Blood Oranges Study Guide

Blood Oranges by Lisel Mueller

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

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

"Blood Oranges" comes from *Second Language,* Lisel Mueller's fourth book of poetry. In this poem, one sees subjects that have interested Mueller throughout her career, most notably the Holocaust in Hitler's Germany and her fascination with poetry's way of capturing the physical world so concretely that reality's horrors cannot be ignored.

An interesting aspect of this poem is that it presents Nazi Germany, from which Mueller's family fled when she was young, as a sort of safe haven, a place where a child could live comfortably in ignorance of the brutality around her. The abusive political system that Mueller looks back on here is that of Spain in 1936, where, on August 19, the famed poet and playwright Federico García Lorca was executed by Fascist rebels. García Lorca was internationally famous for his sympathetic writings about the poor common people of Spain, especially the Andalusian gypsies.

"Blood Oranges" describes Mueller as a child, living in Germany and reading acceptably pleasant German poetry from long in the past, oblivious to the Spanish political situation and unaware of the sheer greatness of the poet who was being murdered at the same time. There is a painful irony in the fact that, as García Lorca was being killed, the young girl was savoring the sweetness of oranges from Spain that are called "blood oranges." Modern readers are able to add to this scene another layer, with the knowledge that the Fascist rebels in the Spanish Civil War were supported by Adolph Hitler and that Hitler would in a short time wield similar control over Germany, encouraging mob action against Jews and blacks, homosexuals and gypsies.

Author Biography

Lisel Mueller was born in Hamburg, Germany, on February 8, 1924, and she grew up there during the time of Adolph Hitler's rise to power. Her parents, both teachers, immigrated to the United States when Mueller was fifteen because they openly disagreed with Hitler's policies. Her father, who had already been arrested once by the Nazis for his leftist views, fled the country first and then sent for Mueller and her mother when he was established with a position at the University of Evansville, Indiana. Mueller married her husband, Paul, when they were both nineteen, and they were together for almost sixty years, until his death in January of 2001.

Mueller received her degree from the University of Evansville in 1944. After college, she did not write poetry for ten years, feeling that it was "adolescent stuff." Instead, she worked a number of jobs, including receptionist, social caseworker, library assistant, and freelance writer. She returned to poetry when she was twenty-nine as a way of coping with the strong emotions she was experiencing after her mother died. Mueller's career as a writer ascended slowly but steadily, from her first published book at the age of forty-one in 1965 to her most recent collection, which has received universal praise. While writing, she has taught at a number of institutions, including the University of Chicago, Goddard College in Vermont, and Elmhurst College. She currently lives in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Her many impressive achievements in the field of poetry are made even more impressive by the realization that she was raised speaking German and that English is her second language. In addition, many of the brilliant visual images in her recent poetry have been drawn from memory, as her eyesight has been failing due to glaucoma, which was diagnosed in 1985.

In 1997, Mueller received a Pulitzer Prize for her book *Alive Together,* which is a compilation of poems from the past thirty-five years. Previously, she was the recipient of the National Book Award in 1981 for her book *The Need to Hold Still,* the Lamont Poetry Selection in 1975 for *The Private Life,* and the 1990 Carl Sandburg Prize for *Waving From Shore*. She has also gained fame by translating poems by Marie Luise Kaschnitz and a play by Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

Poem Text

In 1936, a child
in Hitler's Germany,
what did I know about the war in Spain?
Andalusia was a tango
on a wind-up gramophone,
Franco a hero's face in the paper.
No one told me about a poet
for whose sake I might have learned Spanish
bleeding to death on a barren hill.
All I knew of Spain
were those precious imported treats
we splurged on for Christmas.
I remember pulling the sections apart,
lining them up, sucking each one
slowly, so the red sweetness
would last and last—
while I was reading a poem
by a long-dead German poet
in which the woods stood safe
under the moon's milky eye
and the white fog in the meadows
aspired to become lighter than air.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-2

Assuming that the speaker of this poem is to be identified with Mueller, the child that is described here would be about twelve. It is not always the case that a poem's main character is based on the author, even when the poem speaks as "I," but in this case there is enough in common between the two (such as similar age and German background) to assume that Mueller is actually speaking about herself. These opening lines present an unsettling dramatic contrast in their use of the phrase "a child in Hitler's Germany." Childhood is often thought of as a time of innocence, and yet the world has come to see Adolph Hitler as the embodiment of evil due to the widespread slaughter of innocents that went on during the years that he ruled Germany, 1933-1945. The two phrases contained in these first two lines, separated by a comma, never actually work into a sentence in the proper grammatical way: instead of their dovetailing into the third line, it picks up a new idea, giving the impression that each phrase is an aborted start, as if the speaker is looking for a way to talk about this subject and each time changes her mind.

Line 3

It is not unusual for a child to be unaware of complex international affairs, especially when, like the Spanish Civil War, there is no clear international consensus about how to react to what is happening. The party in power at the time was the one supported by the majority of the people, but under their rule there was anarchy, and the Spanish government was barely able to function. The Falange party that challenged them was brutal and emulated Italy's Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, but at the time Fascism was considered by some to be a reasonable response to anarchy. It is only in the years since those turbulent times that the world has come to doubt, in retrospect, whether the loss of personal freedom under the Nazis, the Fascists, or the Falange was a reasonable price to pay for civil peace. To this day, children tend to repeat the popular sentiments they hear about political issues if society has a fairly unified approach, as seen in America's united opposition to Bosnia's president Slobodan Milosevic in the 1990s. If popular opinion is divided, though, and the issue is too complex, people tend to block it out, as this poem's speaker has done.

Line 4-6

Andolusia is the region of southern Spain where Federico Garcia Lorca grew up and where he was killed when he returned at the age of thirty-eight. It was a poor area that was considered to have a rustic charm especially in its tradition of tango dancing, but its culture was not taken seriously until Garcia Lorca wrote about it. The reference to a "wind-up gramophone" indicates that Mueller's childhood home did not have electricity,

but it is also a sensual image, invoking the particular sound of a machine that played records at an uneven pace from start to finish. This sensation is unforgettable and is not reproduced in the modern mechanical world. The reference to Franco is, of course, ironic: he was supported by Hitler and would have been treated like a hero by the newspaper in the state that Hitler controlled, even though the world has come to see both men as cruel dictators, responsible for millions of deaths and untold human suffering.

