Song of a Citizen Study Guide

Song of a Citizen by Czesław Miłosz

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BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

"Song of a Citizen" is a poem by the Nobel Prizewinning poet, Czeslaw Milosz. It was written in 1943, during the German occupation of Warsaw and was published in Polish in Milosz's collection *Ocalenie* (English translation, *Rescue*) in 1945. However, the poem was unavailable in English until 1973, when it appeared in Milosz's *Selected Poems* in a translation by the author.

The context of the poem is the enormous social and political upheaval that Milosz has witnessed during his lifetime and the continuing world war in which thousands are dying. And yet even in the midst of all this horror, the poet affirms that it is better to be alive than dead. He seeks a respite from the dark realities that surround him by thinking of the eternal phenomena of nature and the formulae of mathematics. He also recalls times when he seemed to be able to penetrate the mystery of things, and the poem brightens with sensuous imagery and Arcadian visions. But "Song of a Citizen" ends on a strong note of regret, as the poet acknowledges that he may never be able to realize his dreams. He questions God as to why his life has been so full of suffering and who is to blame for it, but he finds no answers.

Author Biography

Czeslaw Milosz was born June 30, 1911, in Szetejnie, Lithuania, the son of Aleksander (a civil en- gineer) and Weronika (Kunat) Milosz. By the time Milosz became a high school student in Wilno (Vilnius), Lithuania had become incorporated into Poland. In 1929, Milosz enrolled in the University of Wilno and studied law. He also became known as a member of a literary group known as the Catastrophic School, and he published his first volume of poetry, *Poem on Time Frozen* (1933). Milosz graduated with a master of law degree in 1934, after which he studied in Paris. Returning to Poland, he published his second book of poems, *Three Winters* (1936), and worked for a radio station in Wilno and later in Warsaw. He was in Warsaw when Poland was invaded by German and Soviet forces in 1939, beginning World War II. Milosz remained in Warsaw throughout the German occupation, writing for the underground resistance. After the war, *Rescue* (1945) was published in communist Poland. This third collection of poetry established his reputation as one of Poland's important writers.

Milosz served as second secretary at the Polish embassy in Washington, D.C., for over four years and was then transferred to Paris, where he defected to the West. He lived in Paris until 1960, publishing frequently. His books included a nonfiction work, *The Captive Mind* (1953); two novels, *The Seizure of Power* (1955), which drew on his experiences in Poland during World War II, and *The Issa Valley* (1955); *A Treatise on Poetry* (1957), and an autobiography, *Native Realm* (1958). He received the Prix Littéraire Européen for *The Seizure of Power*.

In 1960, Milosz moved to the United States, and, in 1961, he became professor of Slavic languages and literature at the University of California at Berkeley. Between 1962 and 1974, he published four volumes of poetry in Polish: *King Popiel and Other Poems* (1962), *Bobo's Metamorphosis* (1965), *City Without a Name* (1969), and *From Where the Sun Rises to Where It Sets* (1974). With the appearance of his *Selected Poems* in 1973, many of his poems were made available in English for the first time. Another collection in English, *Bells in Winter*, appeared in 1978.

Milosz also worked to make Polish literature more available to English speakers, publishing translations of Polish poetry and nonfiction works such as *The History of Polish Literature* (1970). He also translated into Polish many writers in English, including Shakespeare, Milton, Eliot, and Whitman.

In 1980, Milosz was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature, and, in that year, his books of poetry were published for the first time in Poland. In 1981, he visited Poland for the first time in thirty years, and the following year he published his tenth book of poetry, *Hymn to a Pearl*. In 1988, *The Collected Poems* was published in English.

In 1990, Milosz received the U.S. National Medal of Arts and was admitted to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He was presented with the Order of the White Eagle by the president of Poland in 1994.

Poem Text

A stone from the depths that has witnessed the seas drying up
and a million white fish leaping in agony,
I, poor man, see a multitude of white-bellied nations
without freedom. I see the crab feeding on their flesh.

I have seen the fall of States and the perdition of tribes,
the flight of kings and emperors, the power of tyrants.
I can say now, in this hour,
that I□am, while everything expires,
that it is better to be a live dog than a dead lion,
as the Scripture says.

A poor man, sitting on a cold chair, pressing my eyelids,
I sigh and think of a starry sky,
of non-Euclidean space, of amoebas and their pseudopodia,
of tall mounds of termites.

When walking, I am asleep, when sleeping, I dream reality,
pursued and covered with sweat, I run.
on city squares lifted up by the glaring dawn,
beneath marble remnants of blasted-down gates,
I deal in vodka and gold.

And yet so often I was near,
I reached into the heart of metal, the soul of earth,
of fire, of water.
And the unknown unveiled its face
as a night reveals itself, serene, mirrored by tide.
Lustrous copper-leaved gardens greeted me
that disappear as soon as you touch them.

And so near, just outside the window□the greenhouse of the worlds
where a tiny beetle and a spider are equal to planets,

where a wandering atom flares up like Saturn,
and, close by, harvesters drink from a cold jug
in scorching summer.

This I wanted and nothing more. In my later years
like old Goethe to stand before the face of the
earth,
and recognize it and reconcile it
with my work built up, a forest citadel
on a river of shifting lights and brief shadows.

This I wanted and nothing more. So who
is guilty? Who deprived me
of my youth and my ripe years, who seasoned
my best years with horror? Who,
who ever is to blame, who, O God?

And I can think only about the starry sky,
about the tall mounds of termites.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-4

The first three and a half lines of "Song of a Citizen" form one sentence, with the subject ("I, poor man") placed at the beginning of line three. The poet likens himself to a stone in the depths of the sea that has witnessed a cataclysmic disaster. In the disaster, the seas have dried up and a million white fish, deprived of the element that gives them life, leap in agony. Lines three and four continue the metaphor, applying it to the realm of human history. The poet sees many nations deprived of their freedom. The description of them as "white-bellied" links them to the earlier image of the white fish. Using another image drawn from marine life, the poet sees a crab eating at the flesh of the nations. The image suggests rot and decay in a world in which one living thing feeds on another (crabs eat dead fish).

