

# **The Players Come Again Short Guide**

## **The Players Come Again by Carolyn Gold Heilbrun**

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.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

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". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

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". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">The Players Come Again Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Social Concerns.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Techniques.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Key Questions.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Literary Precedents.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>

# Characters

Simon Peralstine, an editor from one of the six biggest publishing houses, contacts Kate Fansler and offers her the opportunity to write a biography of Gabrielle, the wife of modernist writer, Emmanuel Foxx. Kate, who is at loose ends because she has finished her magnum opus on Henry James and Thomas Hardy, grudgingly accepts the offer after reading part of a biographical sketch by Anne Gringold, a woman closely associated with Gabrielle Foxx.

During the course of her research, Kate interviews three women who were girlhood friends: Dorinda Goddard Nicholson, a wealthy woman; Anne Gringold, whose mother was a housekeeper; and Nellie, the supposed daughter of Hilda and Emile Foxx. The three women convince Kate to keep their secrets as well as Gabrielle's secrets and to edit her novel with just a short biographical note. Although this seems intellectually dishonest, Kate agrees to this charade.

Although she is already dead by the time Kate accepts this writing assignment, Gabrielle Foxx, the wife of Emmanuel and the mother of Emile, had survived her husband by a number of years. She had spent her declining years writing a novel which is titled *Ariadne*. Her version is considerably different than Emmanuel's because of its point of view, and Kate feels that it will make a tremendous contribution to literature.

Emmanuel Foxx was a Modernist novelist. His character seems to be patterned after a cross between James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence. During the course of the mystery, one learns that he fathered Nellie, who was passed off as his granddaughter.

## Social Concerns

The *Players Come Again* is about women finding their voice and having the confidence to speak. It is also about escaping from the traditional concerns of feminine existence. It is about aging. As Virginia Woolf, from whom the title of this work is borrowed, noted in her diary she "found out how to begin (at forty) to say something in my own voice; & that interests me so that I feel I can go ahead without praise." This book also deals with women maturing. In some respects, it is a rite-of-passage book for the different female characters. Because of the way in which the book is plotted, the reader has the opportunity to see each of the female characters at different stages in their lives. The triumvirate of Dorinda, Anne, and Nellie are seen as girls, as young women, and finally, as middle-aged women. The character of Gabrielle is also seen at several different life stages but the most important revelation about her is found in her posthumous novel. Was Gabrielle more than the helpful muse, the wife of modernist writer Emmanuel Foxx? How great a role did she play in creating "his" novel? To paraphrase Isak Dinesen, when Gabrielle is old enough to have done with the business of being a woman, she can let loose her strength and become one of the most powerful creatures in the world.

This novel raises important issues about authorship. It also serves to examine male and female voices and counterparts in literature. Emmanuel Foxx and Gabrielle are counterparts in the same way that James Joyce and Virginia Woolf can be seen as counterparts. Joyce, who represents a patriarchal viewpoint, constructed his own male labyrinth. Woolf discovered the feminine text and a whole world that Joyce could not and would not understand. Although each of the male writers is heralded as "really knowing women," when the female writers create they demonstrate that the men really do not know women. Men create only the illusion of women. The reader is left with some fascinating questions: Are male and female viewpoints really polarities and can they ever be merged?

The book also raises issues about the nature of biographies and autobiographies and the way in which women describe their lives. It also raises issues about the role of the biographer. What exactly does a biographer really ever know about the subject? Carolyn Heilbrun has written about this problem in *Writing A Woman's Life* (1988). As Amanda Cross, writing *The Players Come Again*, she also raises questions about the rights of deceased subjects.

What rights does a researcher have?

How ethical is it to pry into something that the biographee does not want revealed? How much does the public have a right to know about a "public person"?

## Techniques

This is a carefully plotted novel and reading it is rather like peeling an onion or maybe an artichoke. As each layer is revealed, the object becomes more interesting, until the reader finally gets to the heart of the matter.

The whole action starts because of an autobiographical fragment, the subsequent revelations related to that fragment, and the discovery of a lost manuscript by the wife of a well-known modernist author. Kate, who is clearly looking for a new adventure at the opening of the novel, is intrigued by the request to write a biography of Gabrielle Foxx. She is definitely hooked by the time she reads an autobiographical fragment written by a Anne, a friend of the family. Kate is then reeled in by the three women who convince her to edit the "missing" manuscript and leave out the facts of the life of the author.

