Social Life Study Guide

Social Life by Tony Hoagland

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Introduction

Tony Hoagland's poetry focuses primarily on contemporary issues in middle and upper class America, especially in middle class suburbia. His personal experience in this environment sometimes shows up in poems as straightforward autobiography and other times manifests itself in a generic "you" or "they" address, suggesting a shared experience within an entire generation. From politics and adultery to religion and sex, Hoagland's themes often resound of daytime talk shows and evening news, but the poems are also lined with an undercurrent of self-reflection and disillusionment, anger and hope. "Social Life," which first appeared in the spring 1999 issue of *Ploughshares*, aptly expresses the poet's take on contemporary society and behavior □here, in the form of party goers□but also offers an unusual shift in setting for his work. Typically content to deal with the material, plastic world of things and the people who use them, Hoagland searches for something different in "Social Life," something found only in the serenity, beauty, and wonder of the natural world.

Author Biography

Tony Hoagland was born Anthony Dey Hoagland on November 19, 1953, in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Very little biographical information as of 2003 was available on Hoagland, yet scholars of his work point to various known autobiographical poems that help draw a slim profile of him. Growing up in white, middle-class American suburbia□a theme in much of his poetic work□Hoagland seems to have been at odds with the wholesale materialism of his environment, viewing it with both cynicism and a desire to understand it. While his parents were able to provide him a comfortable childhood in the physical and monetary sense, Hoagland's poems tell the story of emotional upheavals within the family that mere money could not make up for. Apparently, his father intentionally ruined his own marriage (thus the title of Hoagland's first fulllength collection, *Sweet Ruin*) and then died of a heart attack a short time later. At seventeen, the young poet lost his mother to cancer. Events at home, however, did not deter him from pursuing a college education, and he attended Williams College and the University of Iowa, eventually earning his master of fine arts degree at the University of Arizona in 1983. Not long after, Hoagland began a career in teaching English and poetry and has taught at several colleges and universities over the past two decades, including Arizona Western College, St. Mary's College in California, the University of Maine, and Warren Wilson College in North Carolina. Hoagland has also served on the English faculty at the University of Pittsburgh.

Though the quantity of Hoagland's publications has been relatively small, the quality of his work has not gone unnoticed. Between 1985 and 1990, he published three chapbooks of poems and turned some of the material in those books into *Sweet Ruin*, which was selected by poet Donald Justice as the winner of the Brittingham Prize in 1992. Hoagland's second collection, *Donkey Gospel: Poems*, was awarded the James Laughlin Award in 1997 and was published by Graywolf Press the following year. "Social Life" was published in 1999 in *Ploughshares*, the literary magazine of Emerson College in Boston. This poem was expected to be included in revised form in Hoagland's collection scheduled for publication in the fall of 2003.

Poem Text

After the party ends another party begins
and the survivors of the first party climb
into the second one as if it were a lifeboat
to carry them away from their slowly sinking ship.

Behind me now my friend Richard
is getting a fresh drink, putting on more music
moving from group to group□smiles and
jokes, laughter, kissy-kiss□

It is not given to me to understand
the social pleasures of my species, but I think
what he gets from these affairs
is what bees get from flowers□a nudging of the stamen,

a sprinkle of pollen
about the head and shoulders□

whereas I prefer the feeling of going away, going away,
stretching out my distance from the voices and the lights
until the tether breaks and I
am in the wild sweet dark
where the sea breeze sizzles in the hedgetop
and the big weed heads whose names I never learned
lift and nod upon their stalks.

What I like about the trees is how
they do not talk about the failure of their parents
and what I like about the grasses is that
they are not grasses in recovery

and what I like about the flowers is
that they are not flowers in need of
empowerment or validation. They sway

upon their thorny stems
as if whatever was about to happen next tonight
was sure to be completely interesting□

the moon rising like an ivory tusk,
a few funky molecules of skunk
strolling through the air
to mingle with the aura of a honeysuckle bush,

and when they bump together in my nose,
I want to raise my head and sing,
I'm a child in paradise again
when you touch me like that, baby,

but instead, I stand still and listen
to the breeze departing from the upper story of a tree
and the hum of insects in the field,
letting everything else have a word, and then another word,

because silence is always good manners
and often a clever thing to say
when you are at a party.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-4

The first line of "Social Life" creates a tempo for the early part of the poem, almost begging to be read in a slow, monotonous tone in order to mimic the boringly repetitive behavior of typical party goers. One can hear the dreariness of routine in the voice of the speaker whose description of the party seems to say that after one thing ends, more of the same begins. The speaker adds to the already dismal scene by comparing the socialites to "survivors" of a boat wreck and the party they have been attending to the "slowly sinking ship" they managed to escape. The new party that starts is a "lifeboat" for the survivors of the first gathering, though one can easily imagine that it, too, will become a sinking ship before long.

Lines 5-8

These lines portray the activities at the party in more detail, and, again, there is an acute sense of treadmill behavior, of people doing expected things in expected manners while speaking expected words. The speaker's "friend Richard" is a model of the typical suburban socialite who circulates among party guests with "a fresh drink" in his hand, sharing small talk and gossip while everyone pretends to enjoy the chitchat. The phrase "moving from group to group" reminds one that party crowds often splinter into little cliques of guests, and the "smiles," "jokes," and "laughter" they emit are doubtfully genuine, particularly when an act as artificial and spurious as "kissy-kiss" is included. The notion of such idle chatter reappears at the end of the poem and lays the foundation for one of its most important themes.