Lines 5-10

These lines reveal more about the poet, who states that he has witnessed many disasters in human history. He has seen states fall, tribes become lost, and kings and emperors forced to flee. He has also known the power of tyrants. But in spite of this, and even while everything around him is dying, he still believes that it is better to be alive than dead. The allusion is to the verse in Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament: "But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion" (chapter 9, verse 4). This means that it is better to be alive even if one's lot in life is miserable because once a creature is dead, even a noble, powerful creature like a lion, it is as nothing.

Lines 11-14

Repeating that he is a poor man, the poet sits disconsolately in his cold chair and thinks of other things than the horrors of history. He contemplates a starry sky and a space not defined or measured by the principles of Euclidean geometry. (Euclid was a Greek mathematician who wrote a treatise on geometry in the third century B.C.) The poet also thinks of amoebas, microscopic one-celled organisms, and their pseudopodia. *Pseudopodia* is a zoological term, the plural of *pseudopodium*. It refers to a temporary projection of the protoplasm of a unicellular organism (such as an amoeba), by means of which it moves about and takes food, before being withdrawn into the mass of the organism's body. Following this, the poet thinks of tall mounds of termites. Termites are white ants that are found in the temperate zones and the tropics; they eat wood and can destroy wooden structures. Using soil and mineral grains, termites build mounds in which they lay their eggs. Some termite mounds can rise as high as a small tree; in Africa, they can be as high as twenty feet□hence, the reference in the poem to the "tall" mounds.

Lines 15-19

The poet states that his world has become reversed. When he is awake and walking around, it is as if he is asleep. Perhaps this means that he is forced to close his mind to the horror around him, dulling his own reactions. The phrase might also imply that what he has to endure each day is so aw- ful that it puts to sleep his higher aspirations or his sense of purpose or his belief that life should not be so sordid or destructive. The result of having to endure this odd state, in which waking seems like sleeping, is that the poet's dreams become more real to him than his everyday experience. But the dreams are not pleasant. He is pursued by something□he does not say what□and he runs, becoming drenched in sweat. He also dreams of dealing in vodka and gold in the square of a ruined city. The city, with its "marble remnants of blasted-down gates" may have been bombed. Perhaps it is an image of wartime Warsaw. The reference to vodka and gold suggests that the poet dreams that he is selling valuable commodities on the black market during times of privation.

Lines 20-25

This stanza is in contrast to the previous one, which described different kinds of illusions masquerading as reality. Here, the poet recalls that on many occasions he was able to penetrate to the essence of things, the "heart" of metal and the "soul" of earth, water, and fire. He gained momentary insight into the deep truth about life; what was previously unknown revealed itself to him. These were serene experiences, the poet says, but they were fleeting. He compares them to luscious gardens that greeted him but disappeared as soon as he touched them.

Lines 26-30

This stanza appears to continue the thought of the previous one but places it in a more concrete setting, "just outside the window." The images of the beetle and the spider, which are "equal to planets," suggest the infinite significance of tiny things. Even a stray atom can suddenly flare up and seem as mighty as the planet Saturn. The stanza closes with a pastoral image of harvesters drinking from jugs on a hot summer day. The images of nature's tiny creatures are thus linked to human celebrations of the bountifulness of life.

Lines 31-35

The poet speaks personally of his desires in life. The way he places his desires in the past tense ("This I wanted and nothing more") suggests that he has not found what he wanted and does not expect to in the future. He says he had hoped that in his later years he would be like the great eighteenthand nineteenth-century German poet Goethe, able to understand the natural world, to know it for what it is, and to express that understanding in his work ("reconcile it / with my work built up"). He anticipated that

his work would be like a citadel, or fortress, a firm, stable structure, even though it had to be built on the unstable, ever-changing nature of life ("a river of shifting lights and brief shadows").

Lines 36-40

The poet repeats the first line of the previous stanza and then poses a series of questions as he seeks to know why his life has not turned out as he wished and why he has had to endure so many horrors. Who can he blame for this? Who is guilty? Who deprived him of his best years? The final question is addressed to God. However, the questions remain unanswered.

Lines 41-42

In the absence of any answers to the questions that trouble him, the poet returns to the images he used in lines 12-14, of starry skies and mounds of termites. This is all he can think about.

Themes

Destruction and Negation

In the first two stanzas, which establish the context for the whole poem, the poet contemplates destruction on a vast, unnatural scale. In line 1, the apocalyptic, end-of-the-world image of the seas drying up suggests that something is happening that has never happened before. The results are catastrophic, producing mass death and suffering and unprecedented upheavals in human social and political organizations. The catastrophe is clearly man-made, unlike a natural disaster such as an earthquake. It represents a negation of all positive human aspiration, the triumph of everything in the human psyche that leads to violence and evil. In the midst of it all, the poet, by means of metaphor, equates himself with a stone at the depths of the now-disappeared ocean, an image that suggests his helplessness in the face of the destruction he is forced to witness. The remainder of the poem is a valiant attempt by this "stone" to articulate a response to the tragedies that he sees unfolding.

Affirmation

In spite of the distressing position in which he finds himself, the poet still is able to affirm the value and beauty of life. Although deeply troubled, his spirit is not entirely crushed. The affirmations take a number of different forms, including a quest for knowledge, a will to survive, and imaginative insight into the true nature of things.

