For Jennifer, 6, on The Teton Study Guide

For Jennifer, 6, on The Teton by Richard Hugo

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

"For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" is included in Richard Hugo's 1975 collection, *What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American*, which was nominated for the National Book Award and reprinted in *Making Certain It Goes On: The Collected Poems of Richard Hugo* (1983). Hugo often wrote poems to lovers, students, and sometimes children of friends and lovers, and this is one of the latter. Hugo addresses the child, Jennifer, throughout the poem, making comparisons between her life and the Teton River, which inspired the poem. Historically, poets have used the river as a symbol of time, life, and change, and Hugo draws on this tradition in the poem. The form of the poem, though not a letter, has much in common with the poems in Hugo's next collection, *31 Letters and 13 Dreams* (1977), many of which he addresses to friends and acquaintances.

In five stanzas, the speaker, acting as sage, makes observations about childhood, nature, ageing, language, and death, providing the child with an idea of what life has in store for her. Hugo's language in the poem, like the language of one of his primary literary influences, Wallace Stevens, is highly elliptical. This means he leaves much unsaid, and his comparisons can be difficult to grasp upon first reading. However, as with good poems that stand the test of time, Hugo's poem offers something new upon each rereading.

Author Biography

Richard Franklin Hogan was born December 21, 1923, to Esther Clara Monk Hogan and Franklin James Hogan in White Center, a poor workingclass neighborhood on the south side of Seattle, Washington. Hugo's father abandoned his family, and Hugo's mother left the child with his grandparents, who raised Hugo in what he describes as a loveless and often mean environment. Esther Hogan married Herbert F. Hugo in 1927 but never reclaimed her son. Nevertheless, Hugo took his stepfather's name in 1942. After serving in the United States Army Air Forces from 1943 to 1945, where he received the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal, Hugo attended the University of Washington, receiving both his bachelor's and master's degrees in English on the G.I. Bill, while taking poetry classes with Theodore Roethke. Between 1951 and 1963, Hugo worked as a technical writer for Boeing.

At the age of forty and after publishing his first collection of poems, *A Run of Jacks* (1961), Hugo took a position as visiting lecturer of English at the University of Montana, and a few years later, he was running the master of fine arts program in creative writing. Hugo's hard-luck childhood, his sense of wonder at the natural world, his difficulties with women, and his relentless need for approval define his intensely emotional poetry. Place is integral to Hugo's poetry, and he readily owned up to being a regional writer. Frequently exploring the relationship of the past to a landscape's present, Hugo's poems tie the particular to the universal, the emotions to the land. In poems such as "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton," included in his National Book Award nominated collection, *What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American* (1975), Hugo connects the fate of the individual to that of the natural world.

In addition to his poetry collections, which include *Good Luck in Cracked Italian* (1969), *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir* (1973), *31 Letters and 13 Dreams* (1977), and *White Center* (1980), Hugo has also published prose. For his Pulitzer Prize-nominated novel, *Death and the Good Life*, published in 1981, he was awarded an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, and his collection of essays on craft, *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing* (1979), has become a classic for teachers of poetry writing and lovers of poetry. After Hugo died of leukemia in 1982, a few other collections of his writing were published, including *Making Certain It Goes On: The Collected Poems of Richard Hugo* (1984), *Last Judgment* (1988), and *The Real West Marginal Way: A Poet's Autobiography* (1986).

Poem Text

These open years, the river
sings 'Jennifer Jennifer.'
Riverbeds are where we run to learn
laws of bounce and run.
You know moon. You know your name is silver.

The thought of water locked tight in a sieve
brings out the beaver's greed.
See how violent opaque runoff moves.
Jennifer, believe
by summer streams come clean for good.

Swirl, jump, dash and delirious veer
become the bright way home
for little girl and otter
far from the punishing sun,
games from organized games.

This river is a small part of a bigger.
That, another.
We get bigger and our naming song gets lost.
An awful ghost
sings at the river mouth, off key.

When you are old and nearing the sea,
if you say this poem
it will speak your name.
When rivers gray,
deep in the deepest one, tributaries burn.

