In Memory of Radio Study Guide

In Memory of Radio by Amiri Baraka

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

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

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

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

"In Memory of Radio" appears in Baraka's first collection of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note,* published in 1961. Baraka was then known as LeRoi Jones. Although the poems in this collection express disaffection with conventional social values and mores, they do not embody the often strident political views Baraka became known for later in his career, when he embraced Black nationalism and then international Marxism. The third poem in the collection, "In Memory of Radio" comes just before a poem to his wife, "For Hettie." It is not, however, about memory or, necessarily, radio. Rather, Baraka uses these subjects to explore ideas of taste, technology, imagination, identity, and the poet's role in society. Written in free verse and employing a conversational, sometimes humorous voice, the poem uses the speaker's memory of radio shows to ostensibly evoke a sense of nostalgia and loss. In actuality, the poem comments on the very insidiousness of radio itself, and how the medium commands human attention and creates a reality separate from the one in which human beings live. The central image in the poem is a superhero from comic books and radio shows called The Shadow. Under the cloak of invisibility, The Shadow hunts down and roots out evil in the world. The words he uttered after he transformed himself from Lamont Cranston, a millionaire playboy, to The Shadow have become a part of popular culture: "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows."

Baraka's early writing was very much influenced by Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, both of whom wrote spontaneously and championed the immediacy and the authenticity of human experience. Like much of Beat literature, Baraka's poem offers a critique of mid-century American culture and society. The poem questions middle-class tastes, popular culture, and America's seeming unquestioning acceptance of technology. Like much Beat writing it is more process than product, and hence difficult to summarize or paraphrase.

Author Biography

Amiri Baraka, who was born Everett LeRoi Jones in Newark, New Jersey in 1934, has been one of the strongest African-American voices for political change in the last thirty years. The son of Coyette ("Coyt") LeRoi Jones, and Anna Lois Jones, Baraka is widely recognized as a leading playwright, poet, essayist, and cultural historian as well. By his own account, Baraka cultivated his imagination as a child in playgrounds and on the streets of Newark, as well as from comic books and radio, which he listened to regularly. His favorite shows included *The Lone Ranger, Sam Spade, Inner Sanctum, I Love a Mystery, The Shadow, Let's Pretend,* and *Escape.* From these he developed strong images of evil and the heroes who defeated evil. These images later formed a central part of his writing, both in his poetry and his plays such as *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?.*

After three years in the Air Force, Baraka moved to Greenwich Village, the center of bohemian life in the 1950s and 1960s, and subsequently earned a degree fromRutgers University. In his early years in New York, he cultivated his passion for writing and along with Hettie Roberta Cohen, his first wife, published two influential Beat magazines, *Yugen* and *Floating Bear,* which showcased influential writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, and Gilbert Sorrentino. His first volume of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note,* appeared in 1961, the same year he was awarded a John Hay Whitney Fellowship for his fiction and poetry. In 1959 Baraka visited Castro's Cuba, which opened his eyes to politics, and specifically the ways in which art and writing can be political. This awakened consciousness also provided him with new themes for his writing. After winning an Obie award in 1964 for his provocative play about racial conflict and identity, *Dutchman,* Baraka founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BART/S), which dedicated itself to fostering racially focused art in Black communities, specifically Harlem. In the mid-1960s, he divorced his wife and moved to Harlem, changing his name from LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka, a Bantuized Muslim name meaning "Blessed Prince." This began the "Black Nationalist" phase of Baraka's life, which saw the writer championing Black political and cultural groups, including the Black Panthers. In the mid-1970s Baraka renounced nationalism and declared himself an international Marxist. He has since devoted himself to speaking and working for the oppressed and against capitalist exploitation throughout the world.

In addition to his prolific writing output, Baraka has held a number of teaching positions. In 1999 he retired from his last teaching position Professor of African Studies at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

Poem Text

Who has ever stopped to think of the divinity of Lamont Cranston?

(Only Jack Kerouac, that I know of: & me.

The rest of you probably had on WCBS and Kate

Smith,

Or something equally unattractive.)

What can I say?

It is better to have loved and lost

Than to put linoleum in your living rooms?

Am I a sage or something?

Mandrake's hypnotic gesture of the week?

(Remember, I do not have the healing powers of

Oral Roberts ...

I cannot, like F. J. Sheen, tell you how to get saved

& rich!

I cannot even order you to gaschamber satori like

Hitler or Goody Knight

& Love is an evil word.

Turn it backwards/see, what I mean?

An evol word. & besides

Who understands it?

I certainly wouldn't like to go out on that kind of

limb.

Saturday mornings we listened to Red Lantern &

his undersea folk.

At 11, Let's Pretend/& we did/& I, the poet, still

do, Thank God!

What was it he used to say (after the

transformation, when he was safe

& invisible & the unbelievers couldn't throw

stones?) "Heh, heh, heh,

Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?

The Shadow knows."

O, yes he does

O, yes he does.

An evil word it is,

This Love.

