



etruscan press

The Candle

By William Heyen

A Study Guide for Students

Synopsis

A collection of selected poems on Holocaust, navigating through family history, witness and stories passed down from one generation to another.

Why Include This Book in the Classroom?

- This book deals with one of the most devastating events in the history of mankind (Holocaust) in an inventive and unforgettable way
- Similarly, this book approaches a public grief through the intertwined experiences of members of the speaker's family—members who are on both sides of the spectrum (Nazis and Jews.)
- The poems in the book represent a selection of the best poems of a poet who has been a National Book Award finalist, spanning over 35 years.
- Being the best work of a master poet, the poems here exude technical virtuosity that only few books can match.
- The poems here tell stories of brutal death, survival, melancholy, hope—these stories are heavy, but the poems deliver them in bold manner.
- In these present times, with events around the world, this is the kind of book we need to remind ourselves of what it means to be human.

Author Bio

William Heyen, an American poet, editor and critic was born in 1940 in Brooklyn, New York. A former Senior Fulbright Lecturer in American Literature in Germany, he has won NEA, Guggenheim, American Academy & Institute of Arts & Letters, and other fellowships and awards. He is the editor of *American Poets in 1976*, *The Generation of 2000: Contemporary American Poets*, and *September 11, 2001: American Writers Respond*. His books include *Pterodactyl Rose: Poems of Ecology*, *The Host: Selected Poems*, *Erika: Poems of the Holocaust*, and *Ribbons: The Gulf War from Time Being Books*; *Pig Notes & Dumb Music: Prose on Poetry and Crazy Horse in Stillness*, winner of 1997's Small Press Book Award for Poetry, from BOA; *Shoah Train: Poems*, a Finalist for the 2004 National Book Award, and *The Confessions of Doc Williams: Poems* from Etruscan Press; and *The Rope: Poems*, *The Hummingbird Corporation: Stories*, and *Home: Autobiographies, Etc.* from MAMMOTH Books. Carnegie-Mellon University Press has published his first book, *Depth of Field* (LSU P, 1970) in its Classic Contemporaries Series. Etruscan Press has recently published *A Poetics of Hiroshima*, a *Chautauqua Literary & Scientific Circle* selection for 2010.

Study Questions

Section 1: Swastika Poems and Erika

1. Considering that the poems in this section are told before the speaker's birth, how effective is the poet's use of flashback? Are there rooms for doubting the accuracy of the information provided in these historical poems?

Writing Prompt: Think of the most frightening/ intriguing story you were told either as a child or as an adult by your parent/family member about them. Think of what you can do by bringing this story to life. Write about it.

Section 2: Falling from Heaven and Ribbons: The Gulf War

1. Given that the speaker is an outside observer in these poems, how far does the speaker go in making us feel for the bodies in these devastating events? Is the speaker able to achieve this catharsis through sheer sentiment or skillful observation? Whatever position you take, support it with textual references.

Writing Prompt: Read a story from a journal or magazine (even statuses on social media), write a poem about the story as though you are present.

Section 3: Angel Voices: A Poem

Linguistically and structurally, this section is different from the rest of the book. With textual analysis, point out these anomalies. Secondly, in your own estimation, how much does this section fit with the rest of the book?

Writing Prompt: Write a poem, made up of short lines and has no physical setting.

Section 4: A Poetics of Hiroshima and Hiroshima Suite

1. Here, the speaker is removed from the histories the poems in this section tell, how does this distance between the speaker and the events make a reader feel, especially when compared to poems in which the speaker is an integral part of the events? Are you less engaged when the speaker is outside the event? Respond with the text.

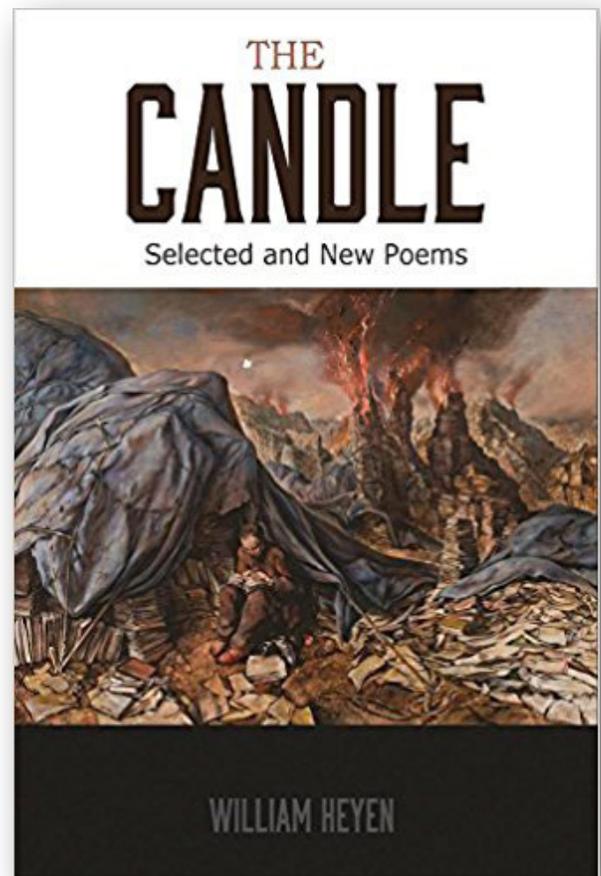
Writing Prompt: Write a poem on an event

that you are outside of. Write another poem in which you are a part of, compare the emotional strengths of both poems.

Section 5: Shoah Train and the Candle: New Poems

1. These are poems of introspection; revealing the inner chambers of the Nazis and in the process showing the machineries of one of the darkest moments in human history. With textual analysis, how much do you agree with this technique? Do you find yourself questioning the speaker? If yes, why? If not, why?

Writing Prompt: Read up on a painful phase of your country's history and turn that history to poetry.



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