The first affirmation of life comes in the second stanza. The poet states quite simply that even at that very moment, when everything around him is dying, it is still better to be alive than dead. This suggests the power of the instinct to live that is implanted in human beings (as indeed in all living things) that cannot be crushed even by the most dire of circumstances. That the poet has a subconscious desire to survive at almost any cost is suggested in the fourth stanza, in which he dreams of selling vodka and gold in a ruined city. Presumably this alludes to the role of the black marketeer, who in times of scarcity is willing to put scruples aside and make profit for himself from the sale of valued commodities. Vodka and gold also represent two ways of escape: alcohol alters perceptions of the world and temporarily eases sorrow, and material wealth can ameliorate for a time the pain of the human condition.

The poet also gives voice to deeper, more noble affirmations of life. In the third stanza, for example, he fills his mind with images from the natural world, far removed from the chaos around him. The thought of a starry sky, in its vast and still serenity, creates a calming influence. It suggests lofty thoughts of infinity, which lead the poet to contemplate mathematical concepts ("non-Euclidean space"), which, because of their order and unchanging nature, stand in stark contrast to the turbulence of human affairs. Even the images of the amoeba and the mounds of termites suggest the possibility of a

kind of detachment gained through the contemplation of the microscopic and insect worlds that go about their business undisturbed by apocalyptic human disasters.

The fifth stanza contains affirmations of a different kind. The poet recalls moments of imaginative intensity when he was able to penetrate the mystery of being: "I reached into the heart of metal, the soul of earth, of fire, of water." In these serene moments of deep insight, he understood things that were previously unknown. He gives no concrete details of what he learned, resorting instead to images of the gentle coming of night or of a luxurious garden to hint at what such moments of transcendence were like. Perhaps the point is that such moments are ineffable, beyond words, and can only be suggested by images.

These moments of heightened perception are also fleeting, like the gardens "that disappear as soon as you touch them." But the poet is in no doubt of their importance, and in the next stanza he hints at them again. It is clear that his mind is still on these transcendental moments because the first phrase, "And so near," echoes the first line of the previous stanza, "And yet so often I was near." This time, however, instead of the elements of water, fire, and earth, the images are more specific, focusing on tiny creatures in the physical world that contain so much more than appears on the surface: "a tiny beetle and a spider are equal to planets." The significance of the tiny extends into the atomic world, where "a wandering atom flares up like Saturn." The affirmation lies in the poet's insistence that everything in the world, even the tiniest insects and particles of matter, has a significance deeper than can be grasped by mere observation of the surface levels of life.

Desire and Regret

From visionary perception that sees beyond the ordinary, the poet moves to personal expressions of desire and regret. It appears that the moments of deeper insight, the attempt to affirm the integrity and wholeness of life in the midst of chaos, are not enough. The poet reveals that his real desires in life have not and may never be realized. That desire is to know and understand life in all its manifestations and to express that understanding in his own creative work. In the midst of the restless transience of life, the poet had wished to build something that would stand as a permanent embodiment of knowledge. He wanted to reconcile eternity and change, perhaps through understanding the eternal laws that govern the universe (as suggested by his interest in mathematics and biology) and combining the precision of the scientist with the insight of the poet. But now he knows this may not happen, since his youth and early manhood have been so blighted by suffering. But he does not know why this tragedy has happened or who is to blame for it. Since his desire to know is thwarted, all he can do is return to earlier images, of starry sky and tall mounds of termites, which may now acquire a darker connotation than they had when they first appeared. The starry sky is impersonal and does not respond to human desires, and the mounds of termites□intricate structures that display a high level of architecture□ are also the breeding grounds of insects that destroy human-built structures.

Style

The poem is written in free verse. The original, in Polish, contained some end rhymes, but Milosz, who translated the poem himself, did not use end rhyme in the English version. However, he does use other stylistic devices: there is alliteration, for example in lines 5 and 6. The "f," "p," and "t" sounds in the "fall of States and the perdition of tribes" are echoed in the same order in the following line by the "flight of kings and emperors and the power of tyrants." Alliteration occurs again in "tall mounds of termites" in line 14 and in lines 17 and 18 with "dawn" and "-down," words that are close enough in sound to create an imperfect rhyme (also known as near or partial rhyme), in which the consonants are identical but the vowels differ.

The stanzas vary in length from four to six lines, with one two-line stanza at the end. The length of the lines varies also, between dimeter (two feet) and heptameter (eight feet), although most lines fall in between these two. The meter is irregular and creates varying effects. Line 1, for example, is a pentameter that contains three successive anapestic feet (an anapest consists of two light syllables followed by a stressed syllable), and this gives the line what is called a "rising meter," which is entirely appropriate to the meaning, since it reinforces the idea of a stone rising from the depths of the sea (or appearing to rise as the sea dries up). In line two, the spondee (two successive heavy stresses) followed by a trochee (a stressed syllable followed by a light syllable) in "white fish leaping" emphasizes this image. The next line begins with two successive spondees, "I, poor man, see," which brings an emphasis to the speaker of the poem and the subject of the first long sentence, mentioned here for the first time.

In a key passage in the poem, Milosz uses punctuation to create a poetic effect. The theme of the second stanza is that no matter how bad the conditions of life are, it is better to be alive than dead. The poet affirms the value of life and of his own existence with the words "I□am, while everything expires." He does not simply write "I am," which would not have the force that he wants. By separating the subject and verb by a dash, he makes the speaking voice (and the silent reader) pause, and the effect is that both words are emphasized. "I□am" thus becomes the poet's triumphant affirmation of his own existence, almost a moment of revelation. He has prepared the way for this with the repetitions in the preceding line, "I can say now, at this hour," which moves from a generalized "now," which could mean "today" or "this year," to the more specific "at this hour," which sets up the "I□am" that follows, with its affirmation of being in a particular moment.

