Fear Study Guide

Fear by Gabriela Mistral

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Contents

Fear Study Guide.....1
Contents.....2
Introduction.....3
Author Biography.....4
Plot Summary.....5
Summary.....9
Analysis.....11
Themes.....12
Style.....14
Historical Context.....15
Literary Heritage.....17
Critical Overview.....18
Criticism.....19
Critical Essay #1.....20
Critical Essay #2.....23
Critical Essay #3.....26
Adaptations.....27
Topics for Further Study.....28
Compare and Contrast.....29
What Do I Read Next?.....30
Further Study.....31
Bibliography.....32
Copyright Information.....33

Introduction

"From her maternal hand this poet offers us her potion, which has the savor of earth and which quenches the thirst of the heart." These words are from the citation that offered Gabriela Mistral the Nobel Prize for Literature for the year 1945. The same speech also noted that "Gabriela Mistral shared her maternal love with the children whom she taught." "Fear" was published in Mistral's second collection of poetry, *Tenura* (*Tenderness*). The poems in this book are referred to as children's poems, even though they have decidedly mature themes, and they have, in the years since it was first published in 1924, become standards of elementary- school education in Chile and throughout Latin America.

In a section at the end of the book called "Colophon by Way of Explaining," Mistral discussed why she chose to write a book about mothers and children. She wrote, "The woman who has never nursed, who does not feel the weight of her child against her body, who never puts anyone to sleep day or night, how can she possibly hum a *berceuse* (lullaby)?" Ironically, though she dedicated her life to children through her profession as an educator, Mistral herself never married and never had a child. Her ideas about the bond between mothers and children, which have come to mean so much to generations of mothers who are thrilled to at last find their feelings expressed in print, came to the author second-hand, through observation of the hundreds of children that she worked with as a teacher and her experience in growing up in a household of teachers. As is apparent by the popular and critical acclaim lavished upon her work about motherhood, Mistral was able to touch upon the very real emotions of the experience even though she did not live the experience herself.

Author Biography

Gabriela Mistral was one of the most famous poets to come out of Chile, and the first poet from a Latin American nation to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. She lived a colorful and active life, visiting foreign cities as a representative of Chile, and was recognized as an expert in education throughout the Americas. Her father was a schoolteacher who married a widow who already had a fifteen-year-old daughter. On April 7, 1889, Mistral was born as Lucia Goday Alcayaga in Vicuna, in the Elqui valley in northern Chile. When she was three, her father abandoned the family, and she was raised and educated by her mother and her half-sister Emilina, who were both teachers. She spent her childhood in the natural, rural setting of the Elqui valley.

By the time she was fifteen, she was already a teaching assistant. At eighteen she met Romello Ureta, a railroad engineer, and fell in love, but their relationship did not work out; not long after they broke up, for reasons unrelated to his relationship with Mistral, he committed suicide. His death was to affect her throughout her entire life. In 1910 she received her official teaching certificate, and by 1912 she was recognized across the country for her work in teaching poor people. In 1914 she won a national poetry competition with three sonnets that she titled *Los Sonetos de la Muerte* (*Sonnets of Death*). This was the first time she used the pen name "Gabriela Mistral," which she would be known by for the rest of her life□Gabriela after the angel Gabriel, and Mistral after the fierce cold wind that blows over the south of France.

In 1922, Mexico's Secretary of Education invited Mistral to collaborate with him on reforming that country's education system, and so she lived in Mexico City for two years. At the same time, in 1921, a professor at Columbia University in New York gave a lecture about her poetry, and when interested members of the audience tried to look up her work they found that no books of her work had ever been published; this led to the publication of *Desolacion* (*Desolation*) in 1922. The book that "Fear" is from, *Ternura*, or "Tenderness," followed in 1924. It is a book about children and motherhood, with poems familiar to generations of children who grew up in Latin America.

Mistral continued to publish influential prose pieces and to travel the world as a consultant in affairs of education. Her only other two books of poetry, published at wide intervals of time, were *Tala* (1938; the title means "Felling," as in "felling trees") and *Lager* in 1954. She received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945, the year that World War II ended. Starting in 1933, and for the next twenty years, Mistral was Chile's consul to several cities throughout the world, including Lisbon, Los Angeles, and Madrid. Near the end of her life she served as the Chilean delegate to the United Nations, retiring in 1954 to Rosalyn Bay, Long Island, where she died in January of 1957. On her tomb is the inscription, "What the soul does for the body so does the poet for her people."

Plot Summary

Lines 1-2

Swallows are small, fast birds known for being gregarious—that is, for socializing with other birds and forming large colonies. They also are known for the long distances of their migrations. When the speaker of this poem infers that someone who is unidentified, referred to as "they," could turn her little girl into a bird, she is speaking metaphorically, by referring to aspects of the swallow that the girl would have if she went through such a transformation. In this case, the fear expressed is that the girl will, as she grows up, start socializing with others of her kind and fly away, traveling with them rather than staying near her home. Moreover, the speaker is not just worried that her girl will turn into a swallow, but that "they" will turn her into one. Readers naturally wonder to whom this refers. At first, it appears to point to a particular mysterious group that wants control of the daughter, but, with no other evidence offered, the best answer seems to be that "they" simply refers to the people that a young girl will come into contact with while growing up: the world of school, teachers, and classmates that directs a child's attention outside of the home.

Lines 3-4

A parent's fear of losing his or her child is so powerful that it is natural to associate it with watching the child disappear off into the vast unknown, as mentioned in the third line. Mistral was certainly well familiar with air travel, but she spent her childhood in a rural, provincial area of Chile during the end of the nineteenth century, with neither automobiles nor air travel that would later conquer great distances. She was well aware of the intimidating vastness of the open sky, of the ways that a simple rural person could feel that someone was hopelessly gone once they had disappeared beyond the field of vision. It would be the same way that a parent would feel upon losing sight of her or his child. This connection between a poor person rooted to one place and a parent is made even more directly in line 4, in which the speaker of the poem refers to "my straw bed." A straw bed is the sign of a country person who has no means to buy a feather bed but has plenty of straw on hand to make her own. This image also refers to a bird's nest, extending the "swallow" imagery. The daughter actually is presented as some kind of bird, meant to fly from home, just not as a swallow, which would fly far away.

