or behavior after visiting his dying father in the hospital. He seems melancholy and resigned to the fact that he must "turn round and face" all that the hospital itself represents□sadness, pain, helplessness, and, ultimately, death. Perhaps the only hint that the speaker has not given himself totally over to grief is his belief that his father is ascending. Using this word to describe someone close to dying implies faith in an afterlife, or in a heaven above, to which souls rise after the death of the body. It may also be an allusion to the Christian belief in the ascension of Christ into heaven after his crucifixion and resurrection. With this in mind, the son is able to turn around and try to distinguish his father's "one pane from the others."

The act of turning and waving is not strange, but doing it in the middle of the road certainly is. This peculiar behavior is the beginning of the son's shift into a solitary state, and, as the poem moves along, it appears as though he cannot help doing it. Like a man daydreaming, he turns his attention inward, focusing intently on his own thoughts and seeming oblivious to events around him. He may not be sure what is happening to him, but he knows it is undeniable, and that is why he begins to wave "like a man catching fire." What is really catching fire is the possibility to go beyond or to transcend the sorrow that mortality brings. In his mind, the son experiences a revelation□a vision perhaps□ that shows him life beyond death. At the moment when he begins to wonder if his father is too weak even to respond to his waving, the dying man "Lifts his arm out of stillness at last." This gesture is like a miracle to the son, and it is at this point that the light from the hospital window strikes him, and he turns "as blue as a soul." The father's wave is, presumably, only in the speaker's imagination. It is unlikely that the father can even see the street from his bed on the sixth floor of the hospital and even more unlikely that anyone standing down there could choose the right window and see any movement behind it. Nonetheless, the act is very real to the son, and he remains in a trance-like

state feeling the euphoria of knowing his father is going to heaven, even while he himself is being told by angry drivers to go elsewhere.

The father's wave is not the only sign that the son envisions. At the peak of the speaker's transcendence—when he says, "I am not afraid for my father"—he also sees the old man "grinning" and has managed to get inside his thoughts, claiming that "he is not / Afraid for my life, either." This acknowledgement strengthens the idea of faith in the poem. If ever a father would fear for his son's life, it would be when the child is doing something as dangerous as standing in the middle of a heavily traveled street. And, yet, because the son has experienced a revelation of Heaven (and imagines that his father has had the same experience), he no longer sees a reason to fear death. He goes so far as to tempt the fates by holding "each car in its place" while the "wild engines" roar and he incites the drivers to blow their horns at him. In his mind, he does not recognize the loud honking as anger directed toward himself. Instead he imagines that the horns can "blow down the walls of the world" so that souls, such as his father's, can make it to heaven unimpeded.

As the son finally makes his way to the sidewalk, he still appears to move as though in a trance. Completely occupied by his own thoughts, he walks slowly and keeps waving his hand although it has gone to sleep at the end of his "bloodless arm." Some sense of clarity seems to return to him as he acknowledges his "mortal" face, but then he quickly discounts mortality. Going through such a startling mental transformation has made him able to see beyond life on earth and to know that physical death is not the end.

Why is this necessarily a solitary experience? Why does the speaker keep all his thoughts, visions, and unexplainable happiness to himself? The answer is just that—it's unexplainable. There is no evidence in the poem that implies a rational understanding on the part of the son as to what has happened to him. In the beginning, he seems "normal," but as he is overcome with emotion, he does not appear to be able to control his behavior. This type of religious and metaphysical happening is too personal to relate to others who are not feeling it. After all, if he does not even comprehend it himself, how could he make others do so? Imagine what the already angry drivers would do if the man blocking the roadway tried to explain why he was there. Think of their reactions to a man telling them his father was dying and that he had never been happier, and, furthermore, that he needed them to keep honking their horns to help his father's soul get to heaven!

For obvious reasons, then, the speaker in "The Hospital Window" finds himself completely alone in a crowd. But there is a more subtle reason that transcendence over the fear of death must be experienced on a solitary basis. A feeling so strong and so enlightening that it allows an individual to overcome common mortal fears would be diminished if it were shared among hundreds of strangers or even among friends and family. In this poem, the son is already facing a traumatic event in the inevitable loss of his father. He needs to find a way to deal with it on his own, for no matter how much sympathy—or how much misunderstanding—he receives from other people, he will not achieve true peace of mind until he can reconcile the event for himself. Although the speaker claims that he can see the dying man waving and grinning, this vision, too, is a

part of the son's imagination. He thinks that he and his father have reached the same level of spiritual understanding and that is a solace to him. Regardless that the old man is probably oblivious to most everything around him, his son is comforted by creating an emotional connection with him whether he knows it or not. But the connection is not real, and, therefore, the son is still alone with his experience.

