Daylights Study Guide

Daylights by Rosanna Warren

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

"Daylights" was first published in the literary magazine *Shenandoah* and appears in Rosanna Warren's first full-length collection of poetry *Each Leaf Shines Separate,* published in 1984. It is a short poem□only twenty-eight lines in two free-verse stanzas□and, like other poems in the collection, was inspired by a famous poem. Many of the poems in the collection are also about paintings and other works of art. Using the second person "you," Warren details the response of the speaker to witnessing a New York City robbery. Full of colorful visual imagery and symbolism, the poem relates the speaker's hyper-awareness of her surroundings and her own mortality. Warren claims the poem speaks to French poet Stéphane Mallarmé's well-known poem "L'Azur," ("The Azure") and to the obsession of European romantics and symbolists with transcendental blue. Mallarmé's poem, published when he was twenty-four, isn't so much a description of the sky as it is of the sky's effects on the poet. These effects aren't feelings of beauty or love in any conventional sense but rather feelings of dread, death, and the impossibility of transcendence. The poet longs for what the blue sky promises while at the same time realizing that that promise can never be fulfilled. Warren uses blue and daylight as symbolic images of the violence and grit of urban America. She juxtaposes the symbolic promise of daylight with the harsh reality of city life. For Warren, art is always a mirror of human life and a way by which to measure it, to bring its meaning into relief. The poem has been reprinted in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* and *The Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets.*

Author Biography

Born on July 27, 1953, in Fairfield, Connecticut, to Robert Penn Warren and Eleanor Clark, a celebrated literary couple, Rosanna Warren was provided the kind of education that many parents can only dream of giving their children. Her father, a university professor and nationally acclaimed writer and critic, won Pulitzer Prizes for both his fiction and poetry, and her mother won the National Book Award. Warren attended the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Rome, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, the New York Studio School, and Yale University, from which she earned her undergraduate degree in 1976. She earned her master's degree in the writing programs from Johns Hopkins University in 1980. Warren's poetry shows her training in and passion for painting and sculpture. Her intricately structured, sophisticated, and detailed poems frequently use works of art and other poems as subjects. "Daylights," for example, is inspired by Stéphane Mallarmé's poem "L'Azur." Perhaps more than any other poet writing today, her verse is directly concerned with how art can shape the way people think and experience the world.

Warren, who published *The Joey Story* in 1963 when she was only ten years old, has already had a distinguished literary career, having won a number of awards and prizes including the Nation Discovery Award in poetry, an Ingram Merrill grant for poetry, a Guggenheim fellowship, the Lavan Younger Poets Prize, the Lamont Poetry Prize, a Lila Wallace Writers' Fund award, and the Witter Bynner Prize in poetry. In addition to her chapbook of poems *Snow Day,* she has published two full-length collections, *Each Leaf Shines Separate* (1984) and *Stained Glass* (1993). A well-respected translator of classical Greek literature, she has also edited a collection of essays on the art of translation titled, appropriately enough, *The Art of Translation* (1989). A chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, Rosanna Warren is the Emma MacLachlan Metcalf Professor of the Humanities at Boston University.

Poem Text

So the sky wounded you, jagged at the heart,
glass shard flying from liquor store window
smashed.
They had warned you, blue
means danger. The kid runs off
zigzagging the crowd, clutching his prize of
Scotch;
the liquor man yells. Those Grecian dreams
endure even New York. You think
you're safe, hum-drumming along
the sidewalk's common, readable gray,
calmly digesting your hunk of daily bread,
with flesh enough on your bones to cast some
shade,
but puddle flashes, car window glints,
a stranger casts you a glance from a previous life:
the sky! And there you stand
unclouded, un-named, as naked as
the chosen Aztec facing the last shebang□
(*his* last shebang; the globe keeps rolling along
slipslop in its tide of blood)□
So there you stand
holding your sky-stabbed heart in your hands
to offer□to whom?□
while the liquor man curses the daylights
out of the cop, and the crowd
clumps dully away.
And you: "What *you* lookin' at?
Move on!" So you
move on and grateful, by God,
in the grit gray light of day.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-7