Plot Summary

Stanza 1:

The title sets the tone for the poem. We expect an elegy to the radio, a nostalgic reminiscence about its effect on the speaker. We get that and more. Lamont Cranston is the alter ego of the Shadow, a black-cloaked crime fighter with an eerie laugh. *The Shadow* was the subject of hundreds of pulp novels and a radio show which ran in the 1930s and 1940s. The speaker wants us to think about how a figure from popular culture can also be divine. He also, consciously or not, sets himself apart from others who listen to radio, declaring that radio stations such as WCBS (a New York City station) and singers such as Kate Smith (a popular crooner who immortalized the song "God Bless America" and who had her own radio show on CBS) are "unattractive." The speaker aligns his taste with Jack Kerouac, one of the leading authors of the Beat movement of the 1950s and 1960s who wrote about jazz and blues and his experiences in the gritty American counterculture in novels such as *On the Road, Dharma Bums,* and *The Subterraneans.* The tone of this stanza is smug, almost arrogant, as he lumps the reader in with "the rest of you."

Stanza 2:

Like the first stanza, this one begins with a rhetorical question. There is nothing to say, the speaker suggests. He underscores this with a play on these famous lines from Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem "In Memoriam": "'Tis better to have loved and lost, / Than never to have loved at all." Making these lines part of a non-sequitur also illustrates the Beat sensibility, which set itself apart from high art and saw sacredness in the everyday. His references to linoleum and living rooms, though apparently nonsensical, underscore the inferiority and shallowness of middle-class tastes.

Stanza 3:

Baraka continues with the playful tone of the poem, again beginning a stanza with a question. He is obviously not a sage, but he also wants to point out that neither are public figures who often lay claim to sage status. Mandrake is Mandrake the Magician, the hero of a comic strip of the 1940s and 1950s written by Lee Falk and Fred Fredericks. Oral Roberts is an evangelist well known for soliciting funds over the radio and television.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen delivered the first radio message fromRadio City, and was the first to host a regular series of religious radio broadcasts. His national NBC show was called "The Catholic Hour." Hitler, of course, was the genocidal German leader of World War II responsible for the systematic extermination of Jews and others in death camps. Baraka uses the phrase "gaschamber satori" ironically to emphasize the moral murkiness with which we perceive public figures, and how bad is often seen as good

and good as bad. A "satori" is a state of spiritual enlightenment in Zen Buddhism, itself a popular religion among some of the Beats.

Stanza 4:

The reader is told what has only been suggested so far, that good and bad, evil and love exist dialectically. That is, one cannot exist without the other. To attempt to understand love is folly, the speaker implies. Not even a poet can understand love.

Stanza 5:

These two lines elaborate on the kinds of shows that the speaker listened to as a child. *Red Lantern* was a character from the children's show *Land of the Lost.* He was a fish who led kids down below the sea to search for their lost toys. *Let's Pretend,* also a children's show, dramatized the Grimm's fairy-tales for radio. The speaker makes the link between his childhood activities of pretending while listening to these shows with his activities as a poet, where he also uses his imagination and "pretends."

Stanza 6:

This stanza refers to the Shadow, first mentioned in the opening stanza. To combat evil, the Shadow had the ability to make himself invisible ("the transformation"). "The transformation" also echoes a religious idea, the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ during the act of communion. Indeed, by describing the Shadow in terms of his adversaries, the "unbelievers" who would throw stones, Baraka ascribes to him a religious quality, which is reinforced by the Shadow's ability to see into the hearts of men.

Stanza 7:

The rhythm of these last lines and the rhyme "does/love" end the poem on a breathy and whimsical note. Baraka has used his memory about radio as a vehicle for commenting on a bigger theme: the inherent duality of the world and of human nature.

Themes

Appearances and Reality

"In Memory of Radio" examines the idea of appearance and reality, suggesting that the world of phenomena or appearances is not to be trusted. In the Western world, Plato was one of the first to popularize this idea in his "Allegory of the Cave," claiming that human beings mistakenly believe that the world as we see or experience it is the real world. Plato believed that the things or objects of the given world were merely imperfect copies of the real, which existed in the realm of ideas. Baraka also calls into question the reliability of what we see, or in this case hear and read. He questions his own authority as poet in the third stanza when he asks, "What am I a sage or something?"□implying that readers would do well not to necessarily trust the page. He then likens his own poetic authority to that of Mandrake, a fictional character who performed magic tricks as well as hypnosis. Not only should we not put our trust in the poet (an idea that Plato also endorsed in *The Republic),* but we should not trust radio either, as it too creates a fictional world, as evidenced by the shows and personalities he lists: *Let's Pretend, Red Lantern,* Mandrake, Hitler, F. J. Sheen, and Oral Roberts, all proselytizers of a particular world view. His lumping of characters from radio shows, a seemingly benign form of entertainment, with religious figures, and the world's most infamous mass murderer, emphasizes the degree to which the poet believes society has been duped by what they see, hear, and read. The character of The Shadow himself is a symbol for the invisible world of ideas. As such he personifies the "real" in his ability to see into the hearts of men. By using The Shadow as the poem's central symbolic image Baraka ties together ideas of metaphysical reality and moral reality, implying that because human beings act upon what their senses tell them, they act incorrectly. In this way, love, a concept we conventionally associate with good, can be "seen" as evil.