Line 7-9

The fact that Garcia Lorca was not mentioned in Mueller's youth is an indication of the relationship that the arts have with politics in general. Having just mentioned the lie that did reach her in Germany, that of Franco's heroism, the poem brings out the ironic contrast of a ruthless dictator living a life of privilege and a truly heroic man dying in obscurity. There is a subtle but potent testimony to the power and clarity of Garcia Lorca's writing in the way that line 8 speaks in the past tense, implying that the poet feels she would, even as a youth, have been moved by the work that later moved her deeply when she did find it in adulthood. Line 9 refers to him "bleeding," as a way of making the relationship between Garcia Lorca and the blood oranges more clear.

Line 10

The wording of line 10 is similar to the wording of line 3. While the earlier line refers to the war and to political matters in general, line 10 introduces domestic matters that would have been more interesting to a young girl.

Line 11-12

In many European countries, oranges were given as Christmas gifts. Contemporary readers might be used to having oranges available year round and might therefore fail to see the excitement of receiving them as a Christmas present but that is because modern refrigeration and transportation methods have made it possible to move fruit to climates far from where it grows. For Germany in 1936, receiving a tropical fruit like oranges in the middle of the winter was a near miraculous treat. They were, as the poem says, "precious" and something that was available only to those who "splurged" and paid a high price. The section of Spain where oranges grow is the Andalusian section to the south, where Garcia Lorca was raised and was eventually murdered.

Line 13-16

The details given indicate just how much the young girl savored her oranges. Her method of eating these orange - pulling the sections apart, lining them up, and then sucking each section slowly - is a way of making the experience "last and last," as line 16 puts it, so that the pleasure she takes in it will continue. This sort of precision in

eating also indicates that the speaker was a very orderly child, an impression that reinforces her willingness to accept Franco as a hero, as the German newspapers report him to be, and to avoid the moral complexity that might result from being skeptical about the official version of the truth. Line 16 ends with a dash, indicating that the poem is changing its subject, as it did between lines 2 and 3: the scene of the child sitting at a table eating an orange does not change, but the dash is necessary to make readers change their attitude so that the poetry discussed in the last lines of "Blood Oranges" is not taken with the sense of sincere delight that the orange evokes.

Line 17-18

The "long-dead German poet" referred to here could be a generalization about poets of the romantic age, but Mueller's use of specific imagery implies that she had a specific old poem in mind. The poem that seems to match her references most closely is "Abendlied" ("Evening Song"), by Matthias Claudius (1740-1825). The first stanza of Claudius' poem contains the same imagery that Mueller uses. It translates, roughly, "The forest stands black and silent / And out of the meadow is rising / The white fog, beautifully."

The poem's emphasis that the German poet is "long dead" is used to bring out several subtle distinctions. In recent years, it has become common to draw attention to literary figures who lack relevance to contemporary life by mentioning that they are dead. The phrase "dead white men" is used negatively to dismiss writers that are traditionally studied in school but that are not really important to the lives of modern students. In this case, however, the poem intends to praise Garcia Lorca, the Spanish poet who is dead, so it needs to specify that the German poet's work lacks vibrancy because he has been dead a long time. This could also be a way of comparing the two cultures: in Spain, the lively war was being raged between the adherents of two ideals, Fascism and Progressivism, while Germany had settled into rule by one party, with opposing views being relegated to the past, like one long dead. Hitler had only been in power a few years, but the Nazi party had so thoroughly crushed their opposition that it seemed like their opposition was long gone.

Line 19-20

The word "safe," used in line 19, is crucial to this poem. The speaker admires Garcia Lorca, who has been murdered brutally, and contrasts him to the safety of the kind of poetry that the oppressive German government found acceptable. In a sense, the title represents the same two extremes that the different poets represent, with "blood" standing for the danger of being a controversial poet and "oranges" representing the small, safe comforts that a twelve-year-old girl would seek. The image of the woods standing under the moon implies a sense of mystery, of hidden truths, as the trees would shield the ground from moonlight and end up entangling this safe world with a tangle of shadows that would be absent from the "barren hill" mentioned in line 9.

Line 21-22

The fog, like the woods, gives the poem a sense of confusion, of hidden truths. The fact that the fog "aspired" to be lighter than air but was unable to be so is symbolic of the failure of the child to transcend her situation with safe German poetry. One might think that she would be able to rise above her situation by reading, but the point that the poem makes is that poetry alone does not raise the spirit above dire circumstances, such as Nazi Germany or Fascist Spain. In the end, the hollowness of traditional poetry is presented as superficial and somewhat impotent. If this were just a matter of empathizing with Garcia Lorca's understanding of his own country, the speaker's disappointment would be sad enough, but the poem has the added, tragic dimension of having the child situated in a society that was just as dangerous and having her be oblivious to the danger.

Themes

Ignorance

In "Blood Oranges," the poem's narrator presents a time in her childhood when, living in Germany, she was unaware of events during the Spanish Civil War that led to the death of Federico García Lorca, a great poet. It describes how she sat eating an orange that had been imported from Spain, reading mediocre German poetry. She seems to regret having been ignorant. The phrase "ignorant" has come to have a negative meaning because it has been used as an insult in recent decades, but the true, basic meaning is that one is unaware. Twice, the speaker points out her childhood ignorance while using strong, defensive language. In line 3 she asks, rhetorically, "what did I know about the war in Spain?" Readers can tell from the way the question is put that she knew nothing about the war, but phrasing it this way implies that the speaker feels a need to point out her ignorance as a child and to make readers admit that her lack of knowledge was a natural thing, that there would be no reason to think that she would have any awareness of the political situation in a foreign land. The second time that her ignorance comes up, it is phrased in an even more self-conscious, defensive way. "No one told me about a poet" she says in line 7, as if to excuse her own ignorance by blaming someone else's inefficiency. In line 10, the poem calms its defensive tone a little and sets out to explain exactly what it was that the child did know to give readers a sense of how ignorant she was. Though readers probably would not blame a child for failing to keep up with international politics, the tone that this poem takes when pointing out its speaker's childhood ignorance implies that she regrets that ignorance, that she feels the need to be defensive about it because it bothers her.

Purity

As opposed to the speaker's youthful ignorance, which she regrets, this poem makes use of the purity of childhood to contrast the horrors of the totalitarian Spanish and German governments. The detail that is given about the child's process of eating the oranges, which were, for her, a rare treat, indicates that she really had no sense of the horrors that were being inflicted by either Hitler or Franco on their respective countries, that she was untouched by worldly evil. The images from the German poem that is referred to at the end of "Blood Oranges" also indicate purity, with their references to whiteness and to milk, as if this poetry had not been contaminated by reality the way that the life and work of García Lorca was. While the child's purity is touching, as indicated in the delight in sweets and in poetry that is safe, the poem seems to indicate that the German poet should have been more complex, that purity is a luxury in which a poet cannot indulge.