In these lines the speaker describes an incident in which she is figuratively "wounded" by the sky after witnessing a liquor store robbery in which a window is smashed. It is important to understand that the speaker is not cut by the "glass shard" in the second line. The proximity of the image, however, evokes the extent to which she has been psychologically harmed by the sky. The "you" is a projection of the speaker. The "They" in the third line probably refers to the symbolists, a group of nineteenth-century poets including Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and others for whom blue symbolized the impossibility and the promise of desire. The speaker, like the boy who had just robbed the liquor store of a bottle of scotch, zigzags between the present and her thoughts on the significance of what is happening. "Those Grecian dreams" refer to the writer's own obsession with Greece and with the blue of the Aegean Sea.

Lines 8-14

These lines describe another experience of the speaker in which she is again symbolically "attacked" by the sky. While walking down the street eating ("calmly digesting your daily bread"), she observes a series of things□seemingly disconnected□which shock her into another consciousness. Her description of herself as someone "with enough flesh on . . . [her] bones to cast some shade" is an understatement, suggesting that she is not thin. Again, the sky is the symbolic image into which the speaker infuses her experience. Like "L'Azur," the Mallarmé poem that inspired this one, the sky is an interrupting force in the speaker's consciousness, reminding her of the danger in desire for transcendence. Juxtaposed with the danger of the blue sky is the "sidewalk's common, readable gray," an image of the physical world at her feet. Its description as "common, readable" suggests that it can be known and is in stark contrast to the sky, which is illegible and mysterious.

Lines 15-18

In these lines the speaker uses a simile comparing herself to "the chosen Aztec facing the last shebang." The Aztecs were the native people of Central Mexico and were noted for their advanced civilization before Cortés the Conqueror came in 1519. A "shebang" is a word of unknown origin, which means situation or an affair. The meaning of the Aztec's "last shebang" is not clear, though it could allude to the conquest of the Aztec people by Cortés, or to the ritual of human sacrifice practiced by the Aztecs. Being "unclouded, un-named" and "naked" suggests the speaker's vulnerability, her innocence, and her shame. This description also suggests the speaker is in a kind of pre-linguistic consciousness, where her mind doesn't categorize the world into parts and

things. Trance-like states were common for many of the symbolist poets, and it is frequently out of these states that they wrote.

Lines 19-28

This stanza begins in the same way as the first, with the offhand and conversational "so." The image of a person standing against the backdrop of an overwhelming universe□frequently symbolized by the sky□appears throughout Warren's poems, suggesting humanity's insignificance and isolation. Other poems in *Each Leaf Shines Separate* that contain this image include "Garden" and "World Trade Center." That the speaker has no one to give her "sky-stabbed heart" to underscores this sense of isolation. The symbolist image of the transcendent blue sky is echoed in the word "daylights," a slang term that also means emotional or mental stability. The speaker is figuratively paralyzed by witnessing the liquor store robbery and unnerved by what she sees around her. Readers can see her standing there wondering what to do next when the owner of the liquor store asks her what she's looking at. In the last line, the speaker "wakes up" from her trance-like state and realizes her situation. This line contains a kind of moral, as the speaker expresses gratitude, presumably for not being a part of the robbery or a victim of urban violence. It critiques the desire of looking for transcendent meaning in some other world and implicitly warns readers to keep their feet on the ground and their wits about them.

Themes

Nature

"Daylights" uses a contemporary urban setting to explore the idea of nature. By juxtaposing the gritty streets of New York with the sky, the speaker questions popular representations of nature as a benign or even a beneficent force. Here, the sky "stabs" the speaker, offering her no solace from the ugly and threatening street crime she witnesses. As lines 14-15 show, the blue sky itself makes the speaker vulnerable, "unclouding" and "un-naming" her, until she feels as if she is facing her own death. Nature for Warren, as for the symbolist poets of the nineteenth century, is not a place of refuge but rather a mirror-like entity that reflects the poet's own fears and desires. Whereas nature inspired the romantic poets, it just as often casts dread into the hearts of the symbolists, making them aware of their own aloneness in the world. Curiously, it is another human being that finally prods the speaker of "Daylights" into action after she is rendered almost catatonic by witnessing the robbery and by seeing someone from "a previous life." The speaker's gratitude, apparently for being physically unharmed, comes "in the grit gray light of day," an urban image posed in stark contrast to the blue of the "Grecian dreams" the speaker imagined earlier.