Lines 5-6

While the opening lines of the poem indicate that the speaker's fear is caused by the thought that her daughter will fly far away, this section indicates that she does not even want her going a short distance. It would seem, in the natural progression of life, that a parent would be glad to have her child "nest under the eaves"—that is, to have her child attached to the same house where she grew up, with a stable home (nest) that is easily

in her mother's sight. Rejecting this distance from her daughter means that this speaker is not willing to put up with even the normal distances that will come between a mother and her growing child. The act of combing the child's hair mentioned in line six symbolizes any type of taking care of the child, as long as it involves the very personal act of touching that is implied in combing.

Lines 7-8

Repeating the first two lines gives the poem a song-like quality, with a refrain that reminds readers of the most important fact, which in this case is the cause of the speaker's fear. Aside from the obvious key element, which would be turning the child into a bird, the key elements in this simple statement are "them" and "my little girl," emphasizing the daughter's helplessness and the threat to the girl that comes from mysterious outside forces.

Lines 9-10

The diction here is just slightly different than it was in the first two lines. Where the first statement like this expressed the fear that "they" would "turn" the child into a swallow, this second stanza starts with the fear that they will "make" her into a princess. The verb "make" shows less aggression than "turn," indicating that it would take less force on the part of the outside forces to perform this transformation. This is, in fact, quite likely, since it would seem that the daughter (and, in fact, her mother) would welcome her transformation into a princess. This slight change in verb subtly indicates the fact that the daughter might be open to change, even though the mother does not want it. Just as the first stanza surprises the reader with the idea that someone might be able to change a child into a bird, this stanza draws attention by stating the mother's opposition to the world glorifying her daughter. Often, parents refer to girl children as "princess," indicating that they are privileged by birth, that they should have no duties other than being themselves, and the wealth of the world will be handed to them. When this speaker wishes that her daughter not be given such easy privilege, readers sit up and take notice.

Lines 11-12

There is an implicit love of nature here that the poem just presents, without supporting. The speaker of the poem wishes against her daughter's social success because she does not want the girl to lose touch with nature, to become unable to play in the meadow. The way that this is presented emphasizes the idea that pampering the girl would separate her from nature. The poem assumes that she would, as a princess, wear golden slippers, and the word "tiny" in reference to her feet brings to mind ancient Oriental practices of binding girls' feet, to keep them small and dainty and impractical for romping across uncultivated ground.

Lines 13-14

Like lines 5-6, this section in the middle of the stanza contains a direct statement of the speaker's personal desire to keep her daughter to herself, away from the outside world. This time, however, there is less reason to believe that the fear of losing her daughter is about the girl's welfare, and more reason to see it as a fear of being alone. While the earlier statement emphasized the selflessness of the act by stating the speaker's wish to serve her daughter, by combing her hair, this stanza states her wish as directly for the speaker's, not the daughter's, benefit. Rather than expressing the fear that the mother could no longer sleep at her daughter's side, the fear expressed here is that "no longer / would she sleep at my side," which indicates that the speaker is concerned with her own loneliness.

Lines 15-16

Once again, repeating the first lines of the stanza has the effect of a refrain from a song, emphasizing the main idea to make it easier for a listener or reader to remember. This time, however with the added measure of desperation of the speaker, with her own self-interest more plainly on display, the repetition seems like a way of reminding and assuring herself that what she fears cannot hurt her.

Lines 17-18

One would expect that nothing but benefit would come to the daughter from becoming a queen, from attaining the ultimate in power in the human social world. Being a queen would certainly be better than being a princess, because a queen holds true power while a princess only has potential. Once again, however, this poem challenges expectations by presenting a mother's wish that she would like her daughter to be a queen "even less" than she would like her to be a princess. An element of reality is implied in the fact that the mysterious "they," who are assumed to have the power to make all of the transformations in this poem take place, would not be able to make the daughter into a queen immediately, only "one day." Their powers to change the girl's species and her social class do not extend to altering time.

Lines 19-20

In these lines, the speaker's fear reaches its emotional height. She fears that her daughter's social ascendancy would create an insurmountable division between them. In the scenario that she suggests here, the daughter may have the ability (through the power of "them") to rise up to the level of royalty, but she, the speaker, is so humble that she could never even be in the presence of royalty, not even if the queen is her daughter. Psychologically, it makes sense that a mother would worry that her daughter would be able to transcend her own humble roots to the extent that she could find herself in company that would keep her own mother out. The odd psychological element

in this poem, as it is throughout, is the projection of the unnamed "they," used to represent social forces that would take the daughter away from her mother. Her fear of losing her daughter, which is a natural by-product of a parent's love, is personified, but incompletely, by characters that are not given names or identities.

Lines 21-22

These lines indicate the selfless concern for the child that is missing from the parallel lines in the previous stanza. Lines 13-14 indicate the speaker's wish for comfort by not wanting to lose the feeling of having the daughter "by my side": here, the mother wants to be able to rock her daughter in the night, to give comfort to her. The use of the night as the time of fear, when either of them would need comfort, is fairly standard in poetry, based on a normal fear of the dark and discomfort about the mystery of being unable to see. Bringing this fear back for a second time in this last stanza helps to emphasize the idea that this poem is not just about a mother's natural concern that her daughter will grow up and leave her, but that it has its roots in deeper, more powerful, psychological mysteries.

