An African Elegy Study Guide

An African Elegy by Robert Duncan

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

"An African Elegy" is one of the most controversial poems that Duncan ever wrote. Editor John Crowe Ransom accepted the poem for publication in *The Kenyon Review* in 1942 calling it "very brilliant." However, after Duncan published his essay "The Homosexual in Society" in Dwight Mac- Donald's radical monthly *Politics,* "outing" himself and arguing (in part) that gay culture needed to see itself as more fully a part of mainstream society, Ransom changed his mind and decided not to publish the poem. Ransom wrote: "We are not in the market for literature of this type." By *literature of this type,* Ransom meant poetry that, in his view, was an "obvious homosexual advertisement." The curious thing about Ransom's rejection of the poem is that he did not read any homosexual content in it when he accepted it, but only after reading Duncan's essay. Ransom, though he praised the essay, disagreed with it and considered homosexuality an "abnormality." In response to Ransom's new reading of "An African Elegy," Duncan wrote, "The theme of the poem is not homosexuality; nor does the darkness stand for homosexuality. The dark continent in the poem is not what one hides, but what is hidden from one.... It would be rather astounding in an overt homosexual that what was held back, imprisoned in the unconscious, was the homosexual desire." Duncan wanted Ransom to publish their correspondence about the poem in *The Kenyon Review,* but Ransom refused. The poem was eventually published in 1959.

The poem itself is difficult. Written in eight free-verse stanzas, it is full of symbols and allusions to both Africa and Western literature. The central symbolic metaphor is how the dark jungles of Africa are like the dark and unknown places of the human mind and heart. Duncan loads the poem with African animal imagery and references to famous women (both real women and literary characters), such as Virginia Woolf, Ophelia, and Desdemona, who either committed suicide or were murdered. Death, personified as a "dog-headed man," appears everywhere in the poem, eliciting varying responses from the speaker.

Duncan said that the poem was, in part, inspired by Spanish poet Frederico Garcia Lorca's poem "El Rey de Harlem" (The King of Harlem). Lorca was a heavily persecuted gay writer whom Duncan admired. Even practiced readers of modern poetry, however, would be hard-pressed to find any evidence of a homosexual theme or imagery in the poem.

Author Biography

Robert Duncan is one of the twentieth century's most enigmatic and romantic poets. His dedication to poetry as an act of magic and self-creation has enlarged the scope of what is possible for other poets to do. Born to Edward Howard and Marguerite Wesley Duncan on January 7, 1919, in Oakland, California, Duncan was given up for adoption shortly after birth and raised as Robert Edward Symmes. He resumed using his original surname in 1942. At three years old, Duncan suffered an eye injury in a fall, making him cross-eyed. Duncan has written about his altered way of physically perceiving the world in his poems, and critics have made connections between his writing and his injury, especially in regards to the blurring of identities and distinctions in his poetry. Duncan's adopted parents were "orthodox theosophists," and his upbringing was steeped in hermetic lore and the occult. Theosophy, a nineteenth century spiritual movement founded on the ideas of Madam Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, incorporated principles from both Eastern and Western religions and held reincarnation as one of its central doctrines. Theosophists saw correspondences in language and nature and believed that the physical world itself was a system of symbols pointing to a deeper reality. Duncan's parents read fairy tales and myths to him and provided him with a storehouse of poetic material, which he would draw from throughout his life.

At the University of California at Berkeley, Duncan began publishing his poems in the school's literary journal, *The Occident,* and meeting regularly with a circle of literary friends which included Pauline Kael, Virginia Admiral, and Lili Fabilli. After two years at Berkeley, Duncan moved to New York City, where he became involved with a group of writers gathered around Anaïs Nin that included Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell, and Nicolas Calas. This was a rich time in Duncan's life during which he developed friendships with poets Russel Sanders and Jack Johnson and a number of abstract expressionist painters who were to influence his own thinking about the possibilities for poetry. In 1942, Duncan met Kenneth Rexroth, one of the central figures in mid-twentieth-century American poetry and a shaper of the San Francisco Renaissance in which Duncan was a major player. Duncan, who saw himself as a spiritual quester and wanderer, married Marjorie McKee in 1943, but the couple divorced shortly after when McKee had an abortion. In 1944, Duncan wrote and published the groundbreaking essay, "The Homosexual in Society," in which he both "outed" himself as a gay man *and* criticized the homosexual culture's attitude of superiority. In 1951, Duncan began what was to be a lifelong partnership with artist Jess Collins.

In the mid 1940s, Duncan returned to San Francisco and became a vital part of the burgeon- ing literary scene there, later known as the San Francisco Renaissance. Writers involved in this renaissance included Philip Whalen, Jack Spicer, Philip Lamantia, and Robin Blaser, among others. Never a follower of any one literary school or trend, Duncan was active in a number of groups, including the Maidens, a San Francisco circle of writers who gathered for readings and discussions, and the Black Mountain group, which included Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, Larry Eigner, and John Cage. Duncan taught at the experimental Black Mountain College for a few terms in 1956 with some of the latter poets and, after Olson died, became the leading

spokesman for open form, or Projectivist, poetry. Duncan published his poetry with a number of presses, many of them small. His best-known books include *The Opening of the Field* (1960), *Roots and Branches* (1964), and *Bending the Bow* (1968).

