In Particular Study Guide

In Particular by Elena Karina Byrne

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

Elena Karina Byrne's poem "In Particular" was published in her first poetry collection, *The Flammable Bird*, in 2002. The poem examines the subconscious, or primitive, mind, a topic that has interested Byrne since childhood when she was exposed to art and visual imagery at an early age through her parents, who were both artists. Through the poem, Byrne tries to convey visually the quality of this primitive mind, which Byrne views as a source of strength for her artistic passions. After establishing the power of this unconscious mind, Byrne examines the effect that this part of the brain has on the conscious mind during a crisis situation when the primitive brain resorts to instinct, reaching a state of awareness before the conscious mind. Through her specific visual imagery, Byrne explores one of these typical emergencies, isolating the "particular" moment that precedes this potential disaster and examining what goes through a person's mind in this moment. Ultimately, Byrne's poem explores the power and resourcefulness of this hidden part of the mind in everyday human experience. A current copy of the poem can be found in *The Flammable Bird*, which was published in 2002 by Zoo Press.

Author Biography

Elena Karina Byrne was born on September 10, 1959, in Los Angeles, California. Her mother was a painter, and her father was a gifted craftsman who taught drawing, two influences that gave Byrne an early appreciation for art and for the visual. In fact, Byrne originally thought that she would be an artist, too. But when she was fourteen, she discovered poetry and fell in love with the visual imagery created by words. After graduating from Brentwood High School, she earned her bachelor's degree from Sarah Lawrence College in New York, during which time she also took classes at Harvard and Wheelock College. She was accepted to New York University's graduate program but decided to take a year off to go to England to write, paint, and teach. In Bath, England, she met Peter Byrne, singer and songwriter in the British pop band Naked Eyes, and the two were married. For the next two decades, Byrne taught writing and English to children, teens, and adults in England and California and submitted her poetry, including "In Particular," to various journals.

Byrne has been active in the poetry world and still teaches poetry to children and adults. In addition, she served for twelve years as the full-time regional director of the Poetry Society of America in Los Angeles and has served as poetry consultant for the Getty Research Institute. Since 1991, Byrne has been program director and moderator for Share Our Strength's annual readings for hunger relief and also serves as consultant and poetry moderator for the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books. Byrne, during National Poetry Month, conducts live, guerilla-style poetry readings on Metropolitan Transit Authority metro cars and also works with the MTA to place poetry placards on over three thousand buses, bringing poetry to those on their daily commute.

Plot Summary

Lines 1—10

"In Particular" begins by introducing the concept of "Recognition in the body." Byrne notes that this recognition, or consciousness, "moves like a swarm of bees: you know all / over at once." This language evokes an image that many readers can relate to, the moment when something unclear or unknown becomes instantly clear or known. This feeling of sudden inspiration, or the commonly defined "a-ha" moment, cannot be predicted; it just happens. Byrne begins to explore the effect of this inspirational feeling, beginning in the second half of the third line: "Your place / in history has not been betrayed," she writes. This may seem an odd use of language to some readers, but it becomes clearer upon further examination. When Byrne says "place / in history," she is discussing the actual life history of a person, the realistic details that make up one's daily life. This tangible realism is not "betrayed," as Byrne notes. It still has its place. But it is contrasted with this sudden feeling of inspiration, which forces a person to find out that "what you really feel follows / no language." In other words, whereas the everyday details of a person's life can be adequately described in realistic terms, this sudden inspiration, or revelation, can indicate what a person really feels about something, and this feeling often defies language. Sometimes, people are struck with one of these revelations, and, though powerful, it is something that they cannot express in words. Yet, this is exactly what Byrne is attempting to do, describe an indescribable feeling.