Class Conflict

In "Daylights," Warren paints a psychological profile of a person caught in the midst of urban violence. Stereotypes of the rich and the poor abound, and New York City is known for being a place where the disparity between the two is stark. Warren draws on these stereotypes to create a portrait of a person whose response to a robbery□an effect of poverty□is existential despair and gratitude that she herself is not part of the cycle of poverty and crime. The speaker's "Grecian dreams" is the first sign that she is not of the same class as the person who committed the robbery, or even the cop, the liquor store owner, or the crowd gathered to witness the crime, all of whom she subtly characterizes as being part of the hoi polloi of seemly urban life. The despair she experiences "holding . . . [her] sky-stabbed heart in . . . [her] hands" is the despair of one caught in a world of others who cannot appreciate her own rarified way of experiencing the world. Such alienation from others is a symptom of the speaker's class consciousness, of which she herself may not be aware.

Style

Point of View

This poem uses the second person "you" as a projection of the speaker. Such use often suggests that the speaker is alienated from herself in some way, that she feels disembodied. Use of the second person has become more prominent in twentieth-century literature in general and in the last few decades of the century in particular. This use fits symbolist verse well because it is a stylized form of address when the "you" stands for the speaker.

However, the "you" here also works to draw the reader into the speaker's experience, Warren's chief aim. The goal of the poem is not to name things in the world but to evoke an experience in readers.

Imagery and Sound

Warren employs a combination of crisp symbolic and concrete visual imagery and a variety of near-rhymes, off-rhymes, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia to create a verbal texture suggesting busy-ness and alarm. For example, verbs such as "hum-drumming" and "zigzagging" sound like the actions they name. By using words that so accurately embody physical actions they also represent, Warren closes the distance between speaker and reader.

Historical Context

Although "Daylights" is set in New York, presumably around the time the poem was written, there is nothing specifically related to New York in it. The liquor store robbery, the inciting incident for the speaker's meditation on daylight, could happen any place. However, the appearance and reaction of the crowd and the liquor storeowner suggest a big city and the accompanying sense of anonymity people feel in them. In 1984, when "Daylights" was published, the prison population in the United States was 454,000, more than double the population in 1970. By 1999, there were more than 1.2 million people in prisons throughout the country, plus an additional half million in local jails. During the 1980s, the Reagan administration made tougher law enforcement a national priority. In 1981, Reagan declared a National Crime Victim's Week□the first of its kind□and Nancy Reagan launched her "Just Say No" anti-drug campaign. Reagan was voted into office during a time of high inflation and a soaring national crime rate, and his anti-crime initiatives were responses to these. His Economic Recovery Act of 1981 was meant to increase investment allowances, provide incentives for people to contribute to individual retirement accounts, and reduce taxes on big corporations in order to stimulate job growth and, it was hoped, reduce crime. In 1983, oil prices dropped and inflation eased. This helped Reagan and his vice president, George Bush, win a landslide election in 1984 over Walter Mondale and his running mate Geraldine Ferraro. Mondale, a moderate Democrat, emphasized the growing disparity between rich and poor during his campaign. Democrats stressed that during the 1980s the wealthiest one-fifth of Americans produced 41 percent of the national income, whereas the bottom fifth produced only 5 percent. The Republicans stressed the fact that, during the 1980s, 46 percent of the jobs created paid more than $28,000 a year and that the Consumer Price Index dropped from 13.5 percent in 1980 to 4.3 percent in 1984. In the end, Mondale proved no match for Reagan, who carried every state except for Mondale's home state of Minnesota and Washington, D.C. The Democrats, however, carried more than 90 percent of the Black vote, 65 percent of the Hispanic vote, and 53 percent of the vote among those earning less than $12,500 a year. Republicans took the majority of votes from those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, suggesting that the younger generation saw the Republican party as the country's best hope for improved economic opportunities.