"The Hospital Window" may be a poem concerning emotional effects□transcendence, religious awakening, metaphysical and mystical revelations, etc.□but it is full of physical descriptions and metaphors relating to the senses. The speaker imagines his "shoulder blades shining with all / the glass the huge building can raise" and that "each window possesses the sun / as though it burned there on a wick." He hears the car horns blast "like shotguns" and the engines "shredding their gears and roaring." And in the last stanza, he describes the color of the "stained" hospital windows as "pale, / drained, otherworldly, stricken, / created." This use of physical imagery to illuminate and expound upon mental phenomena serves to make the inaccessible more accessible. It has already been noted that the son's experience with transcendence is unexplainable, but at least the reader is helped to understand as much as is possible through language that is very graphic and detailed.

In an article titled "Things, Voices, Minds: A Review of *Drowning With Others* by James Dickey," originally published in the *Yale Review* (1962) and later included in a collection of essays edited by Robert Kirschten called *"Struggling for Wings": The Art of James Dickey,* critic and poet Thom Gunn notes that the poet, "builds fantasy on a basis of solid physical detail... His is, by choice, an almost entirely sensuous imagination." Gunn goes on to say that the nature of Dickey's fantasy "is an effort to make [it] meaningful, to turn it into vision." The speaker in "The Hospital Window" makes his fantastic spiritual encounter meaningful by giving it very lucid, physical characteristics. His vision□or what he sees exactly□is not possible to relate. But its essence and its life-changing qualities are both real and evident in the son.

Source: Pamela Steed Hill, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Adrian Blevins is a poet and essayist who has taught at Hollins University, Sweet Briar College, and in theVirginia Community College System. She also is the author of The Man Who Went Out for Cigarettes, *a chapbook of poems. In this essay, Blevins explores the ways in which James Dickey's "The Hospital Window" articulates and makes accessible an experience that is, in the end, of a highly spiritual and even metaphysical nature.*

In his introduction to *The Best American Poetry 1991,* the American poet Mark Strand tells an especially illuminating story about his mother's fear and bewilderment in the face of his decision, as a college student, to become a poet. "But then you'll never be able to earn a living," his mother said.Strand, after a commendable discussion on the differences between the language of poetry and the language of nonfiction prose□generally fact-bound news□that his parents read, says that it wasn't until after his mother's death that his father came to understand the purpose and value of poetry:

It is 1965. My mother has died. My first book of poems has been published. My father, who, like my mother, has never been a reader of poems, reads my book.... The [poems] that mean most are those that speak for his sense of loss following my mother's death. They seem to tell him what he knows but cannot say. Their power is almost magical. They tell him in so many words what he is feeling.

A poet's highest goal is or should be to put inexpressible feelings (sometimes of loss, sometimes of mystification, sometimes of elation and wonder) into expressible terms, andStrand's story is especially poignant because it narrates, in clear-eyed terms, poetry's power to "formalize emotion difficult to articulate." James Dickey's "The Hospital Window," which we take from Dickey's second volume, *Drowning with Others,* is also about a moment between a father and son during a time of crisis. It illuminates in a representative way a transcendent moment between two people who are unable to articulate the power and significance of their own feelings. Thus it attributes meaning and significance to an experience fraught with silence and suffering, and thereby illustrates, likeStrand's story, how important poetry is or should be to everyone.

James Dickey is, without question, among the best known of the poets of his generation, in part because of his ability, as poet and critic Neal Bowers says in *James Dickey: The Poet As Pitchman,* to sell himself. Bowers says that "no poet in this century, with the possible exceptions of Dylan Thomas and Vachel Lindsay, has publicized himself and promoted his work more actively than James Dickey." Yet one of the advantages of Dickey's (sometimes shameless) self-promotion is the fact that it helped him bring poetry to a more comprehensive audience. If the consequence of a poet's need for celebrity status acts, in the end, to service an often misunderstood medium in a culture too often distracted by the temptations of the external world, so be it.

As Bowers says in "Selling the Poem," "The Hospital Window" "draws as near to the straightforward, confessional style that Dickey gets." For this reason "The Hospital

Window" is among the best of Dickey's poems as an introduction to some of his themes and devices. It is also a good poem for the study of Dickey's ability to contain the spiritual or metaphysical within the confines of a narrative□his facility for moving a narrative poem beyond the boundaries of its characters and plot lines. It's this facility, coupled with his willingness to marry a colloquial and plain-spoken speech to a more mystic and surreal sense of diction and rhythm, that makes James Dickey a poet worthy of our continued attention.

"The Hospital Window" begins and ends with a very direct, prosaic statement. "I have just come down from my father," the speaker says twice. These twin lines locate both the poet, as a protagonist in his own poem, and his subject matter, which concerns a notably ethereal experience and vision, in a solid place and time. Dickey's decision to firmly place himself at the beginning and ending of "The Hospital Window" frees him to explore the more mystical moment inevitably inherent in a poem about the nature of death and dying, and, as Dickey himself says in *Self Interviews,* about the experience of trying and failing "to say to his father that unsayable thing that one hopes to be able to say, but which nobody since the beginning of time has ever been able to say."