Plot Summary

Stanza One

In the first stanza of "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton," "These open years" refers to the childhood of Jennifer, the six-year-old child of the poem's title and the person the speaker is addressing. The first lines introduce the image of the river, which Hugo develops as a metaphor in the rest of the poem. The Teton River flows 110 miles east out of the Lewis and Clark National Forest across Teton and Choteau counties, joining the Missouri River just outside of Loma, Montana. The river is home to native Yellowstone cutthroat trout, as well as hatchery brook and rainbow trout. Hugo, an avid fisherman, was most likely inspired by an actual as opposed to an imagined occurrence with Jennifer, while either fishing or canoeing the river. The speaker compares the girl's childhood to a riverbed, "where we run to learn / laws of bounce and run." Both childhood and riverbeds are foundations upon which bigger things are built (i.e., selfhood and river). "Laws of bounce and run" suggest laws of physics, why things work the way they do. In the last line, the speaker explicitly addresses the child, pointing out what she already knows. She understands the concept of the moon, and she knows her "name is silver." This last statement alludes to the history of the girl's name. "Jennifer" is a derivative of the Celtic *Gwenhwyvar* (Guinevere), usually translated as "white wave," though "white skin" or "white shoulders" is also possible.

Stanza Two

In this stanza, the speaker adopts the persona of a teacher describing the river to Jennifer. The first line refers to the river ("water locked tight in a sieve"); it makes beavers "greedy" because beavers love rivers, building their homes there. In the third line, the speaker points out "how violent opaque runoff moves." "Opaque runoff" suggests that Hugo is describing the Lower Teton, which cuts huge banks through rich topsoil, creating heavy sedimentation. The water running down from the Rockies cleanses the river by summer. These lines also refer to the time in life when circumstances or prospects might seem bad. However, the speaker seeks to assure the child that bad times pass, when he writes, "Jennifer, believe / by summer streams come clean for good."

Stanza Three

In this stanza, the speaker lists actions that apply to both child and otter. "Swirl, jump, dash and delirious veer" evoke a child and an otter's playfulness, as well as the movements of the river. The words suggest that being playful and taking action are also ways to lead one's life, rather than always calculating behavior according to risk. This comparison is echoed in the last line, "games from organized games," which

underscores the difference between good kinds of games (i.e., playful, spontaneous) and the "bad" kind (i.e., "organized" with predetermined rules).

Stanza Four

In this stanza, the speaker illustrates the interconnectedness of all things, pointing out, "This river is part of a bigger [river]. / That, another [river]." He also introduces the theme of language's relationship to human identity in the line "We get bigger and our naming song gets lost." Here, the speaker refers to the capacity of language to order the world. Getting bigger suggests growing older and losing the childlike awe and wonder for the world (i.e., "our naming song"). The "awful ghost" singing off key suggests an adult who has lost her way in life.

Stanza Five

The speaker again directly addresses Jennifer, advising her to "say this poem" when she is "old and nearing the sea," a reference to when death will approach. Just as the river sings her name during her childhood, so will it sing her name during her old age. He presents the poem as a prayer of sorts, with the power to heal, or at least to remind the girl that human life is temporary and human identity illusory. The last two lines compare rivers with human life and underscore the idea that life exists inside of life. "Tributary" has two meanings: the first denotes a stream that feeds a larger stream or body of water, and the other means "paid or owed as tribute." Both meanings are present in the last line, as the speaker pays tribute to the child and her youth while urging her to pay tribute to the earth from which she came and to which she will return.

Themes

Nature

Nature has long been a source of inspiration to poets and writers, many of them finding in it meaning and purpose. By setting his poem on the Teton River, Hugo demonstrates his connection to and respect for the natural world, and by using the river as his central symbolic image, he pays tribute to the tradition of poets and thinkers who have similarly found in rivers insight into the human condition and lessons for living. Greek philosopher Heraclitus, for example, famous for saying that one can never step in the same river twice, saw in the continuous flow of the river a symbol for eternal change and renewal. Hugo's advice to Jennifer illustrates this idea and how it relates to her life, writing, "The river is a small part of a bigger. / That, another." Implicit in this statement is that individual identity is transitory and that death is a necessary and unavoidable part of life.

Language

"For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" is as much about the act of writing poetry as it is about change and the human condition. Hugo's attention to the sound of his words, his use of symbolic images with wide-ranging associations, and his focus on the river's ability to name all draw readers' attention to the role of language in the poem. A traditional role of poets is naming the world in such a way that others can see and experience it differently. Hugo accomplishes this by comparing rivers to the stages of human life and by giving the river the capacity to talk as it "sings 'Jennifer Jennifer.'"

As the speaker describes how life is like a river, he also points out to Jennifer what she knows: the word *moon* and that her "name is silver." He reemphasizes the importance of naming again in the fourth stanza, writing, "We get bigger and our naming song gets lost," and in the last stanza he writes:

When you are old and nearing the sea,
if you say this poem
it will speak your name.

By describing the poem as a kind of talisman, the speaker foregrounds the tradition of poet as visionary and language itself as magical, the thing that distinguishes human beings from their environment as it simultaneously fuses them to it.