In the second half of line 6, Byrne offers more language to try to describe this feeling of inspiration. As with the "swarm of bees," she uses similar types of animal imagery when she says "wild stir / of insects, flurry of birds." Again, these are both attempts by Byrne to express the all-consuming, sudden feeling of inspiration. The words "wild" and "flurry," just like the word "swarm," convey the sense of speed. Byrne's next image slows down the pace of this image: "one bone / of the earth shows through, night root / tightened within its ground." Whereas the animal imagery evoked images of sudden activity, the "bone / of the earth" image conveys a sense of stability and structure. Byrne is using this image of the bone as a symbol. A symbol is a physical object, action, or gesture that also represents an abstract concept, without losing its original identity. Symbols appear in literature in one of two ways: They can be local symbols, meaning that their symbolism is only relevant within a specific literary work; they can also be universal symbols, meaning that their symbolism is based on traditional associations that are widely recognized, regardless of context. In this poem, the symbol of the bone is a universal symbol. People often refer to bones□and, by inference, skeletons□as a type of support structure. For example, when a new building is being constructed, workers will usually build a steel skeleton, on which to rest all of the other materials.

The bone image in the poem works in a similar way. Byrne says that one bone of the earth is showing through, implying that the rest of the skeleton is hidden. This is Byrne's attempt to express the vastness of the unconscious, or hidden, mind. The inspiration mentioned at the beginning of the poem is only one bone showing through the earth. In

this case, Byrne is using the earth as a local symbol to stand for the unconscious human mind. Her reasoning makes sense. The earth, like the unconscious mind, is a varied object filled with vast, undiscovered portions. Byrne carries this earth-as-mind symbolism further, calling the bone a "night root," implying that the bone, or inspiration, goes much deeper "within its ground," into areas that are dark, or unknown, to humanity. The use of the word "night" helps to reinforce this idea of darkness, or the unknown.

Because Byrne chooses to right justify the ninth line of the poem, the tenth line sticks out: "Can we be hypnotized by the primitive?" By making this line stick out, Byrne gives it extra importance. This makes sense, because the "primitive," or unconscious, mind is what Byrne is interested in; it is the concept that sets up the rest of the poem.

Lines 11—16

In line 11, Byrne moves from the indescribable feeling of inspiration to a specific, describable occurrence from the poet's life. "I heard a *tick, tick, tick* / once, turned and stared with the light / thinking about nothing." At this point, the reader can only guess what the ticking sound means. The two most likely ideas are a clock or a bomb, both of which make ticking noises. But regardless of which use Byrne intends, it is important for readers to remain aware of the sound because when poets employ sound in their poetry, it usually has special significance. In any case, this ticking sound catches the poet's attention and causes her to turn and stare, her surroundings an unidentified light source, all the while thinking about nothing. Since the poet has given no real sense of setting, where and when the poem is taking place, the light source could be anything. The fact that the poet is thinking about nothing at this point means that her mind is in its normal, everyday state. She is not literally "thinking about nothing"; her conscious mind is just thinking about nothing in particular, nothing that would cause her to stop and focus on what her mind is doing.

The next few lines read: "But I noticed the fine grain of sink wood / like waves, weaving, the real bending / of trees against wind, over□how beautiful it was." These lines accomplish two tasks: They establish at least a tentative setting, a room that contains a sink, most likely a kitchen; and they take the reader back into the unconscious, primitive mind, again using imagery and symbolism to try to convey a sense of an indescribable feeling. In this case, the poet, startled by the ticking sound, turns toward the sound and notices the wood grain on the sink. As before, with the earth and bone symbols, the wood takes on symbolic meaning, as the poet imagines the curvy wood grain as water waves, or as trees bending from the force of a gust of wind. These nature symbols, which are consistent with the other nature symbols the poet has used in the previous lines, convey the poet's appreciation for the "beautiful" quality of the wood's appearance, at least as her unconscious mind interprets this appearance.

Lines 17—27

In line seventeen, Byrne shifts again and, as before, gives more specific details about the setting: "This is / what it is like before sudden disaster, before / the inhospitable truth." What Byrne has been describing, in other words, is the mental equivalent of the calm before the storm. In the poem, Byrne first of all discussed the power and mystery of the unconscious mind and then gave readers an example of how an outside stimulus, such as the ticking sound, can mobilize this unconscious mind to focus on specific details□such as the wood grain. This intense focus on specific details takes the mind away from its normal state, where it is "thinking about nothing," just going through the paces of its day. In the process, a person's perception of time changes, as moments in time such as the examination of the wood grain are frozen and examined in greater detail.