Lines 9-10

These lines introduce the speaker for the first time as an "I," and the personal sentiment they reveal separates him from the rest of the usual party goers. He claims that it is "not given" to him to "understand / the social pleasures" of his entire "species," putting quite a distance between himself and those who share a common background with him. But, in citing his "species," the speaker does not really mean the entire human race, for the significant word here is "my." Rather, he refers to typical American suburbanites who have experienced a very similar environment and lifestyle as his own. Perhaps the last two words of line 10 also suggest a significant difference between the speaker and his more shallow peers□he is actually in a position to say, "I think."

Lines 11-14

These lines bring nature into the picture for the first time. In trying to understand how such seemingly pointless social behavior can be pleasurable for some people, the

speaker compares this behavior to that of bees who extract pollen from flowers just to "sprinkle" a bit of it "about the head and shoulders." Obviously, the relationship between bees and flowers is not so frivolous□they depend on one another for procreation□but the implication here is that party goers who move from one group to another are actually seeking some sense of purpose, some excitement or broadening of their lives, even if it is only short-lived.

Lines 15-16

The distance between the speaker and the other party guests increases in these lines as he claims to "prefer the feeling of going away, going away" over listening to the petty banter, sincere or not, droning on all around him. The repetition of the phrase "going away" helps to emphasize distance, as does the notion of "stretching out." What the speaker wants to get away from are "the voices and the lights" that overwhelm most loud parties. The reference to "voices" and mindless chatter reiterate the sentiment in lines 7 and 8 about hollow conversations.

Lines 17-18

In line 17, the speaker implies that being at the party is like being trapped or tied down and that he must struggle with his bonds "until the tether breaks" and he is free□metaphorically speaking, of course. In reality, his body remains among the hubbub of music and chitchat and drinking, but his imagination has escaped to the "wild sweet dark" where the sounds in his ears are much different from those that inundate the party.

Lines 19-21

These three lines present a striking change of scenery, describing facets of nature that are simple and beautiful in their own right. In his mind, the speaker exchanges the din of party noises for the soothing sound of a "sea breeze" that "sizzles in the hedgetop," and he imagines tall weeds swaying in the gentle wind. In admitting that he "never learned" the names of the plants, he exposes his suburban roots again and implies that this ignorance is another malady of his "species."

Lines 22-28

These seven lines contain three parallel metaphors that contrast the nature of trees and grasses and flowers to the nature of human beings. With both cynicism and wit, the speaker manages to make his point□innocent plants are surely superior to phony people□without ever mentioning party goers or suburbanites or even humans specifically. Instead, he ridicules whiny party guests for how they are by praising the plants for how they are not. Trees are likable because "they do not talk about the failure of their parents." Obviously, the speaker has attended more than one gathering at which

other guests complained about worthless mothers and fathers. He takes a sarcastic stab at self-professed alcoholics or addicts of one kind or another by lauding the grasses because "they are not grasses in recovery." Again, this is a response to too many unsolicited confessions from strangers at parties□strangers often seeking attention or sympathy by playing the oh-pitiful-me role. Finally, what the speaker likes about the flowers is that "they are not flowers in need of / empowerment or validation." That is, nature does not need praise or approval from humans to feel worthy about itself. Nature requires nothing of the speaker, demands nothing of him, unlike the party guests. The speaker is free to be silent in nature, appreciating the simplicity and grace of the flowers and trees. Furthermore, the speaker is free to be among the trees and grasses without feeling that he is being judged or needs to demand "validation" from them.

Lines 29-31

In these lines, the speaker furthers his idea of nature's superiority over certain human behaviors by implying that, within nature, things truly are "completely interesting." Even the swaying flowers can anticipate and trust that "whatever was about to happen next" would be a genuine marvel of the natural world□just the opposite of the artificial compliments and feigned interest that permeate the human world of social interaction.

Lines 32-35

These lines provide exquisite examples of what is so remarkably and totally "interesting" about nature. For the first time, animals□other than man□are drawn into the picture with the crescent moon rising "like an ivory tusk" of an elephant and the "funky" odor of skunk "molecules" wafting through the air. The musty smell creates a wonderful contrast "with the aura of a honeysuckle bush" as the two scents "mingle" unimpeded in their natural environment.

Lines 36-39

These lines likely reflect back on the actual events of the party, particularly the music and typical sing-along by some guests. What makes the speaker so joyful he could "raise [his] head and sing" is the mixture of nature's raw odors "bump[ing] together" in his nose. The italicized lines appear as though they are lyrics to a song and their contemporary slang provides an apt irony to the setting, considering that they describe a man's gleeful union with nature, not a romantic encounter with another human being.

Lines 40-43

In these lines, the speaker draws closer to the central theme of the poem, opting to "stand still and listen" instead of singing his own tune out loud. What he hears is very comforting to him□the breeze blowing through the "upper story of a tree," the "hum of

insects in the field"□but there is something else remarkable about these natural sounds: they take turns. The breeze blows, the bugs hum, and then something else chimes in and still something else after that, each one "letting everything else have a word, and then another word." This, then, is the ultimate illustration of the difference between the natural word and the human.