Education

By using a speaker who writes of life with wisdom and authority, drawing on the natural world for examples and illustrations, Hugo draws on poetry's didactic tradition. Didactic poetry aims to impart theoretical or practical knowledge to its audience. For example, the Roman poet Lucretius's "On the Nature of Things" expounds on naturalistic

philosophy and ethics, and Virgil's "Georgics" explains how to run a farm. Hugo's poem, though highly imaginative in its description of the stages of human life, is didactic in that its purpose is, literally, to show Jennifer what life is like.

Style

Personification

Personification is the act of assigning human qualities to inanimate things. By giving the river the capacity to "sing," Hugo personifies it, making it a character in its own right, with human attributes. He also personifies the beaver when he writes, "The thought of water locked tight in a sieve / brings out the beaver's greed." Greed is a human construct and an idea not known to animals. By personifying the river, the speaker is better able to draw comparisons between it and Jennifer, as he does in the opening stanza.

Sound

Hugo uses a variety of sonic devices in his poem to underscore the action of the river and the role of language as a subject in his poem. These devices include, but are not limited to, consonance, assonance, and alliteration. Consonance denotes the repetition of two or more consonants, as with the "r" in the line "Riverbeds are where we run to learn." Assonance denotes the repetition of vowel sounds in a line or lines of poetry, as with the "e" in "Riverbeds are where we run to learn." When a poet uses alliteration, he or she repeats a speech sound, usually a consonant, in a sequence of words, and usually at the beginning of a word. For example, Hugo uses both alliteration and assonance in the line "brings out the beaver's greed," emphasizing the "b" sound and the "e."

Audience

Audience refers to the actual or purported person or people for whom the poet writes. Readers know from the title and from lines in the poem that the speaker is addressing a young girl named Jennifer. However, the real audience, of course, is the people who will read the poem. Jennifer is a tactic, a kind of trick, to create a scene in readers' minds. From the tone and the sometimes difficult language the speaker uses, the poem appears to be *written* to Jennifer, as opposed to being a representation of a conversation□real or imagined□between the two. An explicit address to someone not present is called an apostrophe. Well-known poems that apostrophize their subject include John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Recollections of Love."

Historical Context

In the early 1970s, when Hugo wrote "For Jennifer, 6, On the Teton," many of the rivers and lakes in the United States were heavily polluted. Lake Erie was dying, algae blooms choked the Potomac River, threatening public health, and authorities estimated wetlands losses at more than 400,000 acres annually. Dead fish regularly appeared on shorelines, and two-thirds of America's waters were unsafe for fishing and swimming. Just a few years before, in 1969, the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio, was so polluted that it caught fire. The sight of the burning river on evening newscasts mobilized the nation and became a rallying point for passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972. Although the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1948 provided state and local governments with funds to address water pollution problems, the federal government viewed water pollution as primarily a state and local problem and did not issue goals or guidelines for reducing it. It was not until 1965 that the federal government required states to set standards for interstate waters that would be used to determine actual pollution levels. The Clean Water Act of 1972 increased federal assistance for municipal treatment plant construction, while expanding federal oversight of pollution control measures, in addition to requiring states to treat all municipal and industrial wastewater before discharging it into waterways. The ultimate goal of the CWA was the restoration and maintenance of the nation's waters.

In Montana, where Hugo worked and fished, the state legislature passed the Montana Environmental Policy Act in 1971. MEPA was patterned after the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and established Montana's environmental policy. The Act encourages Montanans to participate in state decisions affecting their environment and promotes efforts that prevent damage to the environment while maintaining the health and welfare of citizens. According to John Mundinger and Todd Everts in *A Guide to the Montana Environmental Policy Act*, "MEPA further acknowledges that each generation of Montanans has a custodial responsibility concerning the use of the environment. . . . Montanans are trustees for future generations." Hugo identified with the natural world in general and the West in particular, even though he grew up in inner-city Seattle.

Water was not the only thing polluted in the early 1970s. This was also the Watergate era, when Americans became increasingly disillusioned with politics and politicians. In 1973, amid charges of corruption and income tax evasion, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned from office. The next year, President Richard Nixon, facing impeachment charges over what he knew about the burglary of the Democratic Party's National Committee offices in 1972 and when he knew it, was forced to resign. Nixon's resignation, and President Ford's pardoning of any crimes he may have committed, along with subsequent revelations about Nixon's involvement in the Watergate cover-up, all contributed to citizens' growing cynicism with government. During this time, however, Hugo was experiencing a renaissance in his own life. In 1971, he was named full professor and director of the creative writing program at the University of Montana, and in 1973 his collection of poems, *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir*, was nominated for the National Book Award. In 1973, he also met Ripley Schemm Hansen, whom he would marry in 1974. Hugo acknowledges that these events contributed to his

growing self-esteem and his belief that he had wisdom to offer other people. They also no doubt contributed to the wise voice of the speaker in "For Jennifer, 6, On the Teton."

