The Missing Study Guide

The Missing by Thom Gunn

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Contents

Introduction

Completed in 1997, Thom Gunn's "The Missing" takes its place among the most eloquent and poignant testaments to have arisen from the literature of AIDS. Part elegy, part rueful meditation, the poem is told from the perspective of the survivor, one who has been left behind in the wake of a string of senseless deaths. Here, the speaker faces an uncertain and sorely compromised future stripped of the loving support of the friends on whom he has come to rely so heavily. And yet, more than a confrontation of the mystery and irrationality of death, the poem explores the extent to which society influences and shapes the individual. It celebrates the meaningful connections and lasting ties that punctuate a life and often outlive it in the realm of memory.

"The Missing" first appeared in Gunn's 1992 collection, *The Man with Night Sweats.* As its title declares, the AIDS crisis is one of its central preoccupations. Night sweats are one of the symptoms of AIDS and often come as a harrowing harbinger of a yet undiagnosed disease that has already taken up residence in the body. Clearly, this grim and visceral detail indicates a book that is honest in its unsentimental portraits of lives cut short and of people languishing in their prime.

In addition, the poem displays another hallmark of Gunn's poetry: a complex and seamlessly rendered formal structure. Written in iambic pentameter and adopting an *abab* rhyme scheme, "The Missing" is a unique example of a traditional, formal poem taking a contemporary theme as its subject. "Rhythmic form and subject-matter are locked in a permanent embrace," Gunn writes in an essay expressing his theories of poetics, and the embrace is an image that recurs throughout Gunn's work and figures centrally in "The Missing." It is an image of both friendship and desire, two sources of empowerment and identity. But it also an image with the dark shadow of death looming over it, suggesting the infection, the tragedy to which desire can lead.

Author Biography

Thompson William Gunn was born in Gravesend, Kent, England, on August 29,1929. His parents, both journalists, relocated to the London suburb of Hempstead Heath, where they outlasted the Blitz and the rigors of the war. His late teens saw a stint in the British Army and a brief period living and working in Paris. It was there that Gunn made his first serious foray into writing, reading the French masters and trying his hand at fiction. In the early 1950s, he attendedTrinity College at Cambridge and published his first collection of verse, *Fighting Terms,* while still an undergraduate. A creative writing fellowship atStanford University brought him to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1954. In 1958, Gunn accepted an offer to teach at the University ofCalifornia at Berkeley, all the time keeping one ear tuned to the sexual and cultural revolution sweeping through San Francisco and the nation. After a year in London, Gunn gave up the university post in 1966, teaching briefly atPrinceton University and immersing himself in the rhythms of New York City's bohemian enclave, Greenwich Village.

Despite the move to the East Coast, Gunn would not stray from San Francisco for long. His more than thirty books of poetry and prose bear witness to an ever-evolving style of clarity and emotional honesty. Gunn could be best described as an Anglo-American poet, known for his interest in both traditional and free verse and the facility with which he moves between the two. A recipient of numerous accolades, including a MacArthur Fellowship and the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, he still resides in San Francisco, where he continues to teach part-time as a senior lecturer at the University ofCalifornia at Berkeley.

Poem Text

Now as I watch the progress of the plague,
The friends surrounding me fall sick, grow thin,
and drop away. Bared, is my shape less vague
 Sharply exposed and with a sculpted skin?
I do not like the statue's chill contour,
Not nowadays. The warmth investing me
Led outward through mind, limb, feeling, and more
In an involved increasing family.
Contact of friend led to another friend
Supple entwinement through the living mass
Which for all that I knew might have no end,
 Image of an unlimited embrace.
I do not just feel ease, though comfortable:
Aggressive as in some ideal of sport,
With ceaseless movement thrilling through the
whole,
their push kept me as firm as their support.
But death Their deaths have left me less defined:
It was their pulsing presence made me clear.
I borrowed from it, I was unconfined,
Who tonight balance unsupported here,
Eyes glaring from raw marble, in a pose
Languorously part-buried in the block,

Shins perfect and no calves, as if I froze

Between potential and a finished work.

Abandoned incomplete, shape of a shape,

In which exact detail shows the more strange,

Trapped in unwholeness, I find no escape

Back to the play of constant give and change.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-4:

From the onset, the speaker is established as an observer, watching the spread of an unnamed "plague"□the AIDS epidemic. As the speaker helplessly witnesses, his friends wilt and expire. Their bodies, unable to resist the spread of the disease, "grow thin." They become foreign and altered as they succumb to the virus, vulnerable, or as the speaker puts it, "bared." This slow yet sudden expiration prompts the speaker to examine his own state. Is health something the speaker can still rely on without question? Will he be able to avoid this dissipation, in which the body grows more and more "vague"? Though his "shape" can be "sculpted," though the body can be built up and strengthened, ultimately there is no real cure for chronic diseases like AIDS.

Lines 5-8:

While steeling the body's exterior, growing tougher in the face of tragedy may seem like a logical strategy, it is a response the speaker ultimately rejects. "I do not like the statue's chill contour" he asserts, as it is equated with an emotional coldness, an indifference to or denial of the terrible reality of the epidemic. Self-defense or self-protection could result in a dangerous isolation at a time when the action and togetherness of community are needed. It is a mode of response the speaker feels is no longer appropriate, "not nowadays." What is needed instead is the unification of all the body's reserves, combining the intellect, physical strength, and emotion ("mind, limb, feeling") into a greater and more powerful whole. Only then can this strength be projected outward in a vital connection with others. In the stanza's final line, the speaker effectively employs the literary device alliteration, or the repetition of initial sounds. "In" is echoed in "involved," which once again repeats its sound with "increasing." Here the poet has found a way to match form and content. The specific choice of words and sounds mirrors and validates the poem's argument, the specific point it is trying to establish. Thus, the connection formed in the repetition of sounds is an aural way of demonstrating the connectedness of the speaker's evergrowing "family."