Sensuality

The process of eating the orange is a sensual one for the child in the poem, which is to say that it activates her senses completely. Lines 13-16 refer to the feel of pulling the sections of the fruit apart, the look of their blood red color, and, using the most infrequently described sense of all, the taste of the oranges' sweetness. By rendering this entire experience in such vibrant terms, Mueller takes the reader into the process of eating the orange. The grown person who is narrating this poem clearly knows all the details about those oranges, which is an indication of how important they were to her as a child. By rendering them in such vivid sensuality, she gives readers the opportunity to experience the thrill of them as well. To the extent that words on a page can create an experience for the senses, this poem works to trigger the reader's nerve endings.

This depth of detail is mirrored, faintly, in the descriptions from the work of the long-dead poet. Though the final lines give descriptive details, they do not register with readers as powerfully as the description of eating the orange. To some extent, this is because the German poet's intention seems to have been different from Mueller's. If the old poetry had indeed "aspired to be lighter than air," then it makes sense that, in the turbulent political times of the 1930s, it struck the child as being too superficial to care much about. Clearly, the real-world sensuality of eating the orange was a more moving experience than the poetry that she was reading at the time. The relationship between Federico García Lorca and the oranges is blood, which is powerful in look and smell and feel, indicating what is wrong with poetry that tries not to be about reality.

Revolution and Revolt

"Blood Oranges" draws a clear distinction between Spain, where the dictator's rise was resisted, and Germany, where the dictator rose to power through normal political channels and earned the opposition of his people only when it was too late. The two countries are symbolized by, respectively, a talented poet who is murdered and a little girl enjoying a Christmas treat. Although there is no indication that Mueller is suggesting that Germany should have revolted against Hitler, still the poem does clearly take a wary view toward the "safe" feeling Germans had, the one long-dead German poet in particular. Revolution is not romanticized in this poem, though, as the Fascists who murdered García Lorca were the revolutionaries and not the established party in power. The poem is about established governments and settled governments, and it does not take a position that clearly advocates either.

Style

Free Verse

"Blood Oranges" is written in free verse. There is no strict rhythmic pattern or rhyming scheme that would assert the author's control and make readers feel that the ideas presented here are organized by a controlling hand. This lack of structure fits with what the poem is saying: it is critical of poetry that is too intellectual, aspiring to be "lighter than air," and it would be hypocritical of this poem to depend too heavily on poetic technique, which would draw more attention to the poem itself than to the dire political situation it addresses. The lack of formal rules used here is appropriate for presenting a world in disorder, where a great, talented man like García Lorca can be murdered by thugs with no consequence.

Contrast

The poem is only one stanza, but it is divided by subject matter into three parts. In the first, the speaker gives a general overview about how little she knew about events in Spain when she was a child in 1936. She did not know about the murder of García Lorca, and she thought that Franco was a hero. The second section of the poem concerns an in-depth description of how important the oranges she received for Christmas were to the girl, focusing on them with a clarity that contrasts to the vagueness of her grasp of Spanish affairs. In the third section, she describes the kind of poetry that she read in those days. This section contrasts with the section before by showing how much more real the orange was to the girl than the long-dead poet's words, and it contrasts to the first section by showing how little of an impression this poet made on her, as opposed to García Lorca, for whose sake, if she had known about him, the girl might have gone to the trouble of learning a new language.

Symbol

The symbol that binds all of these sections together is the blood oranges of the title. They are a product of Spain's Andalusia region, as was García Lorca. They were a precious treat, which indicates the child's intensity in eating them, her delight in the physical world, her joyfulness in spite of being a child in Hitler's Germany. Most importantly, blood oranges are the deep red of blood, which binds her delight in them to the mention in line 9 of García Lorca bleeding to death. Because of the connection between his blood and the fruit, eating them bears a symbolic relationship to taking Communion, with the great poet representing Jesus for the girl who would grow up to be a poet. The deep blood color of the oranges, as well as their precious sweetness, is contrasted with the vapid, colorless whiteness that pervades during the poem's last section, making the German poetry seem powerless and anemic. The last section does have its own symbolic theme, but it is one of mystery and deceit, with trees obscuring

the moon and fog obscuring the meadow, indicating the secretiveness that is necessary in countries with totalitarian governments, such as Hitler's Germany.

Historical Context

The Spanish Civil War

During the First World War (1914-1918), Spain underwent the difficult transition from a farm-based economy to an industrial one. The rise of industry brought with it a working class, centered in the cities, which struggled against the traditional monarchy. In 1922, to retain control of the country, King Alfonso XIII asked a general of the army, Miguel Primo de Rivera, to take control of the government and run it as a military dictatorship. He ruled as dictator until 1925 and then as Prime Minister until the revolution of 1931 when Alfonso left the throne and went into exile and a new government was formed by a coalition of left-wing groups. This ruling group, the Republicans, included Liberals, Socialists, and Anarchists. They ruled the country from 1931 until 1936 but not well. Poverty and violence were everywhere. In 1933, a new political party, the Falange, rose in opposition to the government. Led by Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the former dictator, the Falange was a Fascist group that followed the policies Benito Mussolini was using to control Italy.

With the public frustrated because of the many reforms that the Republicans had instituted in their five years in office and the Falange party pressing with serious political opposition, there came a third threat: the military, led by Francisco Franco, planned a revolution that would restore King Alfonso to power.

To suppress the rebellion, the Republican government arrested and killed a leading Falangist party member in 1936, charging him with the death of a policeman. The public outrage over this act led the Nationalists, which included the army and the Falange party, to call for revolution. Further government acts of suppression ensued, followed by further acts of rebellion. By the end of the year and for the two years that followed, Spain was a chaotic and bloody mess, with the Republican and Nationalist parties struggling for control and loyalists of each side murdering the other side's supporters whenever the chance arose. Many countries kept out of it, choosing to believe that neither side had a legitimate claim to rule although Adolph Hitler in Germany supported Franco's Nationalists. The war ended in 1939 when the Nationalists took control of Madrid. Franco ruled as a dictator until his death in 1975.

Hilter's Germany

Hitler's Germany Hitler entered politics in 1919, when he joined the National Socialist German Workers Party - the Nazis. He was elected chairman, or *Fuhrer* of the party in 1921, and proceeded to gain attention by preaching hatred against minorities, who he claimed were taking away money and resources that rightfully belonged to real Germans. His autobiography, *Mein Kampf,* was written while he was in prison in 1923 for a plot to overthrow the German government. In 1929, the same depression that occurred in America affected economies all over the globe, and the Nazi party gained

public support by playing to the nation's insecurities: they claimed that the depression was the result of a conspiracy by Jewish bankers and that Germany was suffering unfairly because of the restrictions put on the country after it surrendered at the end of the First World War in 1918. Hitler's election to the chancellorship in 1933 was taken as a mandate to pursue international expansion and to persecute Jews.