Critical Overview

Critics have not paid much attention to "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton," but they have addressed *What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American*. In *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Bob Group notes the book's organization into three parts, arguing the "sections roughly conform to the poet's boyhood past, his recent experiences, and speculations on the future, as if the author is codifying and organizing his perceptions in preparation for some new departure." Other critics develop Group's point. Donna Gerstenberger, in her study, *Richard Hugo*, while praising the collection, sees it as Hugo's "exploration toward the acceptance of the self that is." Michael Allen agrees. In his critical study, *We Are Called Human: The Poetry of Richard Hugo*, Allen calls *What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American* a "crucial" book, writing that the primary theme of the poems

> is the working out of, and the working against, regression,
> that psychological dynamic that yearns for
> what is past and builds, nostalgically, a glow around
> events gone by, and that ultimately creates visions of
> 'the good ole days,' the Golden Age, and unfallen
> Eden.

In *Landscapes of the Self: The Development of Richard Hugo's Poetry*, Jonathan Holden writes that the poems in the collection "dramatize Hugo's struggle with the future of his art, a struggle linked . . . with his own survival." Holden claims that Hugo had come to a crossroads, where he had to decide whether or not "to accept his 'true' heritage, his 'real' self in place of his persona."

Other critics were less specific in their response to the collection. Writing in *Survey of Contemporary Literature*, Leon V. Driskell, states, "This book confirms Hugo's importance as a poet, both through the sheer excellence of individual poems and through the larger interconnectedness of the whole."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Semansky is an instructor of literature and composition. In this essay, Semansky considers how Hugo's poem locates the writer's identity.

In his essay "The Triggering Town," Hugo writes: "Your way of writing locates, even creates, your inner life." However, Hugo was no confessionalist. Hugo considers a writer's work an index for identity because he sees language itself as a constitutive part of a person's emotional life. For Hugo, writing poetry was both a way to negotiate the confusing demands of a self that he had given to him and a way to reshape that self. Hugo had his share of emotional pain, publicly talking and writing about his troubled childhood, his difficulty with women, his divorce, his battle with alcohol, and his psychoanalysis. His poem "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton," an "advice" poem, can be read as a primer of sorts on what Hugo has learned from his experiences.

If writing locates the "inner life," as Hugo has written, his own was balanced between order and chaos and, like the processes of nature, subject to chance. Hugo begins the poem by describing childhood as a time of possibility, when the entire world seems to exist solely for the child. "These are open years," he tells the child, when "the river / sings 'Jennifer Jennifer.'" Describing childhood this way, as a time of learning and possibilities, when the self has yet to consolidate into a collection of habits and preconceived ways of interpreting experience, shows how far Hugo has recovered from his own childhood. In his essay "The Real West Marginal Way," Hugo writes of his childhood: "I was subjected to gratuitous beatings and distorted, intense but, by any conventional standards, undemonstrated affection by my grandmother, who, I was convinced years later, had not been right in the head."

Hugo's speakers are always approximations of Hugo the author. This is not to say they are the same person, only that his speakers embody the emotional truth of the poet, whether that truth exists before the writing of the poem or comes about during its conception. Holden, writing in *Landscapes of the Self: The Development of Richard Hugo's Poetry*, claims that *What Thou Lovest Well, Remains American*, Hugo's fifth collection, marks a watershed for the poet, as it came after the poet had exhausted the "artistic possibilities" for "the myth of personal failure" that Hugo had touted in his previous books. Poems such as "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton," though certainly bleak in parts, are, in the end, an affirmation of the notion that people can re-invent themselves and, for Hugo, that process of re-invention necessarily takes place in language.

Although the speaker is ostensibly addressing a six-year-old girl, she is a poetic convenience for Hugo to explore the new persona he was crafting in the wake of his nervous breakdown in Iowa City in 1971 and the subsequent emergence of a more honest, robust self-image. Hugo still plumbed memory and imagination with his new persona-inthe- making, and there remains the weariness, the darkness of the old Hugo, but now there is also hope and acceptance. He can warn Jennifer about the "violent opaque runoff" inevitable in life, the sudden, inscrutable events that can emotionally sink a person, but he can also console her, assuring her, "by summer streams come clean

for good." The belief that life works itself out like a river, however, is not sentimental or naive but a hard-won insight that has taken Hugo half a century to understand.