Lines 9-12:

In this sharply observed and delicately phrased stanza, Gunn injects a dark irony into the poem. The onslaught of the disease has spurred a mobilization, as friends, both the stricken and the concerned, unite for support and action. First described in the second stanza, the third extends and deepens the portrayal of this process of coming together. In the face of the grim realities of the epidemic, fellowship and community have prevailed, spreading from "friend ... to ... friend." These close bonds grow and replicate, moving from a "supple en-twinement" to "an unlimited embrace." And yet upon closer examination the bonds are the source of something far more insidious. Gunn's words

are filled with dark intention and double meanings. While the diction fittingly conveys the rallying spirit spreading among the speaker's friends, it also chillingly describes the pathology of the disease as well, spreading out in a lengthening chain of infection. In this light, the line "Contact of friend led to another friend" takes an ironic turn as the means of this growing camaraderie and growing intimacy becomes the very means through which the disease is transmitted. The joy and endless possibility of this brotherhood, "which for all that I knew might have no end" is subverted, turning to fear and helplessness when the world is faced with a virus that researchers and scientists have been unable to conquer.

Lines 13-16:

The double face of the language extends into the fourth stanza, although less overtly than before. On the surface, Gunn is still describing the spirit of unity, building and growing not only in his group of immediate acquaintances but far beyond. They are a source of comfort, "aggressive as in some ideal of sport." Here, the poem returns to the imagery of the first two stanzas, borrowing from the figure of the statue. While there its presence unsettled the speaker, by the fourth stanza the image of the physical body has been transformed. Now, the serf-contained strength has been brought out of isolation and is firmly rooted in this new context of friends. Thus, only when power is linked with others can its true potential be unleashed. Only then can the strength be sustained and made truly "firm." This support is necessary, for just as its power grows so does the potency and effect of the disease, "aggressive" in its own right, infecting and claiming countless numbers. When the shadow of disease is cast on the stanza, Gunn's words, "with ceaseless movement ... through the whole," take on a chilling impact in hinting at the unchecked devastation the "plague" may have on an unsuspecting population.

Lines 17-20:

In losing his friends to AIDS, the speaker feels he has also lost part of his identity. It is death that ultimately unsettles and topples his sense of community and wholeness. The end of line 17 mirrors the end of line 3 in answering the question posed in the first stanza. "Less vague" has given way to "less defined," as the speaker relied on the "pulsing presence" of others to make him more "clear." Now those sparks are dwindling. By the end of the stanza, Gunn's words once again echo the first two stanzas. Unlike the statue, the speaker was once "unconfined." But now that is changing, as he "[balances] unsupported here." In less than a stanza, "support" (line 16) has been transformed into its opposite and the freedom and fellowship, "the warmth investing me" (line 6) have devolved to the solitude of the opening.

Lines 21-24:

The sixth stanza continues to revisit the imagery of the opening. The speaker is still watching, "eyes glaring," but this time he observes "from raw marble," an imaginative

space into which he has projected himself. He is reverting back to the statue's pose, a form he rejected in the first line of the second stanza. This stanza is rife with contradictions and unresolved tensions. The speaker seems to be in the process of emerging from the marble and yet his body is positioned "languorously," a word that elicits connotations of softness and suppleness, in stark contrast to the hard rock. His body is "part-buried in the block," a symbol of his contrary stance. He wants to shield himself from the stark reality of a circle of friends devastated by AIDS. But he cannot. The disease will not go away, no matter how steeled, how posed, he makes himself. The third line furthers this contradictory stance. The shins are "perfect," but there are "no calves." He is incomplete, the one part elegantly formed, but negated by the absence of another, by the lack of a whole. The last line is another example of the complex, double nature of Gunn's language. The speaker could be talking of his own loss, by the death of friends and supporters, or directly referencing the lives claimed by AIDS. Here, fear and grief partially paralyze him and limit his own potential, just as disease has cut short the potential of the others. In other words, in the world of irony and contradiction the disease has occasioned, he is torn between the world of the living and the realm of the dead.

Lines 25-28:

In the final stanza, the notion of lives left incomplete is overtly stated. His friends have been robbed of the chance to realize the full arc of their existence. As a result, the speaker's life will suffer as well in the wake of this loss, and thus, it becomes clear why Gunn has adopted his verbal strategy of doublespeak. Though ostensibly focusing on himself, the speaker is really addressing, at the same time, the countless lives that have fallen victim to AIDS. As their lives have been "abandoned incomplete," so too has the poet been abandoned, left feeling incomplete as he has lost all the things these friends would have contributed to his own existence. Thus, this loss of a sense of community has ultimately narrowed the speaker's sense of self. The disease has symbolically and indirectly infected him as well. Again he returns to the worries voiced in the question at the end of the first stanza and provides yet another answer. No, the speaker seems to have resolved, now he is more vague, a "shape of a shape." To make matters worse, he is "trapped in unwholeness." He cannot proceed, feeling so ill-defined and bereft of the strength and support which once surrounded him. And yet he cannot go back, cannot "escape / Back to the play of constant give and change." The joy of interacting with these friends and the unknown, unpredictable future they would have shared is lost to him forever.

