Hymn to Beauty Study Guide

Hymn to Beauty by Charles Baudelaire

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

"Hymn to Beauty" comes from the "Spleen and Ideal" section of Charles Baudelaire's book *Les Fleurs du Mal* (which translates into English as *Flowers of Evil* or *Flowers of Suffering*). First published in 1857, it has become one of the most widely read and influential collections of poetry ever to come out of France. Like Edgar Allan Poe, whose works Baudelaire was instrumental in introducing to French audiences through extensive translations and critical works, Baudelaire viewed the universe with acute sensuality that leaned toward a fascination with the supernatural and the macabre. At the same time, his own aesthetic theories led him to the conclusion that beauty, mysterious and unknowable as it was, was the artist's main concern. Baudelaire is considered to be a precursor to the French symbolist movement that developed decades later, at the end of the nineteenth century, and included Stéphane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine. Most modern and postmodern poetry was influenced in one way or another by symbolism.

Baudelaire's book *Les Fleurs du Mal* was subject to government censorship when it was published. Both Baudelaire and his publisher were forced to pay hefty fines for poems that were deemed indecent. In addition, six poems were removed from the second edition, published in 1861. After the poet's death, several editions were published with different configurations of his poems. "Hymn to Beauty" is included in the recent compilation *Charles Baudelaire: Complete Poems* by Routeledge, translated from the French by Walter Martin.

Author Biography

Charles Pierre Baudelaire was born on April 9, 1821, in Paris, France. His father, Joseph-François Baudelaire, had been ordained as a priest, but left the priesthood during the French Revolution (1789—1799) and worked as a tutor, giving him connections with high levels of French aristocracy. He was sixty years old when he met and married Baudelaire's mother, Caroline Archimbaut-Dufays, who was twenty-six. Baudelaire was six when his father died. For a short time, his mother showered him with affection, but the following year she married Jacques Aupick, a military man who eventually rose through the ranks of the military to become an ambassador and then a senator. Aupick was strict with his stepson, sending him away to military school, where Baudelaire began a lifelong struggle against authority.

Baudelaire was expelled from high school in 1839, though he received his degree later that year. He soon decided that he would be a writer, although his parents pressured him to study law. He enrolled in a law school in Paris, but while there he spent his time with artists and bohemians. He developed an addiction to opium and contracted syphilis, of which he was to die years later.

When he turned twenty-one, Baudelaire inherited a large sum from his father's estate, but went through it quickly, immersing himself in a bizarre, satanic lifestyle until his mother had to step in and have a guardian appointed for his money. He wrote sporadically. His first major sweep of fame came in 1856, when he translated a book of Edgar Allan Poe's verse. His introductions to the two volumes of Poe's work he translated are still considered among the best Poe studies published.

In 1857, Baudelaire published *Les Fleurs du Mal*, a book of poems considered so shocking that he was tried and found guilty of obscenity, ordered to pay a fine, and to remove six of the poems from the second edition in 1861. The obscenity charge made it difficult for him to find a publisher, and his failing health made his writing difficult and infrequent. He moved to Brussels in 1863 and, in 1866, suffered a stroke that paralyzed him and made him unable to talk. He was returned to his family home and, on August 31, 1867, at the age of forty-six, Baudelaire died in his mother's arms.

Plot Summary

Lines 1—4

"Hymn to Beauty" begins with a question that might seem strange to readers who only think of beauty as a pleasant experience. Baudelaire asks Beauty (which is capitalized, as a proper name) whether it is demonic or divine, whether it comes from heaven or hell. The poem is unique in showing that Beauty is as likely to be horrifying as it is to be wonderful. This ambiguous relationship is one that continues throughout the entire poem. In the last two lines of the first stanza, the way that Beauty can hold conflicting ideas together is compared to the effect of wine, because, like inebriation, beauty throws all things, including good and evil, together at random. Wine has been considered since antiquity to raise the animalistic, instinctual side of human nature, and the poem points out that, under the influence of Beauty, even the most severe moral opposites are hard to discern.