Historical Context

Poland has long been a country caught between hostile larger powers. For much of the nineteenth century, Poland was ruled by Russia, but in 1915, during World War I, Germany occupied the capital city of Warsaw, ending a century of Russian dominance. After World War I, Poland enjoyed over twenty years of independence, but this came to an end when Germany invaded the country on September 1, 1939. The Poles resisted, but after a three-week siege, Warsaw, a city of nearly 1,300,000 people, was captured. The Germans began a reign of terror that was to continue until early 1945. There were mass arrests, brutality, public executions, and forced deportations.

The Poles formed an underground resistance movement that carried out acts of sabotage against the Germans, who responded with bloody reprisals.

The city's 400,000 Jews suffered badly under the German occupation. They were herded into a walled ghetto, from which about 300,000 were sent to the concentration camp at Treblinka in 1942. In January 1943, the Germans attempted to deport the sixty thousand remaining Jews but met with resistance from the Jewish Combat organization. In April 1943, German troops attacked the ghetto and were again resisted by the Jews. The Germans responded by setting fire to the ghetto and flooding or smoke bombing the sewers through which many Jews tried to escape. Within a month, the Germans had killed almost all the Jews and completely destroyed the ghetto. Milosz, who as a member of the literary underground was publishing resistance poetry at the time, expressed revulsion at the killings in his poem "Campo dei Fiori," which includes these lines: "Those dying here, the lonely / forgotten by the world."

On August 1, 1944, another rebellion began, known as the Warsaw Uprising. The Polish underground hoped to gain control of the city before it was seized by the Soviets, whose forces had advanced to the banks of the Vistula River, on the other side of which lay Warsaw.

In the early days of the uprising, the fifty thousand Polish fighters gained the initiative. Within three days, they had seized control of most of the city from the surprised Germans. Milosz, who was living with his wife in the outskirts of the city, has described what happened to him on the first day of the fighting. The street in which he lived with his wife and mother-in-law came under fire from German tanks, and he and his wife took shelter with friends who lived on the next street. After the firing died down on the second day, Milosz's wife went back to fetch her mother, who was still in the building, and she also brought back some of Milosz's manuscripts. Not long after this, the building was destroyed by artillery fire.

Their troops under-armed and low on ammunition, the Poles' success did not last. The Germans fought back, bombarding the Poles' defensive positions with air and artillery attacks. Fighting went on for sixty-three days, but the Poles received no help from the Allies. The conflict is vividly described in Sir Winston Churchill's book, *Triumph and Tragedy*, the final volume in the British prime minister's history of World War II. Churchill

tried but failed to get help to the Polish insurgents. On August 24, 1944, Churchill wrote to President Roosevelt, quoting eye witness accounts of the battle:

> The Germans are continuing . . . their ruthless terror methods. In many cases they have burnt whole streets of houses and shot all the men belonging to them and turned the women and children out on the street, where battles are taking place, to find their way to safety. . . . In one house, where lived old retired professors of Polish universities, the SS troops forced an entrance and killed many of them.

The Poles were finally forced to surrender on October 2, when their supplies ran out. During the two-month battle, the Poles had 20,000 insurgents dead and 25,000 injured. The toll among civilians was over 150,000. Many of them were killed in massacres that took place in the early days of the uprising. The Germans had 10,000 killed, 7,000 missing, and 9,000 injured.

After the Polish surrender, the Germans took revenge. Adolf Hitler ordered the destruction of Warsaw. Within the next three months, eighty-five percent of the city was reduced to rubble. Thousands of people were deported, and there was famine amongst those who remained.

Milosz, who lived through those terrible times of the German occupation, many years later found it a difficult subject to discuss: "There was the ghetto, for God's sake, and the liquidation of three million Polish Jews, a sin that cries out□on the earth, in all of Poland□to be absolved."

In January 1945, Soviet forces entered the city and established a communist government under Soviet control. The ruined city was rebuilt but remained dominated by the Soviet Union until 1989, when a noncommunist government was elected.

Critical Overview

"Song of a Citizen" was first published in 1944 during the German occupation of Warsaw as one of a cycle of six poems making up the slim volume, *Voices of Poor People*. Like other poetry published in occupied Warsaw, it was produced in secret by printers who were willing to take the risk of being caught and punished by the Germans. Many copies circulated in the city. Milosz tells a story of a Polish boy during the occupation who found a suitcase in the family attic. It had been recovered by his railwayman father from a train, the occupants of which had all been sent to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. When the boy opened the suitcase, he found a copy of *Voices of Poor People* copied on a typewriter. No doubt "Song of a Citizen," as the voice of a Polish poet writing under the German occupation, had inspired many readers long before it became known to the outside world.

The poem did not become known in Englishspeaking countries until 1973, when it appeared in Milosz's *Selected Poems*, in a translation by the author. At that time, Milosz's work was almost unknown in the United States. *Selected Poems* was enthusiastically received by reviewers. Paul Zweig, in the *New York Times Book Review*, commented that on the evidence of the book, Milosz "seems one of the few genuinely important poets writing today." Zweig also wrote, in a comment that is relevant for "Song of a Citizen," that "Although Milosz is a poet of many subjects, the experience of loss casts shadows across all his work and amounts to an interpretation of life itself." D. J. Enright, in the *New York Review of Books*, referred to the "rational but gentle skepticism" of "Song of a Citizen," quoting the entire second stanza and comparing it to the work of the early-twentieth-century poet, C. P. Cavafy. Enright also commented that Milosz's work was "easy to quote from but difficult to describe, since effect and meaning are so much a matter of tone."

Although Milosz's output as a poet has been prolific, "Song of a Citizen," a poem written relatively early in his career, still gains the attention of critics. For example, in his essay, "Czeslaw Milosz: Silence . . . Memory . . . Contemplation . . . Praise," in *World Literature Today*, William Riggan quotes the entire poem as being representative of the poems Milosz wrote in the 1930s and 1940s. In the same issue of *World Literature Today*, which is a celebration of Milosz, Krzysztof Dynbciak quotes lines 20-22 of "Song of a Citizen" as an example of one of Milosz's many "enraptured descriptions when being is encountered, where it reveals itself to man."

