Feeding the Moonfish Study Guide

Feeding the Moonfish by Barbara Wiechmann

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Contents

Introduction

Much of Wiechmann's contemporary life and works are not formally chronicled; however, *Feeding the Moonfish* is included in Eric Lane's *Telling Tales: New One Act Plays*. Published in 1993, the work is a compendium of contemporary one-act plays from some of today's best playwrights in contemporary theater.

Author Biography

Barbara Wiechmann grew up in Middle Haddam, Connecticut and attended Hamilton College before moving to New York where she resides as a writer and performer. She has written several plays, including *Feeding the Moonfish*, *The Holy Mother of Hadley, New York*, and *The Secret of the Steep Ravines*. Her work has been produced and workshopped at P.S. 122, the Ensemble Studio Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, BACA Downtown, HERE, the Ohio Theatre, and the Samuel Beckett Theatre. Her work has also surfaced at the Edinburgh, New York, Philadelphia, and Seattle fringe festivals (a wide variety of unjuried and uncensored theatre). In addition to her regular appearances at the New York Theatre Workshop, Wiechmann is also a New Georges affiliated artist and has been a longstanding member of the Arden Theatre Company. She is an NYSCA grant recipient and a Jane Chambers Award finalist.

Plot Summary

The setting for *Feeding the Moonfish* is a dock on a saltwater lake in southern Florida. The action takes place in one evening. As the play opens, the audience hears two or three long whistles and then a series of overlapping voices. "Martin, Martin, Martin," chant the voices of the moonfish as they welcome him "home." Martin responds as if he has indeed returned from a long journey. Martin asks (referring to his father): "Can I see him? I want to see him." The moonfish ignore his persistent requests, instructing him to close his eyes and "Tell us we're beautiful."

Martin tells the moonfish about a dream where he was flying in a plane. He describes it in great detail, from the moment he hits the mattress and "some stewardess is strapping me in." He takes a flight into a deep blue sky, and it's as if he were levitating or floating weightlessly "in blue heaven." He describes a flight complete with "movies, brunettes and cocktail almonds." After he shares his dream, Martin tells them that he is "home," his memories are "hot and heavy." The moonfish then ask him to put his face in the water, Martin responds and asks to see "pieces of him" floating in the coral.

Eden arrives, breaking the hypnotic trance evoked by the chanting of Martin and the moonfish. She is curious, while Martin is defensive, demanding to know how long she has been standing there. Eden admits to stowing away in the back of Martin's car, curious to see where he goes after work. She explains her actions, saying, "you sweat to death side by side of someone . . . an they never speak a word to you, never pass the time of day, never basically even look at you, an you get curious□you know?" And, Martin concludes that waitresses are "all alike," telling Eden that she merely seeks attention.

Eden protests Martin's order that she "go home," claiming that she could be "harassed or raped or chopped up or worse." She does not understand why Martin is not flattered by her attention, nor does she understand his fascination with the rotting dock or the fish in the water. She asks what the huge fish are called and responds with skepticism when Martin tells her that the moonfish feed off the dock at night when the moon shines, explaining:

"The moon's got a force, an it pulls an pulls at the insides of these fish and locks em into a way of behaving," he tells her. "They got no minds of their own anymore. Once the moon's got em they're hopeless beyond all control. All they got is moon minds."

Eden continues to ask questions, and Martin responds by turning the conversation back to her and her own personal history. Eden shares that her father was beaten to death and that her mother and grandmother are responsible; however, only her mother went to prison. Her grandmother is under surveillance in a nursing home. Martin suggests, "There must be some place you go home to□I'll take you home O.K.?" but Eden holds fast to her conviction that home is not a safe place.

Eden turns the conversation back to Martin, asking him "Do you think there are forces between us?" She asks him to kiss her, and he violently rejects her. Eden voices her displeasure, telling Martin he does not appreciate her, that he treats her like a "disease," some "piece of filth." But when Eden walks off, Martin is left alone, and he pleads with her to return.

The voices of the moonfish come back in chorus, and they ask Martin to picture the water. Martin shares with them his concern for Eden's safety; he fears he might harm her. The fish respond, "Nothing can happen you don't want to happen. If you make the pictures." Again, they beckon him to the water, assuring him that he will not drown and tell him that he will "see his shadow on the end of the pier," calling him to see his father and to "watch the moonfish feed."

Eden returns to the dock with an old sleeping bag and a couple of beers only to be chastised for swearing and for stealing the alcohol from the restaurant. Martin softens, and they sit and drink as Eden shares her affinity for the nighttime. Martin opens up to her and tells her the history of the docks: "The living things were all dying," he says. "But not anymore. The moonfish are making a comeback." When Martin shares that the fishermen who frequented the dock were responsible for the slaughter of many fish, Eden abruptly turns the conversation and asks Martin, "do you think my mom's having an O.K. time behind bars?"

Martin responds with complete disbelief to her candor, and he asks Eden to recount the details of her father's death. The audience learns that although her mother tried to kill her father, it was her grandmother that "dealt the actual death blow." When Martin asks why they did it, Eden shares that her father "used to beat on my mom on a semi-regular basis" and her grandmother and mother were "merely killing him out of self-defense." Martin also learns that it was really Eden's stepfather, not her natural father, who was killed.

When Martin asks if the murder bothered her, Eden recalls the day she found out about it and admits that it did in fact upset her. When Eden mentions that as the police questioned her, others may have thought she was "psycho." Martin assures Eden that she is not "psycho" then scolds her for wanting a joint. Eden responds excitedly to his lack of understanding. When Martin tells her to calm down, Eden exclaims that "of course" she is "worked up," she has been trying to make a new friend only to be ignored. "There's no rational way to account for the disgusting things I've seen in my life," says Eden.