One of the ways "The Hospital Window" transcends its narrative base can be seen in how its architecture seems to duplicate, in a recognizably contemporary landscape, the Christian cosmology of heaven and hell. The entire hospital, from the poet's perspective on the street, becomes a symbol of heaven. At first, Dickey makes this allusion in the most direct way imaginable. As the speaker of the poem waves from the street, trying to determine behind which window his father lies "in the shape of his death still living," he says that "all the white rooms /... turn the color of Heaven." Dickey then associates the hospital with heaven by using a re-occurring color motif. Early in the poem, the poet talks about his father as "he lies / above me in a blue light." He then repeats this reference to the color blue throughout the entire poem, saying, for example, that he turns□as he stands paralyzed in the middle of the street (while "The horns blast at me like shotguns, / and drivers lean out, driven crazy)□"as blue as a soul." Later on in the poem, he expresses his wish "that the dying may float without fear / in the bold blue gaze of my father." The hospital also has "six white floors" and "dozens of pale hands" within "the bright, erased blankness of nothing." Although Dickey has said time and time again that he is not a Christian poet, these images fully evoke the spirit-centered architecture and color scheme of a traditional Christian cosmos.

In contrast to the father in his heavenly blue hospital, the son, down below in the middle of the street, nearly goes blind from the sun glaring on the hospital windows. He says that "each window possesses the sun / as though it burned there on a wick" and that he waves "like a man catching fire." This conflict between the calming white/blue hospital and the frantic noise down below on the street, with its "wild engines / ... shredding their gears and roaring," implies that the son is either in a kind of hell or, with his "shoulder blades shining with all / the glass the huge building can raise" is standing in the pre-dawn of a Christ-like ascension. Either reading works to set the reader up for the poem's greatest moment, which is when the speaker transcends his place in the street, with his "pin-tingling hand half dead / at the end of [his] bloodless arm" to connect, perhaps for the last time, with his father.

This turn is what makes "The Hospital Window" more than just a documentary about a man's feelings regarding the inevitability of his father's death and his inability to say anything about it. The turning point in the poem comes when the father finally raises his hand to wave back to his son. He "lifts his arm out of stillness at last," the speaker tells the reader. At this point, "The light from the window strikes" the speaker, removing him from his place among the crowd, and he turns, as was shown, "as blue as a soul." This is the moment in the poem when the speaker begins to share fully in his father's experience. Dickey then likens this moment to "the moment when I was born," linking birth to death in a way that suggests his appreciation for the natural order of the universe. (This appreciation or theme can be seen throughout all of Dickey's work.) The speaker then describes himself as moving "high, still higher, still waving," going on to say that he is both "fully mortal, / and yet not... in the pale, / drained, otherworldly, stricken / created hue of stained glass."

A second refrain in "The Hospital Window" further reinforces this idea of the son transcending, for a moment, his place and time on earth. At the beginning of the poem, Dickey describes his father as lying "higher and higher ... above me in a blue light." Then, at the end of the poem, the poet describes himself as moving "high, still higher." This refrain works beside the refrain of the twin beginning and ending lines to tie the poem into a coherent frame. It also helps to fully unite father and son in an experience that is often described in much more singular or exclusive terms.

There's no dogma in "The Hospital Window" □no sermon about how readers should live their lives or explication for why a belief in the afterlife could help them send their dying parents away from them in a kind of life-affirming flash of blessing. "The Hospital Window" is in this sense not a poem with an agenda. The poem's value and power comes from both the poet's willingness to describe his own experience with his father as clearly as possible and from his aptitude for knowing which poetic devices would best help him invent a still life describing a transcendent moment firmly in praise of even the darkest or most frightening of human processes. These devices□the poet's refrains, his willingness to combine plain-spoken lines ("And then step out onto pavement"; "I know that my father is there") to more figurative lines in which the sun burns glass windows on a wick, and the speaker becomes "drained, otherworldly, and stricken"□ all work to help Dickey articulate and make accessible an experience that is, in the end, of a highly spiritual and even metaphysical nature.

Although James Dickey worked all his life to produce an accessible poetry that could be read and understood by all people, he was always, in nature and inclination, a metaphysical poet striving toward a coherent expression of the mythological realms, moving step by step in many poems from the everyday into unseen (or imaginary) realms of human experience, expressing his own various transformations into and toward the *other* in the hopes, as he said often, that his readers would move, too, beyond and past and above their own daily experiences.

Mark Strand's remarks about his father's gradual understanding of the power of poetry may also express, in some strange way, Dickey's vision in "The Hospital Window." Most of Dickey's poems strive, as Howard Nemerov says, to express a kind of "salvation ...

apprehending the continuousness of forms, the flowing of energy through everything." "The Hospital Window," as the reader has just seen, is no exception.Strand says:

It may be, therefore, that reading poetry is often a search for the unknown, something that lies at the heart of experience but cannot be pointed out or described without being altered or diminished□something that nevertheless can be contained so that it is not so terrifying. It is not knowledge, at least as I conceive of knowledge, but rather some occasion for belief, some reason for assent, some avowal of being.