In literature, the early 1980s saw two "schools" of poetry vie for public attention, the new formalists and the language poets. The new formalists called for the return of fixed traditional poetic forms, partly in response to the saturation of literary magazines and journals with anecdotal, first person, free verse lyrics, many of which were written by graduates of M. F. A. programs. More well-known new formalists include Molly Peacock, William Logan, Timothy Steele, and Brad Leithauser. The language poets, on the other hand, often associated with the political Left, stressed the idea that language creates rather than expresses reality. Poet and leading language poetry theorist Charles Bernstein wrote that one of the chief aims of language poetry is to expose "the optical illusion of reality in capitalist thought." Although manifestoes, essays, and poems both by and about new formalists and language poets continue to be written today, they

appear mostly in academic journals and literary magazines and have little wider social appeal.

Critical Overview

No critics have written specifically on "Daylights." However, the collection in which the poem appears, *Each Leaf Shines Separate,* attracted considerable attention from reviewers. Tom Sleigh of the *New York Times Book Review* wrote that Warren's "lavish technique is disciplined by her austere moral intelligence." In their introduction to her poems in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry,* anthologists Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair write that her poems are "highly finished, meticulously detailed, intricately composed." On the dust jacket of *Each Leaf Shines Separate,* poets Richard Eberhart and John Hollander praise Warren's work. Eberhart writes that "Rosanna Warren's poems are like pure water falling from a hill, reflecting light and giving cool sustenance." Hollander applauds the collection's "elegant pace and timing of the way these poems unfold themselves, their precise observation, the learning and judgment at their depths and the remarkable taste that controls their surfaces."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Semansky has published widely in the field of twentieth-century poetry and culture. In the following essay, he considers the inter-textuality of "Daylights."

"Daylights" is a poem about another poem. When poems directly or indirectly reference other poems, they participate in what literary theorists call inter-textuality. Simply put, inter-textuality refers to the ways in which a piece of writing is involved with other pieces of writing, whether openly or covertly.

At the simplest level, "Daylights" alludes to another poem, Stéphane Mallarmé's "L'Azur," written in 1864. "L'Azur," which refers to the blue sky, is written in French and is a dramatic lyric consisting of nine quatrains. Here is the first stanza, translated:

The everlasting Azure's tranquil irony
Depresses, like the flowers indolently fair,
The powerless poet who damns his superiority
Across a sterile wilderness of aching despair.

For Mallarmé, the blue sky is a ubiquitous reminder of the poet's inability to make anything happen, to effect change, either on himself or on the world. It is a symbol of his own ennui. In the second stanza, he asks "Where can I flee?" Then he calls on the fog to "Pour your monotonous ashes down / In long-drawn rags of dust across the skies." The sky for Warren's speaker is more malicious, more active than Mallarmé's sky, which is more like a presence that taunts and harasses him. Warren begins her poem as if in the middle of another story, another thought:

So the sky stabbed you, jagged at the heart,
glass shard flying from liquor store window
smashed.
They had warned you, blue
means danger. . . .

Was the speaker daydreaming? How can the sky "wound" her? Who is the "They"? To understand these questions, readers must consider not only the structure of Warren's poem but also of Mallarmé's, and the ways in which he used language. For the symbolists in general and for Mallarmé in particular, language was to be used for its effects. Symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire wrote that "everything, form, movement, number, color, perfume, in the *spiritual,* as in the *natural* world, is significative, reciprocal, converse, *correspondent.* " The symbolists saw correspondences everywhere. Between the mind and the external world, inherent and systematic analogies existed. The symbolic images they employed, often private, were meant to exploit and manifest these analogies. The sky "wounds" Warren's speaker because it suggests the promise of clarity and knowledge yet delivers, instead, the muddle of violence, danger, and surprise. She is drawing on the historical symbolism of the image of the sky, but she is also drawing on Mallarmé's use of the image in his poem. The

"They" is the symbolist poets themselves. Both poems use speakers who address themselves at various points, with Warren's speaker addressing that part of herself whose desire she is trying to tame and Mallarmé's speaker addressing his soul. Both poems evoke the sense of isolation and despair. Mallarmé's speaker has nowhere to run: "Where can I flee?" he asks. "What haggard night / Fling over, tatters, fling on this distressing scorn?" Warren's speaker comes close to being a caricature of Mallarmé's when at the beginning of the second stanza she says, "So there you stand / holding your sky-stabbed heart in your hands / to offer□to whom□?" Warren's speaker is surprised, in a state of shock, whereas Mallarmé's is world-weary and exhausted.