Hugo achieves that understanding through his poetry, for not only does his speaker use the exemplum of the river to describe life's twists and turns, but he also uses it to describe the processes of poetry itself, the writing of which creates and recreates the author. Thus, when the speaker uses the metaphor of "water locked tight in a sieve" to describe a river, he is also using it to describe poetry. "Water," in this case, might be emotions or experience or some combination of the two, and the "sieve," the form the poem takes. In his essay "Writing off the Subject," Hugo argues:

A poem can be said to have two subjects, the initiating
or triggering subject, which starts the poem or
'causes' the poem to be written, and the real or generated
subject, which the poem comes to say or mean
and which is generated or discovered in the poem
during the writing.

It is hard to know the triggering subject of "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton," though readers can infer the poem might have sprung from an actual event of fishing or canoeing or playing with Jennifer, who might have been a daughter of a friend or a lover. The "real" subject, however, is the relationship between language and emotional growth, a relationship Hugo uses the figure of Jennifer to articulate. The third stanza describes□as it embodies□ the playful act of writing poems, as much as it shows the importance of risk-taking and following instinct:

Swirl, jump, dash, and delirious veer
become the bright way home
for little girl and otter
far from the punishing sun,
games from organized games.

Hugo's advice to poets in his essay "Nuts and Bolts" is to make up rules for their writing. "If they are working," he says, "they should lead you to better writing. If they don't, you've made up the wrong rules." In "Writing off the Subject," Hugo notes that aspiring poets frequently feel wedded to the initiating subject of their poem, finding it difficult to free themselves. The advice he gives them about writing echoes the same advice he gives Jennifer about life:

Don't be afraid to jump ahead. There are a few people
who become more interesting the longer they stay
on a single subject. But most people are like me, I
find. The longer they talk about one subject, the
duller they get. Make the subject of the next sentence
different from the subject you just put down. Depend
on rhythm, tonality, and the music of language to
hold things together. It is impossible to write meaningless

sequences. In a sense the next thing always
belongs. In the world of imagination, all things be-
long. If you take that on faith, you may be foolish,
but foolish like a trout.

Poetry is part of language, just as "[The Teton] river is a small part of a bigger [river]." For Hugo, human beings carve out their place among other creatures and landscapes through language. However, as one ages, the sense of wonderment and awe at the world the speaker describes in the opening stanza diminishes: "We get bigger and our naming song gets lost." That "naming song" refers to human beings' capacity not just to put words to experience but also to experience the world anew. The "awful ghost / . . . at the river mouth" singing off key seems to suggest someone whose eyes as well as tongue have grown weary. But, approaching death, for the new Hugo, does not spell imminent doom and the loss of self-worth. Poetry itself offers a way of being in the world. The final lines of the poem offer hope: "When rivers gray, / deep in the deepest one, tributaries burn." When all seems lost, something remains. Those burning tributaries suggest qualities that sustain people as they age: memory, friends, a life's work. They also undergird a self now confident of its worth to others, and its place in the world of things. In writing a poem to a six-year-old girl, Hugo was actually writing a poem to himself, re-inventing a self-pitying persona into one full of grace, confidence, and acceptance.

Source: Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Blevins has published essays and poems in many magazines, journals, and anthologies and teaches writing at Roanoke College. In this essay, Blevins suggests the success of Hugo's poem can be attributed to the way in which Hugo uses the lyric speaker to invent a character of ethos.

Recent books of important criticism on American poetry have sought to evaluate the work of contemporary poets in terms of Aristotle's "ethos" (from *The Rhetoric*), which relates the value of a text to its speaker's ability to persuade, which is then related to the text's ability to present a speaker as a person of character. Carl Dennis's *Poetry as Persuasion* suggests that the speakers of poems can only be authentic if they are inclusive, discriminating, passionate, and generous. In other words, a poem can only work if its speaker reveals himself or herself to be a person readers can care about. In *The Old Formalism: Character in Contemporary American Poetry*, the American poet and critic Jonathan Holden sounds much like Dennis when, quoting part of a poem by the American poet Naomi Shihab Nye, he says, "The achieved poem of ethos will affirm love in spite of 'the hundred disappointments.' It will be oriented to the future. It will risk sentimentality but overcome it. Most significant, it will be generous, focused not on the poet's self, but on other people."