Themes

Community vs. Solitude

In "The Missing," the speaker assumes a terrible responsibility as a voice forced to speak not only for itself but the countless others whom death has silenced. It is the way the speaker solves this dilemma of representation that makes the poem a unique achievement. In speaking of the serf, the sudden unexpected condition of loss and loneliness in which the speaker is suddenly entrenched, he is able to address the grave plague that has threatened any sense of community. Thus, a vibrant and living link is established between the living and the dead that otherwise would be impossible.

The arc of the poem moves from solitude to a vital sense of community, and then back to the sole voice devoid of these social connections. In the first stanza, the speaker's friends have begun to "fall sick, grow thin, / And drop away." He finds himself confronting his own body, and thus his own mortality in light of this development. In the second through fourth stanzas, this self-consciousness is temporarily postponed by the "involved increasing family" that had once assembled around him. But this comfort was fleeting. The community assumes an ironic, if not paradoxical, presence in the poem. It was this very assembling of a group of friends and lovers that has allowed the disease to spread. By the fifth stanza, the poem begins its retrograde, its backward, movement. The speaker remains, "[balancing] unsupported here." Without the love and support of his friends, the speaker feels he is something less, "a shape of a shape," that can resort only to the slim comfort of memories. At its end, the poem does not offer any solutions, any realizations this pain has offered the speaker. In losing others, the speaker, "trapped in unwholeness," has ultimately lost part of himself as well.

Exposure vs. Self-Protection

The poem takes as its subject the spread of the deadly AIDS virus, a modern plague that has claimed millions of people worldwide. In lieu of a cure for the disease "Which for all I knew might have no end," the speaker presents the solidarity of those whose lives have been touched by the epidemic. Their unity is the one source of comfort and strength staving off the inevitable fate of those infected with the virus. And yet, in describing this community of the concerned, the poem assumes a hint of irony. "Contact of friend led to another friend," the speaker offers, presenting the story of his growing chain of acquaintances. But the diction here, the specific word choices, makes the speaker's true intent unclear. Is he describing this growing group of friends or the silent, unchecked progress of the disease? Opening oneself to others, to an intimate, sexual love, possibly means opening oneself to infection. Here, exposure to this thrilling "unlimited embrace" has a potentially deadly element.

An image central to this theme is the figure of the statue. To counteract or diffuse this threat of infection, the speaker assumes the static form of a man partially trapped in a

block of marble. In one sense, it is a posture of serf-protection. If his body becomes rigid, if his exterior is steeled to both the physical threat of infection and the emotional pain the AIDS crisis has occasioned, then the speaker can ensure his safety, can create a haven. But, again, Gunn's treatment of this image invests it with a double nature. While mimicking a statue may be an attempt at serf-preservation, ultimately it threatens and unsettles the speaker's well-being, and thus, the strategy becomes unacceptable: "I do not like the statue's chill contour." Metaphorically turning the self into stone only results in blocking "the warmth investing" the speaker that has ultimately led to this thriving network of friends. In this light, the statue becomes an image of cowardice and isolation. But despite how hard the speaker attempts to resist this solitary life of hiding, at the end of the poem he cannot escape it. Half-finished, only partially chiseled from the block, he is "Abandoned incomplete."

Loss of Identity

In the wake of such tragedy, the speaker is threatened with a loss of identity. "Their deaths have left me less defined: / It was their pulsing presence made me clear." The speaker has grown to rely on his family of friends, these close ties empowering him and keeping him "firm." "But death" has taken this all away, and the speaker is left to "balance unsupported" and alone. In light of this, another dimension to the image of the statue emerges. The speaker feels as if his body were "part-buried in the block." His reaching out to a community of friends can be likened to the figure starting to take shape, breaking free of the heavy block of stone. But despite the "Shins perfect," there are "no calves." They have not yet been formed. In other words, he is incomplete, lacking some essential parts. The balance between the self and the community that surrounds and supports it has been compromised. This external source is diminishing, and in its absence the speaker lacks an essentially complete and fully integrated wholeness. While a statue may embody strength and physical perfection, it is devoid of an inner life or a true identity. While it resembles a human form, it is nothing more than the "chill contour" of stone. Thus, the speaker is "Trapped in unwholeness," his eyes peering out from behind the "raw marble." The seemingly endless deaths that surround him have rendered him a living person trapped in a lifeless form.

Style

The first line of a poem is considered by many to be its most important. It is the reader's entry into the poem, introducing the work and establishing both expectation and the desire to delve further. In addition, it presents language in a pattern that is either puzzling or familiar, that mimics everyday speech or is foreign in its sound and arrangement. With "The Missing," the reader is immediately presented with a blend of these two different modes. The diction, or specific word choices, is simple (plain words that are easily recognizable). And yet as the first quatrain (four-line stanza) unfolds, a certain pattern emerges, a rhythm strikes the ear. There are ten syllables in every line, laid out in an almost regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. In the first line, for example, the stresses alternate, falling on "Now," "watch," the first syllable of "progress," "of," and "plague." This meter, or recurring pattern of beats, acts like an engine driving the poem and propelling the reader rhythmically through it. It is called iambic pentameter, meaning there are five ("penta") two-beat units in each line.

In addition, there is another formal device Gunn employs in "The Missing": an *abab* rhyme scheme. That means the last words of the first and third lines, and the second and fourth lines, respectively, match each other in their sounds. Most of Gunn's lines end with perfect rhymes as in "plague" and "vague." Others end on slant rhymes in which the sounds are similar but not precisely paired: "mass" and "embrace." Either way, these rhymes, in combination with the meter, are the glue that holds each stanza and ultimately the poem together.