Martin tells her she is not alone and that he in fact shares a similar past. They begin trading one shocking family secret for the next until Martin reveals that his father slit his own throat. Eden becomes quiet. Martin apologizes and offers her something to eat and then ends up chastising her for her poor behavior in front of the men that frequent the restaurant. Eden tells him that he "shouldn't talk" because she heard "what you done to girls . . . to that girl."

The two continue to argue as Martin accuses Eden of lying and Eden defiantly telling him she knows of his improprieties with a certain inebriated, young woman whom Martin let wander around on the docks. She accuses Martin of standing by and watching the woman drown. The climax comes when Martin protests and moves to strike Eden but does not.

The tension shifts again as Eden explains the strange relationship between her mother and stepfather. Although her mother helped kill her stepfather, Eden maintains there was love between them. Despite the beatings, Eden claims that "Forces was pulling em□just like them fish□only they could feel emotional pain in their minds too so it was worse." She then tells Martin that there is nothing he could do, no horrific act that could change her feelings toward him.

Martin then tells Eden he thinks she is a little sick but she assures him that he is in good company. Then Eden reveals to him that she likes him and that he has a beautiful face, and the two fantasize about their escapes. Eden wants to leave Florida while Martin's utopia is a place where he cannot see the heat, where he can "see the lake clear down to its floor" and the ocean floor is "sand white," its creatures "huger and wilder."

He shares with Eden the former beauty the docks once held for him and the nights spent watching the moonfish with his father. He tells Eden that the fish talk, and she tries to hear them. Then the two settle down on the docks for a night's sleep, and, as Eden settles into Martin's arms, he tells her of his dream in which he is waiting for his father. In the dream, Martin's father comes to him, picks him up in his arms, and takes him to the docks to watch the fish feed in the stillness and complete darkness of the night without the force of the moon.

As Martin continues, his voice along with the moonfish rise in chorus recounting the activity. Martin shares a vision he has of his father cutting his own throat then falling to Martin's feet. In his dream, Martin pushes the body into the lake and the fish come to feed. Martin then reveals that his mother left his father, an event he identifies as the ultimate cause for his father's suicide.

As the scene ends, Martin tells Eden his dreams about a man and woman. Although they have nothing to do with his life, he imagines inflicting harm on the man. Eden listens, asking him to stroke her hair and to tell her she is beautiful. Martin obeys, his hand momentarily lingering on her throat as if to choke her. He then begins to stroke it and tells her, "You're beautiful, you're so beautiful."

Summary

Feeding the Moonfish is Barbara Wiechmann's one-act play about a boy and a girl drawn together by natural forces and the inevitability of destiny.

Late one night on a dock near a saltwater lake in Florida, a young man about twenty years old named Martin listens to the sound of female voices beckoning him closer to the water. The voices ask about his day, whether he is tired and what he is thinking about. Martin replies that he wants to see "him," but the voices insist that Martin first close his eyes and tell them that they're beautiful.

Martin insists that he wants to see "him," and the voices say that "he" will be here soon. Martin talks about his wish to fly and to fall into the clouds and tumble around effortlessly. Martin tells the voices that his real life is heavy and dark in contrast, and the voices tell him to put his hand in the water to cool off and then to reach farther and put his entire face in the water.

Martin knows that if he puts his face in the water, he will be able to see pieces of "him" floating around and getting stuck in the coral. The voices join Martin, and they describe walking to the end of the pier to watch the moonfish feed. Martin will also be able to see "him" better here in the dark.

Eden, a girl of sixteen, approaches Martin from the rear, asking what he is doing here. Martin is abrupt, thinking that Eden has observed his actions and his conversations with the voices. Eden works with Martin at a local restaurant and has stowed away in his car, hiding under a sleeping bag in order to see where Martin goes when he leaves work at night.

Eden would like to be friends, but Martin keeps to himself most of the time and does not appreciate the intrusion on his privacy tonight. Martin asks Eden to go home, but she contends that she could be murdered or raped trying to find her way home from such a remote area.

Eden does not share Martin's fascination with the decaying dock and the murky water, but then she notices the huge fish swirling around. Martin tells her that the fish are called moonfish, but Eden questions his veracity. Finally, Martin explains that the moonfish come to the surface of the water at night and suck on the dock under the light of the moon. Martin further explains that the moonfish instinctively know how to find the dock, even though it may be too dark to see it. The fish are pulled by the force of the moon and are single-minded in their quest for food once they are under the moon's spell.

Martin hopes that this explanation will satisfy Eden and that she will leave, but she wants to stay with Martin. His threats that Eden's mother will be worried do not faze the girl. Eden shares the fact that her mother is in Sing Sing prison and that her

grandmother is kept under security at a nursing home for killing Eden's stepfather. Eden is living in Florida with her aunt because she has no other family up north.

Martin is incredulous about the story, but Eden reveals that her mother and grandmother killed her stepfather by beating him with a waffle iron and an iron skillet. This line of conversation makes Martin uncomfortable, and he suggests once more that Eden go home. Eden moves closer to Martin and wants to know if there are forces moving between them.

Eden tries to kiss Martin, and he pulls away, rejecting her and her ideas about powerful outside forces pulling them together. Martin claims that Eden is just lonely, and she replies that Martin is lonely as well. She starts to leave but Martin calls her back. The moonfish voices come again and beckon Martin to look into the water again, but Martin is too preoccupied with Eden's safety out in the darkness. The voices tell Martin that "nothing can happen you don't want to happen. If you make the pictures."

The voices come again and tell Martin to watch for "his" shadow at the end of the pier and to see the moonfish feed. Eden unexpectedly returns carrying a can of beer for both her and Martin, and he reprimands her for stealing from the restaurant. As they sit quietly on the dock, Eden shares her affinity for the night and its ability to make people open up more.

Martin turns the conversation to days gone by on the dock. He used to see things floating by all the time, including all types of dead fish. In the past, fishermen would come and hunt sharks and leave their carcasses to rot in the sun. For some reason, though, the moonfish are returning.