Aleksander Fiut, in *The Eternal Moment: The Poetry of Czeslaw Milosz*, points out that the first four lines of "Song of a Citizen" illustrate a characteristic way in which Milosz approached the violence of the age and the deaths of so many people: "No Polish poet ever so radically equated the destruction of human beings, races and nations with the death of fish, insects, crabs and reptiles." Fiut argues that there were a number of reasons Milosz did this. First, it was to show that man is part of nature and is subject to its laws, just as lower organisms are. Another effect was to show that during wartime all the trappings of civilization are stripped away, leaving man closer to the animals and "face to face with naked existence." But the most important reason Milosz chose this

way of expressing himself was as a critique of the nihilism inherent in fascism. Fascism applied the same ruthlessness to the organization of human social life that the laws of nature produced in the evolution of animal life, particularly as shown by Darwinism:

> The universality and unpredictability of death, the
> struggle for existence determined by strength and the
> ability to survive . . . and the annihilation without
> trace of whole groups are all commonly accepted axioms
> in the biological sciences. But their application
> to human relations calls the entire humanist tradition
> into question.

Finally, Leonard Nathan and Arthur Quinn, in *The Poet's Work: An Introduction to Czeslaw Milosz*, interpret the poem, particularly lines 31-40, as Milosz's questioning of his vocation as a poet. They point out that this was more than a personal issue for Milosz, since he and his fellow poets in Warsaw were asking themselves whether poetry was of any use in such extreme times of human suffering.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses how Milosz's discovery of the poetry of William Blake influenced his poetic vision in "Song of a Citizen" and other poems.

In his book *The Land of Ulro* (1984), Milosz reveals his high regard for the English romantic poet William Blake (1757-1827). Milosz first discovered Blake's poetry in Warsaw during World War II. Working as a janitor at the university library, which was closed to the public, he taught himself English and read a few of Blake's poems that he found in an anthology. Milosz writes, "In those times and in that landscape so inhospitable to a child's awe before the miraculous, Blake restored to me my earlier raptures, perhaps to my true vocation, that of lover."

Later in his life, Milosz would study Blake's work, including his complex mythology, more deeply. Although he comments that he borrowed little from Blake in terms of literary technique, the influence Blake had on him is clear from the poems he wrote in wartime Warsaw, including "Song of a Citizen." Although Milosz does not say which of Blake's poems he read, it is likely that they were some of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794), which were the best known of Blake's poems at the time and were frequently anthologized.

Blake's *Songs of Innocence* are short lyric poems written from the point of view of a child's innocent perceptions. The world is illumined by the light of God, and everything is under the divine protection. The flavor of Blake's *Songs* is echoed by Milosz in his cycle of twenty poems entitled "The World," which he wrote in 1943□the time he was also reading Blake. These are deliberately simple poems that express a serene faith in the order and beauty of the world. Like Blake's *Songs*, their simplicity of tone and diction make some of them resemble nursery rhymes. Milosz subtitled the cycle "A Naïve Poem."

Two of these poems, "Fear" and "Recovery," are clearly modeled on Blake's *Songs*, particularly "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found." In "Fear," a little boy is lost in a frightening dark forest at night. He calls out, "Where are you, Father? The night has no end. / From now on darkness will last for ever." In the companion poem, "Recovery," the father appears and comforts his son as the darkness and fog give way to dawn. Similarly, in Blake's "The Little Boy Lost" a frightened boy loses his father in a dark fen at night; in "The Little Boy Found," God appears like his father in white and rescues him.

If the poems in "The World" are Milosz's "songs of innocence," the cycle of six poems entitled "Voices of Poor People," as well as several other poems Milosz wrote in Warsaw in 1943 and 1944, form his "songs of experience." These are darker poems that face the reality of suffering and the terrible cruelties that exist in the world. Blake subtitled *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, "Shewing the two contrary states of the human soul," and the epigram is appropriate, too, for Milosz's contrasting perspectives in "The World" and "Voices of Poor People." The latter collection, which

includes "Song of a Citizen" provides a series of snapshots of what one man saw, felt, and thought in that dark period of Polish, and European, history.

One such thought concerned the role of poetry and the poet. Some critics argue that in the last stanzas of "Song of a Citizen," for example, the poet questions his vocation, as he realizes that he may never fulfill the poetic dreams and ambitions of his youth. This implicit questioning of what poetry can accomplish becomes the primary theme of "The Poor Poet," one of the poems in "Voices of Poor People." It is a dramatic monologue that traces the evolution of the poet's career. His early poems were joyful, but since then he has seen too much of the world's miseries and now openly states that poetry is unrelated to real life and, therefore, of no use to humanity:

I poise the pen and it puts forth twigs and leaves, it
is covered with blossoms
And the scent of that tree is impudent, for there, on
the real earth,
Such trees do not grow, and like an insult
To suffering humanity is the scent of that tree.

The same theme is stated more bluntly in the poem "Dedication," which, although not part of the "Voices" cycle, was written in Warsaw in 1945. It includes the following lines: "What is poetry which does not save / Nations or people?" Later in his career, Milosz wrote of the "immorality of writing when confronted with some horror of the world or of life, the so-called conflict of life and art." Milosz's tendency at the time to doubt his vocation and the power of poetry to change things was quite different from Blake's, who in *Songs of Experience* exalted the poet as a seer who knows past, present, and future. But Blake's lifelong belief in the power of the poetic imagination to perceive life beyond its surface appearances did have an influence on Milosz, and this is discernible in "Song of a Citizen." One Blake poem that is often anthologized and which Milosz may have read in Warsaw in the 1940s is "Auguries of Innocence." It begins with some of Blake's most famous lines:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

The idea expressed in this quatrain is that somehow the whole of creation (indeed, the whole of being itself) is contained in every part of it, and it is the poet who is able to see this. Surely it is this concept that underlies the otherwise puzzling line in stanza six of "Song of a Citizen": "where a wandering atom flares up like Saturn," since the atom is Blake's "grain of sand" and Saturn is his "world."