In the next line, Byrne gives more insight into the unconscious mind, referring to it as "our other brain, the one / which cannot speak, the one who sleeps incipient / on the job." This line refers back to line 13, in which the poet is "thinking about nothing." This primitive, unconscious, mind is the one that gets humans through the routine of their days. Unlike the conscious mind, which humans are very aware of, the unconscious mind is a behind-the-scenes player, the one that "walks the dog," as line 22 indicates. But as the poem indicates, when faced with a sudden, intense situation, such as the unnamed "disaster," the ability of the unconscious mind to switch gears and focus intently becomes a survival tactic, because the unconscious mind functions on instinct, taking in a massive amount of detail in a short time in order to give the rest of the brain the tools it needs to act. Byrne expresses this when she notes that the unconscious mind "gives in, hears / the *tick, tick, tick*, turns / toward it with the light." Here, Byrne is again referencing the ticking sound, which prompts the unconscious mind to make "us look□whether for the first / or last time, we look." This emphasis on "last" is a reference to death, which underscores the idea of "sudden disaster." Although the poem never specifies what the disaster is, or what the poet is looking at, in the end it does not matter. Byrne's purpose, as she has shown throughout the poem, is to explore the meaning and power of the subconscious human mind, which normally functions unseen but which has the ability to suddenly mobilize human thought and action through creative inspirations or a heightened state of awareness that is sometimes necessary for survival.

Themes

The Unconscious Mind

The poem's main theme concerns the unconscious, or primitive, human mind, which Byrne initially introduces through the concept of "recognition." The unconscious mind recognizes, or becomes conscious of, something before the conscious mind does. It is the unconscious mind's job to recognize an idea or situation and to make the conscious mind aware of this thought so that the conscious mind can choose the best way to respond to the stimulus. Normally, as Byrne notes, the unconscious mind helps humans function on autopilot: it "walks the dog" and handles other mundane tasks of everyday life. As Byrne notes, it "cannot speak" because the human language functions are tied to the conscious brain. The unconscious mind can only function on its instinct and inform the conscious mind. Byrne underscores the effect that this primitive mind has on the conscious mind when she notes at the end of the poem that the unconscious mind "makes us look" at something. Although it is not the part of the brain that people normally think of, it is, as Byrne demonstrates, a crucial component of humans' observational intellect, since it often knows about something before the conscious brain does. Ultimately, the two work in conjunction to prepare a person for dealing with specific situations.

Creative Inspiration

One of these situations is the creative inspiration that strikes people, suddenly and unexpectedly. Byrne uses various words, such as "swarm," "wild," and "flurry," to convey this sense of revelation, which many artists, writers, and other creative types experience regularly as they craft their works. As Byrne notes, this inspiration often manifests itself in a way that "what you really feel follows / no language." The emphasis of the word "really" implies that up until the time of the inspiration a person believes one thing, and with the addition of this revelation or inspiration this belief or feeling changes, or at least is called into question. This change can be so drastic that it can cause a person to feel that his or her "place / in history" has "been betrayed." In other words, every person has his or her own identity, which is built up over time and which is founded on certain core beliefs. But sometimes when people experience the profound lightning flash of creative inspiration, this new thought can challenge their beliefs or feelings, causing them to feel that their "place" has been betrayed. This feeling can be even more profound, since, as Byrne notes, what people really feel "follows / no language." When people tap into their primitive mind, which, once again, is not attached to the human language function, their revelations can be scary because people cannot always express them. This idea gets to the heart of the creative process itself, which involves formulating and honing new ideas in the chaos of the unconscious mind and eventually imposing order on them□with the help of the conscious mind's language and action functions□by adapting them into a form that others can understand.

Crisis Situations

Another situation in which the unconscious mind plays a role is in a "sudden disaster" or other intense situations in which a person's body and mind are mobilized for action. As with creative inspiration, the primitive mind recognizes a situation before the conscious mind. In the poem, Byrne visualizes the effect of this recognition by demonstrating how, in these intense situations, time can seem to stand still, as the unconscious mind snaps from its normal dormant status to high alert, examining the aspects of a person's surroundings in detail, in an attempt to provide the conscious mind with the information it needs to act.