Lines 5—8

The personification of Beauty is continued in the second stanza with a mention of Beauty's eyes. Though Baudelaire may have had someone in particular in mind when he wrote this poem, most likely his mistress, Jean Duval, the image of Beauty here is described as an idea that has been imbued with human traits. Traditionally, beauty is linked with serenity and self-contentedness, but the Beauty that Baudelaire imagines in line 5 is closer to the "demonic" image of the first stanza, with flaring suns and burning sunsets that suggest the fires of hell. This fiery imagery is balanced, however, by the calm image in line 6 of "phantom fragrance"□not only is its source so subtle that it cannot be identified, which is what makes it a "phantom," but the use of the pleasant word "fragrance" contradicts the harshness of the demon imagery that precedes it. Line 7 recalls the intoxicating effect of wine with its mention of drugs, while line 8 continues the idea of Beauty turning natural order around, as the social roles played by men and boys are reversed.

Lines 9—12

The poem's original question, from lines 1—2, is repeated in line 9. As a twist on the poem's constant personification of Beauty, Fate is introduced. Instead of being talked about as a person, though, Fate is presented as a dog that follows after Beauty, "faithfully." It is rare that a poet would consider Fate weaker than anyone or anything, and the fact that Baudelaire shows Fate as Beauty's faithful pet is a clear indication of how powerful he thinks Beauty to be.

In the second half of this stanza, the poet expresses fear for Beauty's great power. That power is not used wisely. It could lead to ruin, but then again, the poem also admits that it could lead to love. The one constant that the poet identifies in Beauty's use of power

is that it is always going to be used erratically. As line 12 tells readers, Beauty rules, but does so without responsibility.

Lines 13—16

Once again, the poem returns to the idea of Beauty as a frightening creature. Its personification in the form of a beautiful woman is retained in line 13, where it is presented as someone whom the poem's speaker has watched dancing. The dancing referred to, however, is perversely on a grave, where more solemn behavior is expected. In line 14, at the very center of the poem, Baudelaire states clearly one of the poem's main points, about the relationship between Beauty and Horror, calling Horror a "dazzling jewel," implying that it is used to make Beauty even more appealing than it naturally is. If Horror is a decoration, though, Beauty also uses Murder like a move in a game, a stratagem. In this case, the game pits Beauty against "useful fools," who presumably would not appreciate Beauty's charms without the presence of danger.

Lines 17—20

The "man-fly" referred to in line 17 is a moth, which is attracted to a candle or other source of heat and light, flying toward it and then burning up as a result. In the same way, the poem implies, men are drawn to beauty, knowing that it will end in their own destruction. As it is presented here, men do not merely accept their destruction by Beauty, but actually welcome it, thinking of it as martyrdom, as if they are dying for an important, noble cause. Lines 19 and 20 draw a direct comparison between a lover giving in to desire and a person who knows that he is destined to die and so goes to his grave eagerly. The center of this connection between love and death is that Beauty is the motive for both.

Lines 21—24

Baudelaire makes it clear in this stanza that this poem is not a philosophical reflection on all aspects of Beauty, such as where it comes from, but is only concerned with the practical effects of Beauty as he experiences it. He says that he is not at all interested in its origins, but only with the thrill that he draws from contact with it. The images that the poem uses in line 23 show how desperate its speaker feels for any slight glimpse of Beauty, longing for a glance at her eyes or even just her feet. At the end of this stanza, Beauty is referred to as a Goddess, which is a concept that runs through all of Western civilization, one familiar to the mythologies of ancient Greeks and Egyptians.

Lines 25—28

The first line of the last stanza serves as a sort of summary of the poem, restating the most significant ideas about Beauty that have been raised. It reminds readers of the senses that one can use to experience Beauty, and of the poem's uncertainty about

whether it is good or evil. Baudelaire goes on to ignore the question of good or evil, though, saying that he does not care about morality, that Beauty is so important to him that it does not matter whether it is "a blessing or a curse." The reason for this, which has not been brought up earlier, is the despair that he feels toward life in general, which he characterizes as "the dead hours of this grim universe." He expresses his willingness to accept whatever Beauty has to offer, whether it is heavenly or hellish, as long as he can experience Beauty's light within the darkness of his existence.

