Memoir Study Guide

Memoir by Mona Van Duyn

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Introduction

Mona Van Duyn first published "Memoir" in the summer 1988 issue of the *Yale Review*. Subsequently, the piece appeared in her 1990 poetry collection, *Near Changes*, for which Van Duyn earned the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1991. *Near Changes* was Van Duyn's seventh published collection of poetry. She first introduced readers to her work with her 1959 publication of *Valentines to the Wide World*. Since 1990, Van Duyn has published two additional collections, *Firefall* (1993) and *If It Be Not I: Collected Poems 1959—1982* (1993).

Like much of Van Duyn's work, "Memoir" is written in a strict poetic form. In this case, Van Duyn uses a form called the sestina, which is a thirteenth-century poetic form based on the number 6. As a sestina, the poem's first six stanzas are made up of six lines each, and the same six words (or a near derivative) serve as the final words in the work's first thirty-six lines. Van Duyn intentionally highlights and repeats the words "ear," "sound," "eye," "lose," "words," and "print" throughout the work as a way to explore the idea that the printed word is an invaluable safeguard against the loss of art and poetry with the passage of time. Dedicated to Harry Ford, Van Duyn's editor, "Memoir" is a tribute to the editor's role in this preservation process.

Author Biography

Mona Van Duyn (pronounced "Van Dine") was born in Waterloo, Iowa, on May 9, 1921, to Earl George and Lora (Kramer) Van Duyn. She grew up in Eldora, Iowa, a small town with approximately thirty-two hundred people. As a young girl, Van Duyn was an avid reader who developed an affinity for poetry at a young age. Despite keeping most of her poetry writing secret, she published her first poem when she was in the second grade.

Van Duyn attended Northern Iowa University, where she earned her bachelor's degree in 1942. She completed her master's degree the following year at Iowa State Teachers College, which is now the University of Northern Iowa. Also in 1943, Van Duyn married Jarvis A. Thurston. Together, the couple founded and edited *Perspective: A Quarterly of Literature* from 1947 through 1967.

Van Duyn published her first collection of poetry in 1959 in *Valentines to the Wide World*. She followed this collection with several others, including *A Time of Bees* (1964), *To See, to Take* (1970), *Bedtime Stories* (1972), *Merciful Disguises* (1973), *Letters from a Father, and Other Poems* (1982), *Firefall* (1994), and *If It Be Not I: Collected Poems 1959—82* (1994).

As an accomplished writer, Van Duyn has earned many accolades for her work. In 1992, she became the first woman to serve as the United States Poet Laureate, and in 1991 she won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for her collection *Near Changes*, in which "Memoir" appears. Her other distinguished awards include the Eunice Tietjens Memorial Prize, *Poetry* (1956), for *Three Valentines to the Wide World*; the Helen Bullis Prize, *Poetry Northwest* (1964 and 1976); a National Endowment for the Arts grant (1966—1967); the Harriet Monroe Memorial Prize, *Poetry* (1968); first prize in the Borestone Mountain Awards (1968); the Bollingen Prize, Yale University Library (1970); the National Book Award for Poetry (1971) for *To See, to Take*; a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial fellowship (1972—1973); the Loines Prize, National Institute of Arts and Letters (1976); the Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America (1987); the Hart Crane Memorial Award from American Weave Press (1968); and the Ruth Lilly Prize from *Poetry* and the American Council on the Arts (1989).

Washington University and Cornell College conferred Honorary Doctor of Letter degrees on Van Duyn in 1971 and 1972 respectively. Also to Van Duyn's credit, she became a fellow in the American Academy of Poets in 1981, and in 1985 she became one of its twelve chancellors who serve for life. In 1987, the National Institute of Arts and Letters also invited her to be a member.

In addition to writing poetry, Van Duyn has been a university instructor, lecturer, and adjunct professor at the State University of Iowa, the University of Louisville, and Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Van Duyn retired from teaching in 1990.