These formal elements employed by Gunn achieve other effects as well. Gunn's poem of mortality and the death of friends never swerves toward the maudlin or overtly sentimental. The rhyme and meter help prevent this by imposing a regimen of strict control on the poem. Thus, the chaos and senseless loss the poem takes as its subject is counterbalanced, reined in by its form. The formal devices impose a sense of order and logic in the face of a threat and a reality against which the speaker is otherwise powerless. Here form attempts to tame the wild disorder of the speaker's world.

Historical Context

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) first crept into the world's consciousness in the early 1980s as the death toll started mounting. And yet, initially the seemingly scattered and random deaths were no indication of the millions the disease claims to this day. At its onset, the medical community was stunned and unprepared, fearing they had the makings of a modern plague, a virus of which they knew little and for which they had no cure. AIDS is a disease transferred through the exchange of bodily fluids, and it is commonly, though not exclusively, sexually transmitted or introduced through a blood transfusion. In light of such a pathology, experts predicted that the rate of transmission would skyrocket worldwide. Their fears proved true.

In the wake of growing fears, activists and medical professionals raced not only to dispel misconceptions about the disease, but to disseminate accurate information in the belief that public awareness was the best means of prevention. Initially, among those hardest hit by AIDS were homosexual men. After the *New York Times* reported early findings of the disease in 1981, AIDS was dubbed the Gay Cancer. While opportunistic diseases have little prejudice or preference for whom they strike, the epidemic presented a daunting setback to a community of activists fighting for societal acceptance and equal rights. Those involved in the gay community and the gay rights movement now had added responsibilities: advocate the allotment of research money, fight for the rights of the infected, and all the while care for the sick and dying.

At the time Thom Gunn's "The Missing" was completed in 1987, although a wealth of information was known about the disease when compared to the early 1980s, the relentless spread of AIDS continued unchecked. Similarly, the fear of infection was not on the decline either. AIDS had cut an especially wide swath through major urban centers, such as New York City and San Francisco, Gunn's hometown, where gay populations were high. Significant numbers of diagnosed cases began to emerge as well in people of all races, genders, and sexual orientations. Action and organization were needed.

On the local level, the "involved increasing family" Gunn cites in "The Missing," refers to his immediate group of friends. To him the disease was at its most tragic and most personal when it claimed those closest to him. But this cohesive unity also has a wider scope, possibly including the highly organized and unified gay community of San Francisco as well as AIDS activists and researchers everywhere. Within the first few years of the onset of the crisis, a collaborative network of city and state agencies, hospitals, health care providers, and community-based organizations (CBOs) began to develop. A large array of services evolved to help people who tested HIV-positive (usually a harbinger of the development of fullblown AIDS). This complex network became known as the San Francisco model of AIDS care. Long considered an exemplary approach, the San Francisco methods of care spread as people from around the world visited the city, interested in helping remove the stigma of AIDS and developing models of treatment. This increasing family turned out to be a passionate group of caring and talented individuals with a commitment to wipe out the disease.

The contributions of these various advocates and medical health professionals have resulted in significant strides not only in the treatment of AIDS but in its public perception as well. New medicines and new treatments aimed at staving off AIDS-related illnesses have extended and improved the lives of patients and significantly altered the strict death sentence a positive diagnosis once was. In the United States in 1997, AIDS deaths dipped for the first time since the onset of the epidemic. However, like the common cold and the various types of cancer, forms of prevention and treatment improve, but a cure remains elusive.

Critical Overview

Hugh Haughton in *The Times Literary Supplement* praises the *The Man with Night Sweats* for its "somewhat scaresome lucidity" and feels the poem "seeks to render permanent the transitory embraces through which we play out our need for each other and shield ourselves." Haughton also notes that "Gunn's verse has always been marked by a strange combination of intimacy and detachment... Gunn's lyrics hold experience and the reader at arm's length." In "The Missing," Haughton detects a poet "poignantly facing his physical vulnerability," as "the speaker constructs a kind of bounding shield out of the tightly interlaced ... rhymed ... quatrains." The reviewer sees the poem in terms of the embrace, a recurring image in the collection and Gunn's work in general. "Seeking to define his need for solidarity, he adopts another very different image of an 'embrace.' ... Of course the 'supple en-twinement' of that 'unlimited embrace,' the source of his sense of belonging within the 'increasing family,' has, of course, become the source of his crisis, leaving the poet precariously 'unsupported' and 'incomplete.'"

Henri Cole in *The Nation* comments on the form fitting such a poem "of mortality, where metrical patterns help control elegiac emotions, like the steady drum tap accompanying a coffin to its cemetery." He cites Gunn's collection as an "[example] of art produced at the historical moment it depicts and standing as a monument to the human spirit in the face of appalling suffering."

William Logan in *The New York Times Book Review* observes of Gunn, "Here his formal distances, his comforts in the methods of literary detachment, give him a purchase not available to poets more weakly personal. The poems are written in a measured voice of despair, every word a vain effort of memory, a memory that is the only memorial to these abbreviated lives." Although the collection is given a less than favorable review, Logan concludes, "Mr. Gunn's best poetry is a resistance to the beautiful, a withholding or withdrawing in the formality of the verse moment...."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Robert Bee is a freelance writer who teaches atRutgers University. He has published over 20 short stories and a number of book reviews. In this essay, he focuses on how "The Missing" fits within the dominant themes of Thorn Gunn 's career and responds to the affect of the AIDS crisis within the gay community.