Style

While the first part of the poem, where Byrne talks about the primitive mind in general, seems to serve merely as an introduction to the topic, this section has another, very important purpose. This first section foreshadows, or hints at, what is to come later in the poem. The style of language that Byrne uses to discuss creative inspiration in this first section, lines 1—10, also foreshadows the idea of sudden disaster. For example, when the poem first starts, Byrne describes inspiration as being "like a swarm of bees." While this type of language conveys speed, it also has negative connotations, since bees sting and are often looked at based on this negative fact. Likewise, as the poem continues, Byrne uses phrases such as "wild stir / of insects" and "flurry of birds." Again, while the primary purpose of these words is to convey the sudden speed with which an inspiration hits somebody, these words also have negative overtones. When bees "swarm," insects stir in a "wild" fashion, or birds fly away in a "flurry," it is often a survival tactic. Either a predator has been spotted or another stimulus has been identified that taps into the creatures' instinct and forces them to act. Even the use of the word "tightened" in line 9 has negative emotional overtones, as if somebody's gut is being tightened□which is one of the common physiological responses when a human is exposed to a stressful or potentially dangerous stimulus. Collectively, all of these potent words foreshadow the negative "sudden disaster" situation later in the poem, a situation that carries with it an "inhospitable truth." Although this truth is never clearly expressed, it is quite possible, as the words "last time" indicate, that this truth is a potentially fatal disaster.

Historical Context

When Byrne wrote "In Particular," she had the benefit of a very rich century's worth of research on human consciousness and intelligence. The twentieth century witnessed a huge leap forward in the understanding of the human brain, thanks in part to the introduction of psychoanalysis, a method that sought to investigate disorders of the mind. Psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud, one of the early psychoanalytic theorists and practitioners, believed that these disorders were caused by conflict between the conscious mind and repressed forces that resided in a person's unconscious mind. The way to treat these disorders, psychoanalysts believed, was to use dream analysis, free association, and other mental tools to try to discover these problematic, repressed forces and work through their underlying causes. But until the late twentieth century, when biomedical science also made a huge leap forward, psychoanalysis relied largely on theory to support its claims. Current psychophysiological research into the human central nervous system, however, seems to tentatively support many of the twentieth-century ideas about the unconscious. Researchers have even surmised that something as complex and mysterious as human memory function may be based on chemical changes within the brain. As psychologists and other scientists continue to map the human brain, this field promises only to become more popular.

Yet, as exciting as these developments have been in advancing the understanding of human consciousness and intelligence, science has also been working over the past century to apply the concept of human intelligence to nonhuman objects such as robots. Artificial intelligence, or machines whose operating systems mimic aspects of human cognitive processes, was a staple of science fiction in the twentieth century. As is the case with some other science fiction concepts such as space travel, science is starting to catch up with fiction. Computers today are extremely advanced compared to their early counterparts, and researchers and scientists continue to try to imbue robots and other machines with certain elements of human consciousness, such as learning, reasoning, and problem solving. Part of this push comes from an attempt to create machines that can adapt and thus be used in a number of commercial applications such as household assistants. The hypothetical danger in this, which has also been depicted in many science fiction works, is that machines will become smarter than their human masters and will rebel. Several films in the late 1990s and early 2000s explored the idea of machines that can think for themselves. Some of them, such as the wildly popular film *The Matrix* (1999), depicted a war between humans and machines. In this film, the character of Neo (played by Keanu Reeves), learns that his entire life has been an illusion, controlled by thinking machines who have enslaved humanity.

Other recent films have taken a more philosophical approach to artificial intelligence, examining whether or not a machine can ever truly be considered human. One notable example of this genre is *Bicentennial Man* (1999)□a film based on a classic Isaac Asimov story□in which Robin Williams plays a robot who desires to become human as he gains a greater number of human emotions. Likewise, one of the most hyped films of 2001, Stephen Spielberg's *Artificial Intelligence: AI*, features the character David Swinton, played by Haley Joel Osment, who is a highly advanced robotic boy. Like the

classic Disney character Pinocchio, David wishes he were a real boy so that he could earn the love of his human mother. Whether human or machine, the subject of consciousness has proven to be an endlessly fascinating topic for both scientists and authors and will likely remain so in the future.