Plot Summary

Stanza 1

The first line of the first stanza begins "so the earshell beseeches the eye / to find the sounds it would lose, / and the eye prays that flying words / will be trapped in the amber of print." Here, the ear becomes like the shell whose "silence wants to be sound." Both the shell and the ear are keepers of sound. The ear's sounds, or the poetry it hears, are like the silence within the shell. It is not silence. It is a sound wanting to be heard. The ear feels an urgency, as indicated by the word "beseeches," to covet sound and to share in the responsibility of retaining and sharing what it hears. Fearing that it might fail to hold onto, lose, or forget what it hears, the ear requests help from the eye. In turn, the eye hopes that the "amber of print" will help it permanently preserve the words it sees. Van Duyn uses the image of amber in the final line because it is a fossilized resin produced by a pine tree. As a fossil, amber, like the published works of writers, will last well into the future. In this opening stanza, Van Duyn highlights the idea that the only way to secure the safe transmission of poetry to future generations is to collect and publish it. Poetry that is simply heard may be lost, just as "flying words," or poetry that is scattered and uncollected, may be lost as well.

Stanza 2

Van Duyn continues in the second stanza with "Like a pine the man who will print / what plays through his needle-branched ear / towers, his resin wraps words / and the resonant shape of their sound / that a dry heart has to let loose." Van Duyn figures Harry Ford as a pine tree and thus makes him the source of the "amber of print" mentioned in the previous stanza. Just as amber comes from a pine tree, so published words come from Ford. He takes what he hears from the hearts of poets who are compelled to share their life experiences, opinions, feelings, and thoughts and preserves them in a permanent record, a book, which is not mistakenly made of paper, another by-product of a tree. Van Duyn describes Ford's ear as "needle-branched," suggesting that it is like the branches and needles on a tree. Tree branches and needles are the visual elements on a tree that prove its life. Branches grow as trees age, and their needles are evergreen. In a similar way, Ford's ear confirms life—in this case, the lives that the poets he publishes present through their work. Like the shell, his ear is both the keeper of sound and the vehicle through which that silent sound is shared. He hears their poetry, edits it, and publishes it so that it can be enjoyed by others.

Giving Ford more credit than simply being a historian or scribe, Van Duyn concludes the stanza with "He will pass through art's strict needle's eye." Whereas "eye" in the first stanza referred to the human eye, it is used here in conjunction with needle and thus evokes the image of the sewing needle and the eye through which thread is passed for sewing. If Ford is to pass through this eye, then he becomes like the thread, that which physically connects pieces of fabric. Thus, in addition to giving Ford accolades for preserving poetry for posterity, Van Duyn commends him for the unique ways in which he puts together the tapestry of his writers' art.

Stanza 3

In the third stanza, Van Duyn continues, "When the poem arrives at the eye / of the hurricane, hush of print / retrieves what the blind wind would lose." Using the images of the wind and a hurricane, Van Duyn again alludes to the way in which poetry can be scattered or destroyed. Thankfully, the "hush of print" can save it from being lost or ruined. She concludes that once poetry is published, "the heart becomes all ear / and the deaf-mute world hears the sound / of its own green, resplendent words." When Van Duyn says that "the heart becomes all ear," she refers readers to the "earshell" and "needle-branched ear" images that appeared in the first two stanzas. By circling the reader back to these two images, she conveys the notion that once one's writing is formally put into print, the heart, like the earshell or conch shell, is emptied and free to take in new life and to share its sounds with those who will listen. In sharing those sounds, or poetry, the heart becomes like the "needle-branched ear," which continues to be evergreen, confirming life. Through the writing of poets, the "deaf-mute world," or those who do not hear and speak about life like poets and their editors do, are able to hear about their own lives.

For Van Duyn, poetry divorced from life has no value. In stanza 4 she says, "Who gives up the world for words / gives creation a bad black eye / in uncoupling sense and sound." In "uncoupling sense and sound," one separates feeling, intuition, wisdom, and meaning from poetry and in doing so removes the perceptions and opinions about life that Van Duyn sees as an integral part of poetics. Sound or poetry that is absent of such qualities lacks depth and consciousness and is an insult to the art of poetry writing.