Themes

Sensuality

The word "sensual" refers to works that evoke the five senses in order to make their audience *feel* the experience that is being described, as Baudelaire does in "Hymn to Beauty." While the narrow sense of the word "sensuality" only implies a reference to the senses, there is also a common association of the word with sexuality. In this poem, Baudelaire uses physical images to give an erotic allure to Beauty, whom he has presented as a particular person. The poem is particularly focused on the mystery and attraction of the eyes. Beauty is said early on to have eyes in which "suns flare and sunsets burn," in stanza 6 she is said to have "smiling eyes," while in stanza 7 he calls her "my dark-eyed queen."

The poem also mentions things such as fragrance, dancing, and jewels, which are all associated with sexual attraction. Overall, the image of Beauty as personified here is not that of a passive, spiritual or innocent beauty, but of a worldly woman who uses her sexual prowess to lure men into doing her bidding.

Nihilism

This poem projects a philosophical stance that rejects moral and religious values. That stance is referred to as "nihilism."

If the poem showed no understanding of the traditional values at all, then it could be said to be building its own moral vision of the world afresh. As it is, though, it shows a great deal of awareness of the ordinary concepts of heaven and hell, good and evil. It asks Beauty in the first line whether it is demonic or divine, and then repeats that question several times throughout. It is the poet who is making the distinction between what is good and what is bad, and therefore the poet must have some sort of system in mind that recognizes different levels of morality.

In the end, though, Baudelaire says that he does not care whether Beauty is "a blessing" or "a curse." He is willing to accept Beauty under any conditions. This rejection of traditional values, with full awareness of what they are, is what makes the poem nihilistic. The speaker of the poem seems conscious of the fact that his worship of Beauty may drive him toward destruction—not necessarily a physical destruction, but the destruction of his soul. Still, he stands by his belief that Beauty is worth more than good or evil, heaven or hell. He recognizes traditional values, but does not accept them; instead, he finds Beauty to be more important than even the most important aspects of traditional moral systems.

Redemption

At the end of the poem, Baudelaire identifies Beauty as a source of redemption in his life. After openly rejecting traditional values in line 26, when he asks, "Who cares if you're a blessing or a curse?" he goes on to explain life as being bleak and empty, describing everyday existence as "the dead hours of this grim universe." In this void, there is only one thing that gives him "light," and that is Beauty.

Even while he is identifying Beauty as a source of light, he also calls it his "dark-eyed queen." The contrast between light and darkness in this image gathers together all of the poem's themes in just a few words. The dark eyes are used to signal the attractiveness of Beauty, and are also used to show Beauty as a mysterious presence, with a depth that cannot be readily understood. At the same time, the world is mysterious, but in a frightening, dead way. Paradoxically, the dark eyes of Beauty are able to generate a light that cuts through the darkness of life and makes it bearable. At the same time that he is rejecting the universe as being grim and dead, Baudelaire finds the horrors of life redeemed by the negative powers of Beauty. He does not find the darkness of Beauty's eyes grim at all, but instead finds them enlightening.

Style

Iambic Pentameter

This translation of "Hymn to Beauty" follows an iambic pentameter rhythm structure. This means that the basic rhythm is iambic. An *iamb* is a two-syllable segment of poetry, with one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, as in "di-VINE" or "with-OUT." This unstressed-stressed pattern is the general rhythm followed throughout the poem, as in the line "like STU-pe-FY-ing DRUGS your KISS-es TURN." The translator takes liberties with this basic pattern often, in lines like "WHO CARES if YOU'RE a BLESS-ing OR a CURSE?" This is sometimes necessary to maintain the integrity of the poem's language in its original French.

Pentameter means that the poem has five iambs in each line, for a total of ten syllables per line. This poem maintains the syllabic count quite strictly.

Iambic pentameter is the most common metrical pattern in English, because it follows the natural rhythm of the way that English is spoken. The original French version of "Hymn to Beauty" is measured, but it is not as strict about the number of syllables per line or the patterns of stresses in the words.