Lines 23-24

The same pattern that ended the other two stanzas□the repetition of the first two lines□is played out again here, with one slight difference, which is the addition of the final exclamation mark. Since this thought has already been expressed in lines 17-18, the effect of the exclamation point is not to add any new information, just emotion. This speaker *really* does not want her little girl made into a queen. Repetition and the exclamation mark push the speaker's fear even higher, almost to a degree of terror, making it difficult to read her case as a normal discomfort about her little girl growing up. Mistral presents this speaker as a complex character who has a right to be concerned but who has let her maternal fear, especially her fear of what might be done to her by unidentified forces called "they," take control of her mind.

Summary

"Fear" is Gabriela Mistral's poem of a mother's love for her daughter, the intensity of which instills fear that the girl may become so worldly, successful, or well known that she will be unavailable to her own mother one day.

The poem opens with the woman declaring that she does not want "them" to turn her little daughter into a swallow because the daughter would then be able to fly away and perhaps never return. If the girl were to transform into a swallow, she would no longer sleep on her mother's straw mat and may even take up residence in the eaves of the house where the young girl could not be reached by her mother who wants to comb her hair. The mother repeats her fear of "them" turning her daughter into a swallow.

The mother transitions from the birds to the fear of "them" making her daughter a princess. If the girl were a princess, she would no doubt wear small golden slippers, which would be highly impractical for playing in the meadow. If the daughter were a princess, she would not be able to sleep in her mother's humble home each night which is one more reason the mother does not want her little girl to be made into a princess.

Elevating the mother's fear even more is the idea that if the little girl were a princess there is a strong possibility of "them" making her a queen. Clearly, then, the daughter would be placed on a throne and would not be accessible to her own mother. The final fear is that night would come and the daughter who is now queen could not be rocked by her mother. In closing, the mother states again that she does not want "them" to make her little girl a queen.

Analysis

The style of the poem is very straightforward and simple, written from the first person point of view. The narrator of the poem is probably a common countrywoman evidenced by her simplistic wishes and needs. The author also gives clues about the simple life of the mother through her references to sleeping on a straw mat and rocking her child. The author moves from present tense when she declares, "I don't want them to turn..." to the future tense when the mother speculates on the outcome, "She would fly far away into the sky..."

Each of the three stanzas ends with the same two lines that began the stanza. For example, the first stanza begins and ends with, "I don't want them to turn / my little girl into a swallow." This repetition helps to validate the intensity of the mother's thoughts and fears for her child and for herself.

There is melancholy in the tone of the poem because the mother does not want her daughter to leave and stalls the inevitable by the declarations of her own will. Although the woman is from a rural area, she is obviously aware of the dangers and the lures which would be attractive to a young girl represented by the "tiny golden slippers" which

would ultimately turn the girl away from her country home... "How could she play in the meadow?"

The two important themes in the poem are love and fear of change. The mother clearly adores her child and loves tending her and rocking her each night. These maternal pleasures are in jeopardy should someone else or one of "them" discover the sweetness of the child and want to remove her from the mother's world. It is important to note that the mother has only elevated views of her daughter's potential transformations, as a swallow, princess, or even queen. The mother cannot or will not allow any negative thoughts or less than noble transitions to alter her child's life.

Ultimately, it is understood that the daughter is not in immediate danger from some wicked unknown entity, but "them" simply symbolizes anyone with whom the girl will come in contact. Each person that the daughter meets carries the potential to illuminate the girl to a different and more favorable life which would mean the mother's devastation.

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Themes

Return to Nature

From the details provided, it is clear that this speaker lives in a rural setting: she sleeps on a straw bed and she knows enough about birds to imagine which type of bird her daughter would become if she were to become one. She knows that swallows travel with large flocks of other swallows and that they cover vast distances in their migrations, which means that they leave for long periods of time. Ironically, the transformation to a swallow in the first stanza is not presented as a return to nature but as a corruption of nature, forcing a little girl to separate from her mother. One of the primary fears worrying the speaker of this poem is that her little girl might no longer be able to play in the meadow if she becomes too deeply a part of society, which is symbolized here by tiny golden slippers. She would prefer her daughter to not be pampered by the excessive delicacy of culture, to instead keep in touch with her surroundings (as long as her surroundings are the rural area that the speaker knows as home). The image of playing in the meadow is an idealized way of imagining that the child can remain one with nature, presenting childhood play as part of nature and little golden slippers as the opposite of it.

Change and Transformation

This poem presents a parent fearing the changes that will happen to a little girl. Change is inevitable, and it is natural that a parent would fear that change might cause her daughter to drift away, a fear that reflects the intensity of the parent's involvement in the child's life currently. The likelihood of change is treated creatively here, described in terms of transformations that have less to do with reality than they do with the parent's emotional state. Of course a child cannot transform from a human into a bird, but the parent might feel as if the child is a bird when she leaves, like a bird flying from its nest. Children from humble backgrounds are not spontaneously turned into princesses, either, but to a parent, looking on as society gives the girl the adoration she used to get from her mother, it might feel like she is a princess. She also does not need to fear the girl being turned into a queen, but if the girl some day became a woman of power and influence it would feel the same to her mother as if she were a queen. The poem speculates that all of these changes and transformations would be brought about by some power known only as "them," who would want to make the girl into a sparrow, a princess, or a queen for unexplained reasons. The most reasonable understanding of "them" is that they are the people whom a growing child would meet throughout her life, and that her transformation would then be just the normal result of the influence of other people.

Public vs. Private Life

The speaker of this poem has, like all parents, a special bond with her daughter: it is a small, private society with just two members, shared by them when the speaker rocks her child and combs her hair. Beyond their small world is a larger one inhabited by people who want to change the daughter in ways that would take her away. If they were to succeed in turning the daughter into a swallow, a princess, or a queen, she would be a successful part of their world, but she would not be part of the mother's any more. The poem's title refers to a mother's fear of losing her daughter□not to death, not to disagreement, but to the general social world of other people. This fear is expressed most directly and most poignantly in the poem's third stanza, in which the mother hopes against her daughter's social success by visualizing a scenario in which her daughter would be made queen, with all of the command over society that a queen has, but when she is placed on the throne her mother would not be able to see her any more. This reflects the social responsibilities of a queen, who would not be allowed to associate with a commoner even if it was her parent. Social allegiances would, in such a case, become more important than private bonds.