Both poets draw on the symbolism of the color blue. The color suggests height and depth□the blue skies above and the deep blue sea below□as well as darkness made visible. Such a range of associations is perfect for these poets, for whom the sky is a container for their own emotional and psychological projections. At one point Mallarmé writes, "The Sky is dead," mirroring his own creative and emotional torpor. Warren's blue sky, her azure, is "daylight," which in addition to daybreak also connotes clarity and mental stability, as well as the end of a successful endeavor. She plays with the associations of this word to play off Mallarmé's poem, "updating," in a sense, "L'Azur."

Both poems can also be seen as indictments of society at the end of their respective centuries. In "L'Azur," Mallarmé paints an almost Dickensian picture of his environment, as he urges pollution onto the blue sky:

Unceasing let the dismal chimney-flues
Exude their smoke, and let the soot's nomadic prison
Extinguish in the horror of its blackened queues.

For Mallarmé, society is made up of people who are conformists; physical reality is itself almost unbearable. Poetry, like the sky, promises another world where the ideal might be achieved, but never is. For Warren, society is not so much a place of boredom and ennui as it is for Mallarmé, but a place of random, almost hallucinatory violence, where the poet engages with the physical world and makes a strange peace with it, realizing the folly of longing for the ideal in some transcendent symbol such as the sky. The very title of her poem underscores this idea.

Another difference between the two poems is in their form. Whereas Mallarmé's poem is a lyrical lament about the poet's internal torment, Warren's poem resembles a cautionary tale about the random violence of urban environments and the necessity to keep moving. Whereas Mallarmé evokes, Warren describes.

Most beginning readers of poetry would not know the relationship between Warren's poem and Mallarmé's, so in some ways "Daylights" is a poem which speaks differently to different kinds of readers. Readers approaching her poem for the first time and without the benefit of having read "L'Azur" or much symbolist poetry will be drawn in by Warren's crisp imagery, the drama of the robbery, and the hyperbolic manner in which the speaker details her experience, but they will no doubt be stumped by the symbolic weight she intends "the sky" to carry in line 14. However, this does not mean that the

poem is the lesser one because it draws on Mallarmé's poem. Inter-textuality isn't a theory used to unpack individual poems or stories but a way of thinking that acknowledges that human beings are born into a world of language. Readers and writers learn (or not) to use language based on their own experiences. Reading and writing semiotician Daniel Chandler explains inter-textuality as follows: To communicate we must utilize existing concepts and conventions. The concept of inter-textuality reminds us that each text exists in relation to others. . . . In fact, texts owe more to other texts than to their own makers. Consequently meaning is not a matter of authorial 'intention'. . . . Texts provide contexts within which other texts may be created and interpreted. The debts of a text to other texts are seldom acknowledged (other than in the scholarly apparatus of academic writing). This serves to further the mythology of authorial 'originality.' The practice of alluding to other texts and other media reminds us that we are in a mediated reality. Chandler reminds us, then, that Warren's poem isn't necessarily a poem which describes an experience in New York City as much as it is a poem which answers another poem, the meaning of which changes the way that readers understand her own.

By focusing on the relationship that poems have to one another as well as on the relationship they have to readers, readers themselves will gain a deeper and stronger appreciation for the text in front of them. They will understand that the world that they see, taste, touch, feel, and hear is only one world among many.

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

Critical Essay #2

Hart, a former college professor, is currently a freelance writer and copyeditor. In this essay, she discusses various ways of interpreting Warren's poem using an assortment of psychological models of reader response literary theory.