Quatrain

This poem is written in *quatrains*, or four-line stanzas. This pattern gives poems a balanced, logical, symmetrical feel. Quatrains frequently employ a rhyme scheme of *ABAB*, which means that the first and third lines (the *A* lines) rhyme with each other and the second and fourth lines (the *B* lines) rhyme with each other. This is the rhyming pattern used in "Hymn to Beauty." Other common rhyme schemes for quatrains are *AABB* and *ABCB*, in which only the even-numbered lines end with similar sounds. The geometric versatility of having two pairs of lines per stanza is what makes the quatrain a popular form.

Historical Context

Charles Baudelaire is associated with the intellectual and artistic scene in Paris in the 1850s, which is where he wrote his most significant poetry. Paris has long been considered one of the great centers for artists, with a tight-knit, thriving community of poets, novelists, and painters who were willing to starve for the sake of their passionate commitment to their arts. The city has existed for centuries, since it was founded as a fishing village by the Romans in 52 b.c. , and it has been the capital of France since the fifth century. In Baudelaire's time, though, Paris was in the process of becoming the cosmopolitan city that it is known as today.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Paris was still organized like a small medieval town. It only contained about a third of the land of contemporary Paris, and was surrounded by walls with gates to let traffic in and out. Only twelve of the current twenty municipal subdivisions, or *arrondissements*, made up the city.

When Napoleon Bonaparte became emperor of France in 1804, he modernized the town by building bridges, streets, and massive monuments, with the aim of making Paris one of the grandest capital cities in the world. The Industrial Revolution, which affected urban areas around the globe, did even more to change the city's character. Farming gave way to factory work as the mainstay of the country's economy by mid-century, bringing people from all over rural France to the city in search of employment. The population doubled between 1836 and 1866, from one to two million people, then up to three million in 1886, and reaching a peak of four million by 1904 (today the population stands at just over two million).

The growing urban population brought with it the usual problems that plagued ancient cities all over the world trying to cope with major population shifts. Slums grew up, crime thrived, the streets became congested and disease spread. For artists like Baudelaire, the burgeoning town offered an inexpensive place to live and to commune with others of similar interests. His most fertile period of work was spent in the Latin Quarter, which is the area around the Sorbonne, a famous art school, where he lived as part of the "bohemian" subculture that has been traditionally associated with Paris for centuries.

When Napoleon III proclaimed himself Emperor of France in 1853, he set about instituting a project of urban renewal for Paris. Major thoroughfares were widened and straightened, and the city annexed a large area called "La Petite Banlieue" ("The Little Suburbs"). Its population immediately grew by 400,000, but the annexation also allowed planners to chart out a more reasonable scope for the city, which had become cramped within the same perimeters that had confined it for hundreds of years.

The expansion and modernization of the city were finished by the 1870s, when Napoleon III was ousted from office after losing the Franco-Prussian War. There were detractors who thought that the changes had ruined the character of a traditionally simple, classically organized city, but the vast majority agreed that Paris would have

suffered even more from the changes that industrialization brought if it had not been modernized to address the future.

Critical Overview

The collection that "Hymn to Beauty" comes from, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, overcame a rocky start to become one of the most recognized and influential books of poetry ever written. When it was first published in 1857, Baudelaire and his publisher were sued for indecency. Each had to pay fines. Worse, however, was the fact that reviewers were frightened away from offering positive reviews. As A. E. Carter explained it, this was a catastrophe that can hardly be understood in the modern age of marketing. "In 1857 the uses of publicity were not properly understood: instead of profiting by the lawsuit, Baudelaire's career suffered an undeniable setback. Poetry is seldom an easy article to market, especially poetry like his, and now publishers had a sound excuse for turning down his manuscripts. Not until twenty or thirty years later did the 1857 stigma prove negotiable. It has paid off pretty well since; *Les Fleurs du Mal* have always smelled of forbidden fruit." The second edition of the book, in 1861, is the one on which Baudelaire's considerable reputation is built□the six poems deemed to be indecent were removed, and roughly a hundred new poems were added.

Baudelaire was considered a breakthrough poet, at least by other poets. His reputation was discussed, but his works were not widely available until after 1917, when the copyright ran out and his works fell into public domain. Baudelaire was a powerful influence on the French symbolists, who gained international acclaim in the late 1800s. He was also a strong influence on T. S. Eliot, whose artistic theories were central to the development of the Modernism movement from the 1920s forward.