Lines 44-46

The last three lines of the poem provide a witty final blow to the common social life of men and women in contemporary suburban America. While maintaining one's "silence" in order to listen to someone else is "always good manners," it is a rare occasion at a loud party often filled with people who would rather hear themselves talk than anyone else. With this in mind, the speaker playfully suggests that coming right out and saying, "Silence is always good manners," at a party would add a clever twist to the event, even if its wry irony is lost on many of the revelers.

Themes

Self-Absorption

"Social Life" is not an enigmatic poem that attempts to hide its intended themes or disguise the message with irrelevant twists and esoteric metaphors. Instead, it very plainly makes two major points, the most dominant being human self-absorption and its pathetic results. The speaker's target is his own world, so he does not vainly exonerate himself from criticism but rather acknowledges his role within this world and admits that he is sometimes as guilty as the rest. But guilty of what? Largely, too much ego. While it is not fair to stereotype every individual who attends parties and other social gatherings, there is enough evidence of some typical behavior among certain factions to warrant the scrutiny. Most people have witnessed guests□and been guilty themselves□ making the obligatory rounds at a party, with or without a drink in hand, oozing small talk, and pretending to be interested in what other people are saying when there is no genuine interest at all. Most people, too, have turned the tables at the first opportunity to begin talking about themselves, as though their own opinions, complaints, and platitudes are of more value than anything they have just heard. These are the people in Hoagland's poem. They mingle and drink, listen to music and chat, and tell jokes that may or may not be funny but everyone pretends that they are. The speaker's "friend Richard" is like the everyman of the contemporary suburban party scene□he moves "from group to group," smiling, laughing, joking, and planting insincere kisses on the cheeks (or just in the air) of people who act as if it is delightful. And though the speaker is present at the party, and therefore plays his own role in the charade, he cannot help but question the "social pleasures of [his] species."

Probably the greatest irony about being selfcentered is that those who are guilty of it often point it out in everyone else but cannot see it in themselves. The party goers in "Social Life" complain about their parents, wear their "in recovery" status like it is a badge, and whine about not having any "empowerment or validation" in their lives. Amidst all the talk, no one is listening. The "good manners" of silence are lost in the din of self-absorbed chatter, and the result is a pathetic portrayal of life in middle class, suburban America: much materialism and ego, but even greater emptiness.

Nature in Suburban America

The other prominent theme in this poem is the role□or lack thereof□of nature in the suburbs. Surely, it exists, but many suburbanites do not seem to be aware of it. This point is seen most clearly in the marked contrast between the descriptions of the party indoors and those of the natural world outside. The speaker emphasizes the vast distance between them in his "going away, going away" to reach nature, which may consist only of flowers, trees, and weeds in somebody's yard, but it still provides a refreshing change of scenery. Whether the sea breeze, rising moon, or insects humming in a field are actually real or just a part of his imagination does not matter.

What does matter is that the party guests do not appear to recognize nature, real or imagined. Even the speaker, who is also a product of the suburban environment, admits that he "never learned" the names of "big weed heads" that dot the surrounding landscape. This may seem an insignificant confession, but his simple ignorance is a symbol of a much larger failure. Contemporary society is out of touch with nature. While bees and flowers, the moon, even a skunk or two make appearances in cities and suburbs across America every day and night, many human inhabitants of these areas are blind to their presence. People cannot name the plants and animals that share their lawns and gardens, much less any of the more exotic species that may occasionally show up in a field or along the countryside. The guests at the party in "Social Life" are too caught up in their own little worlds to learn about the big one outside. The speaker represents hope, even for the plastic generation of which he is a part. After all, he may not be able to name the weeds that "lift and nod upon their stalks," but he does see them. He does appreciate them and recognize how unlike people they are□without complaint, without whining, without ego. But weeds, like all of nature, do not need recognition in order to achieve "validation"; they simply *are*, and that is enough.

Style

"Social Life" is written in contemporary free verse with no rhyme or distinguishable meter. The stanzas are made up of two, three, or four lines, based on the subject and setting of each as opposed to any desire for structural consistency. In other words, Hoagland lets the events of the poem drive its format and is unconcerned with any established patterns of verse. One technique very evident in this poem, however, is the use of enjambment, or the continuation of a syntactic unit from one line or stanza to the next with no pause. For example, line 3 begins with the words "into the second one," but this phrase actually completes the thought begun in line 2 with "the survivors of the first party climb." Line 6 begins with the verb "is" but its subject is the last word in line 5, "Richard." One can find line-to-line enjambment throughout this entire work, but the technique also appears in stanza-tostanza form. For instance, the fifth stanza ends with "and I" (line 17), and the sixth stanza completes the thought with "am in the wild sweet dark" (line 18). The eighth stanza ends with "They sway" (line 28), and the ninth tells how they sway: "upon their thorny stems" (line 29). The poem also contains a bit of alliteration (the repetition of consonant sounds) although it is not always clear whether the effect is intentional or accidental. For example, the *s* sound in the words "survivors" and "second" (lines 2 and 3) is most likely unplanned, but the repetition of the same sound in "slowly sinking ship" is a definite poetic technique. The tenth stanza provides a fairly strong example of assonance (the repetition of same or similar vowel sounds) with the recurrence of the *uh* sound. "Tusk," "skunk," "honey" and "suckle" all share the sound, and even "bush" is a close companion. Beyond these poetic efforts, though, "Social Life" is a solid example of verse that is both contemporary and free of formality.