Critical Overview

Byrne has been highly active in the world of poetry, holding several prestigious posts and publishing her poems in several distinguished journals. It is a little surprising then that Byrne's first collection, *The Flammable Bird*, received such little critical notice. The attention the book has received, however, has been overwhelmingly positive. In his review of the book for *Solo: A Journal of Poetry*, M. L. Williams calls Byrne's collection "a terrific first book, crackling with linguistic energy." Though Williams likes the collection as a whole, he does have favorites, which he notes "are mercurial and possessed, enjambing through a tumult of images and ideas that surprise and arrest." Williams concludes that "Byrne has crafted an excellent, surprisingly mature first collection of poems."

Williams is not alone in this assessment. In his review comments for *The Flammable Bird*'s back cover, fellow poet Tom Lux notes the following: "Sometimes, when a gifted poet bides his or her time, their first book seems more like a fourth or fifth book. *The Flammable Bird* is like that." David St. John, another poet who submitted review comments for the book's cover, calls Byrne's collection "a marvelous debut" and a "powerful and exquisite collection of poems." St. John notes Byrne's focus on the layers of human consciousness, saying that the book "invites us . . . into both sublime pleasures and the raw psychological densities of contemporary experience." Yet another poet who submitted review comments for the book's cover, Sherod Santos, notes the power of "the heady, headlong language of her poems," which reveal an "artful liturgy of devotional wonders."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Byrne's use of imagery and sounds in the poem.

Byrne's poem delves into the concept of human consciousness, exploring how the human brain's state of awareness works on a daily basis, as well as how it functions in particular instances, such as when a person becomes creatively inspired or is faced with a crisis. In his review comments for *The Flammable Bird*'s book cover, fellow poet David St. John notes Byrne's interest in human consciousness. St. John says that Byrne "invites us into the layered realms of consciousness, into both sublime pleasures and the raw psychological densities of contemporary experience." Throughout "In Particular," however, Byrne focuses mainly on the hidden, unconscious part of the human mind. She even tries to explain this part of the mind by expressing the specific feelings that it produces in humans and by demonstrating its overall purpose in human consciousness. But since this part of the mind deals with feelings that often transcend words, these feelings are hard to define. In order to convey her thoughts about the topic to readers, Byrne employs imagery and sounds.

"In Particular" is an extremely visual poem, by necessity. As she indicates in the first line, the poem is going to address "Recognition in the body." This is an intangible, subjective concept that is hard to express fully using words alone. As a result, Byrne expresses the idea of recognition through a unified system of imagery. This is a common method that poets use when the ideas they are discussing relate more to thoughts or feelings than to physical objects that can be found in the real world. In Byrne's case, she chooses a unified system of nature imagery, an appropriate choice, given the fact that she is discussing humans' primitive brain, which functions on instinct, as do many living things in nature. In fact, in her first use of imagery, "a swarm of bees," Byrne ties into this idea of instinct. When bees swarm, it is a very instinctual, coordinated group effort. The same thing is true when there is a "wild stir / of insects" or a "flurry of birds." All of these images depict instinctual processes that these natural creatures perform for a specific purpose□usually to protect or provide for their respective communities.

In her attempt to visualize the characteristics of the unconscious mind, Byrne employs other forms of natural imagery besides birds and insects. She also uses broader aspects of nature, such as "the earth" itself. Byrne is fascinated by the unconscious mind, so much so that she imagines it as complex and mysterious as a planet. On this planet, recognition, which Byrne visualizes as a partially submerged bone, is literally the tip of the iceberg of the unconscious. In other words, while Byrne is exploring the idea of sudden recognition in the unconscious mind, she is also stating that this feeling of inspiration□the end product that humans actually experience□is merely the surface characteristic. Like a small piece of dinosaur bone poking out of the ground, indicating the presence of a huge, submerged skeleton, Byrne sees the unconscious mind as

going much deeper than the part humans actually experience. Her use of the words "night root" underscores this idea, since roots are also hidden in the ground.