Some literary theorists believe that any work of creative writing possesses no fixed or final meaning. The old school of thought that purported that there was only one, so-called correct way of interpreting a piece of writing is diametrically opposed to the belief of these theorists, who are referred to as reader response theorists. Within the category of reader response theories are several different methods of obtaining that meaning, but in general the theories all contain the concept that meaning is created somewhere between the author, the reader, and the text. In other words, meaning is found somewhere between what the author implies, what the reader experiences, and what the text inspires. Using a few different approaches to reader response theory, this essay will examine Rosanna Warren's poem "Daylights" in an effort to demonstrate some of the theories as well as to try out several different possible interpretations of the poem. One reader response theory uses what is called a cognitive-processing model. Under this model, readers are given a plan or model that will help them explore a work in order to eventually create their own interpretation. For example, under this model it might be suggested that the reader write down possible motives that lie behind the actions of a particular character in the piece being studied. If the motives are not easily understood, the reader might first write down a series of questions that, under a second or closer reading of the work, might later be answered. For example, to be specific to Warren's poem, the reader might ask questions such as these: Why does the speaker of this poem begin with the words "So the sky wounded you"? How could the sky wound anyone? What is it about the sky that could be piercing? Is it the brightness of the sun? Does it have anything to do with the title of the poem: "Daylights"? And why does the speaker seem to infer that the person in this poem feels safer in "readable gray" and by the end of the poem that the person in the poem feels "grateful, by God, / in the grit gray light of day?" What is it about light that appears to bother the person in the poem? Why would light bother anyone?

When using reader response theory to interpret a poem, it can be rather liberating to know that there are no concrete answers, but at the same time it can be a bit threatening. Some readers might find that it is not always easy to trust the initial thoughts that pass through their minds. Or it might just be hard to grasp them. It's also hard to forget the fact that the author of the work must have had some very specific ideas for writing the piece in the first place.

A reader response theorist might suggest that readers allow the images that the author has created to work on their thoughts, to trust the effects and power of the poem. What is important about the poem is the significance that it arouses in the reader. And to help readers grasp their thoughts while reading the work, to help them create a list of questions to ask of themselves, some theorists have suggested the following steps. First, read the work (in this case, the poem). Take notes on the parts of the poem that

are bothersome, the parts of the poem that cause a reaction. For example, one reader might find it bothersome when Warren writes "glass shard flying from liquor store window smashed." Here is a person, walking "hum-drumming along," when all of a sudden she hears glass cracking, sees a young kid running off "zigzagging the crowd," hears the storeowner yelling. This is a startling scene. There is uncertainty. There's been a crime. Violence has been committed, and there is a chance that more violence could follow. The person in the poem more than likely feels threatened. Some readers might find this section bothersome or unsettling. But not all readers will react to this scene. Nor will all readers react in the same way. According to reader response theory, that's the way it should be, because each reader brings different experiences to the text. However, the mere fact that something is bothersome to someone might mean that that particular part of the poem might also be one of the more interesting parts of the poem, and therefore the reader should pay more attention to it. This is the part of the poem where the reader might learn the most because this is the part that affects the reader the most.

The next suggested step is for readers to define what they don't understand about the particular piece. For instance, Warren writes in lines 6-7, "Those Grecian dreams / endure even New York." Some readers might ask, What is a Grecian dream? What things have difficulty enduring in New York? What does New York represent, especially in contrast to Greece? These questions might require a little research for some, but others might already have some ideas about Grecian culture or the lifestyle of New York. And still other readers might rely on an intuitive sense, fed by images from the rest of the poem. And that is the next step: to create hypotheses that help make the poem more understandable, forming it in a personal way so that it makes sense. In this particular situation, for instance, the reader might have images in mind that make New York seem like a difficult place to live. Everything in New York seems congested: too many people, too many cars, too many buildings. Nature is almost completely obscured in New York, whereas the Greek Isles are pictured as a place to escape modern civilization, a place to dream and reflect. Greece and its culture, in contrast to New York, may appear more romantic, more conducive to a balanced emotional life. By following these investigative steps, readers should be able to develop a more directed interpretation.