Holden gives an entire chapter to Hugo's work in *The Old Formalism: Character in Contemporary American Poetry* partly in an attempt to reveal the ways in which Hugo's autobiographical or confessional inclinations do not undercut his ability to present speakers or personas of ethos. A close look at Hugo's "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" will also reveal the ways in which poems can succeed by using the conventions of the lyric, which presents a single person meditating on a single theme or motif and sometimes can thus seem self-serving and/or self-interested, to speak toward and about others, rather than just the lyric self. In other words, because Hugo's speaker in "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" is "focused not on the *poet's* self, but on other people," Hugo is able to use the isolated nature of the lyric speaker for what might be called "the greater good." The success of "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" can be attributed to many other virtues□Hugo's fresh metaphorical imagination, free verse rhythm, and original images are possible attributes□but the way Hugo uses the lyric speaker to invent a character of ethos can be said to be the poem's predominate virtue. Understanding the ethos of Hugo's speaker in this poem can provide readers with a fresh means of evaluating the success of lyric poems in general.

As many poets and critics have said, Hugo is a poet of the landscape□his themes often involve or describe the exterior world of his native Pacific Northwest. Yet Hugo is not a pastoral poet; he does not use the landscape for the purposes of merely depicting or describing the landscape as phenomenon. Instead, he locates his emotions and observations within the landscape to speak about or toward the world of people. "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" is located in the place of the river Teton (in Montana), but the poem itself is about issues much larger than just this place. Although the celebration of childhood and bittersweet lament on its loss can be said to be directed toward the child,

Jennifer, in the poem, Hugo's interest in humankind in general manifested in his use of the plural first person "we" as well as a use of metaphor to link Jennifer's playing in the river to the behavior of all rivers across all spaces of time makes the poem universal, or plural.

The poem begins when the unspecified speaker states that "These open years, the river / sings 'Jennifer, Jennifer." Because "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" opens metaphorically, suggesting that a river can sing a young girl's name, it leans toward the emotional world, rather than the world of depiction or description. The phrase "these open years" is also noteworthy since it qualifies or limits the river's ability to sing Jennifer's name. That is, by suggesting that the river Teton can sing Jennifer's name because the years are "open," the speaker has implied that a future is coming in which the river will no longer sing her name. This method helps Hugo foreshadow the expanse into larger time in the poem's last stanza or makes it possible for him to imbue the poem's opening sentence with a sorrow large enough to cast a shadow across the rest of the poem. This strategy helps Hugo weave celebration with lament. Since the marriage of celebration to lament is necessary for Hugo's theme about the inevitable passing of time, this strategy is essential to the poem's complexity and beauty.

In the poem's third and fourth lines, the speaker continues his metaphorical approach, tying Jennifer's experience as a child playing in a river to all humankind by stating that "Riverbeds are where we run to learn / laws of bounce and run." In other words, in the poem's first few lines, Hugo ties his celebration of the child Jennifer playing in a river to the larger observation that all children "we" learn "the laws of bounce and run" from such activity. Thus, though it is safe to say that although "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" focuses on a single child in a single moment in time, it is directed beyond a single person and time. The poem thus becomes inclusive; it locates narrowly for the purposes of being concrete but spreads outward to the larger world of all children and thus can be said to be more about the nature of childhood than the momentary experience of a single child.

Hugo's point of view shift in the poem's first stanza is also notable. The speaker moves from speaking in the third person ("These open years, the river / sings 'Jennifer, Jennifer.'") to the plural first person ("Riverbeds are where we run to learn / laws of bounce and run") to the second person, or point of view of direct address ("You know the moon. You know your name is silver.") This gradual and almost seamless shifting from the most dis- tant point of view choice to the most intimate point of view choice mimics the movement of typical thought process. It duplicates the way the mind will think in generalities until it finds a point of focus. Of course, since much of the poem shifts between lines of direct address and more general, third person statements, this strategy also foreshadows the poem's entire approach, and so seems to anticipate what it is going to say before the saying is said. Such a technique solidifies the poet's authority over his subject matter. The speaker of "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" subtly reveals that he is not making random choices but carefully laying out the map for the poem's movement. Such a method also speaks, technically, toward the virtue of inclusivity since it includes and even embodies more than one point of view.

In his second stanza, Hugo focuses on describing the behavior of the river and the creatures who make their homes there. He says that "The thought of water locked tight in a sieve / brings out the beaver's greed." Although it is not clear at first that this metaphor is meant to suggest that childhood is also like "water locked tight in a sieve," the speaker's image of the river water being "violent opaque runoff" and moving, coupled with the command, "Jennifer, believe / by summer streams come clean for good," implies that the beaver's dam will unravel or come done. In this stanza, Hugo describes the temporary nature of childhood by marrying it to the temporary nature of the beaver's dam. The lines in this stanza about water moving also anticipate the poem's final last line in which "tributaries" (or small streams feeding in larger streams or lakes) "burn," and so reinforce the speaker's authority or supreme control over his subject matter.