When Byrne changes course and begins talking about a specific event from her past, she incorporates other forms of natural imagery, beginning with an image of "light." Byrne notes that she "turned and stared with the light" but never defines what this light source is. It is likely that Byrne is using the light to visualize another concept, an idea that can be inferred from the fact that the light contrasts sharply with the "night root" image from before. By establishing the unconsciousness as a dark, subterranean place, then, by extension, light signifies the conscious, realistic world of everyday human experience. In this realistic world, people go about their days "thinking about nothing," until they are faced with a stimulus that forces their unconscious mind to become suddenly aware. In the poem, this sudden awareness is also expressed in terms of nature imagery: "But I noticed the fine grain of sink wood / like waves, weaving, the real bending / of trees against wind, over□how beautiful it was." Although at first Byrne seems to be talking only about the wood that is on her sink, as the unconscious mind becomes aware and speeds up its observation, it fixes this moment in time, noting minute details in the wood grain that are expressed in the form of natural imagery such as waves and trees.

There has to be a reason for this heightened awareness, of course, some outside stimulus that mobilizes the unconscious mind. In this poem, that stimulus is a sound: "I heard a *tick, tick, tick*." Normally, when poets include a sound in the poem, it is used for a very specific purpose. In this poem, this ticking sound takes on an even greater importance because it is the only sound in the poem. Though the natural imagery, such as the "swarm of bees" and the "flurry of birds," indirectly implies sound, Byrne chooses not to have the bees "buzz" or the birds "flap their wings." This is intentional on Byrne's part. It is almost as if people are in a hypnotic state during most of the time when their unconscious minds are running the show, as Byrne suggests when she asks, "Can we be hypnotized by the primitive?" In a hypnotic state, people are not conscious of their surroundings and must be led through even the most basic actions by a mediator, the hypnotist. This, Byrne is saying, is the function of the unconscious mind. We are hypnotized by it on a daily basis, as it works behind the scenes to get us through the days. It is the one, she notes, who "walks the dog" and which takes care of other such mundane tasks. It is the one, to use another real-world example not mentioned in the poem, who makes sure that people drive home safely from work each day, a journey that the conscious mind cannot always remember to do.

But when the poet hears the ticking sound, it yanks the unconscious out of its normal state, where it "sleeps incipient / on the job." This ticking sound has pulled Byrne's mind out of its standby state, where it was "thinking about nothing," and the primitive brain begins assessing the details of the situation, in this case fixating on the sink's wood grain. What is this ticking sound, one may ask? One explanation is that this ticking is the sound of a clock, or even of time running out. But a ticking sound is also commonly associated with a bomb. In either case, a ticking sound is one that is usually used to evoke a sense of danger or desperation. Since it is highly unlikely that a bomb is about to go off in the poet's kitchen or that a ticking clock would startle her, one can surmise

that Byrne is not thinking of the sound as a literal ticking sound but instead as a symbol. The ticking quality could be Byrne's way of conveying that this sound, whatever it is, is the sign of the impending "sudden disaster" that Byrne mentions in the poem. For example, since the poet is standing in her kitchen, the ticking could symbolize the ringing of a phone, and it could be one of those instinctual moments when a person suddenly knows that the caller is bearing bad news, such as the death of a loved one.

The idea of death, and mortality in general, is expressed at the end of the poem, when Byrne says that the unconscious mind, once alerted, "makes us look□whether for the first / or last time, we look." The use of the words "last time" underscores the severity of the disaster, which could be fatal□for the poet or somebody else. Because of this negative connotation, the unconscious mind does not want to acknowledge the "inhospitable truth," but eventually it "gives in" and "hears / the *tick, tick, tick*." Once this happens, the unconscious mind turns toward the sound, whatever it is, and is forced to acknowledge "the light." Again, just as with the previous reference to the light, Byrne is talking about the symbolic light of consciousness, which is a contrast to the "night" darkness of the unconscious mind. In other words, by giving in, the unconsciousness assesses the details of the situation and then turns control over to the conscious mind, which possesses the tools of language and action necessary to deal with the sudden disaster.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "In Particular," in *Poetry for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Topics for Further Study

Byrne's poem describes the way that time can slow and details can emerge when one is faced with an intense situation. Recall an event such as this in your own life and write a short, descriptive essay about how time occurred for you during this event.