As much as readers can sympathize with the poem's speaker for her fear of losing the intimate relationship she shares with her daughter, it is based on her fear of society in general, and that must be accepted for readers to truly accept her feelings. She fears that a public life will give her daughter freedom like a bird's, and will offer the honors due a princess or, even worse, the power due a queen. By imagining that society could or would bestow such honors, the narrator proves herself to be unfamiliar with the ways of public life, uncertain what it might do. She is a woman who sleeps on a straw bed, who rocks her child to sleep and combs her child's hair□ she understands the small world, not society at large. Not understanding the public world, she fears it, and her fear makes her imagine the public world coming to take away the thing she values most.

Style

Even in its original Spanish, "Fear" follows no strict rhyming or rhythmic pattern. This is appropriate because the speaker of the poem, sleeping on a straw mattress and worrying that her daughter will one day be too good to associate with her, is a simple woman and would naturally not have a voice that is too polished or refined. Still, there are sections that follow rhythmic structures, which has more to do with displaying the poet's skill than the character's personality. This poem is predominantly, but loosely, iambic, which means that the rhythm that occurs most frequently is the iamb. An iamb is a combination of one unstressed syllable with one stressed syllable. A line like "and *nev*-er *fly* a-*gain* to my *straw bed*" starts out iambic before losing the pattern at the end; the line "and *when* night *came* no *lon*-ger" is iambic with one extra syllable at the end. The quantity of iambs in this poem gives it something like an iambic structure, but it would not entirely be correct to say that the poem has a definite rhythm. There is also a strong presence of the "Cretic foot," which follows a pattern of stressedunstressed- stressed. The line that appears with varia tions at the beginning and end of each stanza has two Cretic feet: "*I* don't *want* / *them* to *make*." There are definite rhythmic patterns in "Fear," but they do not add up to an overall rhythmic design.

Other elements help to give readers a sense that the author has a firm control on the ideas expressed here. Each stanza has eight lines, and each begins and ends with a variation on the same two lines. There is no set length for the individual line. They do not all have the same number of syllables, but there is not any great degree of variance, either. For instance, there are no very short or very long lines. This speaker is a person of moderation□the whole poem is about fear of change□but she is too simple to have her ideas presented in an ornate, complex pattern.

Historical Context

Chile is a long narrow country that runs along the western coast of South America. The Andes mountain range runs the length of the inland border. It was originally inhabited by Araucanian natives, but was colonized by the Spanish in 1550. Unlike many South American countries, Chile does not have abundant deposits of gold or silver ore, and for this reason its growth as a colony was slow. It does, however, have great stores of iron, copper, and nitrates. During the Industrial Revolution that swept the world in the nineteenth century, these elements became crucial for manufacturing. Especially influential was Chile's nitrates, which were essential in fertilizers that became increasingly valuable as countries all over the world moved from farm economies to urban industrial societies, and for the manufacture of explosives. Chile became a rich country by the dawn of the twentieth century from nitrate production.

The country's greatest problem was that its nitrate wealth was not evenly distributed. The country's wealth was in the hands of a small proportion of people. As the economy grew, the cities grew at a tremendous rate, too fast to control, and they ended up breeding slums. The government looked after the interests of the wealthy: starting in 1891, Chile was a Parliamentary Republic, with the parliament appointing the president and his cabinet. The parlia ment was elected, but the elections were controlled by wealthy business people.

Labor organizations started to gain in popularity at the beginning of the twentieth century, advocating socialist and anarchist policies that would take wealth from the rich and put it in the hands of the common people. In cities and in the nitrate and copper mines in the north, where Mistral grew up, unions encouraged workers to fight against their employers to increase their financial positions and working conditions. Because the government was, essentially, an arm of the owners of industry, government forces were used to fight the workers. One particularly stirring episode in the struggle for labor reform was a massacre at the miners' camp at Iquique in 1907, where government troops killed striking workers. Economic tensions became even more strained during the following decade when, during World War I from 1914 to 1918, the world's usage of nitrates dwindled. Even worse was the fact that during the war Germany developed synthetic nitrates for its explosives, which devastated the Chilean economy.

In the 1920s, when "Fear" was written, the government of Chile was changing. In 1920, Arturo Alessandri was made president, in an attempt to keep the people from rebelling and taking over the government. While the Parliament had appointed Alessandri to be a moderate and to look after their own interests, he turned out to be a true reformist once in office. He was popular with the people, but he had trouble getting any measures passed by Parliament, and therefore the country sank into deeper financial trouble during his presidency. In 1924, Alessandri went past the legislators and straight to the people who elected them, and with the people's support he was able to have his reform legislation passed. This caused a coup by military right-wingers, who took control of the government in September of 1924. The reformists had enough power by then to perform a second coup in January of 1925, and a new constitution was drawn up that

gave more power to the common people but that also compromised with the wealthy landowners to assure their cooperation. This constitution served the country until the early 1970s, when Salvador Allende became the first president elected with a Marxist agenda in a non-Communist country. Three years into Allende's administration, he was ousted by a coup led by General Augusto Pinochet, with American support. Pinochet ruled the country for almost twenty years and had himself declared a Senator for Life.

Literary Heritage

When Mistral was writing "Fear" in the 1920s the Modernism movement that influenced artistic theory across the world was settling into maturity. Literary theorists use the term "modernism" to describe a wide variety of changes that came about at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is generally used to explain the backlash against literary tradition, a reaction caused by the way psychoanalysis changed the understanding of personal behavior and that Marxism changed the way that social behavior was understood. In poetry, Modernism entailed casting away traditional forms and concepts of beauty and using words that were concerned with evoking an emotional impression over those that had a beautiful sound together. Many strains of modernism, such as surrealism, imagism, and dadaism, were more concerned with striking readers with a powerful feeling than with overall logic.