Culture Clash

"In Memory of Radio" presents a contradictory and, ultimately, unresolved stance towards mid-century American popular culture. Although the poem criticizes middle-class bourgeois tastes, it does not provide a clear-cut alternative to those tastes. The poem begins by praising Lamont Cranston, the alter ego of The Shadow, a crime-fighting hero of radio, comic books, and novels, and condemning Kate Smith, a popular singer, star of her own radio and television show who was known for her fierce patriotism and traditional values. By aligning himself with Jack Kerouac, Beat icon and countercultural hero, the speaker sides with those who experimented with new forms of art and experience. Kerouac and the Beats were known for their oppositional stance towards the status quo. They loved jazz and blues, celebrated sexuality, and often smoked marijuana and took speed, hallucinogens, and other mind-altering substances. The poem takes another jab at a symbol of traditional Western culture in the second stanza when the speaker butchers Tennyson's famous lines "Tis better to have loved

and lost / Than never to have loved at all." The substituted lines are telling, for they yoke together the hackneyed sentiment of a canonical poem with a status symbol of the growing middle class: linoleum. The third stanza skewers popular radio and television evangelists, Oral Roberts and Bishop Sheen, and Mandrake the Magician, suggesting that those who listen and believe what these figures have to say are being duped. But comic book and radio show characters also belong to middle-class tastes, and it is here that the poem's oppositional stance towards bourgeois tastes falls short. Perhaps, however, in positioning children's shows and characters such as The Shadow, *Red Lantern* and *Let's Pretend* as somehow more wholesome, Baraka is making the point that these shows foreground their "pretend" qualities, whereas adult celebrities do not, claiming reality as their province.

Style

"In Memory of Radio" is written in a very loose conversational free-verse style using associative logic. Its use of informal punctuation and speech rhythms show the influence of Projectivist verse, a kind of poetry based on theories articulated by Charles Olson, among others. Unlike more conventional strains of poetry, Projectivist verse does not attempt to illustrate one central idea through imagery or statement but rather to evoke a mood or "circle" an issue through spontaneously recording the writer's thoughts as he or she writes. Such composition is also linked to the improvisatory processes of jazz, which heavily influences Baraka's writing. The poem's use of sometimes incongruent images, as in "I cannot order you to go to the gaschamber satori like Hitler or Goody Knight" shows the influence of Dadaism, an early twentieth-century art movement which rebelled against traditional subject matter, conventional forms, and often common sense itself.

Mood is the atmosphere or emotional tone of a poem which helps to configure a reader's expectations. Through his at times contradictory reminiscences of the past, Baraka establishes a mood of resignation and despair, what we might expect for a poem about loss. However, because of the speaker's offhanded, erratic way of presenting information, his unwillingness to develop a thought, and his use of The Shadow's own signature tag line (i.e., "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows.") followed by his creepy snicker, it is hard to take the poem seriously.

Historical Context

For poets and writers, the 1960s were a time of experimentation and prolific output. Inexpensive offset, letterpress, and mimeograph machines allowed almost anyone to become a publisher. Those at the margins of society□minorities, the poor, the disenfranchised, the "oddball," or simply those with different visions of society□took advantage of the "mimeograph revolution," producing countless newsletters, journals, pamphlets and other publications. Baraka himself was integral in a number of publishing ventures including Totem Press, and the magazines *Yugen* and *The Floating Bear.* With Totem Press Baraka published poets such as Frank O'Hara, Carol Berg, Gilbert Sorrentino, Diane Wakoski, Jack Kerouac, Paul Blackburn, and Gary Snyder. Corinth Books co-published and distributed many of Totem's titles in the late 1960s. In 1958 Baraka, along with his first wife, Hettie Cohen, edited and published *Yugen,* a "zine" devoted to New York writers, as well as minority voices. Many of the writers in *Yugen* also appeared in Donald Allen's groundbreaking anthology, *The New American Poetry,* published in 1960 largely as a response to the 1957 anthology *New Poetry of England and America,* a collection edited by Louis Simpson, Donald Hall, and Robert Pack which emphasized what Allen called "academic poetry." *Yugen* also became known for publishing theoretical essays spelling out the critical stances of many experimental writers and groups. *The Floating Bear,* co-edited with poet Diane di Prima, was a mimeographed newsletter which circulated solely through a mailing list. Named after Winnie-the-Pooh's boat made of a honey pot, the newsletter came out monthly for the first two years. In a study of the history of the small press in America during this time, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side,* Diane di Prima attributes the success of the newsletter to Baraka's (then LeRoi Jones) work habits: "LeRoi could work at an incredible rate. He could read two manuscripts at a time, one with each eye. He would spread things out on the table while he was eating supper, and reject them all□listening to the news and a jazz record he was going to review, all at the same time," she said. Di Prima also gives credit to their many friends who helped to collate, staple, edit, and stuff envelopes in all-night "publishing parties."

Many of these writers were associated or came to be associated with the Beat movement which rebelled against the perceived moral and cultural bankruptcy of middle-class American life. They loathed what they saw as the crass materialism of American life and its emphasis on conformity and living a "safe" life. Beats loved the bebop jazz of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, whose improvisatory methods of composition they frequently followed in their own lives and art. In art they praised the abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollack and Willem DeKooning, whose non-representational paintings celebrated color and movement and asked viewers to make their own meaning out of what they saw. The word "Beat" itself signified both exhaustion and beatification; in their writing and performances Beats such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg expressed their disgust with the shallow commercialism and conformist attitudes of society, often choosing to heighten their own experiences through the use of stimulants and hallucinogens such as marijuana, peyote, and speed. Jack Kerouac's own best-selling novel *On the Road,* published in 1957, told the story of rebellious

hipsters who lived spontaneously, crisscrossing the country while high on Benzedrine and alcohol, always ready for a sexual (mis)adventure.