Another echo of Blake's quatrain occurs in the second stanza of Milosz's poem "By the Peonies," which is part of the cycle "The World":

Mother stands by the peony bed,
Reaches for one bloom, opens its petals,

And looks for a long time into peony lands,
Where one short instant equals a whole year.

Other images in stanza six of "Song of a Citizen" have a Blakean flavor. Consider the lines ". . . the greenhouse of the worlds, / where a tiny beetle and spider are equal to planets." Blake's poetry is full of images of tiny things, including insects, that have a significance well beyond what might be supposed from the evidence of ordinary perception. An example would be the following lines from his long poem "Milton," which Milosz almost certainly did not know at the time he wrote "Song of a Citizen":

Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a
grain of sand?
It has a heart like thee: a brain open to heaven &
hell,
Withinside wondrous & expansive: its gates are not
clos'd;
I hope thine are not: hence it clothes itself in rich
array.

Once more, the minute thing contains whole worlds hidden to normal sight (note how in the line from "Song of a Citizen" quoted above, Milosz uses the plural, "worlds," where one would have expected the singular form of the noun).

It is remarkable that Milosz, who at the time had access to only a few of Blake's poems, should so thoroughly have imbibed the spirit of the English poet. Part of the explanation is that Milosz himself had the Blakean gift of seeing, in sudden moments of heightened perception, into the depths of things□ a gift which is quite independent of literary influences. It is this aspect of Milosz's work that is apparent in these earlier lines in "Song of a Citizen":

And yet so often I was near,
I reached into the heart of metal, the soul of earth,
of fire, of water.
And the unknown unveiled its face.

In Milosz's autobiography, *Native Realm: A Search for Self-Definition*, he recalls one such moment from wartime, and it serves as a detailed gloss on the above lines:

Lying in the field near a highway bombarded by airplanes,
I riveted my eyes on a stone and two blades
of grass in front of me. Listening to the whistle of a
bomb, I suddenly understood the value of matter: that
stone and those two blades of grass formed a whole
kingdom, an infinity of forms, shades, textures,
lights. They were the universe. . . . I saw into the
depths of matter with exceptional intensity.

Milosz would later associate such intense moments with experiencing life in the present, the now, the eternal moment, when consciousness of self is lost and the universe appears to disclose its inner essence and meaning. On some occasions, the poet senses the potential presence of such moments of illumination but they hover just beyond his conscious awareness. In the poem "Mittelbergheim," in *Collected Poems* (written in 1951), for example, he lies half-awake in the early morning and contemplates his many years on earth:

I felt I was attaining the moving frontier
Beyond which color and sound came true
And the things of the earth are united.
. . . . . .
Let me trust and believe I will attain.

These cryptic lines suggest the elusiveness of such moments, existing as they do in a "moving frontier," and yet they remain central to Milosz's quest for an authentic mode of being. In "This Only," for example, a poem written in 1985 and included in *Collected Poems*, the poet returns to a place of his youth, where he felt great joy in nature's variety and constant movement. Now, on his return, he does not ask for such moments to be repeated:

He wants only one, most precious thing:
To see, purely and simply, without name,
Without expectations, fears, or hopes.
At the edge where there is no I or not-I.

It is in such moments "at the edge," where all distinctions between subject and object vanish in an eternal moment, that poetry□at least a certain kind of poetry□is born. Once again, Blake has the right words, in lines that were well known to the later Milosz:

For in this Period the Poet's Work is Done: and all
the Great
Events of Time start forth & are concievd in such a
Period□
Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on "Song of a Citizen," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Ozersky is a critic and essayist. In this essay, Ozersky considers Milosz's poem as a statement of faith in the power of life. Czezlaw Milosz, in his acceptance for the 1980 Nobel Prize in Literature, asked what tyranny had to fear from experimental poetry. His response was that "Only if we assume that a poet constantly strives to liberate himself from borrowed styles in search for reality, is he dangerous. . . . There is no reason why the state should not tolerate an activity." He continued:

> that consists of creating 'experimental' poems and prose, if these are conceived as autonomous systems of reference, enclosed within their own boundaries. Only if we assume that a poet constantly strives to liberate himself from borrowed styles in search for reality, is he dangerous. . . . In a room where people unanimously maintain a conspiracy of silence, one word of truth sounds like a pistol shot.

It is telling that Milosz sees the formal aspects of verse as a political decision and compares it to the sound of a shot. Milosz's vision was tested in wartime, and afterwards in the repression of Soviet Poland, from which he defected in 1951. A poet at the center of the century's greatest catastrophe, Milosz is one of the great spirits in contemporary literature, a seer who speaks truth to power through his rich sense of nature and the universal laws that govern it. But can the truth reside in poetry as mystical, abstract, and Olympian as his? For Milosz, as he also said in his Nobel address, is not concerned in his art primarily with the traditionally political. Rather, he believes so strongly in the power of the Truth, that speaking it, on whatever level, serves the ultimate reality, the eternal. This eternal will survive all human catastrophes, Milosz believes, because it exists outside humanity and even outside the natural world:

> Complaints of peoples, pacts more treacherous than those we read about in Thucydides, the shape of a maple leaf, sunrises and sunsets over the ocean, the whole fabric of causes and effects, whether we call it Nature or History, points towards, I believe, another hidden reality, impenetrable, though exerting a powerful attraction that is the central driving force of all art and science.