By 1936, Hitler started to be more aggressive. Having banned all political parties but his own and thus having established himself as dictator, he started a course of international expansion that eventually led to World War II. Germany invaded Rhineland, a demilitarized area to the west that was rich in natural resources. That was followed by occupation of Austria in 1938 and Czechoslovakia in 1939. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Britain and France, which had a pact with Poland, went to war with Germany, which led to one country after another choosing sides and entering the fight.

During the period between the invasion of Rhineland and the outbreak of the war, Hitler pursued the domestic policies that have left him remembered as one of history's most evil figures. His secret police, the Gestapo, compiled files on nearly every German citizen, encouraging neighbors, coworkers, and even children to report on anyone they thought might be a threat to the government. Ghettos were established where Jews and other minorities were sent, leaving their possessions behind to be claimed by their neighbors. Later, as the war reached its peak, Hitler's ministers decided that it was not worth the government's cost to imprison these minorities, and so they were killed in mass executions, their bodies buried in huge pits that were plowed over with steam shovels. Many Germans who lived through the Nazi years have said that they were unaware of the existence of the Death Camps that only came to the attention of the world after the war was over. Some historians have been skeptical about how the German citizens could be ignorant of such large-scale slaughter, but others believe that the combination of the Nazi effort to keep the Holocaust a secret and the general public's willingness not to think about the fate of those who were "relocated" makes their claim believable.

Critical Overview

Throughout over forty years of publishing poetry, Lisel Mueller has been a poet's poet, well revered by her peers in the writing world but not well known outside of it. "Blood Oranges" is from her fourth collection, *Second Language,* which was received, like her other works, with sweeping acclaim. "Morality is a constant preoccupation in these pages," Peter Stitt wrote of Second Language in the *Georgia Review,* "and is one of the reasons this volume is so powerful." Stitt also pointed out Mueller's constant, skillful use of imagery, noting that "[i]t is the objects around her, the objects she welcomes into her poems, that give meaning to the world for Mueller." Joseph Parisi, in *Booklist,* called the book a good reason for her many fans to rejoice, referring to Mueller's "uncommon empathy." Parisi's overall assessment of *Second Language* was that "Poem for poem, this is one of the strongest volumes of this or many another year."

One of the few questions about the effectiveness of Mueller's poetry came in a generally favorable review of *Second Language* from Fred Muratori, writing in the *Library Journal*. After much praise, he pointed out that "so many poems are first-person meditations (even the frequent "you" is an "I" in disguise) that one feels one's attention repeatedly called to the poet's sensitivities rather than to the poem." This is a minor complaint and one that not even universally observed. Alice Fulton, reviewing the same book in *Poetry,* came to the opposite conclusion to Muratori's. "Like so many plain-style poems, these equate invisibility of craft with authenticity," she wrote. "The important difference here is that one does not feel manipulated by a disingenuous sincerity. There is no see-how-sensitive-I-am posing, no subtext of self-congratulation."

The praise for Mueller's poetry accelerated when she became more widely recognized. An Associated Press article printed in the *New Standard* pointed out that Lisel Mueller's life had changed at exactly 2:15 P.M. on April 8, 1997. That was when Western Union phoned her house, forwarding the telegram message that she had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her book *Alive Together.* The degree of fame that came along with the Pulitzer has made Mueller more famous although she is hardly a household name. The Associate Press article, by Lindsey Tanner, made note of the fact that the Pulitzer earned her more widespread recognition than winning the National Book Award sixteen years earlier for *The Need To Hold Still,* even though the NBA is "considered the pinnacle of honors in literary circles." The fact that the Pulitzer was awarded for a book of collected poems representing a lifetime of accumulated work only serves to highlight the esteem that her peers and critics have held for Mueller all along. An example of the recognition this book earned came from John Taylor's review in *Poetry:* "She seeks to determine whether we can become aware—through poetry—of the precious gifts of the present before they are lost. Her poetry constantly turns us back to living, to the vibrant existences in our mist." These words capture the sensibility of "Blood Oranges," with its contrast between eating an orange and reading lifeless old poetry, and they apply equally well to the entire span of Mueller's long poetic career.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Kelly Kelly is an instructor of creative writing at College of Lake County. In the following essay, he explores how the image of the blood orange and the poet Federico García Lorca are used to mean almost the same thing and questions whether this might unintentionally diminish García Lorca's stature.

The poem "Blood Oranges," from Lisel Mueller's book *Second Language,* focuses readers' attention on the differences between innocence and ignorance, knowledge and sorrow. The poem works by creating a web out of contradictory events that all converged at one particular moment in the poet's childhood. She lived in Germany, where Adolph Hitler ruled and enjoyed popular support in the 1930s, while his reign was young and people well remembered the economic turmoil that made them turn to Hitler's extreme policies. In 1936, Hitler supported the rise of the Fascist revolution that brought Francisco Franco to power in Spain. In Spain, the poet Federico García Lorca was murdered for his democratic beliefs, while the future poet Mueller, unaware of García Lorca's persecution, enjoyed the sweetness of an orange that was imported from Spain. While eating the Spanish orange, she read insipid, "safe" German poetry, which contained empty, obscure imagery that made no comment on the sort of ruthless politics that allowed Hitler to thrive. All of these things happened in 1936, and years later, when Mueller read García Lorca's poetry and the facts about his death, she realized what she had missed. She came to worship him so much that, as the poem explains, she "might have learned Spanish" for the sake of understanding his poetry.

Except for this one line explaining his importance, the poem is unclear about its speaker's relationship with García Lorca's work and what it is supposed to mean. Obviously, it is something that she admires, but what is not so obvious is whether her admiration for him is meant to be as genuine and meaningful as the experiences of her youth and whether readers should feel secure that the poet has found complete understanding now. There are many good reasons for the poem to make its readers work toward determining the significance of things that have such deep meaning for the poem's speaker that she can hardly bring herself to talk about them. Just the same, there are also good reasons for readers to want to leave a poem alone once they have settled on one clear, simple meaning. Further consideration is required.

García Lorca's life clearly altered the way that the speaker of "Blood Oranges" viewed her own life, making him a sort of hero to her. Heroism is one of the key issues that drives this poem, but its meaning is not entirely clear from the story Mueller tells. The nature of heroism changes throughout the lifetime described here, and it is not always easy for readers to keep up with the changes. There is no assurance that the heroic image that the poem grants to García Lorca, which it shows in contrast to the other elements of 1936, is meant to be true and lasting, even though that is the implication.