This is like most of Cross's novels, more of a detective novel than a murder mystery. There is no real body, it has long since been buried, and so has the murderer. However, there is intrigue, passion, and love. Nothing else is what it seems and certainly none of the players are exactly who or what they seem to be. Most of the action takes place away from academe. This is more of a mystery of manners than a hard-boiled detective work and, as such, is a fine example of that genre.

One learns more about the literary world, the publishing industry, the upper class, and the lives of "real women" who live far away from the ivory tower of academe. Each of the women characters has a secret and it is a fascinating game to unravel the story and then make sense of it.

# Themes

The main theme of the book is reality versus the perception of reality.

How do we ever know what is real and true? The other main theme is the relationship of women. In *The Players Come Again*, three women struggle to understand their relationship to each other and to their families. As each grows to maturity and womanhood, each learns a truth about herself that enables her to become an adult. They learn to care about each other and about a woman who is dead. They conspire to protect her and to carry out her wish to regain the truth about themselves and about their relationship to the famous author Foxx.



# Key Questions

All humans remake themselves.

Memories and stories are reshaped to fit public persona, to shield each other from "horrible truth," and even to save oneself from embarrassment. Children have secrets, parents have secrets, and families have secrets. Only with the passage of time, with the experience of adulthood, can we hope to gain knowledge and insight into these secrets. In *The Players Come Again*, Amanda Cross explores the secrets and relationships between daughters and father, wife and husband, and contrasts them to the relationship between a father and his son. She also explores the relationships of women from different stations and backgrounds who share common experiences and love for one another.

1. The title *The Players Come Again* is taken from a poem by Virginia Woolf.

What does it mean?

2. In *The Players Come Again*, the author refers to Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers." In that literary work, the women stay in the kitchen and solve the mystery while their male counterparts go out and search for clues. Once they have solved the mystery, the women take the clues away with them.

What significance does this have to the story? Who is the jury in this story?

3. Kate says that she, like a good biographer, will search for evidence to substantiate her experiences. What does she mean?

4. Why is it significant that Anne is the one to write the autobiographical fragment? Why wouldn't it have been effective if Dorinda had written it?

5. By the end of the novel Kate sees this like all literature as a story of second chances. Why is it a second chance for Kate?

6. By the end of the novel none of the women is caught in the past, and yet Kate sees them as all simultaneously children and mature women.

Why?

7. Each of the characters (Dorinda, Anne, and Nellie) pursued the truth about themselves and about their relationship to Emmanuel Foxx but in the end they decide not to reveal that truth to the world. They decide to reveal only the "truth they had lived for most of their lives." Was that an easy decision? An ethical decision?

8. Kate agrees to edit Gabrielle's novel and to add some biographical material. However, she does not reveal all that she knows about the Foxx family. As a scholar



who should be concerned with truth, is this acceptable? Is there such a thing as absolute truth?

Kate realizes that she is not like a le Carre character and she cannot extract the truth but must rely on others. She asks how can she know when she has got the truth? How can any biographer know if she has discovered the truth?

9. One will never know if Gabrielle wrote *Ariadne* or if the idea was Emmanuel's nor will we ever know how much of the original work with its insight into women was hers. Heilbrun seem to suggest that many women have helped write for their husbands and have never been given credit for this help. Hansford indicates that he had problems with his wife because she read too much feminist criticism and felt that T. S. Elliot took his wife's very words for *The Wasteland*. Is it possible for one artist to ever fully capture the thoughts of the other gender on paper? Is androgyny ever really possible? Is it desirable?

10. The modernist novel produced by Emmanuel and Gabrielle is called *Ariadne* and is based upon an old myth about a labyrinth. Why is this apt and why are there two novels? Are they merely point-counterpoint. Or is there some other significance?



## Literary Precedents

In *A Path to the Bridge* (1958), author Brian Cooper used Cambridge as the background for a haunting tale of love during World War II. Two young men are attracted to the same woman, only later do they find out that she is the half-sister of one of the men.

The novel is also related to James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931). It is also strongly connected to the legend of Ariadne. "Virginia Woolf and James Joyce: Ariadne and the Labyrinth," an essay by Carolyn Heilbrun (Amanda Cross), contained in *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women* (1990), details the author's feelings about the importance of the Ariadne myth and her speculation about Joyce's overlooking of Ariadne.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994