Historical Context

Because this poem did not appear in a journal until 1999, it is more closely associated with present American culture and social ethics than with any historical perspective. That said, however, the brief span of years between those publications has brought significant and unimagined political, economic, and emotional change, not only for citizens of the United States, but throughout the world.

By some accounts, the decade of the 1990s is remembered as the "Narcissistic 90s," based on Americans' increasing material indulgence and a seemingly unlimited consumption of everything from trendy foods and gasoline to big houses and new computers. Middle class families moved in droves into "Monopoly board" communities, with houses pre-designed by contractors, offering little variety in appearance but touting such amenities as built-in microwave ovens, home offices, security alarms, Jacuzzi baths, and three-car garages. These new suburban neighborhoods sprang up quickly across the country, attracting many people with children who felt a greater sense of safety and a shared value for home ownership, as well as comfort and convenience. Many of the communities are located close to schools, shopping and entertainment centers, and various corporations, providing these families with all the suburbanite essentials and making it unnecessary to leave the general area. City planners and politicians have made an effort to attract more people and businesses to downtown areas to prevent the further decay of inner cities, but, for the most part, they have not been able to compete with the lure of the perceived security and personal convenience of the suburbs.

In the late 1990s, the American economy appeared to be undergoing limitless expansion. The stock market increased its value by an incredible margin, due largely to low inflation, stable interest rates, and a boom in high-technology industries. Never before had so many Americans been able to make money for a considerable length of time simply by owning stocks. Because of the boost in investment, many industries were able not only to recover from previous financial setbacks but also to achieve a growth status that would have seemed unthinkable only a few years earlier. From automobiles to high-tech computer hardware and software, manufacturers boasted record gains and a renewed sense of financial stability. Then came September 11, 2001.

Since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., many people have experienced only a sense of dread, vulnerability, and fear. Aside from the obvious shock and emotional anguish brought on by this catastrophic event, some Americans have also admitted a desire for spirituality over materialism, peace of mind over personal gain, honesty and integrity over self-indulgence and deceit. This is not to imply, of course, that the narcissism of the twentieth century's final decade has given way to some Pollyanna brotherhood and sisterhood throughout the country, but that perhaps more people have taken time to question what is truly valuable in their lives. Families still flock to the suburbs, yet there is a reborn sense of pride and determination in bringing back the spirit of city living and

of refusing to let international extremists make Americans afraid of their own big towns. Despite the wave of emotions, however□from disbelief and fear to anger and determination □the state of the American mind cannot deny the state of the American economy.

After September 11, the stock market plunged and was slow to yet to recover. The United States and Britain led war with oil-rich Iraq resulted in the same market jitters that occurred in 1990 when Iraq attacked Kuwait, sparking the first Persian Gulf War. Unemployment rose in the United States, not only in blue-collar fields but in white-collar corporate positions as well. Despite the gloomy economic conditions, many factions of society persevered with business as usual. Entertainment and sports industries seemed undaunted, religious leaders rallied more and more supporters to their cause, and even the federal government made progress on strengthening bipartisanship and across-the-board policies. While it is safe to say that materialism and self-absorption were as much a part of the American fabric as baseball and apple pie, one may also assume that somewhere in the midst of mingling, music, and "kissy-kiss," everyone knew the world was a different place.

Critical Overview

With only two full-length collections to his credit at this point, Hoagland has not yet been afforded volumes of criticism, good or bad, within the annals of literary scholarship. But the fact that both books he has produced were selected for prestigious awards by prominent colleagues in American poetry speaks strongly of a positive reception. Writing a book review of *Sweet Ruin* in a 1992 issue of *Ploughshares*, poet and critic Steven Cramer says that "Hoagland's poems grapple with selfhood and manhood, but they also consider the mysteries of national identity□how the social and the personal mutually impinge." At the end of the critique, Cramer sums up his evaluation by declaring, "Hoagland's is some of the most sheerly enjoyable writing I've encountered in a long time." Six years later, in a *Library Journal* book review of *Donkey Gospel*, critic Frank Allen says that "Hoagland's second book . . . is nothing if not imaginative. Invigorated by 'fine distress,' these graceful, perceptive poems gaze without blinking at what we hide from each other and ourselves when 'head and heart / are in different time zones." Allen's analysis of Hoagland's most recent book is that, "This awardwinning collection illuminates conflicts between individual desire for self-actualization and the 'dark and soaring fact' of experience." From all accounts, his third collection, due out in 2003, is a much-anticipated work, and if "Social Life" is a fair representation of its contents, the book will likely garner as much praise and enthusiasm as the first two.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Hill is the author of a poetry collection, has published widely in literary journals, and is an editor for a university publications department. In the following essay, Hill examines Hoagland's portrayal of American middle-class emptiness and the spirituality of nature viewed as polar opposites in this poem.