Another development in response theory is based on psychoanalytical theories of response. Under this theory, according to Richard Beach in his book *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories,* "the ways in which readers' subconscious fantasy themes shape the meaning of their experience" is considered. In other words, a reader "transforms experience into a conscious level that expresses, through identification with the fictional character, the reader's repressed, subconscious experience." This is a theory that is grounded in the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud. Using this aspect of a psychoanalytical theory when reading "Daylights," readers might find themselves becoming angry when they read lines 22-23: "while the liquor man curses the daylights / out of the cop." Why is the storeowner cursing the cop? The cop didn't do anything wrong. The liquor man should be cursing the thief. This anger could be a clue to readers that somewhere in their past they felt unduly charged for some disturbing consequences of which they had no part. They might never have been

able to prove their innocence and have thus repressed their anger. Upon reading the poem, that anger might be released. At least, this is what Freudian psychoanalytical theorists believe.

If it is true that readers bring their experience to a text and that through that experience they interpret the text, it is only a matter of math to sum up the facts and conclude that there are multiple interpretations possible. So, taking the text of Warren's poem and examining the concepts she has given, it might be interesting to create some hypothetical interpretations.

Having been raised in an urban setting in New Jersey and having listened to Bruce Springsteen since he was twelve, some imaginary reader studies Warren's poem and concludes that this is a poem about the cold, steel and concrete environment of modern society that beats away at the soft emotions of modern man. Where does this interpretation come from? Looking at the poem, this reader sees images of a harsh urban setting with the "glass shard," the "prize of Scotch," the "puddle flashes," and the "car window glints." He also sees concrete sidewalks, dull crowds, and strangers demanding eye contact. The character in the poem feels naked in the crowd, holding her "sky-stabbed heart" in her hands while she is yelled at by someone in the crowd: "What *you* lookin' at? Move on!" Another reader, a young woman, perhaps, having been raised in a Christian household, might read Warren's poem and see images of Christ. There is the reference to "your hunk of daily bread" that brings up the image of Christ at the Last Supper, stating that this bread is his body. There is also "the chosen Aztec facing the last shebang□." Could this not be Christ just before his crucifixion: "(*his* last shebang; the globe keeps rolling along / slipslop in its tide of blood)□"? There is Warren's reference in line 27, "grateful, by God," which suggests that there might be some religious overtones in this poem, so the Christian woman reading it is at least somewhat aided in her interpretation.

Then again, there could be a reader who recently broke off a relationship with a lover or, worse yet, may have suffered the death of a friend. For this person, with her emotions already on fire, the passion of Warren's poem might rush to the forefront. This reader might interpret the "sky wounded you, jagged at the heart" as the sentiments of a character who is suffering, a character who would prefer to remain in the shadows rather than to have her raw emotions exposed to the light. "You think you're safe, hum-drumming along" might refer to the safety one feels in a crowd, lost in the unidentifiable qualities of a crowd, lost in the mass of all the unknown stories. In other words, the strangers are all unknown to one another; therefore, no emotions are exposed or need to be explained. The only reminders of emotions are the lights that come from the sky, the reflections in the puddles, the car windows□all the daylights. In this interpretation, the Aztec might take on the image of the lover who is lost, especially if that lover has died. The "stranger . . . from a previous life" could represent someone who reminds her of her lost lover, reminds her of her pain. For this reader, the "sky-stabbed heart" speaks for itself, and when she reads line 21, she might have to choke back tears because the identification is so powerful: her broken heart is in her hands and she is offering it□but "to whom?"

According to reading response theories, all the above interpretations represent hypotheses. Each is a possibility. After formulating a hypothesis, the reader should then review the text "to find information relevant to understanding" the parts he or she doesn't understand. And finally the reader should test and revise the hypothesis "against prior information" to come to a final conclusion, a cohesive interpretation, one that makes sense not only on a personal level but also makes sense in relation to the full text. So for the young man who loves Bruce Springsteen, he should look at the text to see where his interpretation might not fit. For example, how has he decided to interpret the image of the Aztec in Warren's poem? What does the title of the poem refer to? And why does the speaker of the poem say that the character is grateful to move on? The reader with a Christian background, on the other hand, needs to figure out what the "prize of Scotch" might refer to and why the speaker of the poem says, "They had warned you, blue / means danger." And the reader who has lost a lover might have to fit into her interpretation line 15: "unclouded, un-named, as naked as / the chosen Aztec." Do these particular lines make sense in view of these readers' personalized interpretations?