Source: Adrian Blevins, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

Jonathan N. Barron is an associate professor of English at theUniversity of Southern Mississippi. Beginning in 2001, he will be the editor in chief of The Robert Frost Review. *In the following essay, Barron discusses how the elegy, as an ancient poetic genre, explains the principle theme of "The Hospital Window."*

Elegy, one of the most ancient and important poetic genres, has, in the past 150 years, undergone such a shift that recent scholars now distinguish between the elegy, on the one hand, and a new "modern elegy" on the other hand. One scholar, a professor of English at theUniversity of Virginia, Jahan Ramazani, has done the most work on this distinction. According to him, the modern elegy does not conform to its traditional three-part mission: consolation, lamentation, praise. Instead, the modern elegy, as he says, "rebel[s] against generic norms but reclaims them through rebellion." This means that the modern poet writing an elegy is unwilling to accept death and will often refuse such typically comforting devices as praising the dead, lamenting the dead one's absence, or seeking consolation for the death. Yet even though the modern elegy refuses to engage in these comforting strategies it does, nonetheless, find a rather crooked, offbeat way of achieving consolation, lamentation, and even praise. In the modern elegy, the old strategies are re-packaged in irony, bitterness, and experimental poetic technique. It is true that, sometimes, the modern elegy will even go so far as to refuse to lament, to ask for consolation, or to praise the dead but, more often, according to Ramazani, such wholesale rebellions are rare. Instead, the modern elegy usually continues the work of mourning by establishing a distance from the traditional task of compensating for the loss. It does find some kind of healing but not in the language of either praise or lamentation. What makes the modern elegy' s continuation of the traditional task "modern," then, is the presence of anger, irony, bitterness often in the company of experimental poetic forms and techniques. As Professor Ramazani says, the modern elegy is "anti-consolatory and ... anti-Romantic ... and anti-conventional." He adds, "If the traditional art of elegy was an art of saving, the modern elegy is what Elizabeth Bishop calls an 'art of losing.'" Since this "art of losing" is more art than anything else it does not give up on the tradition to which it belongs. Despite its attempt to reject the traditional function of the elegy it often incorporates, as Ramazani says, "the traditional elegy within the modern."

To understand how this tension works between the old way of mourning through a willingness to accept death and the more modern experience of mourning as anger, resentment, and bitterness one need only turn to James Dickey's "The Hospital Window." Happily, Professor Ramaziani, himself, discusses this poem. Sadly, he hardly discusses the poem at all. This is not a surprise since his book is devoted literally to hundreds of poets and poems. Although a widely read and well-known poem, "Hospital Window" is surprisingly under-studied. This is a shame since the poem's elegaic qualities manifest a most interesting, moving, and complex attitude towards grief.

In nine stanzas, the poem works through a son's grief for his father. Distancing is the poem's most immediately notable strategy. From afar, the son describes his father's

death. This adds an objective quality to what is otherwise an intensely personal event. The son, one notices, only watches his father from afar seeing him through a dark window. This image is particularly important since it conjures up the biblical reference to seeing as "through a glass darkly." In the Bible, the image reminds people of their limitations, particularly with regard to matters of faith and religion. This is a particularly nice allusion here because it establishes the poem's principle theme as a tense dance between the language of faith and religion and the language of science and technology. In his brief comment on the poem, Professor Ramazani notes that the poem is interesting precisely because it contrasts the ascent to heaven of the father with the descent of the son in the elevator. But one might add that this contrast is not as clean as it appears to be. Yes, the poet keeps the Christian language of the soul's ascension to heaven but, at the same time, he deflates that language by referring not to the ascent to heaven and the descent to hell but rather to simple elevators. This deflation of what ought to be a serious Christian idea about death is part of the larger contest between religion and science: a conflict central to the poem's principle theme.

Looking more closely at the first stanza will make some of this more clear:

I have just come down from my father.

Higher and higher he lies

Above me in a blue light

Shed by a tinted window.

I drop through six white floors

And then step out onto the pavement.

In this stanza, the father rises only because the son descends. But rather than the have the father journey to the blue light of heaven, Dickey has the father "lie" in the antiseptic "blue light" of a "tinted window" in the hospital. The son's drop is not a descent into hell, nor is it a fall. Despite what it is not, the allusions and the language reminds readers, who are assumed to be familiar with Christian ideas of the afterlife, of the language of faith. The language makes readers think of the soul, and of heaven, even though this is not the plot of the poem. The first stanza plays Christian motifs□ascent, fall, descent□against technological reality. In terms of strictly realistic facts, however, there is no contest between heaven and hell. The stanza merely describes a simple trip in a hospital elevator.

This double strategy, saying two things at once, also applies to the second stanza. Here, Dickey uses the language of geometry and technology to play with the idea that the father is really ascending to a better place. In so doing, this stanza revives two of the major functions of the elegy: consolation and praise. The idea of heaven will console the son; he will be able to feel better about this death if he can believe that his father will be in heaven. Also, by suggesting that his father is in heaven, he implicitly praises his father's good name: the father is a man who deserves to go there. Here is that stanza:

Still feeling my father ascend, I start to cross the firm street,

My shoulder blades shining with all The glass the huge building can raise. Now I must turn round and face it, And know his one pane from the others.