Research the various theories of time and how it passes or appears to pass. Think about how time has appeared to slow down or speed up in your own life and discuss your thoughts on the subject, using research and examples from your life to support your claims.

In her poem, Byrne evokes the subconscious mind. Read the latest research on the structure and function of the mind and create a diagram that outlines the major mental functions and their respective locations in the brain.

Research two different theories of the subconscious mind and write a short essay comparing and contrasting these theories. Research and write a short biography of one of the main theorists. Discuss how details from this person's life might have affected his or her thoughts about the mind.

Byrne has stated that she enjoys translating the visual into poetry. Choose an image from a work of visual art and transform it into your own poem.

What Do I Read Next?

In Byrne's poem, she contrasts conscious versus unconscious thought in the human brain. In Lise Eliot's book *What's Going on in There?: How the Brain and Mind Develop in the First Five Years of Life* (1999), the author examines modern research on brain development and discusses how intelligence evolves in the early stage of the human life cycle. The book also discusses the development of motor skills, emotional growth, and memory.

Byrne's poem takes the reader inside the author's thought processes. In William Faulkner's acclaimed novel *As I Lay Dying* (1930), readers hear the inner monologues of several members of the Bundren family as they take the body of the family's matriarch, Addie, to the town where Addie requested to be buried.

Byrne's poem describes the primitive mind as it heightens and speeds up its awareness to take in every minute detail, making it seem as if time is passing more slowly. In James Gleick's *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (2000), the author examines how various aspects of modern civilized life have accelerated the pace of everyday human experience.

In James Joyce's controversial modernist novel *Ulysses* (1922), readers are taken inside the head of two characters, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, on June 16, 1904, in Dublin, Ireland. Through the use of stream-of-consciousness writing, Joyce examines this typical day in the characters' lives through their eyes and shows the sheer number and variety of thoughts and experiences that go through any human mind on even the most typical of days.

Drawing on historical details and educated guesswork, Alan Lightman's bestselling novel *Einstein's Dreams* (1993) tries to recreate the dreams that the author imagines the physicist might have had in 1905 when he was working on his now-famous theory of relativity. Lightman, who teaches physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, takes the reader inside these hypothetical dreams where time is experienced in different, bizarre ways.

Further Study

Cawsey, Alison, *The Essence of Artificial Intelligence*, Prentice Hall, 1998.

This book provides a short, accessible introduction for students who are new to the concept of artificial intelligence. Whereas most books on this topic include a formal, mathematical approach, Cawsey gives an overview of the major artificial intelligence topics and provides clear descriptions of techniques and algorithms. It includes a glossary.

Mitchell, Stephen A., and Margaret J. Black, *Freud and beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought*, Basic Books, 1995.

This book offers a clear historical overview of the major psychoanalytic theorists and theories in the twentieth century, starting with Sigmund Freud. The book includes biographies, short descriptions of key concepts, and clinical examples.

Stevens, Anthony, *Jung: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Carl Jung was one of the twentieth century's most original theorists of the unconscious mind, but he did not always express his ideas clearly and thus has been largely overshadowed by theorists such as Freud. In this book, Stevens gives an overview of the main Jungian concepts, including the collective unconscious and persona. This text provides a good introduction to Jungian thought.

Pinker, Steven, *How the Mind Works*, W. W. Norton, 1997.

Pinker, one of the world's leading cognitive scientists, examines the latest research on the human brain. In this bestselling book, he discusses how the mind evolved and demystifies why humans act and feel the way they do. Pinker ties these topics into pop culture references as wide-ranging as *Star Trek* and Marilyn Monroe.

Bibliography

Byrne, Elena Karina, "In Particular," in *The Flammable Bird*, Zoo Press, 2002, p. 36.

Lux, Tom, in *The Flammable Bird*, Zoo Press, 2002, back cover.

Santos, Sherod, in *The Flammable Bird*, Zoo Press, 2002, back cover.

St. John, David, in *The Flammable Bird*, Zoo Press, 2002, back cover.

Williams, M. L., "What the Fire Said: *The Flammable Bird* and *The Kingdom of the Instant*," in *Solo: A Journal of Poetry*, Vol. 6, 2003, pp. 123—25.

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