Eden abruptly changes the subject to the topic of how people pass their time in prison. Eden worries about her mother having enough to do because before she was locked up her mother was always very busy. At one time, Eden sent her mother yarn and knitting needles, but the needles were taken away because they were considered to be lethal weapons.

Eden shares more of her past with Martin and tells him that her stepfather used to beat her mother severely. One day, he was choking her, and she hit him with the waffle iron. Eden's grandmother dealt the final deathblow with an iron skillet. Eden admits that her stepfather never beat her because she was not his biological daughter.

Eden remembers the unreality of the day of the murder. She was called out of class over the P.A. system and instructed to report to the office, and everyone in the school assumed that Eden had been caught with drugs. The women in the office bluntly informed her that her stepfather had been killed by a waffle iron, and they provided a release so that she could go home. The next few weeks were a blur of police questioning and alienation at school, which culminated in her being sent to Florida to live with her Aunt Inez.

Eden begins to get hysterical, and Martin tries to calm her. She persists in her frantic mood, not understanding why Martin will not befriend her. After she thinks about it, Eden

tells Martin that she does not blame him because there is no way to understand all the disgusting things she has witnessed in her life.

Martin assures Eden that she has no exclusive rights on seeing disgusting things in life, and then he changes the subject to Eden's inappropriate behavior with all the men at the restaurant. Eden challenges this statement with knowledge of Martin's own inappropriate behavior with one girl in particular. The two argue, and Eden finally reveals that she knows about the drunken girl who fell in the water and drowned while Martin stood by and watched. Martin raises his arm to strike Eden but stops himself in time.

Eden is not bothered that Martin does not think about her one way or the other because this is the same way her stepfather behaved toward her mother. Eden's stepfather would beat her mother and be unfaithful to her, but "in the long run it was her. She weren't just nothing to him. She was it. She was his living end."

Martin is incredulous about this due to the fact that the woman killed him, but Eden adamantly defends the love between her parents. The pull between the two of them was so strong that she would have killed him at some point just to possess him completely. There was nothing they could do to change the situation due to the natural forces and the emotional pain that accompanied them.

To further the point, Eden tells Martin that there is nothing he can do or has done to make her change how she feels about him. Martin begins to soften toward Eden and asks about how it is to live up north. Martin would like to travel someday, and Eden asks to go along. Martin feels paralyzed to stay in this place. The pictures in his mind when he comes to the dock reveal a place that is cool and clear where he can see through the crystal water all the way down to the white sand on the bottom.

Martin laments that the dock is not the same as it was when his father brought him here as a little child to see all the different kinds of fish. Martin used to be particularly fascinated with the moonfish that would swim around and around until "they became one silver river wrapped around the dock."

Martin declares that he can hear the moonfish talking to him, but Eden cannot hear a thing. She suggests that she and Martin sleep on the dock because it is getting late. Martin begins to tell Eden about a recurring dream about "him," Martin's father. In the dream, Martin's father picks him up as if he were a little boy and carries Martin to the end of the dock. Then, he points out a moonless sky and a sea with no tide.

Martin's father begins to call the moonfish, which come in spite of the moonless sky, and Martin is overwhelmed by their silver beauty. The voices join Martin in repeating his father's dream words of how the two of them will watch the moonfish kiss the dock in the moonlight.

In the dream, Martin's father cuts his own throat, and Martin pushes the lifeless body into the water, where the fish immediately gather to devour the dead flesh. Martin shares the fact that his father committed suicide when Martin's mother left him.

Eden is overcome with tenderness for Martin and asks him to brush her long hair, which he does while talking about the pent up rage that still boils inside him. Eden tells Martin once more that there is nothing he could do that would ever change the way she feels about him. Eden places Martin's hand on her breast, and he moves it to her throat, which he caresses tenderly while telling Eden how beautiful she is.

Analysis

The significance of the play's title is related to both Martin's waking life and his spiritual dream life. In actuality, Martin's father used to take Martin to the dock to watch the moonfish feed in the moonlight. Martin remembers their lunar appearance and associates them with warm memories of time spent with his father. After Martin's father's suicide, Martin returns to the dock to see the moonfish as a worldly reminder of his dead father, but the fish also serve as symbols of Martin's dreams.

The moonfish come out only at night, as do most dreams, and the fish tell Martin that anything that he wants to have happen will happen as long as he paints the pictures. This signifies the merging of Martin's wishes in his dreams and the images of his memories. The moonfish are a thread between Martin's memories and his dreams, which is why he is compelled to spend every night at the dock.

The author makes the point that there are powerful forces at work in nature, as exhibited by the moonfish behaviors, but these forces also apply to human beings, as Eden tries to get Martin to understand. In many ways Eden is more mature than Martin in this area, despite her younger age. She has experienced the negative effects of these strong forces by watching the violent relationship between her mother and stepfather.

Eden tries to get Martin to understand that while his grief is tragic, he is not the only one who suffers painful loss and that it is time to move forward and take advantage of nature's powerful forces in a positive mode. Even the moonfish come out to feed whether or not the moon is shining; they are driven by natural rhythms and patterns.

Eden acts as the foil to Martin's character, not allowing him to wallow any longer in his grief and in things over which he has no control. The two young people share the unhappy bond of losing a parent in violence, which is a force that has pulled them together because each of them needs someone who can understand the weight of this emotional burden.

Martin does feel drawn to Eden but pushes her away at first because of the fear of his behavior toward women. Eden has mentioned an incident where Martin watched a drunken girl drown, and perhaps Martin is afraid of any future interactions with women because of his emotional walls. Ironically, the moonfish voices sound feminine as they taunt him and represent the perception that Martin has of women's betrayal, probably brought on by his mother leaving him and his father.

In Eden, Martin finds a feminine spirit who accepts his pain and his past, and when his hand on Eden's neck turns from a chokehold to a caress, the author provides a

message of hope. Perhaps it is not necessary that attraction, or love, end in violence - as was true for both Eden's parents and Martin's parents. New dreams may soon be formed, and the moonfish will continue their rituals without Martin.