Contemporary critics are able to see the influence that Baudelaire's poetry has exerted on the literary world over time. Most literary analyses focus on his fascinations with Satan and beauty, such as when Lewis Piaget Shanks noted, in 1974, that "Baudelaire could never shake off the Catholic dualism, that consciousness of our warring flesh and spirit." It is this dualism that has made him a model poet□his poetry is intellectually challenging, but still based in the experiences of the senses.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature. In this essay, Kelly examines the ways in which Baudelaire's poetry fits into the literary categories of romanticism and symbolism, while actually being a part of neither movement.

Depending on which critics you read, the poetry of nineteenth-century French writer Charles Baudelaire might be fitted into several different places in literary history. Some place him as a late member of the romantic movement; others as a precursor, by several decades, of the French symbolists. Still others will resist putting him into any category, and will explain the illogic of doing so by saying that his work was just too unique to force into a grouping with any others. All of these assertions have been made by intelligent, thoughtful critics, and each is right in its own way (and therefore, of course, wrong in its own way as well). In a poem like Baudelaire's "Hymn to Beauty" readers can see the elements of several different literary schools, as well as elements that defy any attempt to narrow the scope of his achievement. While it is good to avoid insisting that the poet is anything that he is not, there are even more compelling reasons for taking a look at possible schools of thought that he could be affiliated with, if only to better understand how literary style evolves over the course of generations.

To start with, the last claim is the most obviously true: that Baudelaire wrote from such an original perspective that his talent cannot entirely be claimed by any larger movement. This is actually true of any artist, no matter how much teachers try to use them as examples of what was going on in their societies. Technically, a writer who does not "make it new," to use Ezra Pound's brief and eloquent description of the artist's goal, would not be worth talking about, and therefore would never even have the chance to stand for her or his crowd. But it should only be after we accept the fact that all artists have individual styles that we start grouping them into general categories. It takes nothing from Baudelaire's accomplishment to take note of the ways in which his writing is similar to that of others with whom he had things in common. The only reason to steadfastly refuse to categorize him would be if someone insisted that he could have no other identity than that of his grouping: if forced to reduce his work to "nothing more than" an example of romanticism or symbolism, then a good idea might be to say that he was too original to give an honest answer. As it is, though, the most honest intellectual thing to do is to at least *try* different modes on his poetry, to see what might be relevant.

If one is to look for the closest literary movement to Baudelaire, it is natural to look at the one that came before him. Rare is the writer who shows no trace of the sensibilities that shaped his or her world. In the case of a poem like "Hymn to Beauty," there are quite a few traits linking the work to romanticism. By the 1850s, when the first edition of Baudelaire's book *Les Fleurs du Mal* went to press, romanticism had been around for over a half a century, an exhaustively long stretch for a movement based on spontaneity. His work could be considered romantic if one focuses on its antecedents, although, like almost all poetry from that time that was worth reading, it was bursting out of the romantic's norms.

A brief history of romanticism shows that a poem like "Hymn to Beauty" would not have been possible without it. Most critics, though hesitant to claim any definitive moment that a literary movement came to life, would be comfortable with accepting the date 1800 as literary romanticism's start. It was then that, in the introduction to the second edition of their poetry collection *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge lambasted the intellectual approach to art, asserting that beauty was to be found in the ordinary elements of everyday life. Clearly, their approach was a product of the same sensibilities that had given rise to the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789, with all of them stressing that individuals know what is best for themselves and are not bound to follow the rule of "experts" in order to determine right from wrong or, in the case of artists, in order to know beauty.