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on "Daylights," in *Poetry for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Adaptations

The *Atlantic* sponsors a website at http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/poetry/soundings/hardy.htm on which Rosanna Warren reads Thomas Hardy's poem "During Wind and Rain."

The journal *Philosophy and Literature* carries Warren's essay "Alcaics In Exile: W. H. Auden's 'In Memory Of Sigmund Freud'" at http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/phl/20.1warren.html (last accessed April 2001), along with other interesting articles.

Topics for Further Study

Make a list of the images that you would use to symbolically describe the town or city in which you live; then write a poem using those images.

After researching the symbolist poets of the latenineteenth century, write an essay arguing for the ways in which "Daylights" is and is not a symbolist poem.

Write a story about a time when you encountered violence. Explain what you learned from the experience.

Pick one other poem from Warren's collection *Each Leaf Shines Separate* and explain how it is part of another poem or work of art.

Compare and Contrast

1984: Geraldine Ferraro from New York becomes the first woman vice presidential running mate, teaming with the Democratic Party's Walter Mondale.

2000: Joseph Lieberman becomes the first Jewish vice presidential candidate for a major party, teaming with the Democratic party's Al Gore.

1985: Bernhard Goetz is charged with attempted murder for shooting teenagers on a New York City subway. Goetz claims the teenagers threatened him and attempted to rob him. New York City crime becomes front-page headlines in newspapers across the country.

2000: Mayor Rudolph Giulliani's law and order administration is credited with the continuing drop in New York City's crime rate. However, abuses by police continue to plague the city.

1985: Scientists claim that a hole in the ozone layer, first detected in 1977, is now indisputable.

2000: The media carries first-hand reports that the polar ice cap is melting, an effect of global warming.

What Do I Read Next?

Warren's poetry appears in *The Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets,* published in 1984. This anthology showcases Warren's work as well as that of many of her contemporaries.

In *The Roots of Romanticism,* published in 1999, editor Henry Hardy collects lectures delivered by historian of philosophy Sir Isaiah Berlin at Washington, D.C.'s National Gallery of Art in 1965. Berlin shows how romanticism would later influence twentieth-century thinkers and artists. This is an accessible and useful study of romanticism.

Paul Horgan's study of Henriette Wyeth's art, *The Artifice of Blue Light: Henriette Wyeth,* released in 1994, argues that Wyeth's work "belongs in the first rank of contemporary American painters." Among other things, Horgan examines Wyeth's use of the color blue in her paintings.

Warren's second collection of poems, *Stained Glass,* published in 1993, contains thirty-nine poems, most of which concern death. These poems have the intensity of visual imagery which readers have come to expect from Warren's work.

Warren published a work of fiction, *The Joey Story,* in 1963 when she was only ten years old.

Further Study

John Jay College of the City University of New York Staff, *Crime and Justice in New York City, 1998-1999,* McGraw Hill, 1998.

This handbook examines the crime problem in New York City thoroughly, its causes and effects. It also looks at the components of the criminal justice system including police, courts, probation, and the death penalty.

London, Herbert, *Broken Apple: New York City in the 1980s,* Transaction Publishers, 1989.

London examines the social and economic problems of New York City in the 1980s.

Mallarmé, Stephané, *Collected Poems,* translated by Henry Weinfield, University California Press, 1996.

This collection contains Mallarmé's poem "L'Azur," which influenced "Daylights".

McClatchey, J. D., ed., *Poets on Painters: Essays on the Art of Painting by Twentieth-Century Poets,* University of California Press, 1990.

This collection presents reviews and essays by well-known poets on painters.

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Berlin, Sir Isaiah, *The Roots of Romanticism,* edited by Henry Hardy, Princeton University Press, 1999.

Bernstein, Charles, and Bruce Andrews, eds., *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book,* Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.

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Sleigh, Tom, *New York Times Book Review,* July 21, 1985, p. 24.

Warren, Rosanna, *The Art of Translation: Voices from the Field,* Northeastern University Press, 1989.

□□□, *Each Leaf Shines Separate,* Norton, 1984.

□□□, *The Joey Story,* Random House, 1963.

□□□, *Snow Day,* Palaemon Press, 1981.

□□□, *Stained Glass,* Norton, 1993.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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