Never one to promote his own writing or to participate in the kind of reputation mongering in which so many writers engage, Duncan has nevertheless gained a steady, if modest, stream of new readers through the years. His poetry, learned and sometimes obscure, is at once intensely personal and passionately public. He strove to give meaning to his own life by seeing it as a part of all life. Poetry, for Duncan, did more than merely reflect society; it helped determine what it would be.

Robert Duncan died of a heart attack on February 3, 1988, in San Francisco, California.

Poem Text

In the groves of Africa from their natural wonder
the wildebeest, zebra, the okapi, the elephant,
have entered the marvelous. No greater marvelous
know I than the mind's
natural jungle. The wives of the Congo
distil their red and the husbands
hunt lion with spear and paint Death-spore
on their shields, wear his teeth, claws and hair
on ordinary occasions. There the Swahili
open his doors, let loose thru the trees
the tides of Death's sound and distil
from their leaves the terrible red. He
is the consort of dreams I have seen, heard
in the orchestral dark
like the barking of dogs.
Death is the dog-headed man zebra striped
and surrounded by silence who walks like a lion,
who is black. It was his voice crying come back,
that Virginia Woolf head, turnd
her fine skull, hounded and haunted, stopt,
pointed into the scent where
I see her in willows, in fog, at the river of sound
in the trees. I see her prepare there
to enter Death's mountains
like a white Afghan hound pass into the forest,
closed after, let loose in the leaves
with more grace than a hound and more wonder there
even with flowers wound in her hair, allowing herself
like Ophelia a last
pastoral gesture of love toward the world.
And I see
all our tortures absolved in the fog,
dispersed in Death's forests, forgotten. I see
all this gentleness like a hound in the water
float upward and outward beyond my dark hand.
I am waiting this winter for the more complete black-out,
for the negro armies in the eucalyptus, for the cities
laid open and the cold in the love-light, for hounds
women and birds to go back to their forests and leave us
our solitude.
Negroes, negroes, all those princes,
holding cups of rhinoceros bone, make
magic with my blood. Where beautiful Marijuana

towers taller than the eucalyptus, turns
within the lips of night and falls,
falls downward, where as giant Kings we gathered
and devourd her burning hands and feet, O Moonbar
thee and Clarinet! those talismans
that quickened in their sheltering leaves like thieves,
those Negroes, all those princes
holding to their mouths like Death
the cups of rhino bone,
were there to burn my hands and feet,
divine the limit of the bone and with their magic
tie and twist me like a rope. I know
no other continent of Africa more dark than this
dark continent of my breast.
And when we are deserted there,
when the rustling electric has passt thru the air,
once more we begin in the blind and blood throat
the African catches; and Desdemona, Desdemona
like a demon wails within our bodies, warns
against this towering Moor of self and then
laments her passing from him.
And I cry, Hear!
Hear in the coild and secretive ear
the drums that I hear beat. The Negroes, all those princes
holding cups of bone and horn, are there in halls
of blood that I call forests, in the dark
and shining caverns where
beats heart and pulses brain, in
jungles of my body, there
Othello moves, striped black and white,
the dog-faced fear. Moves I, I, I,
whom I have seen as black as Orpheus,
pursued deliriously his sound and drownd
in hunger's tone, the deepest wilderness.
Then it was I, Death singing,
who bewildered the forest. I thot him
my lover like a hound of great purity
disturbing the shadow and flesh of the jungle.
This was the beginning of the ending year.
From all of the empty the tortured appear,
and the bird-faced children crawl out of their fathers
and into that never filld pocket,
the no longer asking but silent, seeing nowhere
the final sleep.
The halls of Africa we seek in dreams
as barriers of dream against the deep, and seas

disturbd turn back upon their tides
into the rooms deserted at the roots of love.
There is no end. And how sad then
is even the Congo. How the tired sirens
come up from the water, not to be toucht
but to lie on the rocks of the thunder.
How sad then is even the marvelous!

Plot Summary

Stanza 1

Elegies are poems written to lament someone's death. In "An African Elegy" death isn't literal but figurative. The speaker is lamenting the death of a part of himself. The opening stanza creates a symbolic landscape full of exotic African creatures such as wildebeests, zebras, elephants, and okapi, a giraffe-like animal found in the Congo. Swahili are part of the Bantu peoples of eastern and central Africa. Duncan makes an explicit connection between the "marvelous" jungle in which the animals live and the "mind's / natural jungle." "Marvelous" primarily has a positive meaning here, but it picks up less benign associations as the poem develops. The preparation and hunting rituals engaged in by the Congolese men and women create a strange and ominous atmosphere in which death is omnipresent.