This is heady stuff, mystical and metaphysical. It does not seem the stuff of a poet baptized by fire. Yet it is his very philosophical bent that allows Milosz to see beyond the devastation of his own lifetime. A humane Platonist, Milosz believes in the eternal, in an "impenetrable" reality behind all the forms of the world. Such a cosmic worldview seldom stops to make distinctions between public and private, large or small, or past and present. Life and death, truth and falsehood are its only coordinates. It certainly has no time to pay attention to poetry, a trivial form scarcely fit for attention. For that reason,

Milosz' poetry has a weight of meaning that formal experimentation, of the sort explored by his modernist peers, can never approach. For Milosz, poetry is not just poetry. It is a shot fired in self-defense.

For Milosz, the truth is a weapon, a precious power that alone can defeat despair and death. In "Song of a Citizen" the semi-divine consciousness of the poet conflates and contrasts the horrors of war (it was written in Warsaw in 1943) with the infinite glories of life. And the poet is at the center of it all.

A stone from the depths that has witnessed the seas
drying up
and a million white fish leaping in agony,
I, poor man, see a multitude of white-bellied nations
without freedom. I see the crab feeding on their
flesh.

The poem begins, appropriately, with a horrific image on conquest. Writing in occupied Poland in 1943, Milosz composed this poem at what was probably the nadir of the war. The Nazis had occupied the poet's native land in the first days of the war, in possibly the most one-sided conquest in modern history. Other peaceful countries had followed, as well as other military powers, and now, in his ruined capital, Milosz saw the world as many did: as an ocean of desperate, dying lives, about to be extinguished either by the Nazis or by "the crab" of general devastation. Milosz is rarely explicitly political, in the sense of speaking to the specifics of the time and place, and the "I" of the third line is not necessarily Milosz, any more than the poem is necessarily about Poland.

The next stanza continues on theme of devastation, spoken from an eternal, nameless observer.

I have seen the fall of States and the perdition of
tribes,
the flight of kings and emperors, the power of
tyrants.
I can say now, in this hour,
that I□am, while everything expires,
that it is better to be a live dog than a dead lion,
as the Scripture says.

Notice the weight and formality of the first lines, the slow, stately, iambic cadences□and how they contrast with the rest of the stanza. The general dissolves into the first person "I" and becomes more immediate as the line grows choppier, until it stops dead at the word "am."

Life matters most to the singing "citizen," who is a citizen of life and the world, rather than any particular country. Though "a poor man" caught in the world, his consciousness reaches out to embrace life in all its forms□from the "starry sky" of the heavens to the unimaginable forms of non-Euclidean space to the tiny and shapeless,

ever-changing shape of amoebas. And the "I" is not merely the "transparent eyeball" of transcendentalism, but a living, breathing, sweating reality, the perspective of a single human being. For Milosz, reality must be read like a map; seeing is a heroic existential act, in which, as he tells us, "the unknown unveil[s] its face." He tells us, in heroic rhythms, "I reached into the heart of metal, the soul of earth, of fire, of water." The truth is eternal, residing in the elements; in the very stuff of the world. Can such a perspective be enchained by brute force? Throughout "Song of a Citizen," it soars beyond the grasp of warfare and brutality.

And so near, just outside the window□the greenhouse
of the worlds
where a tiny beetle and a spider are equal to planets,
where a wandering atom flares up like Saturn,
and, close by, harvesters drink from a cold jug
in scorching summer.

We see developed here the poetic ideas which have been developing throughout the poem begin to blossom. Small and large are equally miraculous; life in and of itself is the one force connecting the separate wonders enumerated by the poet. Even non-poets feel the force of life, "reach into" the elements: the harvesters drinking from the cold jug in hot sun grasp the harmony of extremes.

In this way, Milosz is very "Whitmanesque." Like Whitman, no part of nature is alien to him, nor do contradictions get in his way. "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I contradict myself (I am large, I contain multitudes)," wrote Whitman. For Milosz, the power of existence is unconquerable, but unlike Whitman, the poet is himself a flawed and imperfect vessel for that existence. As is his medium.

Milosz regards it ironically. In two stanzas beginning, "this I wanted and nothing more," he regards his own self, daring to take into the context of the world his own puny suffering.

This I wanted and nothing more. In my later years
like old Goethe to stand before the face of the earth,
and recognize it and reconcile it
with my own work built up, a forest citadel
on a river of shifting lights and brief shadows.
This I wanted and nothing more. So who
is guilty? Who deprived me
of my youth and my ripe years, who seasoned
my best years with horror? Who,
who ever is to blame, who, O God?

The hubris and grandiose self-pity here is a stark contrast to the high-minded exaltation of the narrator up until now. One interpretation is simply that the poet is here being ironic, overdramatizing his own personal problems as a way to put individual pain in perspective. But this would be an oversimplification. Milosz is an intensely emotional

poet, one very sparing in his use of ironic artifice. Such an ultra-cool gambit as the one just described would be very unlike him. Nor does it make much sense in the larger context of the poem. Why bother belittling the narrator, when he has already been established as a "poor man" with his eyes fixed in the infinite distance?

Perhaps because, despite his best efforts to the contrary, Milosz in unable to attain the pantheistic rapture he seems on the verge of. Despite his best efforts to the contrary□the poet's imagination, his intellect, his bold grappling with the elements□he is still caught caught inside his own skin. Beyond his philosophizing is a comfortless mystery, the sense every person experiences in times of defeat. The repeated, rhetorical "who?" questions change the tone of the poem from an elevated, eloquent, and philosophical one to one of common exclamation. The penultimate stanza is the most conspicuously "unpoetic" in the poem. It is certainly the most unreflective, the one farthest from the empyrean musings of the poem's first two thirds. It suggests the difficulty of seeing beyond the prison of one's own circumstances. And the final stanza takes a final step away, putting the narrator's outburst back into symbolic context.