Thom Gunn's poem "The Missing" is taken from his 1992 book, *The Man with Night Sweats,* a series of poems responding to the AIDS crisis. Gunn, a gay poet living in San Francisco, responds to the crisis in unsentimental, unflinching verse. As Deborah Landau points out in her essay, "How to Live. What to Do: The Poetics and Politics of AIDS": "By exposing the anguish and suffering brought on by AIDS, Gunn chooses an aesthetic strategy that might inspire empathy from readers who have never had a direct experience with the disease." Although other writers, such as the contemporary gay poet Paul Monette, have responded to the AIDS crisis through political rage, Gunn chooses a realistic portrayal of the ravages of the disease on the victims and their loved ones.

The poem's themes rest on a series of oppositions, beginning with the structure. "The Missing" is written in a rigorous, traditional form with rhymed couplets. The controlled form and restrained emotion contrasts with the horror and powerlessness the poet feels in the face of the ravaging disease. Gunn may need to write in a rigorous form to control or deal with such painful emotions and subject matter.

The poem contrasts the narrator's memories of the time before AIDS with the effect the disease has on his community. In the second and third stanza, Gunn describes a time before the plague in almost Utopian imagery. He seems to have found a romantic freedom after the gay rights movements of the late 1960s, when gay men and women could more openly explore their sexuality. He points out, "Contact of friend led to another friend, / Supple entwinement through the living mass / Which for all I knew might have no end, / Image of an unlimited embrace." He envisions a community so close that it becomes one "living mass," possibly embracing all humanity.

This passage resembles the Utopian imagery of some of Gunn's earlier poetry. In his essay "My Life Up to Now," reprinted in *The Occasions of Poetry,* he describes the freedom he felt in the 1960s and 1970s in London and especially San Francisco. For example, in "My Life Up to Now," he describes theGolden Gate Park in San Francisco, the scene of so many mass gatherings in the 1960s: "The first field of a glistening continent / Each found by trusting Eden in the human." The "unlimited embrace" in "The Missing" involves trusting "the Eden in the human." Merle E. Brown in *Double Lyric: Divisiveness and Communal Creativity in Recent English Poetry* points out, "Gunn wants ... to become one with the very quick of life itself .... he wants to experience complete emotional, bodily oneness with other human beings." Thus, within a bleak poem exists an oasis of Utopian sentiment, a remarkably optimistic view of human possibility.

The second and third stanzas also promote an ideal of freedom, for the remembered times before AIDS were characterized by "ceaseless movement" in which the poet was "Aggressive as in some ideal of sport." This passage is reminiscent of the notion of freedom, movement and aggression so controversial in Gunn's early work. As Alan Bold points out, in his book *Thom Gunn & Ted Hughes,* Gunn was known as being a poet "wallowing in violence" who writes about "motor cyclists and predatory birds." Yet Gunn's interest in the bikers and toughs did not really celebrate violence; he was intrigued with the freedom and ceaseless movement of the bikers. Movement and freedom have become interconnected in Gunn's adopted country of America where cars and the open road have become forms of independence. His most famous poem, "On the Move," describes a biker gang in California and admires their ceaseless movement and their embrace of the animal in the human. "On the Move" also demonstrates a concern with the issue of identity, the fact that, as Alan Bold points out in *Thom Gunn & Ted Hughes,* "man's ability to act positively and with purpose is handicapped by his habit of personal reflection." He admired the unreflecting action of the toughs, who are freer than an introspective intellectual.

In 1721, with the Black Death once again threatening Europe, Daniel Defoe penned *A Journal of the Plague Year* to alert the indifferent population of England to the grave danger threatening them and to remind them of the ravages of the Great Plague of 1665. Set in that year, Defoe's unique brand of fictive journalism takes the form of a tale told through the eyes of a survivor□a saddler who has chosen to remain while multitudes flee the disease-stricken city. When it first appeared, readers mistook Defoe's vibrant and irresistible realism as an eyewitness account. The lively, if not chilling, details bring the horrors of the times dramatically to life, as the weak prey on the dying and the pious administer to the sick. Terrified residents wonder who will be the next to succumb, as the death carts rattle along the streets of London to the cries of "Bring out your dead!"

One of the many obstacles activists and health officials faced in fighting the spread of AIDS was educating the public and combating the wild rumors and misinformation that circulated in all communities. The essay collection *Writing ALDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis* (1993) examines the role language and writing played in representing and reporting the realities of the crisis. The volume offers a wide-ranging look at the implications the disease has had for activism, literature, film, journalism, and culture, and the role writers have played in responding to the disease. Also explored are the varying moralistic interpretations of the disease and the sexual acts that, in some cases, transmitted the virus. The collection concludes with an extensive annotated bibliography of AIDS literature.

In "The Missing," Gunn combines his interest in freedom with humanism. The humanism of the poem deepens the tragedy, for the narrator's loss is not just personal, it includes the loss of a community. The death of any member of the community diminishes the narrator, leaving him unsupported and alone. The narrator is part of a larger human mass dying piece by piece.

The poem undercuts the pleasant memories of the second and third stanza with bitter irony. The contact of friend with friend, which so appeals to the narrator, spreads the disease, making it more insidious. The Utopian unlimited embrace degenerates into a potential apocalypse.

On several occasions in the poem, the narrator compares himself to a statue in his grief. In the first stanza, he writes "my shape [is].... / Sharply exposed and with a sculpted skin." Near the end of the poem, he develops the haunting image of self as statue: "Eyes glaring from raw marble, in a pose / Languorously half-buried in the block, / Shins perfect and no calves, as if I froze / Between potential and a finished work." To create a sense of immobility, Gunn compares himself to a statue so immobile that its calves and feet are unfinished. The pain of immobility gains further significance if one considers that praise of action characteristic of most of Gunn's verse, as in the poem "On the Move."