In this stanza, the father's ascent is, in terms of strict logic, merely a technological illusion. It is simply the fact that the son has left the building by going down, which therefore makes the father appear to go up. This trick of geometry allows the son and the readers to make the Christian association with heaven. And, as if to underline that point, the building itself casts what would, in a religious context, be a divine glow of holiness on the son's shoulders (the place where one finds an angel's wings). As if called by some divine light, the son turns to face his father. But when he turns to his father, he is already twice distanced. First, he is physically removed: he is outside many floors below; and second, while he appears to be speaking the language of faith, he is really quite distanced from that language: the facts are just the neutral reality of architecture, and twentieth-century technology.

In the third stanza, the clash between realistic, technological facts, and the spiritual interpretation of death increases. The son waves to the building, saying that the sunlight glowing on him makes him "like a man catching fire." What is really happening? The son is grieving. He wants to lament; he wants to lash out and scream with anger. He wants to declare that this death is unfair. But the fact that he only says this in metaphors tells readers that he is even distanced from his own grief. The tradition of lamentation, of public weeping so common to the history of elegy, is masked here. Rather than weep openly, as so many elegiac poems do, Dickey's poem makes use of metaphors and similes. The son burns, but this fire is just an image cast by the sun on his body. He at once welcomes the need for lamentation and refuses to do it. Similarly, the traditional language of solace that would comfort him is also refused. Rather than insist that his father is now in a "better place," Dickey refuses such religious sentiments and says only that "all the white rooms / they turn to the color of Heaven." On the one hand, he says that he is one fire, below in hell, a great sinner. On the other hand, the fire is just a trick of light catching the descent of the sun on a hospital.

The fourth stanza is the most modern stanza of all and is the very heart of the poem. Here, the poet imagines that he has received a response from his father. Having waved to the window, he imagines a response. What kind of response? "[T]he bright, erased blankness of nothing." In the space of the window, the son does not find the conventional, feel-good conclusion to his elegy. Instead, he finds nothingness, a void where praise, lamentation, consolation, and solace are impossible. There is only a great emptiness, a vacuum. Dickey's speaker merely reports: "I know that my father is there."

The enjambment here, the place where Dickey breaks the line, is especially interesting. The stanza and the line end, but the sentence continues over the stanza break. The rest of the sentence, the second modifying clause in the next stanza, tells readers only that his father is in a place□"In the shape of his death still living." This is the most mysterious line of the poem. What does it mean? How can one's death still be living? One interpretation is that this is the moment of death. The son who is removed below,

far from the body, somehow senses the moment of his father's death, and, having sensed this, the son refuses the traditional language of grief. Neither the Romantic poetic tradition of solace, nor the Christian tradition is suitable here. Although one does not know why they are not suitable, one does know for sure that this speaker will not and does not invoke them. Instead he merely reports that he cannot know what death means. Or, if he knows what it means, the line that explains the death is, itself, meaningless. It cancels out its own meaning: "the shape of his death still living."

This mysterious line, which really has no understandable meaning, is also the first line of the fifth stanza. Oddly, it has no logical relationship to the self-contained image of that stanza: it has nothing to do with what follows. Dickey here yokes the image of his father's body in the hospital room to a new scene of traffic on the street below. The fifth stanza describes the son, evidently lost in grief, standing in the street. The stanza tells readers that he is nearly run down by passing cars. The effect of combining the line about his father's death with this traffic scene is to make the world itself, the technological fact of the modern city, somehow speak to and for the son. The traffic honking and screaming articulates the son's grief. Since he can't do it, the traffic will "blast" like "shotguns" for him; it will sound his lamentation since he cannot. In another strange juxtaposition or radical jump cut the final line of this stanza returns to the father's body back in the hospital room. The most modern, disconnected, and strange stanza of the poem, it is also the moment when grief is sounded. How thoroughly modern! Rather than have the son grieve as in a typical elegy, this modern elegy lets the traffic sounds be the traditional lamentaion, the wail of sorrow. Taken as a whole, then, this fifth stanza links two places and two people together: a father in the hospital room and a son on the street. It associates one with heaven and one with hell. It jumps between them both. Notice, too, that the speaker, the son, never cries. He is in public, but there is no public lament. The traffic does it for him. In the contest between faith and technology, the technological world appears to win. It becomes a substitute language. The poem implies that, for a variety of reasons, no language can satisfy the needs of the poet in despair. He would rather be silent.

As if to underline this point, the sixth stanza decidedly turns its attention on the speaker and away from the newly dead father:

The light from the window strikes me And I turn as blue as a soul, As the moment when I was born. I am not afraid for my father Look! He is grinning ...

This stanza, like the previous one, also accents the enjambment. The new vision of the father "grinning" suggests that, at this point in the poem, the atmosphere and tone have begun to change and become more positive. From the low point of "blank nothingness," the poem now gestures toward some equivalent for the traditional language of Christianity, of a soul's journey toward redemption and grace.