While there may not be a written manual on how to act at a typical contemporary party in suburban America, most party guests seem to have an innate sense of expectations and taboos. Just like the given laws and mores of a society, the common social gathering has its own set of do's and don'ts, such as *do* glide smoothly from group to group; *don't* sit in a corner contemplating the artwork on the walls. Breaking the rules can brand one a social outcast or, even worse, unsophisticated. In Hoagland's "Social Life," the speaker decides to take a chance with the rules, but he does so only in his mind, leaving him caught between the public expectations of materialism and a private longing for something more spiritual.

Even the title of this poem belies its content. Normally, the term "social life" evokes favorable images of togetherness, good times, and positive energy. Here, it translates into little more than trite conversation and pathetic behavior, and all of it with an aura of sadness hanging about. From the outset, the party goers are portrayed as weary "survivors" of a harrowing ordeal, which turns out to be simply the first party that has ended. The metaphoric scene is one of nearly drowned people clamoring onto a lifeboat while in the background their sinking ship slowly goes down□hardly a festive sight. Richard, the speaker's friend, appears to be enjoying himself, but the rote listing of his activities suggests that he is just going through the motions like everyone else: pouring a drink, putting on music, moving around the room, smiling, joking, laughing, kissing, etc. It all reeks of prescribed behavior and total insincerity. So, if these "social pleasures" are not pleasurable in the least, what is their purpose? The speaker is not sure he understands, but he has an idea.

The setting of the party is really the setting of contemporary, suburban America. In this world, *things* are important, not only concrete or tangible things, but also attitudes, desires, and topics of conversation □sort of an *emotional* materialism. The interesting difference between the objects that the guests are expected to possess and the sentiments or thoughts they possess is that the latter are hardly desirable. Big houses with all the latest gadgets, new cars leased yearly, big-screen TVs, fashionable clothing, and tasteful furniture may all be part of the suburban status quo, but apparently so are nagging dissatisfaction, self-absorption, and a need to complain. Social gatherings, then, become a refuge, a place for people to air their woes and at least pretend to commiserate with one another. This is when the pleasure comes in. As the reader learns inadvertently through descriptions of nature, the people in Hoagland's poem grumble about how their parents have failed them, solicit sympathy regarding their "recovery" period from some kind of substance abuse, and blame a lack of "empowerment or validation" for their feelings of emptiness and insignificance. Having a safe harbor where they can share these complaints is comforting and, therefore,

pleasurable. After all, such moaning may not be so well received at work or at home with the family, but it is perfectly acceptable at a party where everyone is doing it.

If the analysis seems too harsh or overly generalized, it may be tempered by the degree of sympathy, if not sorrow, that Hoagland implies with the flowers and bees metaphor he uses to describe the social pleasures of his "species." All the party goers really get from "these affairs" is a little "nudging of the stamen, / a sprinkle of pollen / about the head and shoulders." Aside from the obvious sexual innuendo, there is a pathetic sense of *this is all we are asking for* among the guests. They do not demand any life-changing inspiration from one another □no rewards, promises, or answers. Instead, they seek only a short moment of time to feel important, to be rejuvenated and worthy of "pollination." No one seems to be fooled into thinking any of it is permanent.

The speaker is especially perceptive in recognizing the party behavior for what it reflects□the dull, empty lives of middle-class suburbia□and he is determined not to succumb to it himself. Since he is obviously an invited guest at the event, one can assume he is a part of the crowd, that he shares a similar environment and similar values. Yet he also knows that something is missing, and he steps outside to find it. There, among the sea breeze and weeds, the trees and grasses and flowers, the moon and the scent of skunk, he finds an aura of something higher, something magnificent and spiritual. He finds things that are natural in the utmost sense. There are no pretenses between the plants and animals, no kissy-kiss between geography and the weather. Instead, something quite remarkable is going on out there: nature is living in harmony with itself. Perhaps most extraordinary, it is respecting all parts of itself, actually taking turns within its ranks, from the breeze whistling through the treetops to insects humming in the field. The fact that these movements and sounds let each other "have a word, and then another word" is fascinating to a human being who struggles for genuine respect and fairness among his own kind. How could humans, supposedly the most intelligent of all inhabitants of the earth, fall so short in the process of simply being themselves and getting along with others? Are those two goals at odds with each other in the human world?

The cynical answer is that when human beings are allowed to be themselves then, naturally, they will consider their own situations and agendas of paramount importance and find fault with the same in others. The more congenial answer is that humankind needs to learn only one great lesson from nature, and then harmony may be achievable: be quiet. Be silent while other people have their say and maybe something unexpected will be heard. Maybe the voices will be worth taking turns to hear. The climax of "Social Life" comes in the final three lines of the poem when the big punch is delivered: "silence is always good manners," and especially at a party. This is the exact place in suburban America where it rarely happens. As the speaker so aptly points out, this is a loud place, not only because of the music on the stereo but also from the din of idle chitchat that permeates the room. Undoubtedly, people are talking over top of one another, not hearing what someone else is saying but trying to make themselves heard as they go on and on about their families or jobs or aches and pains and politics, or anything else. The current common phrase *It's all about me* is personified many times

over in this setting. Outside, nature may be saying *It's all about everything* and proving it by letting everything be.