The false hero of this poem is, of course, Francisco Franco. The poem does not delve into Franco's tarnished place in history, other than its implication that someone who is presented as a hero by Hitler's Nazi government could obviously be nothing of the sort.

The poem makes no case against Franco, but its stance against him is clearly implied by the fact that he *is* "a hero's face." The hero-figure of Mueller's childhood is nothing but a façade, an image that the child has been told to see as a hero. The decades that Spain suffered under Franco's dictatorship add to the modern reader's appreciation of childhood innocence: he was no hero. Still, historic knowledge is not necessary to appreciate the poem's basic point that children are willing to accept what heroes the world is willing to teach them to honor.

In contrast to the hollow feeling that "Blood Oranges" describes about Franco, the artificial hero, there is the very real feeling that the child had when eating the blood oranges from Spain. The child is described as doing what she could to make the most of the orange-eating experience-lining up the orange slices, sucking the juice from them slowly, trying to stay within the moment forever. All this while the poem indicates that she does not give Franco even the first moment's consideration. Childhood is often looked at as a time of naïve hero-worship, just as adulthood is often presented as a time when one loses faith in heroes, but "Blood Oranges" shows how ordinary moral dynamics were reversed in Hitler's Germany. The shallow hero figure was idealized by a corrupt society, but the very same people who were willing to call such a person a hero—in this case, represented by Mueller in her childhood—were not inclined to think twice about the true meaning of heroism.

Some poems are overly sentimental about childhood, granting to children the only real valid emotional knowledge and taking a cold look at the ways attitudes change as people mature. In fact, there have been so many poems written with this theme that readers could be forgiven for approaching any poem about childhood with the expectation that the child's point of view might be idealized and that growth might be equated with corruption. "Blood Oranges" does not glorify the innocence of children. Nor does it cast any shadow of blame on its young protagonist, as if she should have known more about poetry and world affairs at such a young age. Instead, it aims to help readers see how the human attraction to sweetness and beauty is sharpened by being deprived. There is a hint that Mueller might never have come to appreciate García Lorca's poetry if she had not been raised on mediocre stuff, just as she savors the oranges because they are an extravagance that her family splurged on only once a year.

It is interesting that no examples of García Lorca's work are presented here. He appears in the poem almost as a political figure, significant mainly for his role in the Spanish Civil War and not for the beauty of his words. Still, readers of "Blood Oranges" can hardly doubt the power of his poetry, which is eloquently indicated by the line about Mueller's willingness to learn a whole new language for his sake. The biographical facts of his life could be translated from Spanish to German easily enough, and even the poems he wrote could be read in translation, but a perfect understanding of the poet's full meaning would have required understanding his language. What she learned about his writings in later life left her wanting to know it, to feel it, more. This poem itself does not trivialize García Lorca's writing by pretending that it can capture a sense of his talent by taking any of his lines or images out of context. It is as if Mueller feels herself unworthy of having her poetry stand beside his.

If her reverence for García Lorca's work were not clear enough, the poem offers, for contrast, some images from traditional German romantic poetry. The milky-eyed moon, the woods, and the white fog struggling to rise are images that could be rendered beautifully by a poet, but they are certainly nothing that would present a threat to the Nazis' rule and would therefore have been considered "safe." These old images also are shown as failing to excite any particular sense of marvel in the child, nor in the adult she was to become. Unlike García Lorca's poetry, which was so powerful that it could not even be touched, the long-dead German poet's work is copied with ease.

The most important question raised by this poem is just how readers are to interpret the relationship between the child's excitement about eating the oranges and the adult's excitement about the poetry of Federico García Lorca. In Mueller's childhood, neither poetry nor politics excited her. Was that because of the nature of children or the particular poetry and politics that she found presented to her? It may sound slightly irreverent to put it this way, but the whole point that Mueller is asking us to consider is whether the poetry of a man who suffered in life and was murdered can mean the same thing to an adult that a Christmas treat means to a child.

The question is only disrespectful if readers consider a Christmas treat to be a trivial thing, but it clearly is important to the child in this poem—*very* important to the child. In showing the ritualized consumption of symbolic "blood," the poem even raises the act of eating oranges to the level of a sacrament, like Communion. Still, if childhood is considered a time of small concerns, of focusing on the immediate experience but missing the larger abstract importance of things, then García Lorca comes close to being represented as a toy for intellectual adults. In fact, "Blood Oranges" encourages readers to take this line of inquiry, to question its own seriousness by making its young protagonist unaware of Hitler, Franco, and the dangerous state of Europe in general in 1936. The child is not dismissed as a "mere" child in this poem, but the poem does raise the issue of how much we know about our own circumstances, about how much we ever could know, and therefore about how much anyone, even an informed adult, could be said to appreciate an heroic individual.

Clearly, this poem does not intend its readers to walk away from reading it with the idea that Federico García Lorca might, in the big picture, de- serve as little regard as Hitler and Franco. It does, however, raise issues about understanding that could let readers question the poet's own level of understanding. This is intellectual honesty, the willingness to be open about how little any of us really knows. It could be that Mueller will some day look back on her feelings about García Lorca with the same fondness and pity with which she saw the child eating an orange at the time when this poem was written, but that possibility is extremely slim. The complexity of "Blood Oranges" should leave readers fairly secure that Mueller knows what is important by this time in her life.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on "Blood Oranges," in *Poetry for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following interview, Bunge and Mueller discusses teaching, politics, and being bilingual and its effects on her writing.

[Nancy Bunge]: How has being bilingual influenced your consciousness of language?

[Lisel Mueller]: We learn language by imitation; even people who don't know the grammar of their own language will speak it correctly if they hear it spoken correctly. Usage is another thing we just pick up. We don't think about our native language at all. But when you switch to another language, you are conscious of *everything.* You're conscious of the grammatical constructions, you're conscious of the phrasing, you're conscious of the idioms, you're conscious of each word—what it means, how it is used in its various forms, its derivation, if there is a cognate in your own language, how it might differ—all those things become so important. And metaphor is difficult at first. Like the popular song "Under a blanket of blue": I knew from the context it couldn't be a real blanket, but I didn't know it was the sky. And I didn't know "deep purple" meant nightfall. In German, I would have understood, any American would have understood . . . except we don't really listen to the words of popular songs in our native language. We hear those words, we say those words, and we never think about what they mean or whether they make any sense. I didn't in Germany, but coming here it became extremely important to be able to understand what every word meant. It's that kind of minute attention I think you have only with a language to which you're not native. Who knows, I might not have become a poet had this not happened to me.