In a weird vision, the father is said to look at the son standing in the traffic. Just as the son is trying to find a way to cope with the father's death (to worry no more for him), the father, so the speaker tells his readers, decides not to worry about the son. In the plot of the poem, the son, standing in the middle of a busy street lost in his grief and confusion

and waving at the hospital window becomes the object of his father's concern. It should have been the other way around! The joke here is that the father, even though he is dead, still watches out for the son. The son reports that he is not "afraid for my life, either." As if newly energized by this realization, the son also says that he holds "each car in its place." From a low point of despair, the son now has gained a new sense of power and positive energy. Once more the sound of grief is heard. Once more the traffic speaks his grief: "[I]nciting its horn/to blow down the walls of the world." This time, however, the son commands such speech: a slight but significant advance from his silence in the previous stanza.

The poem's final stanza is the most enjambed of them all. Its sentences are continuations of sentences begun in the eighth stanza. Like the previous two stanzas, they also accent the fragmented, disconnected, and discontinuous theme of the poem. But, by this point in the poem, neither the language of technology, nor that of religion has been able to console the son. A new source of consolation is required. It does arrive. Notice that the language that had associated the son's location on the ground with hellfire and damnation now associates his same position with the height that one usually assigns to heaven. By the concluding stanza, the son although still on earth is said to be "high, still higher, still waving." These metaphors of height traditionally refer to happiness, to ascent, to heaven, to a glorious and better world after life. The poem gestures to a heavenly redemptive, Christian consolation even as it deflates such religious imagery by referring only to a man waving his arms and hands. After all, the high thing depicted here is just his "bloodless arm" still raised, still waving. What matters, though, is that the son has decided, through his imagination, that his father did express concern for him. No matter how distanced he is from his father's death and his own ability to grieve, he has through his imagination, found a connection, an emotional bond with his father. This bond allows the poet to turn once more to himself:

My recognized face fully mortal, Yet not; not at all, in the pale, Drained, otherworldly, stricken, Created hue of stained glass. I have just come down from my father.

One way to interpret these lines is to ask: whose face does he carry off here? If it is his own, then he has just distinguished himself from his father and, in so doing, has found a way to accept his father's death. He must accept the fact that he is alive. He must accept his own life and, in so doing, will be able to cope better with his father's death. This, of course, is not a traditional elegy's conclusion. Typically, an elegy focuses strictly on the dead. But this conclusion is modern. For by turning to himself at the end, to his own imagination, the son finds a source of comfort that is neither strictly Christian nor entirely cold, bloodless, and logical. On the other hand, the face he carries might also be understood as the image of his father's face and not his own. If that is the reading one finds, then, the poem must be read as dark and despondent.

In the end, though, whatever image the son "carries," the final line, which repeats the first line exactly, does conclude the poem. It does tell readers that the son has come down. At the same time, it leaves open the question of whether or not that descent is a fall into sin, a spiral to hell, or any kind of religious journey at all. Readers can only be certain that from the heights of grief, the son has come down to an earth of pavement,

traffic, and blazing sun. The only compensation he will receive for his father's life will have to come from him. Readers will differ if it does come from the son in the end. When this elegy turns to the speaker and not to the corpse in its search for solace, it becomes distinctly modern. It refuses to side entirely with the realistic facts of science and technology or with the Christian idea of heaven. Neither are able to offer Dickey what his own "amazement" delivers.

Source: Jonathan N. Barron, in an essay *forPoetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2001

Critical Essay #4

Rich, an associate professor of English atMontclair State University is the author of The Dynamics of Tonal Shift in the Sonnet. *In the following essay, he discusses the key roles that structure and plot play in "The Hospital Window."*

The line "I have just come down from my father" both begins and ends a poem that on the surface seems to be about a speaker who is in the street below, looking up at his father's hospital window after visiting him. He is trying to see his father behind the sun-glare reflected in the window. Upon seeing him, the speaker experiences a complex epiphany that is anticipated stanza by stanza through careful plotting. Using puns, syntactic structure, and references to movement, color, and light imagery, Dickey provides four simultaneous levels of plot□the means by which the poem gets from its beginning to its end and closure□that inform a reader's experience. The surface content of the poem would seem ordinary or banal without the dense complexity of the plot maneuvers that Dickey interweaves so seamlessly that they can escape a casual reading. Indeed, critic Neal Bowers mistakenly offers that the poem "adheres to the commonplace," that the opening and closing lines are "flat, unemotional statements," and that "this poem draws as near to the straightforward, confessional style as Dickey gets." On the contrary, the imagery of movement and color, the puns and allusions, and the syntax combine to create a mythic presentation of a seemingly ordinary event. Critic James Applewhite is closer to the mark when he writes that "Dickey's tendency to use sensory illusion ... seems related to his sense of awakening to the world and its curiousness." Through examining plot devices, the reader will see how the epiphany is anticipated and brought to light.