In Latin American countries, literary trends generally followed European trends at the time. A unique literary theory had not been developed, and much of the literature that was read and discussed then was from Europe or the United States. For instance, when Mistral's collection *Tenderness* was published, there was no body of children's literature in Latin America. She had to make what she could out of the modernist sense of using direct language and out of the folktales of her native country.

In many ways, her poems in *Tenderness* anticipate what may be Latin America's greatest contribution to world literature, which is the magical realism movement that started in the 1960s and continues today. Magical realism, usually associated with fiction, is a joining of the serious tone of fatalism associated with Realism with supernatural occurrences that readers know do not really happen in this world. Some of the earliest and most widely read examples of this genre are Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez' 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Argentine writer Julio Cortazar's *Hopscotch*, from 1966. Both of these works presented elements that would be called "fantasy" in other books, treating them with dead seriousness. As Marquez, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, explained it, the tone he was trying to achieve "was based on the way grandmother used to tell stories. She told things that sounded supernatural and fantastic, but she told them with complete naturalness."

BOOKRAGS

Critical Overview

Through the decades, Mistral has remained continuously popular in South America, especially her native Chile, but in North America her reputation has been kept alive mainly by the good word of critics. It was, in fact, good critical response that led to the publication of her first book, *Desolacion*: it was not until a professor at Columbia University in New York, Federico de Onis, talked about Mistral's poetry in a lecture that interested readers created a demand that a publisher filled. Margaret Bates, in her introduction to *Selected Poems of Gabriela Mistral*, pointed out why it has been so difficult to capture the flavor of Mistral's poetry for North American readers. They are especially difficult to translate, she said, because "the effect of utter simplicity is backed up by a subtle, complex, hidden machine that extracts from each word, from each sound and accent, its maximum challenge." Bates quoted Marcel Bataillon, author of *Erasme et L'Esoagne*, saying that he had "found even more reason to love the Spanish language after reading Gabriela."

Critics examining Mistral's poetry, especially the poems from *Tenura*, try to separate the attitude of rural simplicity in her work from the actual simplicity of her humble origins. In an essay called "Gabriela Mistral, the Restless Soul," Majorie Agosin noted, "The Elqui Valley, Chilean women and children, created Gabriela Mistral's voice; it sprang from her depths, and was destined for the exterior world." It was the combination of this rural, home-bound persona and her worldliness as an international traveler that gave Mistral her distinct voice, according to Agosin.

Critics credit the book *Ternura* for being especially skillful in doing precisely what it set out to do, which is to examine the bond between mothers and children. Among volumes of praise for the book that have been published, the general consensus is perhaps best captured by Cuban writer Jorge Manach in his 1936 book *Gabriela Mistral: Vida y obra*: "The art of speaking to childhood is one which only those who have a very deep sense of the spiritual and the concrete can master. The fusion of tremulousness with plasticity, of malice of beautiful expression with the innocence of the emotions□what a faultless achievement in the pages of *Ternura*!"

Since winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945, Mistral's reputation with critics in Europe and North America has been unimpeachable. In South America and among Chileans, she is a sentimental favorite, a source of pride and a symbol of the culture. "She carried within her a fusion of Basque and Indian heritage," said Margot Arce de Vasquez, then the chair of the Department of Spanish Studies at the University of Puerto Rico: "Spanish in her rebellious individualistic spirit; very Indian in her long, deep silences and that priestly aura of stone idol. To this representative cultural value must be added the great value of her literary work, an incomparable document for what it reveals of her person and for its unique American accent."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and composition at two colleges in Illinois. In the following essay, he looks at several of the poems from Mistral's book Ternura *and how they successfully capture the idea of motherhood.*

The poems in Gabriela Mistral's second collection, Ternura, are supposed to be about mothers and their relationships with their children. The author called them "colloquies the mother holds with her own soul, with her child, and with the Earth Spirit around her, visible by day and audible by night." Addressing the wide, emotion-laden subject of motherhood is an ambitious thing to try, ten times so because Mistral was not a mother herself. Like Emily Dickinson, she knew that she knew what she knew about her subject and did not feel the need to justify herself with the weak excuse of experience, which proves nothing (you can't, for instance, expect everyone who has a spleen to be qualified by that intimate experience to explain what it does or where in the body it is located). Unlike Dickinson, who published hardly anything in her lifetime, Mistral put her theoretical works out in the open for all who had really experienced motherhood to see and criticize, and she traveled the world, living in different countries as an emissary of her government, while Dickinson only left her hometown a few times in her lifetime. What are readers to learn from this? That Gabriela Mistral, living among mothers and children as an educator since age fourteen (and a child before that), did more research on the subject she was theorizing about than Emily Dickinson did, and that she was more confident about her conclusions. We know that she was successful in capturing the bonds of motherhood and that Dickinson was successful in capturing the complexities of romantic love. Neither case gives any conclusive evidence about experience, observation, or popular sentiment.

It is, in fact, its bold departure from popular sentiment that marks Gabriela Mistral's greatness. The aspects of the maternal state of mind that she captures in *Ternura* are not aspects that we are accustomed to seeing on paper, and yet, as she did, we know they are right once we see them. Much of the public face of motherhood is about selflessness, about extending beyond oneself, about giving up all one has that is good, if necessary, and taking on another's troubles. Motherhood, in short, is the drama of life's most noble moments.

The problem, as even those of us who are not mothers can realize, is that this view of nobleness is incomplete. That which has life's greatest moments must logically be balanced with some rough spots as well. We seldom see art that probes the deeply troublesome things about being a mother. We hear that it's a lot of work with little thanks, but these apparent negatives actually add to the positive side of the equation, pointing out the superior character of one who can put up with such trouble. Sometimes, we hear macabre stories about negligent mothers, abandoning or abusing their children, but these stories are news precisely because they are so unusual. In patriarchal societies like the United States and Mistral's Chile, where men dominate the economies, mothers are paid for their labors with honor□this is referred to as "the cult of the mother," in which society assigns special privileges to motherhood as well as special

responsibilities. Unfortunately, honor is too often taken too far, blotting out the dishonorable instead of recognizing it.