My poetry is largely Germanic in the sense that I usually use strong, short words and not many latinates because they sound weaker to me—conversational, essayistic. More and more latinates are coming into poetry because our whole speech is becoming more latinate. The younger people use words ending in -ion and so on much more freely than I would. Of course, that isn't unique to me. Look at Dylan Thomas or Hopkins or Roethke who almost exclusively used Germanic words, probably because they dealt with very elementary things. My poems too tend to deal with the elementary and I associate those strongly accented, strongly sounded Germanic words with elementary things. If you're going to discuss ideas, then latinates are appropriate; but I don't deal with them, at least not directly, in my poems.

A number of people have commented that a fascination with language rather than an interest in ideas is the primary impetus for writing poetry.

There are very few ideas worth talking about. Those ideas are good for all times, but unless a poet has a new way of dealing with those ideas, they become commonplace. And new insights, new connections, are inseparable from their language, which is why a paraphrase of a poem always sounds banal.

Your later poetry seems more concerned with political and moral issues than your earlier poetry, or am I imagining things?

No, I think that's true and I think the Vietnam War changed me. That's when I became angry about what was going on. Those were bad years for me, not in terms of my private life, but in terms of being involved in the shame and guilt and wrongness of this country. Like many of us at that time, I took it all very personally, and perhaps the history of Nazi Germany in the back of my mind made me feel involved with it. Also, my father was a historian much involved with contemporary history and perhaps the genes started to take.

I also thought you implied that the large ethical and political questions post-war German writers had to confront enriched their work.

World War I destroyed a lot of the assumptions, but lip service was still given to the nineteenth century virtues and values of decency and humanity and honesty. All of these assumptions were gone after World War II. They had all proved to be illusions. It was like starting from scratch for the writers who survived. They had a lot to catch up on. For about twenty years they had been virtually cut off from new European and American writing. There was a total physical leveling of much of Germany and thousands starved to death even after the war was over. Then there were all the revelations about the death camps and the whole *monstrous history* which had occurred as a result of the Nazis in Germany. So it was like starting from scratch both physically and spiritually. And it was important to find a new, untainted language. This is why a lot of the poetry seems very innovative as well as very stark—almost stammering to come up with something new. And the novelists had a whole new subject. The Germans have had to come to grips with their history and they get their strength from writing about it.

Your poem "The Fall of the Muse" seems critical of American poetry.

It was written against the exhibitionism I thought was going on, not just in poetry—although the confessional poets are implicated in this. It was written after the death not only of Sylvia Plath, but of Judy Garland and Marilyn Monroe and biographers on talk shows were trying to top each other with intimate details about these people's lives. I felt moral outrage about this public suffering and this *glamorizing* of suffering. The temptation is to keep upping the ante and finally all you're left with is committing suicide.

I think that some contemporary American writers romanticize neurosis and I tend to avoid teaching their work, although that may be a mistake.

For obvious historical reasons American writers tend to focus on private psychic suffering, rather than the suffering brought on by social and political injustice. That kind of suffering is no less real than the suffering of a brutalized oppressed person, but it's less shareable. We feel that someone who really has it *rough* in the world . . . we feel that kind of suffering is more justified somehow than the suffering that goes on in so much of the more privileged part of society.

I don't know which makes the better writing because some of the novels that have come out of the more realistic, proletarian writing of the thirties and so on, haven't stood up either.

There is a problem with finding subject matter in our society, partly because there is a great bias among young writers against political writing. They don't want to write about political matters at all. Robert Bly and Denise Levertov have been attacked for their engagement in these issues—the Vietnam War and nuclear disarmament and things of that sort. That seems to me a uniquely American and English tradition of disassociating writing from what goes on in the world because it's certainly not true of European writers and it's not true of South American writers. They're all involved in the politics of their country and they write about that; in countries where they can't write about it directly, like South Africa, Eastern Block countries, and Latin American countries, they write parables. They do it in an indirect way, but it's clearly understood.

That certainly was a prejudice when I was in graduate school: bad writing is ideological and good writing is subtle and intricate. I used to think it was intellectual elitism: the best writing is the most inaccessible.

A friend once gave a poetry reading and after the reading someone came up to him and said, "I enjoyed your poetry even though I can understand it." So, yes, there has been a lot of that. Luckily, I think that is changing.

Some people have said that it's not good for literature to have so many writers sheltered by the academy.

I don't know that it makes writing any less good, but I think it probably does make it more uniform. A lot of poets of our time sound very much alike; perhaps that's come out of the fact that most of us are teachers or writing students rather than working at Sears or driving a truck, or whatever. Writers used to have to support themselves in ways that had nothing to do with writing and this may make a difference in terms of struggling by yourself.

You've written that you did exercises to teach yourself how to write poetry. Do you remember what they were?

I did things like getting books on prosody out of the library and doing some of the things that were explained in there. For example, I would read about the villanelle and I would make myself write a villanelle. It was just a matter of reading books that explained the various forms and experimenting with them; I learned how they worked and tried to do some of them myself.

Do you use anything like that with your students?

It depends on the level of the students. Recently I've been teaching in a tutorial program and dealt largely with students who are already writers, graduate students. They know what they want to do and so I don't give them exercises. I let them write and then we discuss the work at hand. I suggest poets for them to read because I can see certain directions which I would like them to go in or certain things which I feel are not good about their work and I want them to read people they can learn from.

I've done some poetry in the schools and I give exercises with kids because you can't just say, "Sit down and write a poem." You have to give them specific instructions. Younger children are wonderful at metaphor. "Something is like something else" is a very simple way of explaining metaphor. "What does this remind you of?" "What is the color pink like for you?" Blue is an interesting color because some kids come up with all sad images and others come up with wonderful exhilarating blue images. Also, with natural phenomena, they're wonderful. I remember one kid saying, "Hail is like God dropping the ice cube out of his martini."

Should I have my students read work they will understand even if it means they'll be reading Sandburg?

It depends on the student. It depends on the age and the level you're talking about. If you're teaching graduate students, no. Or if you have some ambitious young intellectual who will want to read only things that he or she can't understand . . . But high school students, yes, Give them something they can enjoy because most of them don't like poetry to begin with, or think they won't like it, so give them work that can somehow touch on their own experience, that's simple enough and yet respectable poetry. Don't give them Rod McKuen, don't give them Edgar Guest, but . . . Sandburg may not be the greatest poet we've ever had, but he was a poet. You need to start with something you don't feel bad about giving them, but which will engage their interest.

You have to grab them where they are. Then you may be able to get them to go on from there, but if you give them something that shuts them out at the beginning, you'll never get them.