The poem is presented with brackets marking main and subordinate clauses. When two or more brackets appear together pointing in the same direction, two or more clauses are beginning or ending. A subordinate clause (a dependent clause within a main clause) is said to be embedded. In "The Hospital Window," the greatest and most significant amount of embedding occurs within the seventh and eighth stanzas, beginning with the line, "As the wild engines stand at my knees" and concluding with, "In the bold blue gaze of my father," where four clauses are brought to closure. Poet and critic John Ciardi would call this the fulcrum or point of balance of the poem. It is after this line that the speaker's epiphany occurs, signaled most clearly by the word "amazement." While forty-four lines precede the fulcrum and only ten follow it, the poem balances, not mechanically, but emotionally. The content preceding the fulcrum leads to the revelations of the last ten lines, the speaker's sense of experiencing heaven and hell simultaneously. When the first line reappears as the last, the speaker and the reader experience closure, just as listeners do at the end of a musical composition that restates its opening theme at the end. This phenomenon is fully explored by critic Barbara Herrnstein Smith in her book *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End.*

Within the stanzas of the poem, directional words name movements of the speaker and his father. The father is "higher and higher," "above," and "propped up"; his father "lifts," and the speaker feels him "ascend." The speaker has just "come down," and says "I

drop," "step out," "cross," "turn round," "wave," "slowly I move," "I have just come down." All the movements of the father are upward, while all of the movements of the speaker are downward or lateral until the final two stanzas, when the speaker says of his hand half dead

At the end of my bloodless arm I carry it off in amazement High, still higher.

The characters are in counter-motion relative to each other except for this moment when the speaker symbolically joins his father with the upward motion of his arm. Note also that the "wild engines stand" and the "dying ... float." They do not have upward, downward, or lateral motion, and are thus contrasted to the father moving toward heaven, and the speaker existing in the hell of his mortality, reprised in the final line, "I have just come down from my father." The meaning of the last line has layers and weight far greater than its twin, the first line of the poem.

While blue and white are named in the poem, and other colors are implied by the phrases "tinted window," "deep-dyed," "hue of stained glass," "sun ... burned ... on a wick," "flames," and "color of heaven." The implied colors are simultaneously abstract and intense, suggesting a church setting, heaven or hell, or all combined. The references to white□"six white floors," "all the white rooms"□ seem to name aspects of a hospital, but imply more. Similarly, references to blue□"he lies / Above me in a blue light," "And I turn as blue as a soul," "In the bold blue gaze of my father"□seem literal, but expand beyond direct reference, contributing to the epiphany of the speaker. The qualities of light and color either reflected off glass surfaces of the hospital or transmitted through them create an atmosphere of otherworldliness that deeply affects the speaker. In a sense, by visiting his father, the speaker has become a martyr□

My recognized face fully mortal, Yet not; not at all, in the pale, Drained, otherworldly, stricken, Created hue of stained glass."

While remaining "fully mortal," he has also become a figure in a stained glass window, implying that he is a martyr, dead and sainted.

Poets use puns, ambiguity, and allusions frequently, and Dickey is no exception. Starting with the first line, words and phrases in this poem resonate with multiple meanings. "I have just come down from my father" can be read literally□the speaker has just descended from an upper floor of a hospital building□and, in current parlance, he has experienced an emotional letdown. In the second line, "he lies" places the father in a bed, and also implies a question about truth telling, an issue common to the hospital experiences of patients, their families, and doctors. "I drop," in line five, refers to the action of an elevator descending and also implies the emotional state of the speaker, underlining "come down." In the last line of the stanza, "step out" is literal, and suggests the speaker removing himself psychologically from his father.

In the second stanza, first line, "ascend" is the speaker's feeling first, then hints at the father's death and ascent to heaven, leading to the speaker's "cross[ing]" both himself and the street. The street is "firm" because it is on earth, not in heaven.

Again, there is a doubling of meaning. In the third line, the "shining" of his shoulder blades may be from reflected light or from the image of angel's wings. When he turns round to "face it," he is facing both the building and his father's coming death. And of course "his one pane" has an obvious double meaning.

The words "burned there on a wick" of line two of the third stanza indicates a candle flame; candles burn out, just as his father's life will burn out. When he writes, "I wave," which could be read as, I waver or I move unsteadily, and when the son catches fire, both could be interpreted as the son too will expire or will be in Dante's hell. The rest of the lines in this stanza offer images of heaven and hell that move away from the literalness of the hospital building seen from outside. The people inside are within flames, grave (double meaning) and weak, but the father is not seen because he has become a shadow "In the shape of his death still living."