What Mistral brought to the discussion with *Ternura* was a piercing examination of the subject, putting it into a quiet place, beyond all of the surrounding cultural noise and clutter in the atmosphere. She did not have to emphasize negative examples of motherhood because the truth is deeper and more profound than could ever be conveyed through specific examples about bad events. At the heart of the beauty of motherhood she found the psychological truths of sadness, loneliness, and fear.

The titles of the poems in *Ternura* are not the kinds of titles we see in the upbeat version that literature□not just the popular kind, but the most intellectual, too□often presents. They include "The Sad Mother," "Bitter Song," and "Fear." The poems with titles that are less disturbing are no less forlorn in the stories that they tell about women who look at their children and see their own continuance (for whatever that's worth) and at the same time their own vulnerability. These women measure their own lives by how close or far their infants are to them.

"Bitter Song," for instance, starts with the mother/speaker suggesting that her son play a game with her, imagining that they are a king and a queen, and it goes on to say the bounties of nature are his, working into each stanza the refrain "Whose else could it be?" The son's birthright, granted to him because□well, because he is her beloved□includes "this green field," "this whole valley," "sheep and pasture," and "the gleanings of the harvest." A common paean to motherhood would be content listing the glories this mother wishes for her child, but Mistral includes a stanza in parentheses about the child shivering and the breasts of the mother "dry with suffering," and later in the poem she repeats the entire stanza. The sense of motherhood is conveyed by the abundance she can see around her while watching her child do without, while the bitterness of the title comes from the repeated question that makes us think about who really does own this land, and how they could possibly deserve such wealth more than a son who is loved so much. The reason Mistral is able to introduce the darkness that is left out of so much other literature about motherhood is that there is a scapegoat, someone to blame for the suffering in this poem: the landowners.

And what of "The Sad Mother"? If there is one thing that the traditional uplifting ideal of motherhood does not have room for, it is sadness, except for the momentary sadness that occurs with a glimpse of life's difficulties. In the ideal of the selfless mother that popular culture promotes, it is the woman's place to keep quiet about her own suffering while tending to her child's; here, the mother openly discusses her existential terror and openly admits that her child is a way of blocking out what is frightening in her life. There are three four-line stanzas, culminating in this: "In you, my fear, my trembling / let my body sleep, / Let my eyes close on you / In you my heart finds rest." The unsettling thing about this is not that it admits that a mother can be sad□as mentioned before, the mother's suffering often serves to make her seem more noble□but that she so blatantly uses her child as a tool. Mistral broke new ground on the concept of motherhood in *Ternura* by allowing selfishness into the same poem as maternal love, not claiming that

either leads to or causes the other, only admitting that a respectable person may have both at once.

"Fear" is all about selfishness. The title refers to the fear that the child will one day go off and leave the mother alone. This in itself is a natural fear□no one wants to be alone, and the whole point of being a loving mother is that she wants to be with her child. But the courageous thing that Mistral does in "Fear" is having the poem's speaker admit that she would not want to be separated from her child even if it meant that the child would have a better life. She does not want her child turned into a queen, the speaker says, because "They would put her on a throne / where I could not go see her. / And when nighttime came / I could never rock her. . ." The poem does not look at the situation of the queen on the throne, which, presumably, would be pretty good: the mother, for once in literature, is lamenting her own loss at the child's gain. Like "Bitter Song," there is an external society that is the cause of the problem between the mother and child in "Fear" □the three stanzas are about resistance to "them" turning the child into a sparrow, a princess and a queen, respectively□but this time the offensive intruders pose no threat to the child, only to the mother's self-interest.

Motherhood is not a fragile thing. There is no reason for our literature to view only a narrow range of what it involves, ignoring the fear and the sorrow, as if to talk about them would somehow be disrespectful to mothers (accusing them of not being able to transcend? suppress? of not being perfect?). It is understandable that one would want to focus on motherhood's brighter aspects as a sign of respect, but there is a greater respect in truth. Even those of us who are not mothers can tell that Gabriel Mistral had the truth in hand in her collection *Ternura*.

Source: David Kelly, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

Mowery has a Ph.D. in literature and composition from Southern Illinois University. In the following essay he examines the themes of loss and separation and the bond between a mother and her daughter. In her *Lecturas para mujeres* (*Readings for Women*) (1923), Gabriela Mistral reflects on the role of women and mothers in society. She believes that mothers and motherhood represent the means to national formation in both the physical sense and the figurative sense. But she is in constant fear that mothers and women will be victimized and abandoned by the nation and their men. The conflicts between the expectations, creating life and then being abandoned by their offspring, are at the root of much of her writing, including her poetry. In the poem "Fear," she examines the conflict between traditional family values and family structures and the loss of those traditions.

Mistral has illuminated her deeply held belief in maintaining strong family bonds in *Lecturas*. In them she expressed a concern and uncertainty about what she saw as the dissolution of the family unit. She raised questions about the loss of husband/wife bonds as a result of the increase of outside activity by the wife, even though these were not the most important bonds. As Elizabeth Marchant notes, "the bonds between mother and child lie at the core of Mistral's" concerns. Her poem "Fear," published in 1924, echoes a specific fear: the loss of the maternal bond between mother and daughter.

The importance of the role of the Latin-American mother to hold her children close is emphatically presented here. The plea for the child to sleep with the mother is strong and falls within the normal structure of Latin-American families. Mistral uses this image of the closely bonded pair to lend artistic power to the point she is making.