Critical Overview

Critics have praised Baraka's first volume of poetry, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note,* in which "In Memory of Radio" appeared, many claiming that it contains some of his very best poetry. M. L. Rosenthal says that the collection shows that Baraka "has a natural gift for quick, vivid imagery and spontaneous humor, and his poems are filled with sardonic or sensuous or slangily knowledgeable passages." Theodore Hudson similarly applauds the volume, writing "All things considered 'Preface' was an auspicious beginning for LeRoi Jones the poet." "In Memory of Radio" can be read as a critique of the ways that American society unquestioningly believes what they hear on radio and see on television. However it can, and has, also been read as an endorsement of the fantasy life. Calling the piece "a typical beat Poem," critic William J. Harris writes that Baraka "not only valorizes 'pretending,' he also rejects the role of poet as an active agent in the world." Lloyd W. Brown, though, sees more complexity in the poem, reading it as an indictment of "the culture's destructive dichotomies between reason and feeling." Brown sees Mandrake as Baraka's symbol of rationalism, a force which blocks society's capacity to see itself clearly. "Baraka's poem defines the 'magic' of radio as a symptom of the irrational basis on which the culture perceives the achievements of technological reason. On both counts Mandrake therefore represents the scientific logic that made possible the technological 'magic' of radio."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Chris Semansky's poetry, essays, and stories appear regularly in literary magazines and journals. In the following essay, Semansky examines the idea of loss in Amiri Baraka's poem, "In Memory of Radio."

Traditionally, elegies have addressed the idea of loss. Sometimes that loss is physical, as in the death of a loved one, and sometimes the loss is emotional, as in the loss of love, or metaphysical, as when the poet meditates on human mortality itself. Amiri Baraka's poem, "In Memory of Radio," adds another subject: the loss of serf. His poem signals not the loss of a particular time when radio shows had emotional clout or entertainment value but the loss of a part of the speaker who has moved from innocence to a kind of experience which implicitly undermines his previous response to radio.

Baraka opens the poem by using a convention which often appears in pastoral elegies, the invocation of the muses. Baraka's muse, however, is not one of the Greek goddesses cavorting on MountHelicon, but Lamont Cranston, the alter ego of the Shadow, a crimefighting superhero of pulp novels, comic books, and radio shows from the poet's childhood. The Shadow only assumed the identity of Lamont Cranston, a millionaire playboy not unlike Batman's Bruce Wayne or Superman's Clark Kent, when he felt he could gain more information as Cranston. In reality The Shadow was Kent Allard, an adventurer and pilot who crashed deep in the tropical jungles of South America shortly before The Shadow appeared in New York City. It is the speaker's memory of Cranston that spurs him to think about other radio performers, specifically Kate Smith, the patriotic singer who built her reputation belting out "God Bless America" and helping to sell war bonds and entertain the troops during World War II. Smith's songs were often carried by WCBS, a New York City radio station catering to mainstream tastes. By claiming Jack Kerouac as ally against the tacky tastes of the hoi-polloi, the speaker skirts arrogance. But as he himself says in the very next stanza, "What can I say?" This willingness to undercut his own statements marks the beginning of a self-questioning in the poem, which is never fully resolved.

Part of this poem's confusion lies in the difficulty of its tone, or stance towards its subject. When the speaker asks "Am I a sage or something?" does he mean "Look at me, I know what I'm talking about"? Or does he mean "You are a fool to believe me"? The speaker's cockiness in the opening stanza would seem to argue for the former, but a case could also be made for the latter when he compares himself to Mandrake the Magician, another icon of mid-century popular culture and, seemingly, a metaphor of one of poets' historical roles to construct make believe worlds. The speaker himself seems to endorse this role when he comments on the radio show *Let's Pretend.* Yet another view is that of critic Lloyd W. Brown, who in his study of Baraka's life and writing has this to say about Mandrake:

The figure's familiar attributes (the hypnotic gesture and the powers of invisibility) reinforce that sense of a wonderful ("magical") emotional intimacy which is intrinsic to

the experience of listening to radio: the listener develops private relationships with radio characters precisely because the latter's invisibility demands an imaginative participation from the listener, and thereby enhances the intimacy of the relationship.

This magic, this intimacy, Brown continues, is also a fraud, "a pretended closeness, which does not really compensate for the isolation and divisiveness that the culture encourages by virtue of its fearfully puritanic and narrowly rationalistic responses to love and involvement."

It is not necessary to resolve the meaning of Mandrake or, indeed, the poem as a whole. At this point in his career Baraka himself was exploring his beliefs, testing out ideas and ways of being in the world. He was also more interested in the idea that poems say more than their writers could possibly know. In the mid-1960s, when the poet's own politics were beginning to cohere, he would write poems which were clearer (though not necessarily better) in their meaning, more diatribe and rant than lyrical self-exploration. Combined with the image of The Shadow, the Mandrake figure foreshadows Baraka's future image of himself as a harbinger of White death / destruction. Both images are echoed in his poem "State/meant" published five years after "In Memory of Radio" at the start of the poet's Black nationalist phase:

We are unfair, and unfair.

We are black magicians, black art

s we make in black labs of the heart.

The fair are fair, and death ly white.

The day will not save them and we own the night.