The poem's fourth stanza details the "swirl, jump, dash and delirious veer . . . for little girl and otter." This stanza moves away from its future orientation to focus on the moment at hand. That is, Jennifer is being linked to the otter in the experience of play, and aside from making a comment about other forms of childhood play in the lines about Jennifer being "far from the punishing sun / games from organized games," the speaker refrains from being editorial in this part of the poem. He abstains from commenting on the fact that Jennifer's play is temporary and thus does not qualify or corrupt the idea of play. For this reason, stanza four in the poem is quite clear in its intention to celebrate the beauty of childhood. The poem's fifth stanza breaks the celebration of play by moving out of the descriptive mode. It is, in other words, far more editorial, or about the speaker's feelings or observations, rather than the child herself. In this stanza, the speaker ties river and childhood together more overtly, and so begins the speaker's lament. The speaker moves away from addressing Jennifer directly to speaking in the plural first person again when he says, "We get bigger and our naming song gets lost." In other words, in stanza five, the speaker tells us that "swirl, jump, dash and delirious veer" of childhood will turn, in time, into "an awful ghost / ["singing"] at the river mouth, off key." Although it is hard to say decisively what this "awful ghost" is, the context of the poem makes it clear that the lines mean to describe the reverse of the childhood joy depicted in earlier lines.

Yet the poem does not end on this sad note. Instead, "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" moves from the landscape of the river and Jennifer's childhood to the time when she "is old and nearing the sea." In this sense, "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" is oriented quite literally to the future. Although it focuses on the moment of Jennifer playing in the river Teton and celebrates the beauty of that moment, it is also wise enough or inclusive enough to lament the temporary nature of Jennifer's play. The poem is not content to do this much; it feels the need to move further outward toward the future where it can offer Jennifer itself. The speaker says, "When you are old and nearing the sea, / if you say this poem / it will speak your name." In other words, although Jennifer must move out of childhood and into a time in which "we get bigger and our naming . . . gets lost," Hugo offers the comfort of his poem, which, like the river Teton, quite literally "sings Jennifer, Jennifer." This last move in the poem reveals the generosity of Hugo's speaker. That is, by moving between celebration and lament to the final and most generous act of giving

the gift of articulation to the child Jennifer, Hugo depicts his speaker as a man of character.

Although it is possible to evaluate the merits of any poem by any number of means, the American contemporary period tends to be speakercentered; poets today tend to rely heavily on "voice" and "tone." Word choice, lineation, sound play, and the use of image and other figures of speech combine to produce a speaker's voice or tone. But, too little has been said until recently about a speaker's ability to reveal himself or herself to be worth listening to. Thus, critics interested in ethos, or the ability of a speaker to portray his or her personal virtues, have a new window by which to accurately measure the success of the poetry of their own time. "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" continues to be studied and will not be forgotten because its speaker is inclusive and generous. To use Holden's terms again, it "[affirms] love despite the hundred disappointments." Since the leap from childhood into adulthood anticipates the leap from life into death, certainly it is a generally disappointing transformation. Yet, Hugo's speaker comforts Jennifer (and all his eavesdropping readers) by suggesting that this disappointment can be countered by the beauty of the kind of poetry that can sing a young girl's name even beyond death. What a gift□what an act of bigheartedness□this poem, thus, is.

Source: Adrian Blevins, Critical Essay on "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton," in *Poetry for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Adaptations

New Letters on the Air distributes *Richard Hugo* (1980), an audiocassette of Hugo reading poems from his 1979 collection *White Center*. The tape includes comments made by poet William Stafford in 1983 after Hugo's death.

The Media Project distributes a 16 MM film about Hugo, *Kicking the Loose Gravel Home* (1976), directed by Annick Smith.

Topics for Further Study

Read Hugo's collection of poems *31 Letters and 13 Dreams* and then write a "letter-poem" to a young child, offering him or her advice on life and on what the future holds. Read your poem to your class.

Research the Teton River, paying particular attention to the wildlife the river supports, and present your research to your class.

Hugo's language in the poem would be impossible for a six-year-old child to understand. Assume that you have a six-year-old child in front of you and you want to convey Hugo's ideas to her. What images would you use? What figures of speech?

In the third paragraph, Hugo mentions "games from organized games." To what is he referring? Do you believe that life can be described as a series of games or as a game? Support your response with examples.