Gunn describes the statue as "froze / Between potential and a finished work"□thus emphasizing not just the immobility but also the fact that the narrator feels incomplete now that so many friends have died. Without the community, the "Supple entwinement," he feels unfinished, "Trapped in un-wholeness."

The statue imagery furthermore brings into the poem the contrast between introspection and violent action, an important theme in Gunn's career. Gunn stands out as an intellectual who admires the unreflecting, decisive tough. Yet the narrator of "The Missing" can do nothing as he watches "friends ... fall sick, grow thin, / And drop away." There is no clear action to take. Incapable of action or even movement, the statue only ruminates over its anxieties.

The poem closes on a bleak note, "I find no escape / Back to the play of constant give and change." There is no way for the narrator to return to the lost world of ceaseless movement and the unlimited embrace. As Deborah Landau points out, Gunn's AIDS poems end with "no consolation, transformation, or epiphany." The only hope rests

in surviving difficult circumstances. Despite the bleakness, the poem ultimately impresses because of its high aesthetic accomplishment, its ability to bring together so many of the themes of Gunn's work, and the empathy it produces in readers, who witness the suffering of the dying and the sorrow of the survivors.

Source: Robert Bee, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Marisa Anne Pagnattaro, J.D., Ph.D. in English, is a freelance writer and a Robert E. West Teaching Fellow in the English Department at the University ofGeorgia. In the following essay, Pagnattaro explores Gunn's attempt to come to terms with the loss of friends who died from AIDS.

When Thom Gunn was unanimously awarded the Lenore Marshall/Nation poetry prize for *The Man with Night Sweats,* U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky described Gunn's talent as "distinctive genius□clear, direct but always with something in reserve, generous toward weakness, dryly deflating of cant, a purely focused flame of perception." *The Man with Night Sweats* was widely hailed for its deft treatment of the AIDS epidemic from the perspective of an insider in San Francisco's gay community. Born in England, Gunn moved to California in 1954 for a creative writing fellowship atStanford University. Gunn studied under the well-known literary critic Yvor Winters, who once remarked that many of Gunn's early poems exist "on the narrow line between great writing and skillful journalism." Gunn continues this tradition in *The Man with Night Sweats,* a collection of poetry about friends he lost to AIDS. In an interview with Jim Powell, Gunn acknowledged this aspect of the book:

It seems to me that one of my subjects is friendship, the value of friendship. It is a subject that has preoccupied me in recent years. This shows especially in *The Passages of Joy,* though nobody noticed it. Everybody noticed the gay poetry, but there are many poems about friendship in that book and a great many more in a new one that have to do with friendship, or imply it as a value, as indeed it is for me.

Passages of Joy, which was published ten years before *The Man with Night Sweats,* addresses homosexuality in an almost uncomplicated and celebratory way. Many of the first poems in *The Man with Night Sweats* similarly embrace physical pleasure and the power of seduction. The final poems, however, reflect how the AIDS crisis eclipsed earlier carefree days. In point of fact, they are preceded by a dark epigram from Charles Hinkle: "Rain punishes the city, / like raw mind that batters flesh, / ever saddened by what fails." The title poem "The Man With Night Sweats," which is found within this final section, jars readers into the grim reality of the present. Through its opening stanza Gunn brings the reality of AIDS to the surface: "I wake up cold, I who / Prospered through dreams of heat / Wake to their residue, / Sweat, and a clinging sheet." Night sweats can be an indication of an AIDS infection even before a blood test identifies the disease. The resulting insidious sense of terror is seen throughout the poem and is ultimately encapsulated in the futility of the speaker's final gesture: "Stopped upright where I am / Hugging my body to me / As if to shield it from / The pains that will go through me, / As if hands were enough / To hold an avalanche off."

This visceral reaction creates a feeling of suffocation as the weight and implications of the disease inevitably descend. Living in San Francisco, Gunn saw the effect of AIDS firsthand. In the Powell interview, Gunn further elaborated on the impetus for writing these poems:

... if you're a writer and you have a lot of friends who suddenly die, then you're going to write about it. And then, one of the oldest subjects is how you face the end. One thing I've been greatly struck by in the people I've watched die is the extraordinary bravery with which people face death. So many of one's values□for humanist atheists like myself, as opposed to religious people□arise in confrontation with death.

One of the final poems in the collection *The Missing* reflects this desire to come to terms with loss; even the title suggests a lack of resolution, an absence of closure.

The speaker in "The Missing" watches "the progress of the plague," standing idly by, unable to take any action as the deadly disease spreads. By using the word "plague," Gunn summons the horror of the deadly bubonic plague in Europe. The speaker looks on as the disease begins to consume his friends who "fall sick, grow thin, and drop away" like withering vines and rotting vegetables. He also expresses his own vulnerability, questioning "Bared, is my shape less vague / Sharply exposed and with a sculpted skin?" Here the speaker implicitly questions the risk to his own statuesque "sculpted"□ostensibly robust and healthy□body.

Although Gunn has expressed cynicism about the phrase "gay community," AIDS shifted his perspective as he witnessed the interconnectedness of so many men. Appropriately, the next images in the poem suggest the human entanglement with an "increasing family" of victims: "Contact of friend led to another friend / Supple entwinement through the living mass / Which for all that I knew might have no end, / Image of an unlimited embrace."