If public complaining and confessing fills some material need, perhaps only silence can fill the spiritual need. Hoagland's "Social Life" points in that direction. The irony of the title, the lush descriptions of nature, and the witty little biting comment at the end all add up to a very unflattering appraisal of middle-class suburbia. Feelings of emptiness, however, are not exclusive to this particular part of American society, for people from all backgrounds and all locations can attest to the same. The difference lies more in how individuals or groups deal with emptiness rather than who feels it and who does not. The people at the party try to talk it away. They seem to believe that the more they talk, the less they will have to think about the real problem. What the speaker has figured out, though, is that this method is only digging the hole deeper, making it tougher to fill up with anything but emptiness. He has learned to take a lesson from nature, to reach a level of spiritual fulfillment by being quiet long enough to absorb real serenity and peace of mind. This is the lesson he wishes for his fellow suburbanites, but his assessment of their endless gabbing leaves little room for hope.

Source: Pamela Steed Hill, Critical Essay on "Social Life," in *Poetry for Students*, Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Blevins has published essays and poems in many magazines, journals, and anthologies and teaches writing at Roanoke College. In this essay, Blevins warns that reading Hoagland's poem as a mere celebration of the natural world would undermine its more serious intentions.

Although some critics will be tempted to place "Social Life" in the pastoral tradition by reading it as an idealization of the natural world, an understanding of Hoagland's main concerns and techniques will uncover the poem's more complicated intention, which is to expose the conflict between mind and body. Camille Paglia, writing in *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*, calls this conflict humankind's "supreme . . . problem." Hoagland engages the prehistoric attempt to subdue the dark powers of nature with the civilizing forces of culture to insist that it is incorrect and dangerous to make distinctions between these two powers. In other words, "Social Life" does not compare the weeds to people to celebrate the weeds; a celebration of weeds would seem to Hoagland ridiculous. Instead, Hoagland borrows gestures from the Wordsworthian pastoral tradition to expose man's consciousness of his being both body and mind because it is this consciousness that makes him man.

"Social Life" does seem at first to want to argue that the activities of flowers and trees are preferable to the activities of humans at parties. The speaker praises the trees and grasses because they are without afflictions. The natural world also differs from the world of human experience in "Social Life" in that it is indifferent enough to be content. Yet, the speaker's feigned guess that what his friend Richard "gets from these affairs" emphasizes the poem's recognition that man seeks in his social activities the same natural pleasure that bees and flowers seek in theirs. Only when the poem shifts from its initial comparative base to its speaker's attempt to separate himself from "the voices and the lights" does it rise to the level of its most acute meaning, which concerns the conflict between the process of mind and the process of body that only man must suffer.

To see how the natural images in "Social Life" work, it is important to understand that Hoagland often reverses the process of personification that describes animals and other natural objects by comparing them to humans. When James Wright says in a famous poem like "A Blessing" that ponies in a field "love each other," he is giving animals human characteristics in order to reveal that they are like humans. Hoagland, however, uses images from the natural world to comment on the ways in which humans are not only like animals, but how they are animals. For example, when Hoagland closes his poem "Game" by saying that "the unmown field is foaming at the mouth with flowers," his goal is not to suggest that the field is excited or animated. Instead, by turning regular alfalfa into "Jennifer alfalfa" and a regular cloud into a "Jennifer-shaped cloud," his goal is to comment on his own interests in and obsessions with describing the way all humans frame the world in the context of their own interests and obsessions and therefore seem to be "foaming at the mouth" over "the energy / which gushes through all things."

In the fifth stanza of "Social Life," the speaker states that he "prefer[s] the feeling of going away" to being at a party. Yet, in stanzas 11 and 12, he states that while he is away he "want[s] to raise [his] head and sing." That is, he says he to wants come as close to the natural world as humans can get and praise human union in song. Instead, the speaker "stand[s] still and listens" and "let[s] everything else have a word." The peacefulness of these two stanzas, especially in comparison to the false expressions of the humans seems to imply that "going away" is a suitable way to contend with the din and clatter of human social ritual. But, because the speaker says he is listening and smelling instead of singing, "Social Life" is not really interested in offering solutions to the problem of "the social pleasures of [the human] species." Rather, the poem wants to express the conflict that man must ride between his desire to sing about the beauty of the "the wild sweet dark" and "letting everything else have a word." Paglia talks about the conflict between mind and body by recalling what the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus commonly represent in the Western aesthetic tradition:

> The quarrel between Apollo and Dionysus is the
> quarrel between the higher cortex and the older limbic
> and reptilian brains. Art reflects on and resolves
> the external human dilemma of order verses energy.
> In the west, Apollo and Dionysus strive for victory.
> Apollo marks the boundary lines that are civilization
> but that lead to convention, constraint, oppression.
> Dionysus is energy unbound, mad, callous, destructive,
> wasteful. Apollo is law, history, tradition, the
> dignity and safety of custom and form. Dionysus is
> the new, exhilarating but rude, sweeping all away to
> begin again. Apollo is a tyrant, Dionysus is a vandal.

In "Social Life," Hoagland straddles the space between his need to sing of the Dionysian space that parties represent and his Apollonian contempt for disorder. This theme is addressed again and again in Hoagland's poems, as for example "Lawrence" from *Donkey Gospel*, which celebrates D. H. Lawrence's talent for making humans "seem magnificent" in their "inability to subdue the body." Thus, when in "Social Life" the speaker says that he "listen[s] / to the breeze departing from the upper story of a tree / and the hum of insects in the field, / letting everything else have a word, and then another word," Hoagland is being extremely ironic, since the poem that records the experience is, in the end, the last word.