Stanza 2

Developing the image of death with which he ends the first stanza, Duncan personifies death here as "the dog-headed man zebra striped / and surrounded by silence who walks like a lion, / who is black." This image might also be a literal description of one of the hunters. Duncan uses dog imagery throughout the poem, often to suggest contradictory ideas. Like dogs, death variously appears as a loyal companion, a guide, and a frightening presence. The speaker associates this image of death with British writer Virginia Woolf, who drowned herself in the River Ouse. Death calls Woolf back to the river to drown herself. Woolf suffered from depression and battled emotional demons throughout her life. The images the speaker uses to describe Woolf's journey toward death are dream-like, spectral, and enigmatic. The speaker empathizes with Woolf's emotional torment. Toward the end of the stanza, he compares her to Ophelia, a character from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet,* who, emotionally unbalanced, commits suicide by drowning. These two figures become symbolic representations for all of humanity, whose "tortures" the speaker sees "absolved in the fog, / dispersed in Death's forests, forgotten." Here death is seen as a rescuer, a primal and natural part of the world into which all must eventually journey. Note that Woolf is a variant of wolf, an animal closely associated with the dog.

Stanza 3

In the previous stanzas, the speaker describes what he sees and hears. In this stanza, he announces his desire: "I am waiting this winter for the more complete black-out." This image and the ones that follow are symbolic, that is images that arise from the speaker's subconscious. Symbolic imagery does not have a one-to-one correlation to things or ideas outside of itself; rather symbols open up a realm of association, which can either be private (known only to the poet) or public (familiar to the common reader).

"Negro armies in the eucalyptus" is an obscure image but one which suggests the idea of waiting. Who, though, is the "us" to whom the speaker refers? If the poem is read as a statement on homosexuality, as at least one reader has interpreted it, it might refer to the gay community itself, which has been persecuted and ostracized. Another possibility for the "us" is all the people who have suffered like the speaker himself, people of similar sensibilities, for example, Virginia Woolf. The third possibility is that the "us" is universal as in all humanity. Again the image of dogs, figured as "hounds," appears. This stanza suggests a contradiction in the speaker's desire. He wants "hounds / women and birds to go back to their forests and leave us / our solitude." Yet those very images, associated with death, are the ones that can "absolve tortures."

Stanza 4

This stanza describes a ritual in which Negro princes drink the blood of the speaker from cups made of rhinoceros bone and then, using magic, "tie and twist [him] like a rope." This stanza echoes lines from Spanish poet Frederico Garcia Lorca's poem "El Rey de Harlem." Duncan himself has noted that this scene describes a sado-masochistic ritual in which the speaker casts himself in the role of victim. The speaker describes himself and others as "Kings" ("as giant Kings we gathered / and devourd her burning hands and feet") possibly transformed through the smoking of marijuana, a plant with psychoactive chemicals. He then invokes the names of both "moonbar" and "clarinet" as talismans, that is, objects that hold magical powers. Duncan was well versed in the occult and the practice of magic and alchemy, and he frequently uses images from those fields in his poetry. Moonbar is a pearly white, opaque gemstone, usually pale blue with green and gold mottling, and considered a magic stone. Duncan repeats the image of burning hands and feet later in the stanza, foreshadowing his reference to Orpheus, son of Apollo and the muse Calliope, who was dismembered by the Maenads, a group of women who worshiped Dionysius. The last three lines highlight the symbolic nature of the ritual itself. The speaker is saying that what goes on inside of him, the "dark continent of my breast," is as strange and tormenting as the scene just described.

Stanza 5

This stanza refers to the process of dying and death. "The rustling electric" is life itself, the energy that constitutes the animate world. Desdemona is the wife of Othello, a black African (Moor) in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Her figure holds some significance for the speaker, as she too is a victim. She is murdered by her husband in a jealous rage when he suspects her of having an affair with his best friend. That she "wails within our bodies" further underscores the idea of victimization implicit throughout the poem. However, that she both "warns / against this towering Moor of self" and "laments her passing from him" seems to imply that she, and, by implication, the speaker, and possibly all of humanity are never simply victims but somehow always complicit in whatever happens to them. Human beings are always both victims and victimizers. "Catches" is a word that Duncan has used in other poems. It has multiple meanings. On

the one hand, it can mean the thing that is caught, as in a net of "catches"; on the other hand, it can mean being caught (i.e., what "catches" one).

Stanza 6

In this stanza the speaker's sense of self dissipates into others. The images of the negroes and the rhinoceros-bone cups again appear. Duncan makes the symbolism more explicit in this stanza, as he compares the "halls / of blood that I call forests" to "the dark / and shining caverns where / beats heart and pulses brain, / in jungles of my body." The figure of Othello, here "striped black and white" represents the complexity of the speaker's desire. Othello was largely a good man who gave in to his jealousy and rage. The repetition of the pronoun "I" highlights the ecstatic pitch of the speaker's emotion. Disembodied, he witnesses himself "as black as Orpheus," possibly a reference to *Orphee Noire,* a French film which retells the story of Orpheus. The speaker's identification with Orpheus makes sense when the reader understands that Orpheus was the son of Calliope, one of the nine muses, and was revered for his music and verse. It is said that Orpheus had the ability to tame wild animals with his music.