In Latin cultures there is a strong family bond built on affection between the same-sex members of the family, fathers for their sons, mothers for their daughters. Fathers develop a relationship with their sons that involves instructing the son in the ways of *machismo*, a typical Latin attitude that does not allow boys and men to show emotion, pain, or weakness of any kind. Mothers develop a relationship with their daughters and try to keep their daughters close, to instruct them in the ways of the household and how to be a nurturing mother themselves in the future. For mothers, it is important to keep their daughters free from outside influences as long as possible and to help them cultivate the sense of what is or is not important.

One important cultural aspect of the mothers' attempts to control their daughters' interactions with boys was through the role of a chaperone. When young people became attracted to one anoth er or when the families of young people decided on mates for their sons and daughters, the mother of the girl often took the role of chaperone for the couple during social engagements. Some of these practices have since been forgotten, but Latin-American mothers still have great care and concern for the welfare of their daughters. For the mother, anyone or anything that comes between her and her daughter is an intruder and must be kept at bay.

There are three characters in the poem: a mother, who is the narrator; the daughter, who is the object of the mother's fears; and "them," an unnamed entity who has an effect on the other two. In "Fear" the intruders are different in each stanza, but they accomplish the same disturbing result: separation of the mother and daughter. In the first stanza the intruder is symbolized by the image of the swallow, a bird that seemingly flits to and fro without purpose or direction. The loss of the sense of direction is contrary to the mother's wishes. Mistral's statements about this sense of direction are found in her *Lecturas* when she urges her contemporaries to follow the ancient and eternal roles and models of the past. They are defined by her beliefs that "gender roles were stable and bonds between women and children were privileged," according to Marchant. Therefore, any violation of these privileged roles was unacceptable. Such a violation was an interruption of traditional family roles and contributed to a loss of the opportunity for affection between the mother and her daughter, which constitutes her fear in this stanza.

The intruder in the second stanza is more sinister because it adds materialism to the distractions which interfere with the maternal bonds. The "golden slippers" are symbolic of the increasing materialism of society (even in the 1920s). The mother fears that the daughter will become so interested in material things that the mother will be neglected or forgotten. Mistral also addresses this issue in a prose poem, "To the Children." (A prose poem is one in which the poetic wording is presented in paragraph form, not in the typical stanza form.) In this poem, the mother encourages her children to take the dust of her body after she has died and to use the dust for play and as a vehicle for remembering her after she is gone. She warns the children against letting her dust become part of a brick (a symbol of materialism) but rather to let her dust be a part of the road where the children play. In this way the mother will still be a part of the children's lives. In "Fear" the mother wonders how the daughter can play when encumbered by materialistic objects (the golden slippers). The loss of play then becomes the loss of the maternal bond when the daughter "no longer would sleep at my side."

For the mother the worst kind of departure is found in the last stanza. She warns her daughter against allowing someone else to make the decisions for her. Leaving under such circumstances will create a barrier between the two that is insurmountable. Here the mother fears that her daughter will take on airs and postures and that the daughter will assume that she is better than the mother and she will not allow her mother to comfort her. The mother says "I could never rock her . . ." continuing the theme that the mother wants to provide comfort and nurture for her daughter. In this final stanza the ellipsis implies more in this line than is directly stated.

The inclusion of the ellipsis hearkens back to the previous ideas. But there is more than just the rocking, playing, and combing, the total ideal of comfort, nurture, and support that the mother desires to give to her daughter. The emotional impact of these three dots is theatrical, as when at the most intensely dramatic moment the actor's voice drops off and the sentence is left unspoken. The stanza finishes with a sense of desperation, ending with an exclamation mark.

In the third stanza the mother fears the most significant loss of all: the alienation of affection from her daughter. The simple pleasures of giving comfort, for example by combing her hair (symbolically maintaining the maternal bond with the daughter), will be lost forever. In her poem "Nio Mexicano" ("Mexican Boy") the act of combing a child's hair is mentioned four times and is the major symbol of keeping the maternal bond with her child.

The theme of the poem is loss and separation and is a concern that lies at the heart of Mistral's beliefs. But despite never having married nor borne children, Gabriela Mistral had what Herman Hespelt called "a deep but never satisfied maternal longing" which left "sadness on (her) life and work." Examination of many of her poems will reveal a great affection for children and for the role of the mother in tending to her children. In the *Lecturas*, Mistral urges her contemporaries to follow the patterns of the mothers of the past. In this publication, she presses for a cohesive family unit with an educated mother as the central figure, says Marchant. This little poem makes the same point, as the mother cajoles, urges, and finally warns about the difficul ties ahead if the daughter were to leave the mother under dubious circumstances.

In her poem "Close to Me", she is even more graphic and passionate in her beliefs that the mother/ child bond ought not be broken. "Little fleece of my flesh / that I wove in my womb, / little shivering fleece, / sleep close to me." Additionally, the last line in the poem "Close to Me" is even more dramatic. "Don't slip from my arms. / Sleep close to me." These are the sentiments she expresses in "Fear," although not as directly. The importance of the role of the Latin-American mother to hold her children close is emphatically presented here. The plea for the child to sleep with the mother is strong and falls within the normal structure of Latin- American families. Mistral uses this image of the closely bonded pair to lend artistic power to the point she is making.

Source: Carl Mowery, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #3

In the following brief overview of the writings of Mistral (1889-1957), the reviewer characterizes her work as "harsh," philosophical, and ultimately universal as she united poetry and humanism in one powerful voice.

The life of Gabriela Mistral, who was born on 7 April 1889 in a village in northern Chile and died in New York in 1957, was devoted to an intellectual and spiritual quest. From her early days in Chile's Elqui valley to her European travels on cultural and diplomatic assignments, the story of her career reads almost like a myth. The needy peasant girl becomes the doyenne of Latin-American literature. The humble rural schoolteacher is awarded some of the world's highest honours, including the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945.