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Characters

Eden

Sixteen-year-old Eden, the play's antihero, is wise for her years. She is also a troubled teen whose fascination and free spirit lead her to stow away under a sleeping bag in the backseat of Martin's car. She is daring and defiant, insisting that she get to know Martin, despite his strong reprimands and protestations that she go home. In several instances, the not-so-typical teen demonstrates a disregard for authority. After Martin's initial objection, Eden boldly walks off, only to re-emerge with the sleeping bag and a couple beers the under-age teen has stolen from the restaurant where she and Martin work. Eden also demonstrates a surprisingly cavalier attitude about her dysfunctional family when she tells Martin about the murder of her father in matter-of-fact manner. While many people would be reluctant to share distasteful family history, Eden is forthcoming about her mother's and grandmother's incarcerations.

Eden is a multidimensional character who functions in several ways in the play. She is a foil to Martin. Both characters have experienced the loss of one parent at the hands of another. Martin responds to his tragedy by returning to the docks and by continuing to live this episode of his life in a kind of dream state. Eden appears to have accepted her father's death at the hands of her mother and grandmother. Her perceptions of the tragedy are firmly rooted in reality. Despite her mother and grandmother's crime, they remain blameless in Eden's eyes. She recognizes that the family dynamics of her mother and stepfather's relationship, while abusive, were complex, exonerating her mother and grandmother from any wrongdoing. Eden embraces her past and moves on.

Eden is also Martin's connection to the real world and a means by which he makes a psychic return to that world. She demonstrates that it is possible to make peace with the past, no matter how troubled. She is the vehicle by which Martin can finally share (for the first time) the events of his father's death and his feelings surrounding it. More importantly, Eden is there for Martin. She insists on staying with him unconditionally, and she is the one person who enables him to make peace with his past.

Martin

Haunted by his father's suicide, a twenty-something Martin returns to the docks on a saltwater lake in southern Florida to commune with the moonfish, spiritually connect with his father, and resolve his troubled past. He is quiet and cool, absorbed by his loss. In his grief, he is prone to isolation and is withdrawn at work. When Eden comes around, he is more interested in getting rid of her than he is in getting to know her.

An unfortunate past dictates Martin's present life. He appears to lead an ethereal existence, returning to the docks often, driven to reconnect with his father and the events of his past. He often speaks to the moonfish, responding to them as if they were

human, pleading with them to reunite him with his father. These imagined conversations do not necessarily suggest the workings of an insane mind but constitute a divine connection Martin has with his father. It is clear that he has not resolved the events at the dock nor his feelings surrounding his father's suicide. The events surrounding his father's death consume him and compel him to sleep at the docks night after night.

Martin's past has also shaped his perceptions of women and romantic love. He identifies his mother as the villain in his parent's relationship and holds her accountable for his father's death. Martin believes that by leaving her marriage, his mother drove his father into the loneliness that led to suicide. His anger toward his mother manifests itself in his treatment of women, and he may or may not have an abusive history with women. At one point in the play, Eden brings up Martin's reputation for cruelty and his connection to an inebriated, young woman who drowned in the water near the docks. Martin also demonstrates a dislike for women in his interactions with Eden. One moment he is protective, the next, cruelly pushing her away and criticizing her choice in clothing.

Moonfish

The moonfish are not visible characters but appear to be imagined voices that can be considered a part of Martin's subconscious. The voices are nurturing and distinctly female, welcoming Martin to the dock: "Did you have a long day at work? Are you tired? . . . We're so happy you're home." The voices are also anxious, possessive, and all consuming. They distract Martin from his memories by demanding flattery, pleading with him to "Talk to us," "Tell us we're beautiful," in turn promising to deliver the vision of Martin's father.

The moonfish have several functions in the play. They are a connection to Martin's father, a reminder of happier times spent on the docks. Because of the memories they evoke, the moonfish appear to be a gateway to the divine. They stir in Martin the final recollections of his father and are a way to keep his father alive in his memory. The moonfish also exhibit qualities of Martin's mother, personifying, for him, all that is female. They symbolize all that his mother means to him: abandonment and the catalyst for his father's loneliness. Like his mother, the moonfish present a formidable barrier to his father by demanding his attention.

Themes

Astrology

Elements of the astrological sign Pisces are consistent with those in the play, explaining Martin's character traits, motivations, and his relationship with Eden. The element water, the color blue and the moon tarot card all relate to Pisces. Pisces is symbolized by two fish swimming in a harmonious circle. Like the symbol, the relationship between Martin and Eden is a harmonious one. When Eden is up, Martin is down and vice versa. Key elements related to Pisces□the moon, the water, the fish, and the color blue□dot the play. This forms the basis for Wiechmann's story: the setting takes place on the docks by the water, the moonfish play a central role in Martin's subconscious and the color blue is mentioned in the "blue heaven" of Martin's dreams. Martin is prone to many Piscean traits, which is demonstrated in his deep regard for dreams and his intensely sensitive nature. Like Pisces, Martin's continual struggle to resolve his conflicting desires for isolation and companionship are played out in his relationship with Eden. The moment Eden arrives at the docks Martin rejects her and insists that she leave. When it seems that Eden has finally complied with his request to leave him alone, Martin tells her, "You don't have to leave. . . . Don't leave." References to the sun sign also give the work a cosmic unity from which Wiechmann implies a connection with the divine. An attraction to the moon compels the moonfish, Martin, and Eden to go to the docks. The forces of the moon govern the appearance of the moonfish, evoking memories that help Martin reconnect with his deceased father. "Natural things are moved by forces, see. The moon's got a force," he explains to Eden. Comparing herself to the moonfish, Eden suggests that she and Martin "was being zapped right now by outside forces." It is in this supernatural attraction that Martin and Eden find each other and ultimately make peace with their troubled pasts.