I was interested by your poem about giving your daughter a copy of **Sister Carrie** *because a student once told me that the first time a book engrossed her was when we read* **Sister Carrie** *in class. The next term she got caught up in* **The Grapes of Wrath**, *but she thought the ending was too sad. I said, "Well, there's some hope that the Okies will get together." And she said, "Oh, I hope they do."*

Well, that's it. For young people the personal connection is very important. "Oh, I hope they do," it's as if it were happening to her own family. I have noticed that often someone who has read one of my books, a young student or someone who has come to a reading of mine, will come up and tell me about a poem they have liked, and it's almost always, "I know someone who has done this" or "I have felt this way" or "I've had this experience." They don't respond to it because it's a well-written poem; it's because there's something in the poem that touches them personally. That's always the beginning; the aesthetic thing comes later.

I was reading Sandburg my first year in this country, when I wasn't used to the language. At the same time I was reading Sandburg, I was taking my first high school English Literature course. I was reading Wordsworth and Keats and Gray and I couldn't do much with them. They were simply too difficult for me; but Sandburg, I could read, I could understand, I could respond to. I knew that Keats and Wordsworth and Shelley

and the rest were supposed to be much greater poets, but that didn't mean I really liked them.

You've said that you wrote in free verse because you found "the echoes of the formal masters too strong" for your "incubating voice." Do your students have trouble with echoes?

They have echoes, but they aren't those same echoes because they largely read contemporary poetry; so there'll be echoes of maybe Mark Strand or Galway Kinnell. It's never the traditionally formal poets because my students come from two generations in which they've not been taught metric poetry. A few years ago Donald Hall was teaching a short course in writing in iambic pentameter in the Goddard MFA Program, and students flocked to it. They found it extremely difficult and they found it fascinating: they were learning *new things.* And they found it very hard because they were used to speech rhythms; they were not used to hearing stressed and unstressed syllables. It was like learning to hear poetry in that way for the first time. So everything is turned around.

I've always, for example, liked to have my students read people like Richard Wilbur, who is an absolutely marvelous poet in whatever he does, but who, among other things, is very good with forms. And also someone like Marilyn Hacker who writes not only wonderful villanelles and sestinas and sonnets, but crowns of sonnets and double villanelles. She uses these very traditional forms, but uses extremely colloquial, idiomatic, contemporary language within these forms which I think is a beautiful and interesting combination. I like my students to read these people. It doesn't necessarily mean they write like them. It is hard for them to, say, write a sonnet that doesn't sound like tenth-rate Keats.

If it's possible, I'd like you to explain this comment: "Once the tools, tricks and secrets of the trade become second nature, you lose the attention to technique which has served as a margin of safety. Suddenly you are nakedly exposed to the dangerous process of bringing a poem into existence."

I meant that period between the time you know exactly what you do because you are doing an exercise and the time when you can trust your instinct and critical judgment enough that you don't feel totally at risk. It's like a child learning to walk. The child has held onto the furniture or the hands of grownups and then she lets go and for a little while, there'll be quite a few falls until, eventually, she stops falling and can walk by herself. There is a period like that and it's very troublesome for young writers. I certainly went through that for a number of years.

I get this in workshops where people who don't have much background in writing but a great deal of enthusiasm have no sense of whether the poem works and also whether it communicates its ideas to an outside reader. Often they're very good at criticizing poems by other people but they can't do it to their own poems. I'll talk to them about a specific poem and try to help them see some of the problems and they will say, "Well, you've been very helpful and now I see what you mean, but why can't I do this myself?"

There's no way except the experience of writing and writing and revising, going back, looking at your old poems. There comes a day when you can do it, when the flaws jump out at you.

It sounds as though that middle period is a time when the person hasn't really established a center for his or her work.

That's true, but it's also a matter of learning the craft. Most young writers are very awkward in their language. Even if there's a great deal of talent there, a great deal of energy, the phrasing is usually not smooth yet, not lapidary enough. It's also proportion and pace and transition, how to get from here to there, all those technical things which you have to learn by feel on your own. You develop your own voice, your own language, and that takes time.

Can having other people react to their work speed that process up?

I think it can and that's why workshops are so valuable and such a shortcut for writers. It's something I didn't have when I started to write. Students in workshops get that immediate response from a teacher who's an experienced writer and from their fellow students.

If someone couldn't go to a workshop, what would you suggest they do to teach themselves?

Read the best poets—all the good poets of their time as well as the older literature. We learn to write by imitation largely, just as we learn to speak and walk by imitation. I think most teachers—probably all poets teaching—would agree that they're merely helping along and that the reading is the primary thing. The teacher can be very valuable in helping direct students to what to read. One of the good things about the Goddard program, now at Warren Wilson College, is that each program is individually made up for a particular student, and that it requires a lot of reading. It encourages not only reading poetry and criticism and fiction, but also reading outside of literature—reading about science or architecture or psychology—other subjects that could feed into your poetry as subject matter and enrich your sense of the world. Sometimes young writers don't want to read anything outside of literature and that's a very small part . . . The world is rich. Any writer is a better writer the less insulated he or she is.

Reading widely makes you a livelier, richer person and that would feed into your writing. It's probably more important for novelists than for poets because they deal with social reality whereas poets deal largely with their inner world or how their inner world relates to the outer world, but I think it enriches the whole *context* in which you write. W. H. Auden, for example, regretted very much that he didn't know more about nature, especially botany and zoology, than he did. He felt it would have helped his poetry a great deal if he had been able to use that area of knowledge in a natural way, the way, for example, Roethke did.

Even being a good writer, but *definitely* being a *great* writer, demands a great deal of understanding and knowledge of the world. It doesn't necessarily mean a formal

education, but it does involve curiosity. That's what we feel in Tolstoy and Thomas Mann and Flaubert and the great poets like Yeats or Keats. One has that sense that they were interested in a very large universe.

I'm partial to history. To me a sense of what has gone on in the past is very important to one's view of the world. Because that is my bias in writing poetry, I look at what is going on right now in my life and the life of people around me not as divorced from everything that has gone before, but in the context of the past and of what may come in the future. Now that's not everyone's bias. For some people it may be nature. Everything related to the seasonal, to the rejuvenation of nature, or perhaps it relates to landscape. There are poets whose whole world of inner experience is articulated in terms of natural images; it's as if the landscape or the weather is a metaphor always for what is going on inside them. There are many different possibilities.