The "black labs of the heart" are themselves present in "In Memory of Radio." By focusing on popular public figures such as Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and Oral Roberts, who began their careers proselytizing on radio, the narrator underscores the idea that people are gullible. Not only do we fall for what we are told (e.g., the promise of religious or economic salvation or, in Hitler's case, genetic and national salvation), but we have been trained to be so since childhood. What the speaker once thought were good things, radio shows and characters such as *Red Lantern* and *Let's Pretend,* turn out to be inherently evil, for they condition him, and by implication the public, to live in the world of make believe. The Shadow is an attractive figure for the speaker because he contains within himself both good and evil. He knows the evil that lurks within the heart of men because that same evil is in his own heart. Baraka scholar William J. Harris describes the writer's relation to his fantasies as follows:

In Baraka there has always been a battle between the imagination and the real world. Baraka was attracted to the world of the imagination because there he could be anyone and have anything he wanted. In his Beat days, the late 1950s and early 1960s, the propensity for fantasy displaced history and ethnicity from his work; feeling kinship with the other Beats, he could say that he was 'as any other sad man here / an American/

Harris misses the mark with the word "displaced," as history and ethnicity became subjects for the poet only *after* he immersed himself in the world and ideas of Beat culture. A more accurate way of describing Baraka's change would be to say that he could only embrace the radical poetics of first Black nationalism and then international Marxism once he had rejected the radical poetics of the counterculture Beats.

The self-knowledge of the speaker of "In Memory of Radio" stems in part from his recognition that his childhood love of radio shows and his memory of such shows are not uncomplicated. Though this love helped to form the adult self he speaks from, the poet who can (seemingly) construct whole worlds from scratch, it also helped to put him in touch with his (potentially) evil serf. There is no mistaking that the speaker of this poem sees himself as a kind of Shadow figure. Just as listeners cannot see The Shadow on radio, readers cannot see the writer of poetry or know what is in his heart, the intentions behind the making of the poem. The shadow/Shadow is an apt image for Baraka the poet, for it can symbolically accommodate many of the themes and subjects Baraka mines in his poetry: African-American identity, the relationship between the real and the imaginary, invisibility, good and evil, social justice. That sometimes evil is necessary to bring about good is a claim Baraka himself makes in his more militant writings. This seeming contradiction is evident in his statement that "The Black Artist's role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it." For LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, that destruction also entails a destruction of one self to give birth to another.

Source: Chris Semansky, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Tyrus Miller is an assistant professor of comparative literature and English at Yale University, where he teaches twentieth-century literature and visual culture. His book Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars *is forthcoming. In the following essay, Miller discusses the various functions of the poem, such as to memorialize Baraka's life and death, to reflect on the loss of one's innocence and the realization that such innocence might be a kind of blindness, and to reveal the morality associated with the concepts of color and race.*

"In Memory of Radio" dates from the late 1950s and appeared in a book entitled *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note ...,* **the first collection** of poems by the African-American writer Le Roi Jones (now named Amiri Baraka). Spanning the end of the radio age and the emergence of television, Jones's poem is a lament for the radio as a vanishing medium once capable of entrancing its listeners with spellbinding dramas. This magic power of radio, the "divinity" once radiated by such fictional heroes as Orson Welles's Lamont Cranston in the radio drama *The Shadow,* has now faded into thin air. Like a gathering of howling ghosts, "In Memory of Radio" evokes disembodied voices coming over the airwaves, invisible men and laughing shadows, part of the child's lost world conjured back momentarily by poetic memory.

The titles of both the poem and the collection in which it appeared suggest Jones's powerful preoccupation with death. The poem's title reveals that "In Memory of Radio" will be a sort of elegy, a memorial for the dead, for a cultural experience definitively lost from the world of everyday reality and only to be revisited through a special act of imagination. The book's title, in contrast to that of the poem, evokes a death yet to come and a labor of writing leading towards that death while desperately attempting to forestall it. Jones's "preface," his volume of poems, lies one step before the extraordinarily long "suicide note" that itself must proceed and explain the act of suicide. Figuratively, then, Jones is treating his first book as the initial step into a lifelong work of writing that will sum up his life and show how it led up to and justified his death.

Jones's book as a whole thus points forward towards his ultimate death, following the fulfillment of his task as a man and as writer. In contrast, his poem "In Memory of Radio" acknowledges that even this first entry into writing, this "preface" to the long "suicide note" of his oeuvre, is already steeped in death. For it emerges out of the death and remembrance of his childhood's most intense imaginative experience, the long hours a boy spent seated before the radio.

Jones's poem also suggests, however, that the disappearance of the radio world has its parallel in the child's maturing beyond the state of unthinking belief on which his imaginative play with the radio depended. As the radio age yielded to the new technology of television, so too the poet has emerged into a new "shadowed" complexity of adult emotional and social vision. The radio thus carries a double significance in Jones's poem. It symbolizes an "innocence lost"; yet now seen from the perspective of adulthood, its content never was so innocent. The child's innocence,

which the adult poet seems to mourn as a more authentic and undivided state of imaginative power, was also a form of blindness, a failure to grasp the real world's truth. This metaphorical blindness, however, was in turn conditioned by the literal invisibility of the radio personages, who appeared only through the magical conjurings of their voices. The imaginative pleasures of the radio, Jones implies, was like a kind of hypnosis, making him close his eyes to what was in front of him in order to animate the fantasy voices of the airwaves.