The speaker feels a connection with those around him in an all-encompassing sense of humanity. In an interview with Clive Wilmer, Gunn explained the "Image of an unlimited embrace" as meaning "partly friends, partly sexual partners, partly even the vaguest of acquaintances, with the sense of being in some way part of a community." This sentiment extends into the next quatrain: "I do not just feel ease, though comfortable: / Aggressive as in some ideal of sport, / With ceaseless movement thrilling through the whole, / their push kept me as firm as their support." Quoting this stanza, Gunn elaborated: "Take that image of sport. (Somebody pointed out that I constantly use the word play in *The Man with Night Sweats,* which is□again□something I wasn't completely aware of.) If you use the idea of sport, you think of the violence of the push, yes, but there's an ambiguity: an embrace can be a wrestler's embrace or it can be the embrace of love. There's a tremendous doubleness in that image, which I have used elsewhere in fact: the idea of embrace which can be violent or tender. But if you look at it in any one moment, if it's frozen, it could be either, and maybe the two figures swaying in that embrace are not even quite sure which it is. Like Aufidius and Cori-olanus [two Shakespearian enemies who bitterly join forces]: they embrace, they're enemies. They embrace in admiration at one point. It's ambiguous because the two things are connected. It could turn, at any moment, from the one to the other, I suppose." Inasmuch as Coriolanus died as a result of joining forces with Aufidius, this allusion deeply complicates the poem with a sense of great ambivalence.

The final three stanzas underscore the speaker's fear, exacerbated by having seen his friends die. Ironically, he claims "Their deaths have left me less defined," as if to say that because he lacks the finality of death, he is not clear about his place in life. He now lacks the "pulsing presence" of friends which gave his life definition, as if he could define his own existence through the lives of these lost friends; without them, he feels "unsupported."

The statue imagery that runs throughout the poem is further emphasized in these lines: "Eyes glaring from raw marble, in a pose / Languorously part buried in the block, / Shins perfect and no calves, as if I froze / Between potential and a finished work." It is not entirely clear whose eyes are glaring. The image calls to mind the speaker surrounded by the corpses of his friends who were robbed of their potential in life and became untimely "finished work." Yet, the image could also refer to the speaker, as a self-conscious reflection of his own eyes glaring from his perfect body. He feels part buried by the dead friends, frozen in a timeless hiatus between life and death.

The final stanza, however, returns readers to the speaker's fears and sense of powerlessness: "Abandoned incomplete, shape of a shape, / In which exact detail shows to more strange, / Trapped in unwholeness, I find no escape / Back to the play of constant give and change." Deserted by friends, lovers, and acquaintances, his entire being is permeated with the sense of being unfinished, and lacking the grounding to be complete. Defenseless, he has no hope of flight from his predicament and will be continually subjected to the random ebb and flow of life. "The Missing" is a statement of loss, not only of friends, but also of one's sense of self-definition□all caused by the epidemic we have come to know as AIDS. By the end of the poem, it becomes apparent that what seemingly began as a kind of elegy for lost friends, has evolved into a self-absorbed statement of personal loss. In one sense, the speaker mourns the passing of his friends, not for the loss of their lives, but for the void which he now feels.

Like all of Gunn's poetry, "The Missing" is technically masterful. Influenced by great poets such as John Donne and Basil Bunting, many of the poems in *The Man with Night Sweats* are written in traditional forms, cross-rhymed pentameter quatrains and pentameter couplets. Save one exception, the seven quatrains in "The Missing" are pleasingly iambic, flowing from line to line with great ease. The one line with an extra beat, "I do not just feel ease, though comfortable" seems like a calculated attempt to create a subtle underlying feeling of uncomfortableness, a nagging addition to underscore the speaker's agitation. When asked by Powell if he "can think in rhyme" Gunn responded: "I suppose there are times when it's easy and so you could say that I'm moving comfortably within the form, but those times are extremely rare. What I find more to the point is that in looking for rhyme, or in trying to get the meter right, you are often having to delve deeper into your subject so that you discover things about it, your reaction to it, that you didn't know before ... As you get more desperate, you actually start to think more deeply about the subject in hand, so that rhyme turns out to be a method of thematic exploration."

Echoing his mentor, Yvor Winters, Gunn has defined poetry as "a statement in words about a human experience ... with moral import." He even went so far as to say that in

poems like "The Missing," he makes "moral evaluations of a life that many people would consider totally immoral." Indeed, this is yet another example of the way in which Gunn's poetry provokes readers to reflect on their sense of humanity and the interconnectedness of all of human life.

Source: Marisa Pagnattaro, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Adaptations

San Francisco State University'sPoetry Center has an extensive archive of recorded readings by Thom Gunn. A thirty-four-minute tape of a November 22, 1986 reading features the poet reciting several poems from *The Man with Night Sweats,* the collection that includes "The Missing."

Letters to the Future and *Distressed* are two 1993 recordings of vocal and instrumental scores using the poetry of Thom Gunn as lyrics. The first audiocassette (or CD) features the work of many other established poets as well. They are both available from YRM.

Readings by the Poets is a 1995 book and audiocassette from Faber and Faber that features Thom Gunn and many of Great Britain's most highly esteemed poets.

Poet's Night: Eleven Leading Poets Celebrate Fifty Years of Poetry at Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, a 1998 recording commissioned by Thom Gunn's American publisher, is available from Penguin Audiobooks.

Topics for Further Study

Research the origins of the children's nursery rhyme "Ring around the Rosie." Explain its imagery in terms of how it relates to the Black Plague. Compare the tone of the poem with that of Gunn's "The Missing." How does the singsong rhythm of the nursery rhyme compare with Gunn's meter and rhyme scheme?