Stanza 7

In this stanza, the speaker makes peace with Death. The image of the hound appears again, this time signifying an emotional release of sorts for the speaker. The souls of the dead now appear out of "all of the empty," a kind of limbo. Other images in this stanza symbolize the relentlessness of desire "that never filld pocket," and the incessant nature of being, "seeing nowhere / the final sleep," the inability to die.

Stanza 8

This stanza universalizes the speaker's vision. "The halls of Africa," for Duncan, symbolically representative of the zone of "the marvelous," is a place both desired and feared. These final images speak to the impossibility of love, as "seas / disturbd turn back upon their tides / into the rooms deserted at the roots of love." The first sentence of the fifth line makes literal what was figurative in the image of the "bird-faced children crawl[ing] out of their fathers" in the preceding stanza; "There is no end." The final image of the "tired sirens / com[ing] up from the water not to be touchd" both describes and emphasizes the complex nature of human desire.

Themes

Death

"An African Elegy" presents death as a subconscious force that is not fully present to the speaker except in symbolic terms. Duncan charts his relation to death through introspection, likening his own mind to Africa's jungles. His descriptions of those jungles are replete with images of suffering and death: "Death is the dog-headed man zebra striped /and surrounded by silence who walks like a lion, / who is black." For Duncan, Death is both an ominous seducer, who beckons Virginia Woolf to "come back" to the river to complete her suicide, and a welcome presence, who can rescue people from torment: in death "all our tortures [are] absolved in the fog, / dispersed in Death's forests, forgotten." The death drive, popularized in the philosophical idea of *Thanatos,* is alternately welcomed and rebuffed in Duncan's poem. As an elegy, this poem mourns not physical death, per se, but the fact that death must be a necessary part of the exotic and the beautiful, the zone of the "marvelous."

Race and Racism

Any poem titled "An African Elegy" and written by a white American will necessarily touch on the idea of race. Duncan's poem, written in 1942, though using Africa and the Congo in symbolic terms, nonetheless presents Africans in stereotypical ways. His representations of Africa as a dark and unknowable place and of Africans as an inscrutable and exotic people who engage in barbaric rituals play on popular misconceptions of the continent and its people. Further, Duncan's depiction of African princes as those responsible for drinking his blood and torturing him in (what Duncan has described) a sado-masochistic ritual reinforce stereotypes of African men as sexually aggressive and dominant. These images, presented as symbolic renderings of the speaker's subconscious desires, serve as a historical index of American attitudes toward Africans in the early 1940s.

Nature

"An African Elegy" makes a comparison between the natural world and human nature, suggesting that the latter, at its root, is a variation of the former. Duncan makes the comparison explicit in the first, fourth, and final stanzas. For example, in the fourth stanza, he states, "I know / no other continent of Africa more dark than this / dark continent of my breast." Human beings have long debated their own nature, asking what accounts more for who we are, society or natural laws. This question is sometimes framed in terms of a debate between nature and nurture. Some philosophical and religious traditions, especially those associated with Western Judeo-Christianity, see the desires of the human body as a result of sin and humanity's separation from God. Others see the body's desires as natural, and religious and social prescriptions for

behavior as unnatural. By using the natural world as the primary vehicle for describing human nature, and by making that natural world essentially mysterious and unknowable, Duncan suggests that true human nature is ultimately concealed from humans. All that human beings have access to is myth and imagery to explain themselves to themselves.

Style

Symbol

"An African Elegy" uses symbolic imagery to carry the emotional weight of the poem. Some of Duncan's primary symbols include the Congo, Africa and African nature, African Negroes, blood, and dogs. These images represent a complex of ideas including the unconscious elements of human desire, the ubiquity and reality of death, and the tenuousness of human identity and of life. In the West, Africa has often been used by writers as a symbol of human beings' baser instincts and desires. Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness,* which presents the Congo as a place of violence, ignorance, and barbarity, is one such example. Many of Duncan's images, however, are obscure and sometimes inaccessible to beginning readers of poetry. He attempts to use them as pointers to a deeper, more complex reality than that which human beings experience. That reality can only be expressed in images.

Diction/Tone

Although the poem is called an elegy, its tone shifts between celebration and lament, sometimes approaching a kind of self-destructive ecstasy. The first stanza prepares the reader for this vacillation as it begins with the statement, "No greater marvelous / know I than the mind's / natural jungle," and then shifts to a description of the ominous nature of Death's sounds. Duncan's archaic spelling, sometimes using t instead of *-ed* endings for the past tense (e.g., "stopt" instead of "stopped"), his inversion of subjects and verbs, and his exotic word choice give his poem a formal and often magical tone.