And I can think only about the starry sky,
about the tall mounds of termites.

These lines reconcile the split in the poem. To whom is a termite mound "tall?" Not the starry skies or the infinite perspective they represent. Is the mound tall to a person? Only given that it is made by creatures so tiny, that its scale is so wildly disproportionate to the beings that produced it. Perhaps, the poet suggests that his own verse is a similar undertaking□as hopeless in the face of the infinite, as ridiculous, and as stark a product of deliberate will.

"Song of a Citizen" is a trivial enough undertaking, after all, given the time and place of its writing. Composing metaphysical verse during wartime can, and was, seen by some as fiddling while Rome burns. But to transcend military defeat, and to defeat war and violence itself, required a great act of the spirit. To some extent, Milosz's entire career has been one long act of liberation.

Source: Josh Ozersky, Critical Essay on "Song of a Citizen," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Topics for Further Study

Milosz once wrote of the "immorality" of writing poetry when confronted with some great horror in life (such as the German occupation of Warsaw). What do you think he meant by this? Does poetry have an important role to play in society? What might that role be?

Research what is meant by "survivor guilt," a sentiment that is found in a number of Milosz's wartime poems. What effect does survivor guilt have on people's lives? What might be the best way to deal with it?

Why did Milosz call his poem "Song of a Citizen?" Explain your answer. In addition, think of alternate titles for the poem and explain why you think these titles would fit the poem.

Why is the image of the "tall mounds of termites" appropriate to the poem? What might it signify? (Do some research on termites on the Internet to support your view.)

Why does Milosz mention Goethe in the poem? Who was Goethe, and why is the reference appropriate?

Is it possible to answer the poet's final question, "Who, / who ever is to blame, who, O God?" Explain your point of view.

Compare and Contrast

1940s: Up to 1945, virtually the entire world is at war. Germany and Italy battle the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and their allies for control of Europe, while in the Pacific region the United States continues the war against Japan.

Today: Europe is at peace. Former enemies Germany, Italy, Britain, and France are members of the European Community, with economic and political ties that make a future war between them virtually impossible. These countries are also members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) a defensive military alliance. Of other former enemies, the United States and Japan are allies, not adversaries.

1940s: Poland is at first under German control, then after World War II, although nominally an independent nation, it falls under Soviet domination. In 1955, Poland becomes a member of the Warsaw Pact, a military alliance between the Soviet Union and the communist nations of Eastern Europe. The Warsaw Pact is an adversary of NATO.

Today: Poland is no longer dominated by the Soviet Union, which collapsed in 1991. Before that, the Poles, inspired by the labor movement Solidarity, had battled for a decade to overthrow the repressive communist regime. Along with the Czech Republic and Hungary, Poland is also a new member of NATO (joined 1997), marking its transition from communism to a Westernstyle democracy. Russia opposes this expansion of NATO.

1940s: In wartime Warsaw, copies of Milosz's poems circulate in small numbers in secret. Some of them are copied on typewriters or by hand. Milosz is not known outside his native country.

Today: Milosz is a winner of the Nobel Prize for literature (in 1980), and his poems, translated into English, are known and admired worldwide. He still writes in his native language. Through his efforts, much Polish literature in translation is available in the United States.

What Do I Read Next?

Milosz's *Visions from San Francisco Bay* (1988) is a collection of short essays, originally published in Polish in 1969. Milosz moved to California in 1960, so his reflections on American culture figure prominently in these essays□essays that cover a wide range of topics, from literature to religion, philosophy, and history.

Postwar Polish Poetry: An Anthology by Czeslaw Milosz (1983) is a collection by Milosz of 125 poems by twenty-five Polish poets writing since World War II. The emphasis is on poems published after 1956, when the lifting of censorship and the breakdown of official political doctrines produced an explosion of new schools and talents.

A Book of Luminous Things: An International Anthology of Poetry (1996) edited by Milosz includes a wide range of poems selected by Milosz and grouped under thematic headings such as "Epiphany," "The Secret of a Thing," "The Moment," "Woman's Skin," and "Nonattachment." Milosz's introduction and his notes on individual poems give valuable insight into the reasons for his choices.

Destroy Warsaw!: Hitler's Punishment, Stalin's Revenge (2001), by Andrew Borowiec, is a description of the Warsaw Uprising by a man who took part in it and survived. Borowiec gives a lively and sometimes harrowing account of those sixty-three fateful days in 1944 when Polish citizens rose up against the ruthless Nazi occupation forces.

Polish author Stanislaw Lem's first novel, *Hospital of the Transfiguration*, written in 1948, is the story of a young Polish doctor who begins his career in a mental hospital, hoping to avoid the horrors of the German occupation.

Further Study

Carpenter, Bogdana, "The Gift Returned," in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 73, No. 4, Autumn 1999, pp. 631-36.

Carpenter discusses the influence on Milosz of the English and American literature he read in occupied Warsaw during World War II. These poets included Blake, Milton, Whitman, and T. S. Eliot.

Chamberlain, Marisha, "The Voice of the Orphan: Czeslaw Milosz's Warsaw Poems," in *Ironwood*, Vol. 18, 1981, pp. 28-35.

An analysis of the poems Milosz wrote in Germanoccupied Warsaw. Chamberlain views them as "bitter elegies" arising from the conflict between the poet's energy and his helplessness.

"Czeslaw Milosz: 1980 Nobel Prize in Literature," in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 55, No. 1, Winter 1981, pp. 5-6.

This article contains the entire text of Milosz's Nobel Prize acceptance speech that he made in Stockholm on December 10, 1980.

Mozejko, Edward, *Between Anxiety and Hope: The Poetry and Writing of Czeslaw Milosz*, University of Alberta Press, 1988.

This is a collection of seven scholarly essays that are both a tribute to Milosz and an attempt to give a balanced assessment of his literary output.

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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

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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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