Memory and Reminiscence

It is through Martin and Eden's memories that the audience comes to understand the tragic deaths that drive both of their lives and ultimately bring them together. Martin's memories of his father also drive him, fueling his deep and desperate need to remain connected to a happier past. His desire to revisit his childhood compels him to return to the docks night after night. "I am waiting for my father. I sleep alone here," confesses Martin. Martin's memories comfort him, and his visits to the docks evoke dreams of his father: "I feel him lift me up and up and his arms rock me and his voice in my ear." Martin's dreams also haunt him. Memories ultimately lead Martin to a vision of his father's suicide. By recounting his dreams and memories of his father to Eden, Martin is set free. He unburdens himself of the suicide. In sharing his secrets, Martin is able to separate himself from his troubled past, as evidenced in his words to Eden, "You listen to me tell you this. You listen to me, and you just sit there like it was nothing. Like it was natural."

Murder

Both Eden and Martin's lives are affected by tragic murders. Eden's mother and grandmother worked together to kill her stepfather, which resulted in her mother's incarceration. In recounting the moment she found out about the murder, Eden cites her reasons for being upset: "I got questioned by the police for three days. . . . my friends think I'm a psycho." Although his father's death is a suicide, Martin sees it as murder at the hands of his mother because she abandoned them, and Martin shares that his father "was so lonely for her." Eden accepts the murder of her stepfather as a natural consequence of a relationship with her mother while Martin lives a life of blame, acting out the anger he has toward his mother on other women. Together, Eden and Martin find a common bond in their tragedies, helping Martin to make peace with his father's death.

Forces of Nature

Martin, Eden, and the moonfish are all significantly connected by forces of nature. The moonfish, as explained by Martin, come out at night, drawn to the moon by an unseen force to feed at the edge of the docks: "The moon's got a force, an it pulls and pulls at the insides of these fish. . . . All they got is moon minds." Forces seem to be at work within Martin as he is captivated by the beauty of the fish and their ability to stir within him fond memories of his father. Eden acknowledges these forces working in humankind and declares to Martin that there are forces guiding both their lives.

Eden unknowingly draws a parallel between herself and the fish before Martin has a chance to explain their peculiar habits: "I think I come out at night□you know□like a creature." The same forces compelling the fish are at work within Eden, transforming her personality. They are also the very same forces that Eden uses to justify her parents extremely dysfunctional relationship. Ultimately, these forces draw Eden and Martin to each other and create a union with the power to transform and heal them both.

Style

Antihero

Eden is anything but a typical hero. A hero, by definition, demonstrates admirable traits such as idealism, courage, and integrity. Eden does not. She infringes on Martin's privacy without regard for his feelings by stowing away in the back of his car. The underage teen manages to steal two beers for the trip from her employer. When Eden's classmate successfully shoplifts "four bikinis, a princess phone and two Cheryl Tiegs jogging outfits," she tells Martin with admiration, "you gotta admit□she did something."

Because Eden severely lacks traditional hero values, she feels helpless in a world over which she has no control. Eden's world is an unforgiving place, providing all of the justification she needs to make her own rules. "There's no rational way to account for the disgusting things I've seen in my life," she tells Martin. Despite her disregard for authority, her inappropriate, if not excessive, candor about her dysfunctional family life and brusque persona, Eden manages to reach Martin significantly enough to inspire a profound change in his character in the course of one evening.

Unities

Feeding the Moonfish is a one-act play following strict rules of dramatic structure. It follows Aristotle's most important principles of drama: the unities of action, time and place. These three principles compel a dramatist to construct a single plot that details the causal relationships of action and character, restricts the action to the events of a single day, and limits the scene to a single place or city. The action in Wiechmann's play takes place on a dock in Florida in a single evening. The plot begins with Martin's appearance on the docks followed by an emotional tangle he has with Eden that eventually brings them to a mutual understanding and peace. As the plot unfolds, the audience discerns what motivates both Martin and Eden to behave toward each other in somewhat predictable ways. Martin is upset about his father's suicide, even paralyzed by it, while Eden feels free to share with Martin the details of her stepfather's murder without affect. This exchange provides Martin with the outlet he needs to share his feelings with Eden and put the past behind him. "There's nothing I could tell you that you'd think was crazy," says an amazed Martin as he realizes Eden is there for him. In keeping with modern drama, the work is concerned with the unity of impression. The audience is left with the impression that Martin has for the first time openly shared his feelings about his father's death, with positive results, and his disturbing behavior along with Eden's troubled history hit their emotional mark. As the mismatched pair makes a connection, the audience is left with several problems to resolve: an inappropriate relationship between the two and the task of reconciling Martin's abusive history with women with his apparent rehabilitation at the play's conclusion, which is demonstrated in his refusal to harm Eden.

Point of View

The events of the play are presented from the third-person point of view. The audience is left to interpret the action without any special insight into the characters' minds or motivations. Martin's imagined conversations with the moonfish could arguably be a window into the mind of his psyche, or they may be unexplained, supernatural events. Whether imagined or real, at no time do they provide the audience with sufficient insight into Martin's motivations. The play's conclusion supports this assertion; it is defined by Martin's gentle stroking, rather than choking, of Eden's neck. The suspense surrounding his choice to comfort rather than harm Eden is heightened by the audience's uncertainty and lack of knowledge.

Rising Action

After Eden returns with the sleeping bag and beer, her conversation with Martin becomes increasingly complex as emotions heat up. Eden begins to share the intimate details of and her reaction to her father's murder. In doing so, Eden expresses her vulnerability. Martin criticizes her, Eden responds, and the two go back and forth, exchanging insults. Martin criticizes Eden for wearing skimpy clothing at the restaurant, while Eden provokes Martin, questioning him about his rumored mistreatment of women. The tension building between the two leads to the climax as Martin goes to strike Eden and then stops himself.