Investigate Patient Zero, the mythical man once believed to have introduced AIDS to the United States, and Typhoid Mary, the cook who was allegedly the cause of 51 cases of typhoid. Focus specifically on the distinction between myth and reality in their stories. What would be the purpose of inventing such a figure as Patient Zero? Why would there be such legend and infamy surrounding the life of Typhoid Mary? What does the existence of these figures reveal about the nature of fear and misinformation surrounding disease?

Write a poem in the voice of one of the above-mentioned figures or a mythical "disease carrier" of your own invention.

Compare and Contrast

1347-1350: Black Death sweeps across Europe, introduced into the bloodstream of its victims by a bacillus carried by the Oriental rat flea. When it is over, the epidemic has claimed more than 30 million people, approximately one-third of the continent's population.

1918: A worldwide influenza epidemic leaves 20 million dead.

1939-1945: World War II results in the loss of more than 50 million lives.

2000: To date, the AIDS virus has claimed approximately 17 million victims.

1926-1946: Controversial theories of the origin of AIDS abound. Some scientists believe the virus spread from monkeys to humans some time during this period.

1959: A man dies in Africa's Congo in what researchers say was the first proven AIDS death.

July 31, 1981: Under the headline "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," the *New York Times* reports that a "rare and often rapidly fatal form of cancer" has been diagnosed in gay men in San Francisco and New York City. For the first time, the American public is informed of the disease that would come to be known as AIDS.

1997: The approximate worldwide death count from the disease tops off at 6.4 million. An estimated 22 million people worldwide are HIV-positive, more than the population of Australia.

1980: There are 422 diagnosed cases of AIDS in the United States, resulting in 31 deaths.

1992: Although estimates place the number of cases in the United States at more than a million, there are 257,750 diagnosed instances of the disease and 157,637 AIDS-related deaths.

1998: This year sees a total of 665,357 diagnosed U.S. cases with a total of 401,028 deaths.

1985: Women represent 7 percent of all cases.

1996: As the disease spreads farther and farther into the heterosexual population, that number jumps to 20 percent.

What Do I Read Next?

Thom Gunn's *Collected Poems* appeared in 1994 to critical acclaim. Compiling the highlights of a prolific thirty-five-year career, the volume is essential to those seeking a fuller understanding of Gunn's work: his points of departure, the evolution of his style, and the consistent, yet evolving presence of metrical and rhythmic forms. The collection includes a generous sampling from Gunn's major volumes and displays his inventiveness, shimmering diction, and democratic range of subjects.

In addition to his poetry, Thom Gunn enjoys a burgeoning reputation as a literary critic. His collection of essays, *The Occasions of Poetry,* reissued in 1999, offers insightful critical assessment of some of his greatest influences, from William Carlos Williams and Gary Snyder to Thomas Hardy and Robert Duncan. Also included are five autobiographical essays, which offer a firsthand account of Gunn's development as a poet and chart his reactions to the prevailing literary trends of the times. An essential volume for those interested in accessing a fuller perspective of Gunn's times and career.

Its broad scope and variety of genres are just two of the hallmarks of *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature: Readings from Western Antiquity to the Present Day* (1998). Selections begin with Sumerian lore, span classical Greek and Latin texts, continue through European, English, Latin American, and American literary periods and end with the modern-day golden age of gay literature. General editor Byrne R. S. Fone's comprehensive introduction to each featured writer helps provide an understanding of the important role homosexual love has played in the history of Western literature.

Those interested in reading the work of other writers who have also chosen AIDS as their theme should consult the anthology *Poets for Life: Seventy-Six Poets Respond to ALDS* (1992). Editor Michael Klein has brought together the poetry of writers representing a broad range of backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes. In addition to Thom Gunn, the work of such notable poets as Adrienne Rich, James Merrill, Heather McHugh, Deborah Digges, and Mark Doty is included. Now considered an important work in the history of AIDS literature, the volume offers a comprehensive look at the poetics of mortality and disease.

Further Study

Bold, Alan, *Gunn & Hughes: Thorn Gunn and Ted Hughes,*

New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1976.

Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes first established a foothold in 1950s England, and this study offers a thoughtful review of each poet's aesthetic origins and the themes that preoccupied the writers in their earliest works. Although the focus on Hughes will be of less value to the reader interested in a deeper appre-

ciation of Gunn, Bold's volume nonetheless presents the similar and increasingly divergent currents present in their subsequent works. Long considered an expatriate living and writing in the West Coast, Gunn's debt to the long British literary tradition from which he arose is presented here, firmly placing him as an inheritor of and rebel to that legacy.

Dyson, A. E., ed., *Three Contemporary Poets: Thomas Gunn, TedHughes, andR. S. Thomas,* London: Macmillan, 1990.

Another study considering the work of Ted Hughes (and the lesser-known R. S. Thomas), the essays here present Thom Gunn within the context of his British contemporaries. These writers are viewed as important transitional figures with a foot in both the formalist tradition and the somewhat wilder freedoms of what is loosely labeled "contemporary poetry." Sometimes these competing influences imbue Gunn's poetry with an unresolved tension. Most often, though, the synthesis results in poetry that is bold and utterly new.

Woods, Gregory, *Articulate Flesh: Male Homoeroticism in Modern Poetry,* New Haven, CT:Yale University Press, 1987.

Woods' s study takes as its point of departure the fact that gay men have been among the seminal figures of modern poetry. Thus, homoeroticism is a recurring, if often overlooked, theme. This thoughtful survey remedies this, identifying themes of homoeroticism that have been present in literature since its inception but focusing particularly on the amplified presence of homosexual themes in contemporary literature.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Poetry for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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