Historical Context

In the early 1940s when Duncan wrote "An African Elegy," a group of poets and critics, who came to be known as the New Critics, helped to determine what kind of poetry would be published and read in the coming decades. Writers associated with this trend in criticism include Allen Tate, R. P. Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks, William K. Wimsatt, and John Crowe Ransom, who edited the *The Kenyon Review and whose book The New Criticism* (1941) gave the group its name. The members of the New Critics, who were mostly southerners and politically conservative, held formalist views of literature and argued that poems and stories be considered for their inherent value. This meant that literary works should be regarded as self-contained objects, separate from the traditions, histories, and authors that helped to produce them. Though they never established a doctrine as such, New Critics introduced critical principles and terms into the study of literature that remain today. It is ironic that Ransom rejected "An African Elegy" *after* reading Duncan's essay on homosexuals in society, for it shows that Ransom did not practice what he preached. By 1959, when Duncan finally published the poem, New Criticism had become entrenched in English departments throughout the United States and helped form the theoretical background against which millions of students would come to learn literature.

At about the same time, in Asheville, North Carolina, a progressive school in the arts was developing. Black Mountain College, founded in 1933, was an experiment in community education and appealed to many musicians, dancers, and writers who considered themselves part of the artistic avant-garde. Duncan taught there in 1956, as did other poets and writers associated with Duncan such as Charles Olson, Robert Creely, Paul Blackburn, and Denise Levertov. Olson's theory of poetry, as outlined in his essay "Projective Verse" (1950), became a doctrine of sorts for Black Mountain poets. He was also the leader of the college and the poets. These writers all shared a desire to explore the creative process and to integrate the arts. They saw poems as fields of meaning into which anything and everything was permitted and readers as active participants in meaning-making. Olson saw poetry beginning with the human body. He believed that the way a poem appears on the page should be related to how the poet experienced it and how the reader will experience it. Creely applied Olson's theories to his own poetry, writing a process-oriented poetry which drew attention to the writer's thinking as he went along. Levertov, on the other hand, focused on the perceiving rather than the thinking mind as it detailed the surfaces of ordinary objects to evoke their presence and underlying meanings. Duncan, while influenced by Olson's thinking, attempted to create a poetry that was closer to religion or religious vision. His use of Greek myth and classical literature gave his writing an erudite, almost ethereal feel at times. Projectivist verse was regularly published by journals including *The Black Mountain Review* and *Origin.* Painters, photographers, musicians, and dancers such as Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and Jess Collins (Duncan's life-partner) also taught or gave presentations at Black Mountain.

Although there are references to Africa and the Congo throughout Duncan's poem, they are symbolic rather than historical references. When Duncan wrote this poem, the

United States had just become involved in World War II. Duncan himself spent time in the army but was granted a psychiatric discharge in 1941. Thanks to the war, the country was finally coming out of the Great Depression, as more than fifteen million Americans worked for the armed forces. African Americans, however, didn't benefit from the job boom. One group, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, marched on Washington, D.C., calling for an end to discrimination. Shortly after this protest, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 creating the Fair Employment Practices Commission to investigate complaints and make discrimination in war industries illegal.

Critical Overview

Although associated with the Projectivist school of Black Mountain poetry, Duncan is known as a romantic poet and a mystic whose verse often baffles readers. For example, John Crowe Ransom, after accepting "Sections Towards an African Elegy" (the original title of "An African Elegy") in 1943, returned it to Duncan the next year writing: "It seems to me to have obvious homosexual advertisement, and for that reason not to be eligible for publication." Ransom had re-read Duncan's poem after reading Duncan's essay "The Homosexual in Society" and saw things in it he hadn't before. "Is it not possible," he wrote Duncan, "that you have made the sexual inferences inescapable, and the poem unavailable?" Duncan biographer Ekbert Faas writes that even though Duncan acknowledged to Ransom that the sexual inferences in the poem were "inescapable," Faas himself does not find them as such. Faas sees Ransom's refusal to publish "An African Elegy" as the "sudden end to what easily might have turned into a successful literary career sanctioned by the new Critical establishment."

Mark Andrew Johnson praises Duncan's "powerful imagery" and "roiling vowels" in the poem and notes that the use of Shakespearean characters anticipates Duncan's "The Venice Poem." In his introduction to his volume *The Years as Catches,* Duncan writes that "An African Elegy," along with a few other of his early poems, displayed "exaggerated pretensions" and "falseness." That Duncan chose to publish the poem again anyway demonstrates his willingness to accommodate even the "falseness" of his past writing, for it too forms part of his ongoing work.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Semansky publishes widely in the field of twentieth-century culture and poetry. In the following essay, he discusses the difficulty of reading "An African Elegy" and suggests a strategy.