Gabriela Mistral's poetry, from her 1922 collection *Desolacion* ("Desolation") to *Lagar* ("The Wine Press") of 1954, was written in harsh, powerful and colloquial language. Like her massive output of prose, it is informed by a visionary, prophetic sense of the destiny of Latin America. But readers in Europe and countries as culturally diverse as Israel, China and Japan, also found a meaning in the humanism and poetry of her work.

In many books, theses, poetic and philosophical reflections, it is possible to trace the influence of this Latin-American writer from a country which, within a mere half century, produced three writers of world stature: Gabriela Mistral, Vicente Huidobro and Pablo Neruda.

Why has Gabriela Mistral's work had a universal impact? As in the case of all true creative artists, attachment to her own familiar world did not exclude a strong feeling for other languages and cultures. She acknowledged her debt not only to Saint Theresa and to the Spanish poet Luis de Gongora y Argote but to Dante, Rabindranath Tagore, and the great Russian writers, and, Christian though she was, to the great sages of Buddhism.

Closely identified with her country and with her people ("I am and will remain, she said, "a daughter of my land"), Gabriela Mistral described her personal experience with a voice which all humanity could recognize, drawing from a tragic love affair a song of love and tenderness which speaks to people everywhere. In her sympathy for the downtrodden and her readiness to defend their cause, poetry and humanism become one: "We must give expression to the soul in all its intensity, and boldly utter the message which springs from the heart before it ceases to beat."

Source: *UNESCO Courier,* November, 1989, p. 49.

Adaptations

Babbitt Instructional Resources produced a videocassette with accompanying teacher's guidebook and script called *Gabriela Mistral: Poems of Chile*, in 1999.

Mistral is one of the poets featured on the bilingual filmstrip and cassette package *Twentieth Century Poetry / Poesia del Siglo Veinto* from Films for the Humanities, Princeton, N. J., 1979.

Gabriela Mistral Reading Her Own Poetry is available on a vinyl record. Read in Spanish. Released in 1971 by the Library of Congress, catalog number LCM 2055-2056.

Topics for Further Study

Find a fairy tale that has a person turned into a bird or an animal, and use its situation to illuminate the situation described here.

A modern-day equivalent to turning a little girl into a princess might be turning her into a music star. Think of several similar possibilities that might concern a modern American mother and use them to write additional verses for this poem.

Pick a contemporary politician and report on the relationship she or he has with her or his mother.

Do you think that this poem could have been written in Chile today? Why or why not?

Write a letter from this little girl to her mother, explaining what she wants to be when she grows up.

Compare and Contrast

1924: United States interest in Chile and other South American countries is limited to their production of rich ores. In Chile, the Chuquicamata copper mine and Tofo Iron Mines produce metals of greater purity than those found in North America.

Today: Chile still produces about forty percent of the world's copper, but advances in transportation have made Chile a major exporter of fish and fruit to the world market.

1924: Farmers in rural California, feeling that their water was being stolen by the government (reflected by the poem's suspicion of a monolithic "them"), dynamited the Los Angeles aqueduct seventeen times in open rebellion.

Today: Ranchers in the western states still fight openly and sometimes violently with the government over water rights.

1924: A right-wing military coup ousts Arturo Alessandri, who had been president of Chile since 1920. Supporters of Alessandri helped him gain back the presidency the following year.

1973: General Augusto Pinochet becomes president of Chile after a coup, backed by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency, helps him depose the elected president, Salvador Allende. Pinochet rules the country as a dictatorship for nearly twenty years.

Today: Pinochet, faced with trial in Spain for crimes that he committed as president, has been declared too ill to stand trial, and returned to Chile, where he has received full immunity for crimes committed in office.

1924: British author A. A. Milne publishes *When We Were Very Young*, his first book of poems written for his child, Christopher Robin.

Today: Milne's name will live on forever because of his *Winnie-the-Pooh* books, which were written for Christopher Robin. The Disney corporation holds the copyright and sells millions of dollars each year in Pooh licensed videos, toys, games, and apparel.

What Do I Read Next?

Isabel Allende is the niece of slain Chilean President Salvador Allende. Her 1986 novel *The House of the Spirits* tells the story of one powerful family that captures the spirit of the country. It became an international bestseller.

Short stories by contemporary Chilean women are compiled in the anthology *What is Secret*, edited by Marjorie Agosin (White Pine Press, 1995).

Alfonsa Storni was an Argentine woman who wrote poetry at about the same time as Mistral. Her poems are available in English and Spanish in *Seleccion Poetica De Alfonsa Storni/Selected Poetry*, a 1999 paperback published by Editories Mexicanos Unidos.

Pablo Neruda is another poet from Chile who, in 1971, won the Nobel Prize for Literature. His first book of poetry was published a year before "Fear" was. Neruda's best works are available in English and Spanish in *Pablo Neruda: Selected Poems/Bilingual Edition*, published in 1990 by Houghton-Mifflin.

An American poet who, like Mistral, wrote more from understanding than experience was Emily Dickinson, the famous Belle of Amherst. After years of various Dickinson poems showing up in various places, they were collected in 1960 in a definitive edition, edited by Thomas H. Johnson, called *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*.

Further Study

Castro-Klaren, Sara, Sylvia Molloy, and Beatriz Sarlo, eds., *Women's Writing in Latin America: An Anthology*, Westview Press, 1991.

The introduction to this book is interesting but com plex for students; the examples included, however, offer a good variety.

Hughes, Brenda, *Folk Tales from Chile*, Hippocrene Books, 1997.

Intended primarily for a young audience, this book retells some fascinating traditional tales which capture the flavor of the transformations in "Fear."

Rodriguez, Ileana, *House/Garden/Nation*, Duke University Press, 1994.

This book is an academic exploration of issues of gender and ethnicity in Latin America after the colonial period. It does not specifically examine Mistral, but it does give a good background to the period in which she worked.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) 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, LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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 LDNfS 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

LDNfS 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 Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS 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 Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS 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.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS, 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 Literature of Developing Nations 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 LDNfS, 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 Literature of Developing Nations 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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