I don't mean a writer can't be a wonderful writer and have a highly concentrated vision. There are writers who are obsessed by one thing and that one thing is expressed over and over and wonderfully. It's the hedgehog and the fox idea. The hedgehog is the one who burrows inside; Kafka is a typical hedgehog. He had this one idiosyncratic vision of everything, and it was such a *powerful* vision . . . perhaps if he had dissipated it, it would not have been so powerful. And then there are the foxes like Tolstoy. But I think even for the obsessive ones, knowing as much as possible is valuable and a joy.

Do you get anything from teaching?

I've enjoyed the method of tutorial teaching very much. I like working with one person at a time, being able to relate to his or her particular needs, and see the direction they're going in. I can't really help someone without understanding their poetry [and that] means trying to get into that person's mind.

I like the exchange of talking about literature. Having to do it by mail, as I've had to with my students, is laborious, but it makes you think hard about everything you say because it's down on paper and there are so many more possibilities of misunderstanding. It's taught me to think about things more clearly than I would otherwise. It's also forced me to read a lot more because I've had to keep up with the students' reading and they want to read a lot of things I haven't read. It's been stimulating for me. There is the pleasure of the intellectual- literary exchange, but also of seeing someone develop and maybe having a share in guiding their development.

Source: Nancy L. Bunge, "Liesel Mueller," in *Finding the Words: Conversations with Writers Who Teach*, Swallow Press, 1985, pp. 96-105.

Adaptations

A tape of Lisel Mueller reading her poetry in 1979 is available from the Poetry Center collection. Contact them at http://www.sfsu.edu/~newlit/newcatalog/916.htm (last accessed April 2001) to purchase a copy.

Another audio recording of Mueller reading was recorded by *New Letters Magazine* at the University of Missouri in 1981.

Topics for Further Study

Research the history of the tango and why this dance and musical style is associated with Spain's Andalusia region.

Read interviews with Germans who remained in Germany throughout the Hitler years. Describe what daily life was like. What did Hitler's supporters say in his defense?

Francisco Franco ruled Spain for almost forty years, until 1975. Find other poems that condemn him and his reign.

Blood oranges derive their name from the dark red color they have on the inside. Find another fruit or vegetable that is called by a compelling title, and write a poem that makes use of that name.

Explore the tradition of giving fruit for Christmas: where the tradition came from, how long it has been around, and in what form it exists today.

This poem points out the shallowness of reading about peace and safety while terrible things are going on in the world. Do you think that poets who write about pleasant things are being ignorant to reality? What is the responsibility of poets to keep up with world politics? What is the responsibility of readers?

Compare and Contrast

1936: Political systems gain and hold on to power by exterminating great masses of people. Soviet Russia begins purges that kill eight to ten million citizens in two years. Nazi Germany kills nearly as many during the Holocaust. A million die during the Spanish Civil War.

Today: International peace-keeping forces from the United Nations often intercede in abusive regimes.

1936: Hitler's secret police force, the Gestapo, takes over the regular German police force to spy on citizens more easily.

1986: West Germany and East Germany are still divided, with East Germany aligned with the Soviet Union.

Today: Having been reunited in 1990 as the Soviet Union collapsed, the Federal Republic of Germany is one of the most influential European nations.

1936: The Great Depression that has affected the United States through much of the 1930s is just as devastating to the rest of the world, leading people to support dictatorships as drastic measures for relief.

1986: The United States economy is in a recession, in large part because of unbridled government spending: the national debt doubles from 1981 to 1986, from one billion to two.

Today: Because of the economic boom from the computer revolution, the U.S. government finally has a budget surplus.

1936: Fruits grown in tropical regions very rarely make it to northern markets and then only at a great price; still, their rareness makes them popular Christmas gifts.

1986: Refrigeration and shipping methods made it possible to enjoy produce from around the world.

Today: Increasingly, exotic fruits show up in neighborhood supermarkets all the time.

What Do I Read Next?

Mueller won the Pulitzer Prize for her 1996 collection *Alive Together: New and Selected Poems,* which represents works selected from the previous thirty-five years.

Mueller's work as a translator throws an interesting light on her particular interests. *The Selected Later Poems of Marie Luise Kaschnitz,* published by Princeton University Press in 1980, represents a rare opportunity to read Kaschnitz in English.

Paulette Roeske is a friend and former student of Mueller. Roeske's newest poetry collection, *Anvil, Clock & Last,* is scheduled to be published in 2001.

The poems that the speaker of "Blood Oranges" admired are available in both English and Spanish in *Federico García Lorca: Collected Poems,* edited by Christopher Maurer and published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 1991.

Barbara Helfgott Hyett edited a book of poetry from survivors of the Holocaust in 1986, called *In Evidence: Poems of the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps.* It was released by University of Pittsburgh Press.

A short book about the same subject as "Blood Oranges" is John Gorman's *The Reception of Federico García Lorca in Germany.* Published in 1973, it is now out of print but can be found in library systems.

Poet Robert Pinsky has some of the same sensibilities as Mueller. His collection, *The Figured Wheel: New and Collected Poems,* 1966-1996, (1996) offers a good sampling of his works over several decades.

Rita Dove was one of the judges who awarded the Pulitzer Prize to Mueller. *Her Selected Poems* was published in 1993 by Pantheon Books.

Further Study

Liebster, Simone Arnold, *Facing the Lion: Memoirs of a Young Girl in Nazi Europe,* Grammaton Press, 2000.

This is the author's autobiographical account of life in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France before and during the Nazi occupation.

Posner, Gerald L., *Hitler's Children,* Random House, 1991.

The sons and daughters of leaders of Hitler's Third Reich talk about how they feel about their childhoods.

Wyden, Peter, *The Passionate War: The Narrative History of the Spanish Civil War,* Simon and Schuster, 1983.

Wyden weaves together interviews, memoirs, and documents into a story told to readers in a very clear and understandable way.

Bibliography

Fulton, Alice, "Main Things," in *Poetry,* Vol. CLI, No. 4, January 1988, pp. 366-77.

Muratori, Fred, "Second Language," in *Library Journal,* Vol. 111, No. 15, September 15, 1986, p. 90.

Parisi, Joseph, "Second Language: Poems," in *Booklist,* Vol. 83, No. 9. January 1, 1987, p. 679.

Stitt, Peter, "The Whirlpool of Image and Narrative Flow," in *Georgia Review,* Vol. XLI, No. 1, Spring 1987, pp. 192-208.

Tanner, Lindsey, "Pulitzer for Poetry Ends In Obscurity," in *New Standard,* http://www.s-t.com/daily/05-97/05-04- 97/e06ae235.htm (January 17, 2001).

Taylor, John, "Alive Together: New and Selected Poems," in *Poetry,* Vol. 171, No. 3, January 1998, p. 219.

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