Resolution

At the end of the play, Martin undergoes a dramatic shift in perception which is demonstrated in his responses to Eden. He expresses admiration for Eden, for her unconditional friendship, and for her ability to truly listen to him. More importantly, in the closing moments of the play, Martin moves his hands from maintaining a chokehold on Eden's neck to gently stroking it. His anger toward his mother has resolved itself.

Historical Context

AIDS Crisis

In 1981, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was discovered by physicians. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), a virus that attacks white blood cells and T4 lymphocytes, causes AIDS by weakening the body's immune system, leaving it vulnerable to infection. In the early 1980s, the infection was consistently appearing in homosexuals or intravenous drug users. Many felt that the disease was in fact a "gay" disease, sparking misdirected moral attacks on the homosexual community. Sadly, President Reagan failed to respond to the epidemic, and the disease would take countless numbers of victims before AIDS activists raised public awareness almost a decade later.

The Berlin Wall

The Reagan Presidency signaled the end of the cold war. Some credit the collapse of the Soviet Union to President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative program and his pressure tactics, while others attribute the nation's demise to financial strain. Many attribute Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* (economic reform) and *glasnost* (new openness), which changed the face of Eastern Europe, for eventually contributing to the dissolve of communism in East Germany. The biggest symbol of this dark time in history was the Berlin Wall, a barrier dividing East and West Berlin, the communist and the free world. The wall, once heavily guarded, was dismantled in 1989, as Gorbachev, President Reagan, and East German guards looked on.

Disaster at Chernobyl

The third largest city in the Soviet Union, Chernobyl, was home to a major nuclear power plant. On April 26, 1986, an experiment with the plant's nuclear reactor number 4 led to an unmanageable atomic chain reaction. The results were catastrophic. Tons of radioactive material was released causing an estimated twenty-five thousand premature deaths. The fallout was ten times that of Hiroshima and was predicted to cause eleven times the cancer deaths as those resulting from the 1945 bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined. The disaster prompted concerns regarding the safe maintenance and operation of nuclear-power facilities.

Iran-Contra Scandal

In another grand military scheme, President Reagan made a secret arms deal with Iran in exchange for the release of American hostages being held in Lebanon. Portions of the proceeds from the deal secretly went to fund the Contras, people who were working to overthrow the Sandinista government. Congress publicly rejected such activity,

making it not only illegal but unconstitutional. The scheme came under Congressional investigation, uncovering a trail that led to National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, President Reagan, and Oliver North. In the end, President Reagan would walk away from the incident unscathed while Oliver North's initial convictions were eventually set aside. All were pardoned by President George Bush.

Strategic Defense Initiative

Characterized by some as President Reagan's most ambitious military spending plan, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or "Star Wars" as it was referred to by critics, proposed using orbiting weapons systems to attack incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles before they had a chance to strike. Much of the technology President Reagan suggested was not in development, yet President Reagan and Bush invested $30 billion in the program. Many objectors feared that, in addition to placing a huge financial strain on the nation, the program violated the Antiballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 and made the prospect of thermonuclear war more likely.

Reagan and Reaganomics

Known as the "Great Communicator," President Ronald Reagan based his 1980 bid for the Presidency on policies consistent with his performance as Governor of California; he would cut taxes and downsize big government to end stagflation (inflation without increase in demand or employment). President Reagan supported David Stockman's conservative economic policy called supply-side economics, a belief that government policy could stimulate production. Specifically, it was a belief that supply creates demand. Government would encourage production by reducing taxes and deregulation of industry. Out of this economic policy came the term "trickle down," a belief that by relieving the tax burdens of the wealthy money would trickle down to the American public, stimulating business investment, increasing employment opportunities, and improving the economy.

The resulting policies have been dubbed "Reaganomics." Ultimately, they did very little to stimulate the economy, neither increasing production nor consumption. Instead, President Reagan's policies provided a means for the rich to gain even more wealth. Companies chose to engage in corporate acquisitions and mergers, which meant huge profits for their investors.

Critical Overview

Feeding the Moonfish is one of Wiechmann's more familiar plays and perhaps the only one to make it to mainstream print. Although very little is written about the play, selected criticism on Wiechmann's *The Holy Mother of Hadley, New York* provides some insight into the playwright's critical reception. In a critical review, Matthew Murray is at times complementary, calling the "situation Wiechmann has created . . . an interesting one," characterizing the work as being "mostly touching and inspiring as a portrait of small town life and religion in the modern age." However, he is equally condemning of Wiechmann's consideration of miracles in everyday life. Referring to the characters in the play, Murray says, "Their author could stand to pay more attention to her own words." In another review, Martin Denton, while praising the production, states that "It's unfortunate that, for me at least, none of this effort provides much in the way of elucidation," yet admits, "those seeing the play after September 11 may well react differently to it than I did." It is important to remember amid this criticism that *Feeding the Moonfish*, while rarely the target of critical reception, appears in a notable collection of one-act plays along with some of the greatest playwrights of the twenty-first century.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Carter is currently employed as a freelance writer. In this essay, Carter considers how the zodiac influences Wiechmann's work.

Taken from a literal perspective, Weichmann's *Feeding the Moonfish* is a one-act human drama capturing the moving relationship between Martin and Eden, as the unlikely pair connect, forming an intensely powerful, life-changing bond that ultimately transforms them both. Examining the work from an astrological perspective, however, gives the play a harmonious depth.

Pisces is the twelfth sign of the zodiac and is symbolized by two fish positioned in harmony to one another. Pisces's element is water, its color blue, and its related tarot card the moon. Sensitive Pisces experience an intense inner life, possess a strong imagination, and are deeply influenced by the subconscious in daily life. Pisces are often pulled in opposite directions, struggling to reconcile a need for social activity and a tendency toward isolation in search of their inner selves. Their lives are strongly impacted by childhood memories and the vividness of their own dreams, so vivid that it is hard for Pisces to reconcile whether or not they are real. They often act too late in situations, leaving them to deal with feelings of regret.