It is the second generation of British romantics that we generally associate with the romantic movement. These writers, most notably John Keats, Lord Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, lived to pursue beauty and individuality. Their lives exemplified the melancholy and self-destructive commitment to love that is evident in "Hymn to Beauty" as well as in much romantic poetry. Beside the gloom and emphasis on individual experience that most people think of when they think of romantic poetry in its prime, there is one more relevant element, that of a fascination with the supernatural and the macabre. One sees this in the masterpiece of Shelley's wife, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, who, at age twenty, published *Frankenstein*, a tale that has been constantly revived through the ages to warn of the dangers that can occur when the scientific, rational world crosses over into the territory of the supernatural. The supernatural also plays a strong role in the short stories and poems of American author Edgar Allan Poe, who Baudelaire wrote extensively about and admired. It is easy to see the romantic themes that run through Baudelaire's work in general, and especially through a poem like "Hymn to Beauty," in which he expresses the willingness to consort with demons, if necessary, if that is what it would take to call upon beauty to quell his worldly sorrow.

But there are so many ways that Baudelaire differs from the romantic tradition that it is clear that, if he can only be put in one category, this is not it. If romanticism developed in literature as a rejection of classical rules, such as strict form and regular meter, then the poetry that Baudelaire produced is far from the romantic tradition. Before he arrived, French poetry was dominated by writers who one would have no trouble whatsoever categorizing as romantics: writers like Alfred de Musset, Alphonse Lamartine, and especially Victor Hugo, whose career preceded Baudelaire's by decades and whose life continued long after the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal* was in his grave. While these traditionally romantic poets, the masters of French poetry, considered the role of the poet as being the expression of individuality, Baudelaire objected to verse that had not been carefully crafted. There are two obvious explanations for this. First, there is the natural inclination of the rising young artist to reject the works that are currently being celebrated, thus to make more room in the public consciousness for himself or herself. Rather than being viewed as one who offers more of the same, most artists would probably hope that the public will start seeing all art in an entirely new way just as they themselves are becoming known.

In Baudelaire's case, this self-serving drive coincided with a genuine aesthetic drive to restore the craft aspect to poetry that the romantics, in their emphasis on the individual's self-importance, ignored. As Paul Valéry, one of France's leading poets and critics of the twentieth century, put it in his essay "The Position of Baudelaire," "The romantics had neglected practically everything demanding concentrated thought. They sought the effect of shock, enthusiasm, and contrast. Neither measure nor rigor nor depth tormented them excessively. They were averse to abstract thinking and to reasoning□and not only in their works, but also in the preparation of their works, which is infinitely more serious. The French seemed to have forgotten their analytical talents." Though he shared the romantics' sensibilities, Baudelaire brought to poetry a new concern for craft that romanticism specifically disdained.

Though he is generally considered a great influence on the symbolist movement, critics seldom categorize Baudelaire as a symbolist himself. The term "symbolist" is generally associated with the poetry and poetic theory of Stéphane Mallarmé, who gathered an actual literary movement around himself in his home, outlining his theories (with frequent nods to Baudelaire). For the symbolists, poetry should be wild in spirit, but structurally it should be made of carefully chosen symbols that can explain themselves. The best symbolist writing reaches beyond the writer's personal experience and also transcends intellectualism. Admirers of symbolist poetry note the skill with which it is constructed; detractors note that when it is poorly done, it ends up dense and obscure. By symbolist standards, Baudelaire's poetry, such as "Hymn to Beauty," might seem over explained; he tells his ideas to the reader, rather than making them arrive at their own conclusions.

Baudelaire was neither a romantic poet nor a symbolist, and yet he was both. Such is the nature of literary movements. He is evenly divided between different strategies that have polarized poetry throughout its history and that will continue to be open matters for debate for the rest of eternity: the question of form versus spontaneity, of tradition versus individual vision, and of skill versus inspiration. What makes his position in the center between these two movements even more important is that, end to end, they dominated more than a century of the modern world. That both romantics and symbolists should claim Baudelaire as their own should not be considered a contradiction, but instead should serve as a reminder of just how important one individual can be in changing the current of thought.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on "Hymn to Beauty," in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

A website dedicated to the works of Charles Baudelaire, and in particular to the various editions of his collection *Les Fleurs du Mal*, is located at www.FleursDuMal.org with links to other websites of interest regarding the poet.

Topics for Further Study

Interview members of the local government where you live, and report on their thoughts about what sort of literature they think they would prosecute for being obscene.