It's a fact; some poems are more difficult to read than others. Some are straightforward, using images from the contemporary world and requiring little if any knowledge of other poetry, history, myth, or philosophy from their readers. Others require all of this background knowledge and more. Poems such as T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," for example, considered a modern masterpiece by many critics, contain a veritable encyclopedia of allusions to Western myth and intellectual history. In addition, its form, a collection of fragmented speeches and imagery, makes reading it a challenge. Robert Duncan's poem "An African Elegy," though much briefer and nowhere near as dense with allusions and history as "The Waste Land," is also a difficult poem to read. Its difficulty in part stems from its fragmented structure and its refusal to make the terms of its symbolism accessible in any conventional way. Even seasoned literary critics have had difficulty with Duncan's poems, including "An African Elegy." Writing of Duncan's "drifting conglomerations [of symbols and allusions]," poet and critic James Dickey writes that Duncan "never courted a readership but rather a special kind of reader, who grants the poet a wide latitude in developing his art, even in its most extreme moments.... The number of such readers is necessarily limited, but fierce in devotion." One strategy for reading Duncan's poems is to first understand his own approach toward poetry and composition and then to adjust your expectations and reading practices accordingly.

The first thing to understand about Duncan is his concept of the poem as a compositional field. *Field* in this case is a metaphor for space. Duncan conceives of poems as spaces in which all materials are welcome. Readers, therefore, should not read the poem as a story or a piece of writing with any one message or theme. Rather, they should read with an eye and an ear to the repetition of particular images, sounds, phrases, symbols, or structures, all of which Duncan uses—much as a painter uses color, line, or shape—to suggest ideas or emotions. Duncan, an ardent admirer of modern collage, saw his own verse as a kind of grand collage in which his given material was words. In this light, the individual images that Duncan uses as pieces of his collage might not make sense if readers strive to interpret them in a traditional fashion, pinning them down to specific definitions. However, by taking in the images and their multiple meanings and letting them build up, readers will find that the accumulated images will yield an emotional effect, even if readers are unable to articulate that effect in any coherent or conventional way.

To better comprehend Duncan's images it's necessary to know that Duncan is using them as symbols. Symbols don't have a one-to-one relationship to the outside world but rather weave a web of associations to various ideas and themes. Symbols open up the possibility for meaning rather than limiting meaning to one idea or thing. In his *Dictionary of Symbols,* scholar J. E. Cirlot writes:

This language of images and emotions is based... upon a precise and crystallized means of expression, revealing transcendent truths, external to Man (cosmic order) as well as within him (thought, the moral order of things, psychic evolution, the destiny of the soul); furthermore, it possesses a quality which... increases its dynamism and gives it a truly dramatic character. This quality, the essence of the symbol, is its ability to express simultaneously the various aspects (thesis and antithesis) of the idea it represents.

Symbols are both particular and general, then. They are a prism of an idea or theme, irreducible. Africa, as the figurative space for Duncan's idea of the "marvelous" is, in effect, a symbolic topography of images, all of which contribute to this idea. The first stanza contains many of the symbolic images that will be repeated throughout the poem.

In the groves of Africa from their natural wonder
the wildebeest, zebra, the okapi, the elephant,
have entered the marvelous. No greater marvelous
know I than the mind's
natural jungle. The wives of the Congo
distil their red and the husbands
hunt lion with spear and paint Death-spore
on their shields, wear his teeth, claws and hair
on ordinary occasions. There the Swahili
open his doors, let loose through the trees
the tides of Death's sound and distil
from their leaves the terrible red. He
is the consort of dreams I have seen, heard
in the orchestral dark
like the barking of dogs.

The animal imagery here creates a strange and exotic landscape. Most American-born readers have probably never encountered any of these creatures except in a zoo or on television. Their appearance, then, indicates otherness and difference, a way of being unfamiliar to most readers. The speaker compares his own mind to this sense of strangeness. It too is other or strange to him, and this is exhilarating and frightening at the same time. The ritual of hunting preparation by Congolese men and women also contributes to this sense of the exotic; it underscores the presence and importance of death in their lives. Like the speaker later in the poem, the Congolese men inhabit the identity of another, "wear[ing] ... [the lion's] teeth, claws and hair / on ordinary occasions." The idea of ordinariness resonates in the last animal image in the stanza, the barking of dogs. Dogs are domestic animals; they are also scavengers and hunters and known as being loyal. Associating dogs with death highlights the ordinariness of death in the lives of the other. The "terrible red" is another symbol of death's many forms.

Duncan repeats the images introduced in the first stanza throughout the poem, letting them accrue meaning and power in much the same way a moonbar or magic stone (an

image Duncan uses later) accrues power for its holder. The "barking of dogs" in the first stanza becomes "Death ... the dog-headed man" in the second stanza. Hounds appear over and over again: white Afghan hounds, hounds in water, hounds of "great purity / disturbing the shadow and flesh of the jungle." By repeating this image but altering it slightly and using it in a different context each time, Duncan imbues the image of the dog/hound with symbolic resonance. The dog is at once death itself, death's companion, and a bewildering presence that requires a reassessment of its significance each time it appears.