The radio, the adult poet realizes, always lay under the shadow of politics, class and racial divisions, state power, and sexuality, even as it nourished the child's imagination and allowed the poet within him to develop. The child's seemingly innocent fascination with the radio world was, all the while, unknowingly leading him down into the obscure regions of the heart, the twisted paths of love and evil deeply entwined in his inner nature. And as he recognizes only now, the heroes of the child's radio mythology already "knew" all that and were whispering the unhappy truths in his ear all along. Thus, as an invisible man of the modern city, taking on the shape and shade of night in order to defeat the criminal that is at home there, the Shadow divines "what evil lurks in the hearts of men." For Jones, everything has been transmuted by this sobering recognition of his own double nature. Not even his childhood myths, he confesses, will allow him any longer to sustain the mythology of his own childhood innocence, which to his now-opened eyes appears as no more than the guilt of a willed blindness.

Jones begins the poem by laying claim to a special experience and insight gained through his radio listening. As boys, he and the Beat novelist Jack Kerouac, he writes, shared an enthusiasm for the fictional character of Lamont Cranston, the daylight form of The Shadow. For them, Cranston was a kind of god, an invisible sacred figure who spoke to them through the radio. No one else, he suggests, understood the power of these figures of imagination. Others listened to the mainstream popular music of Kate Smith, unable to rise to the religious zeal of these imaginative boys one day to become poets. But already by the second stanza, Jones ironically undercuts this romantic priesthood of the radio god, weighing the loss of his beloved hero against the suburban triteness implied by the figure of Kate Smith. He reluctantly admits that his awed absorption in The Shadow may have been no better than the gullibility of an adult consumer's hooked by a radio advertisement into buying a product: "What can I say / It is better to have loved and lost / Than to put linoleum in your living room?"

In the third stanza, Jones sets his radio experience apart from the adult one in which race, politics, and religion are more openly the content. Yet he also offers a litany of radio figures that serve as the sinister mirror of his own "religion" of the radio deity Lamont Cranston. In the opening lines of the stanza, for example, he mentions "Mandrake the Magician," whose program was broadcast several times a week from 1940 to 1942. Mandrake was a master magician, accompanied by a servant named Juano Hernandez and a powerful giant named Lothar. He would invoke a magical spell and hypnotize his adversaries. Jones implies that he once identified with these figures, wishing to share in their omniscience and omnipotence. But now he questions that same childish desire as impossible and ridiculous: "Am I a sage or something? / Mandrake's hypnotic gesture of the week?"

In the lines that follow, this desire for magical potency by means of the radio becomes still more dubious, as Jones recalls a series of real-life figures who used the radio to pursue religious, political, and financial power. The poet denies that he can duplicate the healing spells of Oral Roberts, a fundamentalist faith healer and preacher, and he disavows the promises of earthly happiness and salvation that the Catholic evangelist Fulton J. Sheen regularly made over the radio. In the last line, in the climax of the stanza, he presents the most evil form of "hypnosis" through the radio, the political exploitation of its magic to evil ends: "I cannot even order you to gaschamber satori like Hitler or Goody Knight." Here Jones alludes to Adolf Hitler's use of the radio to spread his message of war, conquest, and genocide. And he associates the recent phenomenon of Nazism with a domestic barbarity, the use of the gaschamber not only in the Nazi death camps, but also in the State of California's prisons since 1938. "Goody Knight" refers to Goodwin Knight, the Governor of California from 1953-1959, who appeared often on radio and television: on Jack Benny's radio show in 1957, for example, and on the I *Love Lucy* television show inaugurating the opening of Disneyland in 1955. If Lamont Cranston and, perhaps, Mandrake the Magician were the good deities of Jones's radio pantheon, he reminds us that they nonetheless shared the radio sky with real men of power, men whom Jones had come to see as the evil sorcerers of the mass media.

As Jones suggests, the child's dreams of superhuman powers to do good, fantasies fed by radio listening, are uncomfortably close to the bogus promises of power and moral rightness sold by evangelists and demagogues. He implies that for every fictional radio hero fighting evil with special powers in the 1930s and 1940s, the radio also allowed a fascist manipulator of the medium like Charles Coughlin or Martin Luther Thomas to spread messages of hatred and intolerance. In his own love for the radio and its moral heroes, Jones is forced to recognize this love's potential to be perverted into its opposite, hatred and evil. Accordingly, the next stanza makes explicit this reversibility of love, now not just in reference to Jones's childhood love for the radio, but as an elemental capacity of his own nature and of human nature in general: "Turn it backwards / see, see what I mean? / An evol word. & besides / who understands it?" This sudden loss of moral bearings makes it difficult for the poet to risk loving, the way he once spontaneously and wholeheartedly embraced his heroes in his radio days. If love and evil are so nearly mirror images of one another, so intertwined in the human heart, the poet implicitly asks, how can we know whether we are falling in love or falling into sin? "I certainly wouldn't like to go out on that kind of limb," Jones writes.

In the next two stanzas, however, he turns this negative insight back around into a positive potential for moral knowledge. If moral good does not lie with secret powers, perhaps at least awareness of the danger of self-deception is itself a kind of moral stance: an ethic of self-scrutiny. In turn, the imaginative capacities cultivated by the radio, by the children's shows "Red Lantern" and "Let's Pretend," allow a new form of identification to emerge in the poem. It is not the *power* of the Shadow that Jones now wants to take upon himself, but the Shadow's penetrating *knowledge* of the evil side of human nature, an insight that is also self-knowledge, the recognition of oneself as a figure of night and shadow: "What was it he used to say (after the transformation, when he was safe & invisible & the unbelievers couldn't throw stones?) "Heh, heh, heh, /

Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows." The Shadow folds evil back into self-consciousness: himself having the form of darkness and shadow, he can see into the hidden depths of the human heart. So too, in terms of his physical presence as a figure on the radio, he is paradoxically characterized by a double invisibility, an invisibility made self-conscious. Not only, as a radio voice, is he invisible to his listeners, but even within the world of the radio fiction, he also passes unseen among his fellow characters, themselves of course invisible to their listeners.