Many of Baudelaire's poems have been put to music, often by classical musicians. Adapt "Hymn to Beauty" to the type of music that you like best, and record your composition.

Compare and Contrast

1850s: Louis Napoleon, a nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte who conquered Europe in the early years of the century, rules France as a dictator, taking for himself the name Napoleon III.

Today: France is a democracy, with an elected parliament and president.

1850s: Paris is considered one of the cultural centers of the Western world, and artists flock there to be part of its thriving artistic scene.

Today: Paris is still considered one of the world's great cultural centers. Because of improvements in travel and communication, its appeal is not just limited to people from Europe and America, but from all over the globe.

1850s: One characteristic of the romantic age, which dominates art during the first half of the century, is a fascination with the occult or supernatural.

Today: Very few poets concern themselves with issues like the supernatural power of beauty, focusing instead on how beauty can be found in the commonplace.

1850s: The French government suppresses poetry that it finds "obscene," as it does with several of the poems in Baudelaire's collection *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Today: Printed materials, such as poems and novels, are rarely if ever prosecuted for obscenity.

What Do I Read Next?

Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the most famous names in twentieth-century philosophy, published a book-length examination of Baudelaire in 1950, commenting on the complexity of the poet's vision. Titled *Baudelaire*, it is available from New Directions Press.

Before the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Charles Baudelaire was already famous for his translations of the poetry and prose of American writer Edgar Allan Poe, for whom he had great empathy. A good source for Poe's poetry is *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales*, edited by Patrick F. Quinn and published by Viking Press in 1984.

Though he wrote decades before the writers usually grouped together as French symbolists, Baudelaire is sometimes talked about as the earliest writer of that movement. Examples of the most significant poets of French symbolism are gathered in *Four French Symbolist Poets: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine and Mallarmé*. It was translated with an introduction by Enid Rhodes Peschel and published by Ohio University Press in 1981.

Though they did not write in the same style, Victor Hugo was Baudelaire's acquaintance and closest peer in French poetry of the 1850s. *Selected Poems of Victor Hugo: A Bilingual Edition*, translated by E. H. Blackmore and A. M. Blackmore and published by the University of Chicago Press in 2001, gives a good sampling of Hugo's poetic output.

One of the truest ways to gain a sense of a writer is to see what they had to say informally to their friends. Baudelaire comes across as a mass of uncertainty and conflicting desires in *Selected Letters of Charles Baudelaire: The Conquest of Solitude*, translated and edited by Rosemary Lloyd and published by the University of Chicago Press in 1986.

Baudelaire's influence on the British and American poets of the twentieth century cannot be overstated. Lachlan Mackinnon dedicated an entire book to this subject: *Eliot, Auden and Lowell: Aspects of the Baudelarean Inheritance*. It was published in 1983 by the Macmillan Press.

Further Study

Emmanuel, Pierre, "Erotic Religion," in *Baudelaire: The Paradox of Redemptive Satanism*, translated by Robert T. Cargo, University of Alabama Press, 1967.

The author, a renowned French Catholic poet and literary critic, examines Baudelaire's mixture of religion, beauty, and death.

Hamburger, Michael, *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modernist Poetry since Baudelaire*, Anvil Press Poetry, 2002.

Hamburger's book has been praised for clarifying the issues that make twentieth-century poetry vague and confusing to readers, tracing its roots to changes brought about by Baudelaire.

Lloyd, Rosemary, *Baudelaire's World*, Cornell University Press, 2002.

Lloyd's book is part biography, with the most recent research available, and part sociological examination of nineteenth-century France.

Poulet, Georges, and Robert Kopp, *Who Was Baudelaire?* World Publishing, 1969.

This book is interesting because it blends biography, critical examination, examples of Baudelaire's work, and prints of artwork from the poet's time. Poulet wrote the long critical essay; Kopp wrote the biographical segments.

Richardson, Joanna, "The Author of *Les Fleurs du Mal*," in *Baudelaire*, John Murray Publishers, 1994, pp. 221—50.

This biography of Baudelaire, published in Great Britain, is arranged by periods in the poet's life. There is a detailed description of the controversy and legal battle surrounding his book's publication.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Poetry for Students

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

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

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

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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