The image of the "Negro" is also central to the poem. Duncan presents the image of Swahili men, Negro armies, Negro princes, Negro Kings, and Othello almost always as hunters or aggressors who act on him or others, often in a violent manner, making magic with his blood, twisting him like a rope. As symbolic images that inhabit the zone of the marvelous, these figures simultaneously inspire fear and awe. They function in the poem as markers of the speaker's desire, as parts of himself just beginning to make themselves known to him through these images. In a letter to John Crowe Ransom, the editor of the magazine that initially accepted the poem for publication, Duncan attempts to explain the poem's theme:

The theme of the unknown is seen variously; as the figure of Death, the unknown self ... or as the darkness of repressed desires, the unknown content of the mind as it goes on. Negroes, Africa and the black of love are all symbols of subconscious forces.... The rising figures from the subconscious discovered in the poem then were Death, my lost self, and the lost love-object . . . projected in the mind as the images of the women distilling their red (the object feared and hated) and the image of Virginia Woolf (the object loved and desired).

This explanation is Duncan attempting to understand the poem *after* it was written. Duncan is not interested in intentionality in his poems. When he composes, images often appear. He doesn't sit down and think about how he will use the image of the dog or the image of the African princes to mean something specific. For Duncan, the writing of poetry is itself a means of self-exploration, a therapy of sorts suited to figuring out his identity and desires, to probe the unknown self, as he has written, to "exercise my faculties at large." His poems are often an expression of something he does not understand about himself or about the world as much as they are about what he does understand. In "Pages from a Notebook," Duncan writes the following about his relationship to the composing process:

In one way or another to live in the swarm of human speech. This is not to seek perfection but to draw honey or poetry out of all things. After Freud, we are aware that unwittingly we achieve our form. It is, whatever our mastery, the inevitable use we make of the speech that betrays to ourselves and to our hunters (our readers) the spore of what we are becoming. I study what I write as I study out any mystery. A poem, mine or another's, is an occult document, a body awaiting vivisection, analysis, x-rays.

It is interesting that the words "spore" and "hunter" appear in this journal entry, as they also appear in "An African Elegy." As with "hunters," readers can infer that both of these

words function symbolically in Duncan's universe. Hunting is an act of looking and thinking, of being prepared for what might appear. This description also fits Duncan's work as a poet. Hunting is also a form of wanting or desiring an object. The object of desire in Duncan's poem, though, is never made explicit. All the reader knows is that some *thing* is desired, and whatever it is, is never achieved. This idea is expressed in the poem's final stanza when, for the first time, what the speaker is lamenting in this elegy becomes clear.

The halls of Africa we seek in dreams
as barriers of dream against the deep, and seas
disturbd turn back upon their tides
into the rooms deserted at the roots of love.
There is no end. And how sad then
is even the Congo. How the tired sirens
come up from the water, not to be toucht
but to lie on the rocks of the thunder.
How sad then is even the marvelous!

Duncan laments that the idea of the exotic and the unknown—"The halls of Africa"&mdashthat human beings fantasize and dream about are neither truly exotic nor unknown because we already have ideas of them as such. The true unknown, Duncan suggests, is "the deep," the part of the human soul that can never be described in symbolic imagery or metaphor, the part that transcends language itself. That human beings desire and go on desiring when there is no hope to fulfill that desire is the sad thing. The final image of the sirens, those beautiful mythological sea-nymphs whose ravishing songs caused men to drown themselves, underlines this, while also echoing the manner in which Ophelia and Virginia Woolf died.

When reading Duncan, try not to think about or to figure out what his images mean. Rather, try to inhabit the "marvelous" itself. Don't cogitate. Let the images resonate, reverberate, becoming what they will. Receptive readers, even beginning readers of Duncan's poems, will discover that their own minds can accommodate the exotic and strange as well. They'll discover that the marvelous is the poem itself in the act of becoming, and that as readers they participate in that act.

Source: Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on "An African Elegy," in *Poetry for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Adaptations

Modern American Poetry sponsors a Robert Duncan web site at http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/duncan/duncan.htm (last accessed April 2001).

Kent State University lists a bibliography of Duncan's work in its special collection at http://www.library.kent.edu/speccoll/literature/ poetry/duncan.html (last accessed April 2001).

The Theosophical University Press has a glossary of theosophical terms available online at http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/etgloss/ mi-mo.htm (last accessed April 2001).

The American Academy of Poets offers a 1969 audio cassette of Duncan reading from *The Opening of the Field, Roots and Branches, and Bending the Bow.*

Topics for Further Study

After researching the basic beliefs of Theosophy, give a report to your class outlining them. Are there connections you can draw between any of these beliefs and Duncan's poem?

Keep a dream diary for one month, writing down as much and as many of your dreams as you can remember. Then catalog all of the images and stories. Do certain images or stories recur? What do these images and stories tell you about that month in your life?

Write a poem or story about the creation of the universe using symbols that are personally meaningful to you. Do not worry if these symbols will be accessible to others. Then write a short essay describing why you chose those particular symbols.

Research the use of magic by the Swahili. Do you see any similarities with the rituals Duncan describes in his poem?