Hugo admired Wallace Stevens, and many of his poems allude to Stevens's work. Compare "For Jennifer, 6, on the Teton" with Stevens's poem "The Idea of Order at Key West," focusing on what each poem says about the nature of language and poetry. Then, write a short essay comparing and contrasting the poems.

Compare and Contrast

1970s: The floppy disc appears in 1970, and the next year, Intel introduces the microprocessor, the "computer on a chip." Also, the first testtube baby is "born." These technological events inaugurate a change in humanity's relationship with nature.

Today: With the advent of genetic engineering and the increasing reliance on the Internet for work and entertainment, Americans continue to reshape the ways in which they interact with nature and other cultures.

1970s: Before the Clean Water Act of 1972 is passed, only a third of America's water is safe for fishing and swimming, wetlands losses are estimated at more than 4,600,000 acres annually, and sewage treatment plants serve only 85 million people.

Today: Two-thirds of America's waters are safe for fishing and swimming, wetlands losses are estimated at about 70,000 to 90,000 acres, and wastewater treatment facilities serve 173 million people.

1970s: In 1970, on April 22, the first "Earth Day" is celebrated, effectively launching the environmental movement.

Today: The battles between environmentalists and developers continue. The most recent manifestation of this battle is the Bush administration's proposal to open Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration and the opposition it has generated, both in Congress and with the public.

What Do I Read Next?

Rick Bass, a Mississippi-born writer now living in Montana's remote Yaak Valley, writes stories about the landscapes and people of Montana. Bass's books include *In the Loyal Mountains: Stories* (1995) and *The Roadless Yaak: Reflections and Observations about One of Our Last Great Wilderness Areas* (2002).

Hugo was friends with Raymond Carver, another great writer from the American West. (Both were born in the Pacific Northwest.) Carver's 1983 collection of short stories, *Cathedral*, a classic work of contemporary fiction, was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award and was a runner-up for the Pulitzer Prize.

For students interested in the development of Hugo's poetry, his posthumously published *Making Certain It Goes On: The Collected Poems of Richard Hugo* (1983), is indispensable.

Hugo's 1979 collection of essays on writing, *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*, has become a classic text for teachers of poetry writing. The volume contains essays on topics such as the relevance of creative writing classes and "How Poets Make a Living."

Further Study

Gerstenberger, Donna, *Richard Hugo*, Boise State University Press, 1983.

Gerstenberger's pamphlet on Hugo's writing is a good introductory resource for students who want a quick overview of Hugo's poetry. Gerstenberger also includes a useful bibliography of secondary sources.

Hugo, Richard, *The Real West Marginal Way: A Poet's Autobiography*, W. W. Norton, 1992.

The Real West Marginal Way: A Poet's Autobiography is not a conventional autobiography but a collection of essays that Hugo wrote over his life, addressing topics such as his trip to Italy, how he never met Eudora Welty, and his history of drinking and self-loathing.

Morris, Patrick, *Anaconda Montana: Copper Smelting Boom Town on the Western Frontier*, Swann Publishing, 1997.

Hugo loved to visit and write about the small, often abandoned towns of rural Montana. Morris's social history of Anaconda, Montana chronicles the founding and growth of this smelting town in Montana's Deer Lodge Valley. Among other topics, Morris focuses on the industrial development of the town, examining it in relation to the labor movement in the western United States.

Simic, Charles, "The Bombardier and His Target: Two Poets and a Powerful Coincidence," in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 47, Issue 10, November 3, 2000, pp. 12-14.

Simic, a noted poet and friend of Hugo, recounts a poem Hugo wrote to him, acknowledging that he bombed Simic's town while in the air force during World War II.

Young, William, "Traveling through the Dark: The Wilderness Surrealism of the Far West," in *Midwest Quarterly*, Vol. 39, Issue 2, Winter 1998, pp. 187-202.

Young analyzes the writings of Western poets Richard Hugo, Gregory Corso, and William Stafford,

exploring how 1960s literary surrealism influenced their representations of the American West.

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Holden, Jonathan, *Landscapes of the Self: The Development of Richard Hugo's Poetry*, Associated Faculty Press, 1986, pp. 113-34.

□, *The Old Formalism: Character in Contemporary American Poetry*, University of Arkansas Press, 1999, p. 7.

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□, "The Triggering Town," in *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*, W. W. Norton & Company, 1979, pp. 11-19.

□, "Writing off the Subject," in *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*, W. W. Norton & Company, 1979, pp. 3-11.

Mundinger, John, and Todd Everts, *A Guide to the Montana Environmental Policy Act*, Legislative Environmental Policy Office and the Environmental Quality Council, 1998, pp. 1-10.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Poetry for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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