The light in the sixth stanza□"light from the window strikes me"□is both reflected sunlight and the light of heaven that turns the speaker "as blue as a soul, / as the moment when I was born." And the father "is grinning" like the proud parent of a newborn, confident, "not afraid for my life, either." The word "either" points to both father and son. The father is not afraid of the traffic, the drivers driven crazy, their wild engines, shredding gears, or roaring. Why not? Because "the bold blue gaze of my father," reminiscent of Renaissance paintings of blue-eyed Jesus among clouds, has given the speaker more power than the mere cars stretching for miles. Their horns are like trumpets announcing a royal arrival□the rebirth of the speaker in his father's gaze. This line, "In the bold blue gaze of my father," with its four clauses coming to closure, marks the fulcrum of the poem and the beginning of the speaker's epiphany.

Like a mythic hero, he carries off his "pin-tingling hand half dead / at the end of my bloodless arm / ... in amazement." On the literal level, his arm is bloodless and his hand is tingling from holding them up for so long, but more significantly, he is participating in the coming death of his father by experiencing the partial death of part of his body. He carries it off "in amazement / high, still higher, still waving" as if his arm were ascending toward his father's window or heaven, pointing the way. Because his father has seen him, the speaker's "recognized face [is] fully mortal," but at the same time "not at all, in the pale, / drained, otherworldly, stricken, / created hue of stained glass." He has awakened to his mortality, to his coming death foreshadowed by visiting the hospital where his father lies above him.

When the first line of the poem reappears as the last, it has added weight and gravity. The speaker is in spiritual crisis, having felt his own rise and fall, the tension and balance between life and death. He has "just come down from my father," but by the end of the poem the father of the last line feels more like god than a mortal father. He is a father who offers the possibility of redemption. Thus the son is held in the grace of an epiphany.

The accomplishment of Dickey's poem lies in its transformation of the seemingly ordinary into a spiritually significant moment that results from his careful manipulation of syntax, imagery, puns, and allusions.

Source: Morton D. Rich, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Adaptations

An audio version of Christopher Dickey's biography of his father, entitled *Summer of Deliverance: A Memoir of Father and Son,* is now available. The tape runs 600 minutes and is performed by Alexander Adams.

In 1986 James Dickey released a recording of his best-selling novel *Deliverance.* The book has been recorded by other readers as well, but none compares to the author's own version.

Topics for Further Study

Write an essay detailing any "otherworldly" or transcending experience that you or someone you know may have had. Describe what you think its significance was and whether there may be more than one way of interpreting it.

Write a poem about the death of someone dear to you (real or imagined) and consider how you as the persona in the poem may react to the inevitability of the event.

Choose any color and take time to consider all the ways that color may be used or how it affects objects and people around it. Think about all the interesting ways the color may be described and all the ways it can describe other things. Then write an essay on how and why the hue you have selected is significant.

How do you think you would respond if you were a driver caught up in a traffic jam caused by someone standing nonchalantly in the middle of the street, waving toward a hospital? What if the person were waving toward an office building or toward an empty meadow? Write an essay on how your response may or may not change, based on the situation.

What Do I Read Next?

Many readers who do not know James Dickey the poet are very familiar with James Dickey the novelist. Published in 1970, *Deliverance* became a bestseller and was turned into a full-length feature film in 1973. Dickey himself played a backwoods southern sheriff in the movie.

In 1999, A. J. Conyers published *The Eclipse of Heaven: The Loss of Transcendence and Its Effect on Modern Life.* In this book, Conyers argues that people in the modern world have lost a belief in the power of transcending mortality and, as a result, have only a depressing, shallow view of life and death.

Robert Kirschten's *Approaching Prayer: Ritual and the Shape of Myth in A. R. Ammons and James Dickey* (published in 1998) is a good look at these two southern poets' use of myth, mysticism, and "word-magic" in their poems. It includes commentary on later collections by Ammons and Dickey.

Editors Jeffrey J. Folks and James A. Perkins published a collection of essays on contemporary southern writers in 1997 called *Southern Writers at Century's End.* The essays highlight twenty-one writers whose work reflects the confusion and violence of American culture since 1975.

Further Study

Dickey, James, *The Whole Motion: Collected Poems, 1945-1992,* Wesleyan University Press, 1992.

As the title suggests, this is a definitive James Dickey collection of poetry, including some of his most recognized works alongside other less anthologized material that readers find just as intriguing. This book provides a very comprehensive look at Dickey's unique perspective on nature, family, war, guilt, and love.

Hart, Henry, *James Dickey: The World as a Lie,* Picador USA, 2000.

This recent biography of James Dickey is lengthy (over six hundred pages) but well worth the time and effort. Hart's account of the poet's extraordinary life and works is fair, factual, and very detailed.

--------, *The James Dickey Reader,* Touchstone Books,1999.

This is a collection of selected poems and prose, including excerpts from Dickey's unfinished novel, *Crux,* and some early, previously unpublished poems. The book is organized chronologically and by genre and is an excellent representation of the poet's entire body of work.

Kirschten, Robert, *James Dickey and the Gentle Ecstasy of Earth,* Louisiana State University Press, 1988.

As one of James Dickey's most important critics and advocates, Robert Kirschten presents in this book a comprehensive look at Dickey's poetry up to that time. He highlights the motion in Dickey's poetry, whether it is in the themes, the subject matter, or the language.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Poetry for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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