Compare and Contrast

1958: Patrice Lumumba founds the Movement National Congolais (MNC), which becomes the most dominant political party of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

1960-1965: Political turmoil engulfs The Democratic Republic of Congo. Lumumba is assassinated by forces loyal to Colonel Mobutu Sese Seko, who eventually takes over the government in 1965.

1971: Seko renames the country the Republic of Zaire and asks Zairean citizens to change their names to African names.

1997: Seko is overthrown by Laurent Kabila and Rwandan-backed rebels, who "re-rename" the country the Democratic Republic of Congo.

2000: Political unrest continues in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

1956: Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" is published and embraced by the counterculture. In the poem, Ginsberg calls for America to wake up from its middle-class, sterile slumber that crushes the human soul and to end the "human war" on its own people.

1997: Ginsberg dies at 70. The Beat culture, for which Ginsberg was a central figure, is a historical curiosity and has been reduced to slogans and symbols used in advertising campaigns.

What Do I Read Next?

Robert Bertholf edited a collection of thirty-five letters between Duncan and the poet H. D. in 1991, titled *A Great Admiration: H. D. / Robert Duncan Correspondence 1950-1961.* Duncan and H. D. admired each other's poetry intensely.

Ekbert Faas' biography of Duncan, *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society,* provides a detailed biography of the poet through 1950.

Black Sparrow Press published *Robert J. Bertholf's Robert Duncan: A Descriptive Bibliography* in 1986. The book is difficult to obtain but contains an exhaustive and useful collection of secondary sources on Duncan.

Critics generally agree that Duncan's 1960 collection *The Opening of the Field* begins the poet's mature phase of work. This collection contains what is perhaps Duncan's best-known poem, "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow."

Ian Reid and Robert Bertholf edited a collection of essays and tributes to Duncan in 1979. *Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous* contains essays by Denise Levertov, Michael Davidson, Thom Gunn, and Don Byrd.

Duncan was a fierce and outspoken opponent to the war in Vietnam. James Mersmann's 1974 *Out of the Vietnam Vortex: A Study of Poets and Poetry* examines Duncan's poetry and life in light of the poet's commitment to the idea of community.

Sherman Paul's *The Lost America of Love: Rereading Robert Creely, Edward Dorn, and Robert Duncan,* published in 1981, is a diary of sorts detailing Paul's close reading of these important poets' work.

Cary Nelson's *Our Last First Poets: Vision and History in Contemporary American Poetry* (1981) examines the relationship between history and poetics in a few of Duncan's poems. Nelson is a leading Marxist literary critic.

Further Study

Allen, Donald, ed., *The New American Poetry,* Grove Press, 1960.

This groundbreaking anthology collects poems from many of the most influential poets writing in America since World War II, including Duncan and many of the Black Mountain poets.

Duberman, Martin, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community,* Anchor Books, 1973.

Duberman provides an insider's look at the experimental college where Duncan taught briefly in the mid-1950s. This is an invaluable study of one of the most celebrated intentional communities of its time, its birth, growth, and death.

Duncan, Robert, *Selected Poems,* edited by Robert J. Berthoff, New Directions, 1993.

Including eleven additional poems, this second edition of Duncan's *Selected Poems* is a good place to start for students who want to read more of Duncan's work.

Harris, Mary Emma, *The Arts at Black Mountain College,* MIT Press, 1987. Harris examines the innovative ways the arts were taught at Black Mountain College and the ideals that many of the artists shared.

Bibliography

Bertholf, Robert J., ed., *A Great Admiration: H. D. / Robert Duncan Correspondence 1950-1961,* Lapis Press, 1991.

Bertholf, Robert J., and Ian W. Reid, eds., *Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous,* New Directions, 1979.

Cirlot, J. E., *A Dictionary of Symbols, Philosophical* Library, 1971.

Dickey, James, *Babel to Byzantium: Poets and Poetry Now,* Straus & Giroux, 1968, pp. 173-77.

Duncan, Robert, "Pages from a Notebook," in *The New American Poetry,* edited by Donald M. Allen, Grove Press, 1960, pp. 400-07.

----, *Selected Poems,* edited by Robert J. Berthoff, New Directions, 1993.

----, *The Years as Catches: First Poems, 1939-1946,* Oyez, 1966.

Ellingham, Lewis, *Poet Be Like God: Jack Spicer and the San Francisco Renaissance,* University Press of New England, 1988.

Faas, Ekbert, *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays and Interviews: Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Gary Snyder, Robert Creeley, Robert Bly, Allen Ginsberg,* Black Sparrow Press, 1978.

----, *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society,* Black Sparrow Press, 1983.

Foster, Edward Halsey, *Understanding the Black Mountain Poets,* University of South Carolina Press, 1984.

Johnson, Mark Andrew, *Robert Duncan,* Twayne Publishers, 1988.

Letters from Duncan to John Crowe Ransom, Washington Universities Libraries, St. Louis, Missouri.

Ray, Kevin, "Obvious Advertisement: Robert Duncan and the *Kenyon Review," Fiction International, 1992,* pp. 287-91.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Poetry for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

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:

Editor, Poetry for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535