Hoagland's ability to mix modes of discourse, a technique the critic Steven Cramer described in a *Ploughshares* review as "muscular, conversational lines spring[ing] from narrative passages to metaphorical clusters to speculative meditations," also reveals the tensions and counterbalances that represent the mind/body split that is one of Hoagland's major concerns. In other words, in most of his poems, Hoagland uses the logic and order of Apollo to construct a coherent metaphorical and rhetorical whole to describe an overwhelmingly Dionysian sensibility. In "Social Life," discursive lines such as "It is not given to me to understand / the social pleasures of my species" are married to narrative, time-framing passages like "behind me now my friend Richard / is getting a

fresh drink." These knots of discourse are linked by the metaphorical cluster of the lifeboat that becomes the ship that becomes the vessel on which the speaker can join "the wild sweet dark." These clusters can be said to construct the poem's lyrical center, or the place where time in the poem seems to stop. The mix here produces pleasure at the sensual level of music and rhythm but also serves the purposes of meaning by reenacting mankind's most profound dilemma, which concerns the mind/body split that separates man from other animals.

In his Academy of American Poets citation for awarding *Donkey Gospel* the James Laughlin Award in 1997, William Matthews noted "a gaudy crash between dictions" in Hoagland's work. Although Hoagland does not merge idiomatic and conversational diction with more elevated word choices in "Social Life," the attraction to multiple tones can be seen in the clash between an idiomatic or conversational phrase like "kissy-kiss" and far more lyrical lines like "the wild sweet dark / where the sea breeze sizzles in the hedgetop." Thus, it can be seen that Hoagland's technique reveals his content in his diction as well as in his merging of the various modes of discourse.

Although it would not be fair to say that Hoagland opposes the natural world, it is clear that his work is so solidly bound to the human experience that a pastoral reading of "Social Life" would seriously underestimate the poem's intentions. A broad understanding of both Hoagland's approach and his major concerns shows that "Social Life" seeks to place its speaker in the space between longing (body) and thought (mind) to reveal man's most profound psychological challenge. The poem's most gorgeous irony is that its speaker has the last word by "writing" this poem. Thus, one can see Paglia's claim that "poetry is the connecting link between mind and body" illustrated in "Social Life."

Source: Adrian Blevins, Critical Essay on "Social Life," in *Poetry for Students*, Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Hatlen discusses the "geography" of Hoagland's poetry and his writing style as it appears throughout his works.

The total quantity of Tony Hoagland's poetry is relatively small. Three slim chapbooks were incorporated in large part into the full-length book *Sweet Ruin*, selected by Donald Justice as the 1992 winner of the Brittingham prize. In addition, Hoagland has published other poems in various magazines. But the body of Hoagland's work is fine-honed, and it has won considerable admiration not only from Justice but also from critics like Carl Dennis and Carolyn Kizer. Hoagland's poems characteristically open with dramatic flair: "When I think of what I know about America, / I think of kissing my best friend's wife / in the parking lot of the zoo one afternoon. . . ." or "That was the summer my best friend / called me a faggot on the telephone, / hung up, and vanished from the earth. . . ." These openings suggest the narrative mode in which Hoagland likes to work, and the need to find out what happens draws the reader into the poem. Hoagland develops his narratives in longish poems, almost always more than a page and sometimes as long as three pages, that normally resolve themselves in a wry, epigrammatic twist that implicitly acknowledges the insolubility of the initial premise; after you kiss your best friend's wife or after your best friend calls you a faggot, there is no going back.

The geography of Hoagland's poetry is white, middle-class suburban, post-1960s. Hoagland explores this region with a pervasive irony, a bravura wit, and sometimes a probing self-awareness. Many of the poems seem to be autobiographical, edging toward the confessional. Hoagland, or his invented persona, tells us not only about his best friends but also about how his father deliberately ruined (thus the title of this book) his own marriage and was then struck down by a heart attack; about how, at age seventeen, the young poet watched his mother shrivel away with cancer; about his grandmother Bernice, who believed that "people with good manners / naturally had yachts, knew how to waltz / and dribbled French into their sentences / like salad dressing"; about "that architect, my brother," who "lost his voice, and then his wife / because he was too proud to say, '"Please, don't go"'; about the rock concerts that filled his ears and those of his friends with scar tissue; and about many, many girlfriends. Sometimes the "I" becomes a "you" to imply that these experiences are typical of a generation and a particular social group. Thus, in one poem we read of "the night your girlfriend / first disappeared beneath the sheets / to take you in her red, wet mouth / with an amethystine sweetness / and a surprising expertise, / then came up for a kiss / as her reward. . . ."

In the most resonant of Hoagland's poems the thin and somewhat brittle social surface opens up to reveal unexpected depths. Sometimes the depths are religious, for God, it seems, is keeping an eye on us. In one marvelously delicate poem the poet shares a late-night cigarette with God, and in this moment "things"□the cluttered American middleclass life, not only the cars and the microwaves but all the responsibilities and human entanglements too□fall away, and we find ourselves in the presence of a great and blessed emptiness:

One does so much
building up, so much feverish acquiring,
but really, it is all aimed
at a condition of exhausted
simplicity, isn't it?
We don't love things.