Several elements of the play are consistent with Pisces. Martin and Eden's relationship mirrors the symbol of the two fish which is reminiscent of the yin and yang symbol. Like Pisces, Martin is drawn to the water. His happiest memories with his father are related to the water and time spent on the docks. The moon also plays a crucial role in the play. Martin explains to Eden the hold moonlight has over the fish: "natural things are moved by forces see. Like the moon." These forces also tie Martin to a spot on the docks, compelling him to return night after night to make a connection with his father. Eden acknowledges these forces at work among people and asks Martin to consider the possibility of "being zapped right now by outside forces." In a dream in which Martin is in an airplane, he refers to a blue sky "so deep you could just tumble into it."

Personality traits defining Pisces resemble Martin's character. His dialogue on the docks with the moonfish demonstrates his imaginative side. Martin returns to conjure up memories of his father, sharing with Eden how he spends his evenings at the docks, "Each night I dream and in my dream I see him. Warmer, more real than life." The vividness of Martin's dreams leaves a lasting impression on him. Deeply feeling and sensitive, he remains connected to his childhood. He has been harboring feelings about his mother, causing him to act out in inappropriate or abusive ways toward women. One minute he is protective of Eden, telling her that she should not walk around in the dark alone and in the next he is accusing her of being "just a plain come-on." Martin is constantly fighting his urge to be alone with his memories and the longing for social interaction.

Like Pisces, Martin demonstrates a propensity to act when it is too late and the resulting failures are painful for him. This is best exemplified in what Eden has revealed about

Martin's relationships with women. She accuses him of watching a young, inebriated woman wander off the dock and into the water then choosing to stand by and watch her drown. Martin reacts emphatically, telling Eden to "Shut up. Shut up." Earlier on, the audience is privileged to Martin's deepest fears about harming Eden. When he shares his concerns with the moonfish, they intimate that he has the power to keep her safe: "Nothing can happen you don't want to happen." Together, these events betray a great remorse in Martin and a desire to reinvent himself. He does not hide his past transgressions or fears; instead, he is eager to put them behind him.

The rhythms Martin and Eden move to can also be explained in astrological terms, providing the underlying framework for Wiechmann's play. British astrologer Richard Hills's interpretation of Pisces is very revealing in this regard. He prefaces his online description of Pisces with an explanation of how "life began in the garden of Eden, in Paradise in perfect harmony with the divine." Recalling the biblical Fall, it is the one act of disobedience that causes us to become conscious of ourselves and to lose our place in Paradise. The result, says Hills, is that we became fully human. Eventually, God restores the relationship through the advent of Christ in a more complete way than had man never left Paradise. According to Hills, Pisces straddles the divide between the human and the divine. Further, Hills states, "More than any other sign, perhaps Pisces experiences normal human life as limited, for it excludes so much that can make life more complete." Hills adds that "Some may attempt to live as if this exclusion from Paradise had never happened, and live life in a constant daydream, totally ineffective in the world as it is."

Applying Hills's theories to the play raise some interesting questions. Is Martin prone to insane muttering or does he, in truth, have a connection to the divine? If the moonfish are a means of connection with the divine, the promise to deliver Martin's father, in spirit or in flesh, becomes a reality. Certainly, examining the work from this perspective would account for the openness in which Martin approaches the docks every evening. He does not stop to question whether what he is doing is crazy or not and is not afraid to share with Eden that he does in fact have elaborate conversations with the fish.

Hills also notes that because they have a sense of otherworldliness about them, Pisces are still subject to live a life in a world of limitations. Coming to terms with a life separate from Paradise poses a problem for them. Martin struggles with his need to isolate himself on the docks every evening. He is haunted by his past and can only find pleasure in his memories of his father, memories in which he feels safe, complete, and loved. His entire objective for returning to the docks is to recapture this closeness that he feels, to "see" his father, to feel the power of that relationship in his life.

Other Pisces are able to overcome their desire to dwell among the divine. According to Hills, they successfully live in the "human arena" by infusing it with divine meaning. Eden lives in this "human arena" and looks to her reality to create her own paradise on Earth. She sees her relationship with Martin as a matter of forces working between them as Martin does with the moonfish. The difference between Eden and Martin is that Eden has come to terms with her parents' relationship, explaining its dysfunctional

nature as just part of their own unique interaction, just something they "do." She sees no victims in her stepfather's murder, only people drawn together by destiny:

Gravity was pulling em to each other. Forces was pulling em□just like them fish□only they could feel emotional pain in their minds too so it was worse. They was real helpless. They couldn't change nothing though. They couldn't *change*, see.

Eden's view is new and different for Martin. He has lived in a tortured world up to this point, with very little forgiveness for his mother, and, on some level, perhaps even for his father for committing suicide and, therefore, abandoning him. Eden's view grounds Martin. He begins to see the situation in a different way. He begins to forgive. Martin becomes part of an open, honest exchange with Eden, indicating that he has left some of the anger toward his mother behind him. This is confirmed in the gratitude he expresses toward Eden and his ability to resist the inclination to strangle her.

By opening up to Eden, Martin has opened up a whole new realm of possibilities for himself and has gained insight into how he has perceived his life up to this point. Reaching out to Eden has healed him and made him whole in some way as demonstrated by his transformation at the end of the play. The sudden communion between Eden and Martin is surprising given Martin's tendencies to isolate himself at work and Eden's insinuation into his life by dishonest means. It satisfies Martin's desperate need for some sort of human connection, affirming that he has been alone with his own emotional pain for far too long. Beyond physical symbols and personal traits, the relationship between Martin and Eden has a seamless, melodious quality to it. Both characters demonstrate an astrological affinity toward one another. Eden is flighty, impulsive, intense, and unpredictable, yet Martin seems to anticipate and know how to respond to her. Despite Martin's tendency toward isolation, Eden is able to draw out his darkest personal feelings about his father's suicide and offer him solace.