Jones, however, does not simply intend a moral allegory with his figures of darkness and evil. His serf-conscious acceptance of the "dark side" as a space of moral insight refers as well to his dawning recognition of the politics of race in America. For Jones, being black, having a skin color that this racist society has traditionally feared and despised, becomes a special vantage point from which to see through the facade of America's constitutional promises to the social and psychological evils lurking in its heart. Suggestively, the radio figures that Jones holds up for scorn are primarily real white personages□Kate Smith, Oral Roberts, Archbishop Sheen, Adolf Hitler, Goody Knight□but figures whose race society takes as a given, neutral fact, because the radio conveys only their voices. In contrast, although the existence of such fictional characters as "Red Lantern" and "The Shadow" is only imaginatively derived from the actors' invisible voices, their fictive visual presence, their "color," is specially remarked and emphasized. Subtly, then, Jones implies that the very capacity to imagine race in America and to make visible the evils perpetrated in its name may be the ambiguous privilege of people of color, the terrible good of that evil they suffer under racism. Identification with radio heroes "of color"□the red or black figures of the radio dramas□may thus foreshadow a more fundamental se/f-identification of the poet with his blackness, a moral stance at once "evil" in racist eyes and a hard-won "love" of a serf shrouded in the shadow of blackness. It is this, ultimately, that the radio hero teaches the poet, how to transmute the stigma of his own darkness, the darkness of his skin and the moral darkness within him, into a self-conscious affirmation of love: "O, yes he does / O, yes he does. / An evil word it is, / This Love."

Source: Tyrus Miller, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

In this brief essay, Hakac discusses the hidden meaning in the language of the poem.

Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) was fond of disguising racial themes in some of his early poetry. For example, "In Memory of Radio" has no trace of explicit racial reference, yet the poem is easily read as a statement that Blacks living in a white society have a special ability for the divination of evil. The poet's use of jive and the reader's conversion of a brief passage into Black English reveal Baraka's oblique theme.

Structurally the poem begins with a reference to Lamont Cranston and ends with one to him as the Shadow, jive for Black. It develops the poet's pre- and post-World War II assumption that radio heavily, through optimism and fantasy, purveyed the view that God's in His Heaven, All's Right with the Status Quo. The mention of Hitler and Goody Knight in line 11, however, contradicts that view by alluding to violence and death. Goodwin J. Knight was governor of California for six of the twelve years Caryl Whittier Chessman lived on Death Row awaiting execution. Chessman's prison term spanned the administrations of governors Earl Warren, Knight, and Edmund G. Brown. Convicted of sexual kidnapping in 1948 and ultimately executed on May 2, 1960, Chessman received four of his eight stays of execution from various state and federal courts while Knight was in office, although Knight himself did not issue any of the stays. By 1959, when the poem appeared in the *White Dove Review,* the Chessman case had ignited an international clamour protesting the death penalty and the inhumanity of keeping a man on Death Row for over a decade. Later, bowing under pressure from the U.S. State Department, Governor Brown granted Chessman a sixty-day reprieve on February 18, 1960, designed to ward off hostile demonstrations and possible riots during President Eisenhower's upcoming visit to South America.

Behind the facade of social stability and harmony, the poem asserts, there is really little altruism or love. Love spelled backwards is "an evol word," and no one knows that more surely than Blacks. Baraka cleverly sets up the idea by quoting Lamont Cranston, now become the Shadow, uttering his famous words from invisibility: "Heh, Heh, Heh, / Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?"

At this point, reading lines 22-24 in Black English illuminates the poet's concealed meaning:

" 'De Shadow know!' / O, yeah he do / O, yeah he do." A shadow, Baraka feels, has the keen insight, the "divinity," to detect evil unerringly like the Shadow□perhaps because a "shadow" too, ironically, is an invisible man.

Source: John E. Hakac, "Baraka's 'In Memory of Radio,'" in *Concerning Poetry,* Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring, 1977, p. 85.

Adaptations

The University ofNorthern Iowa released a video of Baraka's 1994 Keynote speech to the International Conference on the Short Story in English. Baraka speaks about the relationship between the short story and poetry in his own work.

The University ofSan Francisco'sPoetry Center released a video called *Color,* an anthology of contemporary African-American poetry. Baraka reads on the video, which was scripted by poet Al Young.

New Letters On the Air issued an audio cassette of Baraka reading his poetry in 1988.

Everett/Edwards issued an audio cassette of Baraka reading his poems in 1976.

Baraka plays a visionary homeless prophet in the 1998 Hollywood film, *Bullworth,* starring Warren Beatty and Halle Berry.

Topics for Further Study

Think about the television shows you watched, books or comics you read, or films you viewed as a child. Write an essay exploring the influence of characters from those shows or comics on your adult life. Has your image of heroes or villains been shaped by such characters? How?

The Internet is to many of today's children what radio was to those of Baraka's generation. Write a speculative essay from a future point of view describing the kind of technological nostalgia someone writing thirty years from now might have.