The poet realizes that, at least in our sleep, we can escape the tyranny of things. All about him (and God) are "bodies / falling from the precipice of sleep," who for a few hours do not

remember how to suffer
or how to run from it.
They are like the stars,
or potted plants, or salty oceanic waves.

It seems that even in American suburbia getting and having can sometimes fade away to allow a few moments of simple being, although the reference to potted plants seems to twist the poem back toward irony.

In a few of his later poems Hoagland chooses to probe beneath the surface of American middleclass life in quest not of spiritual depths but of the social and economic underpinnings of this way of life. In "From This Height," for example, we are invited to observe a seduction scene that takes place beside a hot tub in an eighth-floor condominium. The speaker, caught up in the elegance of his surroundings, suddenly finds himself looking through this veneer as he recognizes that

we are on top of a pyramid
of all the facts
that make this possible:
the furnace heats the water,
the truck that hauled the fuel,
the artery of highway
blasted through the mountains. . . .

At the bottom, the speaker realizes, down there "inside history's body / the slaves are still singing in the dark." The speaker cannot think of anything to do with this knowledge except to kiss the girl and eat another mouthful of the "high calorie paté . . . / which, considering the price, / would be a sin / not to enjoy." But while the speaker of the poem seeks to deflect his new awareness with cynical wit, the poem seems to ask another kind of response from us□to move beyond cynicism and to act on this new and bitter knowledge.

Source: Burton Hatlen, "Hoagland, Tony," in *Contemporary Poets*, 7th ed., edited by Thomas Riggs, St. James Press, 2001, pp. 538-39.

Adaptations

A recording titled *Lunch Poems, Tony Hoagland, 10/7/99* (1999) was produced by the University of California, Berkeley, as a part of its monthly noon-time poetry reading series.

The *Ploughshares* online literary journal at http://www.pshares.org/ as of 2003 links to twenty-four of its articles by or about Hoagland. These pages contain Hoagland's poems, reviews he has written, and articles in which he is mentioned by other poets and critics.

Topics for Further Study

Write a poem about the kind of "social life" you have encountered or that your family leans toward. Is it much like Hoagland's or does it differ dramatically?

Levittown is known as the first suburb in America, named after its founder and creator, William Levitt. Write an essay on this neighborhood, examining both its positive and negative reception, as well as how it sparked controversy over issues of race, gender, and economic status.

In this poem, the speaker's friend, Richard, appears to represent the typical partygoer that Hoagland targets. If you had to create a psychological profile of Richard, based only on the information in the poem, how would you describe him? How fair do you believe your assessment can be and why?

How important is the natural world of trees, flowers, and wild animals where you live? Should more emphasis be placed on them or do other matters take precedence?

What Do I Read Next?

The Academy of American Poets at http://www. poets.org/ maintains a page called "Citation: 1997 James Laughlin Award." Written by late poet William Matthews, this article offers insight into why he and other members of the award committee selected Hoagland's *Donkey Gospel* to receive the 1997 prize. Matthews quotes sections of a few poems from the book and offers critiques on each.

Some Ether (2000) is the title of poet Nick Flynn's first collection. His work has received considerable attention by critics and fellow poets, including Hoagland.

Noted journalist, demographer, and political analyst G. Scott Thomas examines the massive power shift from the cities to suburbia in *The United States of Suburbia: How the Suburbs Took Control of America and What They Plan to Do with It* (2000). He argues that the dividing line between the two Americas, which used to be racial, has become more economic and geographic and that voters in the suburbs control the nation's elections.

In *The High Price of Materialism* (2002), psychology professor Tim Kasser argues that a materialistic orientation toward the world contributes to low self-esteem, depression, antisocial behavior, and even a greater tendency to get physically ill. Though statistically and scientifically based, Kasser's prose is very accessible and his theories are intriguing.

Further Study

Hoagland, Tony, *Donkey Gospel*, Graywolf Press, 1998.

The poems in Hoagland's second full-length collection deal primarily with the male desire for sexual prowess and machismo, while at the same time trying to deal with issues such as homosexuality, feminism, and other contemporary concerns. The poet's sexually explicit language in this collection is not for the easily offended.

□, "On Disproportion," in *Poets Teaching Poets: Self and the World*, edited by Gregory Orr and Ellen Bryant Voigt, University of Michigan Press, 1996.

In this collection of sixteen essays by contemporary poets, subjects range from a defense of the lyric form to Sylvia Plath's bees. Hoagland's contribution is helpful in understanding poetry created from seemingly disparate angles, thus, disproportionate, but not negatively so.

□, *Sweet Ruin*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

Hoagland's first collection is highly autobiographical and centers around his father's quest to ruin his own marriage by committing adultery. But, the poems also expand into Hoagland's own romantic exploits and attempt to connect the deeply personal with the openly social and political, particularly in contemporary America.

Lyons, Paul, *Class of '66: Living in Suburban Middle America*, Temple University Press, 1994.

Though the high school class of 1966 was a few years prior to Hoagland's own graduation, the lives of the subjects in this book parallel those examined in much of the poet's work. Here, Lyons looks at what happened to a select group of white, middle-class suburban kids who grew up in the era of Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement. His findings should be surprising to most readers.

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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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