In keeping with Wiechmann's other works, *Feeding the Moonfish* creates a delightful tension, challenging the audience to reach beyond conventional understanding, to see the world in divine order, a world influenced by the stars. Both Eden and Martin, while on the surface appear to be deeply disturbed individuals, are deeply interconnected. Their union, at least for the moment, serves to reconcile their misgivings about themselves and about each other. Together, they strike a balance between the earthly and the divine. It is in this heavenly relationship that the play ultimately finds its unity.

Source: Laura Carter, Critical Essay on *Feeding the Moonfish*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Topics for Further Study

In the early nineties, Jack Kevorkian captured the nation's attention by aiding in the suicide of a Portland woman in the early stages of Alzheimer's, calling into question the legitimacy of assisted suicide. Investigate the series of events leading up to Kevorkian's second-degree murder conviction. Was he justly punished for a crime or persecuted for an act of mercy? Why or why not?

Moonfish are said to be one of a few fish that "talk," or make sounds that closely resemble human speech. Research and write a report on these creatures. What do they look like? What physical characteristics make them attractive to Martin? How did these fish get their name?

Some interesting parallels can be drawn between the play and the zodiac, particularly the sign Pisces. Investigate your own astrological sign. Does your behavior mirror the description? If it does not, can you account for the differences? Is there strong evidence to suggest that sun signs can dictate character and behavior?

In Wiechmann's play *The Secret of Steep Ravines*, a young girl revisits her memories and desires and travels beyond the realm of her imagination to unlock the secrets of a house and the people within it. How is Martin's own journey to the docks influenced by family secrets? How does the power of imagination shape Martin's perceptions?

Investigate further the one-act play format Wiechmann uses to reach her audience. Choosing this medium poses a challenge to the playwright. Her treatment of a topic or storyline must lend itself to a simple set and a compressed amount of time. Why do you think the playwright chooses this genre? Does the form Wiechmann chooses enhance or detract from her work? Why or why not?

Compare and Contrast

1980s: "Reaganomics," fiscal policies designed to stimulate the economy, result in a record number of corporate acquisitions, mergers, and liquidations, providing a means of greater wealth to the wealthy.

Today: Despite record deficit levels, President Bush runs on a 2004 election platform of tax cuts in order to create jobs, boost spending, and lift the markets.

1980s: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or AIDS is discovered by physicians and identified as an exclusively homosexual disease or "gay cancer."

Today: Researchers discover the source of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a species of chimpanzee living in western Africa.

1980s: On April 26, 1986, engineering experiments at a nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, Soviet Union, lead to a disastrous atomic chain reaction resulting in approximately twenty-five thousand premature deaths.

Today: Proponents of nuclear power in the European Union fear that without reactors they will not reach their goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 8 percent (from 1990 levels) by 2012.

1980s: President Reagan embarks on an ambitious military program, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or "Star Wars," proposing the use of orbiting weapons systems to attack and destroy incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Today: The United States announces plans to abandon the Antiballistic Missile Treaty of 1972, a policy that bans certain defensive missile systems and symbolizes a major turning point in the cold war.

1980s: Members of the Reagan administration make a secret arms deal with Iran in exchange for the release of American hostages held in Lebanon.

Today: President Bush is accused by the popular press of lying to the American public in his arguments for taking the country to war in Iraq in 2003.

1980s: The Berlin Wall, the symbolic barrier dividing East and West Berlin, the communist and the free world, is dismantled as Gorbachev, President Reagan, and East German guards look on.

Today: The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime results in the looting of the Baghdad Museum and the loss of tens of thousands of objects.

What Do I Read Next?

Tony Crisp's *Dream Dictionary: An A to Z Guide to Understanding Your Unconscious Mind* (2002) is an exploration into the unconscious mind. This dream guide discusses dream symbols and their meanings and provides a basis for engaging in dream interpretation.

The Virgin Suicides (1993) is Jeffrey Eugenides' fictional account of five young men struggling to make sense of suicides committed by five sisters twenty years ago. The story is a moving account of how the tragedy of suicide impacts others.

The Field: The Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe (2003) is a chronicle of scientific evidence confirming the existence of a fundamental life force. Written by Lynne McTaggart, the book explains the nature of this interconnected universe and attempts to explain supernatural phenomena.

The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus (2000), by Nostradamus and translated by Edward Leoni, is a complete translation of the prophecies of Nostradamus, the sixteenth-century French astrologer. This work contains his prophecies in both English and French, historical background, commentary section, his will, and his personal letters. The stars had an enormous influence on Nostradamus and his famous predictions.

Further Study

Aristotle's Poetics, translated by S. H. Butcher, Hill and Wang, 1961.

Aristotle's study of drama is a must read for those interested in literary fundamentals, including unity of plot, reversal of the situation, and character. This is the single most authoritative text used by playwrights and theorists for more than two thousand years.

Garrison, Gary, *Perfect 10: Writing and Producing the 10-Minute Play*, Heinemann Drama, 2001.

In this work, Garrison provides a simple and straightforward approach to writing and producing the 10-minute play. An excellent pocket how-to guide for those interested in modern playwriting techniques.

Sakoian, Frances, *The Astrologer's Handbook*, reprint ed., HarperResource, 1989.

Moving beyond predictable analysis of the twelve zodiac signs, this handbook was designed to meet the demands of professional astrologers, yet is user-friendly enough for those new to the subject. A great reference tool offering explanations of all of the central concepts of astrology.

Telling Tales: New One-Act Plays, edited by Eric Lane, Penguin, 1993.

This collection of extraordinary plays contains Wiechmann's play and more than twenty-five one-act plays by Christopher Durang, Maria Irene Fornes, Athol Fugard, Zora Neal Hurston, Arthur Miller, John Patrick Shanely, and others. It is an excellent reference for anyone interested in contemporary theater.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) 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, DfS 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 DfS 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 DfS 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 DfS 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 DfS 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

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

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS 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.

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The editor of Drama 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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