Make a list of your favorite foods, restaurants, magazines, books, television shows, movies, kinds of music, art, and activities. Freewrite about what these things might have in common (if anything). Then write an essay exploring what your tastes might say about you and your class status or aspirations.

Compare and Contrast

1920: The first commercial radio broadcast takes place August 20, on station WWJ in Detroit.

1922: Network broadcasting begins when WJZ and WGY in New York broadcast the World Series.

1926: The Radio Corporation of America (RCA) begins the first national network which helps connect the entire nation.

1931: Kate Smith's own radio show airs.

1932: *The Shadow,* a radio drama, is first broadcast, and lasts until 1954. Other shows that aired this year include *Buck Rogers, The Adventures of Charlie Chan, The Ed Sullivan Show, The Marx Brothers,* and *Tarzan.*

1934: *Let's Pretend* is first broadcast, and lasts until 1954.

1952: Bishop Fulton J. Sheen moves to television from radio. His show, "Life is Worth Living," is the first religious television show in New York when there are very few television sets in the city.

1954: Bishop Fulton J. Sheen reaches 25 million people on television. In 1955, Sheen is broadcast across 170 stations in the United States and seventeen in Canada. From l952 to 1953, Sheen is paid $10,000 per telecast by Admiral Corporation. In successive seasons, Admiral pays $12,000 and $14,000 per appearance. In 1955, Sheen draws $16,500 per show. Sheen sends all these fees to the Propagation of the Faith for the poor overseas.

1950-1960: The Kate Smith Hour (1950-54) airs on National Broadcasting Company television. She returns with CBS's Kate Smith Show in 1960.

1970: Radio historians often mark this year as the beginning of the "Modern" era of radio.

1990s: The popularity of old radio shows remains strong, as Hollywood produces new film versions of old shows such as *Tarzan, Buck Rogers,* and *The Shadow.*

1957: Jack Kerouac publishes *On the Road,* a novel about young intellectuals' exploration of personal identity and search for meaning in a spiritually bankrupt America.

Today: *On the Road* is considered a classic work of American literature and required reading in many college classrooms.

What Do I Read Next?

The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones, by Amiri Baraka, details the author's life up to his fortieth birthday in 1974. Baraka recounts his experiences from his participation in post-World War II counterculture and his role in Black nationalism after the assassination of Malcolm X to his conversion to Islam and his commitment to an international socialist vision.

Baraka's 1995 book, *Transbluesency: The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones (1961-1995),* edited by Paul Vangelisti, pays homage to blues and jazz greats Thelonius Monk, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and John Coltrane. The collection includes many out-of-print and limited edition chapbooks and broadsides.

Komozi Woodard's recently released study, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Black Power Politics,* closely examines Baraka's politics and activism during the 1960s and 1970s, when Baraka was an outspoken advocate for Black nationalist causes.

For a stronger sense of Baraka's pre-Black nationalist Beat poetry, read his first collection, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note,* published in 1961 by Totem Press and Corinth Books.

Further Study

Allen, Donald, ed., *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960,*

New York: Grove Press, 1960.

This anthology was published to showcase those poets writing against the grain since Wolrd War II, in style and forms aligned with movements in music and

painting such as abstract expresionism and jazz. Allen organizes the poets into categories which are still used today to identify particular poetic traditions:New York School, Beat,Black Mountain School, and the San Francisco Renaissance.

Allen, Donald, and Warren Tallman, eds., *The Poetics of the New American Poetry,* New York: Grove Press, 1973.

This book is meant to accompany Allen's anthology, *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960.* Here the poets themselves provide statements on their own poetics and writing processes. This book is essential for understanding the theories behind the practices of Allen's poets.

Clay, Stephen and Rodney Phillips, *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980,* New York: Granary Books/The New York Public Library, 1998.

This book documents the intense and experimental publishing activities of poets and writers from 1960-1980, when Amiri Baraka, then LeRoi Jones, and his wife edited and published *Floating Bear* and *Yugen.* An indispensable resource for learning about small-press publishing during this period.

Bibliography

Allen, Donald and George F. Butterick, eds., *The Postmod-erns: The New American Poetry Revised,* New York: Grove Press, 1982.

Baraka, Amiri, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones, New York: Freundlich Books, 1984.*

--------, *Transbluesency: The Selected Poems of Amiri*

Baraka/LeRoi Jones (1961-1995), edited by Paul Vangelisti, Marsilio Publishers, 1995.

Brown, Lloyd W., *Amiri Baraka,* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980.

Harris, William J., *The Poetry and Politics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic,* Columbia: University ofMissouri Press, 1985.

--------, *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader,* New York

City: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991.

Horowitz, David A., Peter N. Carroll, and David D. Lee, eds., *On the Edge: A New History of 20th-Century America,* Los Angeles: West Publishing Co., 1990.

Hudson, Theodore R., *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka,* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1973.

Jones, Hettie, *How I Became Hettie Jones,New York: E. P. Dutton, 1990.*

Jones, LeRoi, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note,* New York: Corinth Books, 1961.

Rosenthal, M. L., *The New Poets: American & British Poetry Since World War II,* New York:Oxford University Press, 1967.

Sollors, Werner, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism, "* New York:Columbia University Press, 1978.

Woodard, Komozi, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) and Black Power Politics,* Chapel Hill: University ofNorth Carolina Press, 1999.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Poetry for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

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:

Editor, Poetry for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535