Stanza 4

Introducing "Detective Time" in the fourth stanza, Van Duyn suggests that the separation of "sense and sound" is just one danger poetry faces. With the line "Detective Time takes his voiceprint, which ends behind bars," Van Duyn conjures the image of a police detective putting someone in jail. In this case, "Detective Time" seems to take its own voice prisoner. This line can be read metaphorically to mean that, as time passes, the unique experiences of those living in that time are permanently locked away. They are put behind bars and are thus unable to communicate with the outside world. Without the help of editors like Ford, such accounts would be lost for good. Ironically, Van Duyn finishes the stanza with "Nature's ear knows it was little to lose." For nature, the loss of one voice seems minor. One would think that Van Duyn would disagree with this perspective. Her use of the word "voiceprint," which indicates that the voice is unique, and thus valuable, suggests that such a loss would be great. Yet, by placing time and nature in the same stanza, Van Duyn raises ideas about eternity and life's natural cycles. In the context of an eternal cycle of birth, life, and death, one person's story does indeed seem "little to lose" because that person's experience will likely be reflected in the universal story of life that everyone experiences. Like the conch shell, nature's ear tells a collective story about the place from which it came, not the individual story of the shell's individual inhabitant.

Stanza 5

In stanza 5, Van Duyn turns to the topic of the relationship between poets and Ford. She describes him as having "child-cheeks" and an "Orphic ear." "Child-cheeks" perhaps pertain to his youthful appearance, and "Orphic ear" refers to his experience as a poetry editor. In Greek mythology, Orpheus is a poet and musician whose poetic and musical talents convinced Pluto and Persephone to free his wife from Hades. Van Duyn credits Ford with an "Orphic ear" and thus implies respect for his poetic skills. Implicit in this respect is a trust for his editorial input about poetry. She says, "The heart must be mud-mum," or silent, or it might "lose face." One way to read this is that, at some point, poets must quiet their hearts and stop producing the sounds of poetry, or writing, or they run the risk of embarrassing themselves. If they ceased to write, they would then be able to open their hearts to the editorial suggestions offered by Ford's "indelible imprint." In making his mark on their work, Ford ensures that readers can better understand it. Van Duyn continues, "Love's incoherence is sound," meaning that the feelings of the heart do not always make sense when they are expressed as sound, or as poetry. Ford is a "god without words," and in the silence afforded by the writing and editing process, Van Duyn seems to suggest that he skillfully ensures the coherence of the poet's work.

Stanza 6

In the sixth stanza, Van Duyn wonders if there is any sound that will prevent time from destroying the writing of poets. She asks, "In a deathly silence, what sound / amends Time's law that we lose?" Her answer is "That memoir read from fine print." Ultimately, Van Duyn suggests that the sound of poetry read aloud saves the art from destruction. Sight and sound work together to preserve poetry that was created from the musings of the heart, or "love's beautiful babble." For Van Duyn, the art of poetry has human value. It "fixes the world I-to-eye," meaning that it makes the world right, by bringing the self into focus for the world to see. Through poetry, people can read about the things of life, theirs and others. Reciprocally, these lives are the fodder for poetry. It is no mistake that Van Duyn selected "Memoir" as the title of this work. To her, poetry itself is a memoir, something that recounts the stories of people's lives. These stories are the breath that "beats the drum of our ear," meaning that they are the inspiration and the heart that give the ear something to hear and in turn, like the conch, something to share.

Stanza 7

In poetic terminology, the final stanza is called an envoy (or envoi), which, according to *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, is "a short concluding stanza" that serves "as a pithy summing-up of the poem." The seventh stanza reads: "Sound ear and sound eye keep in print / any rhyme the world makes with its words / that the heart cannot bear to lose." "Memoir" is a tribute to Van Duyn's editor, Harry Ford. She dedicates the work to him and proceeds to applaud his knowledge and experience as an editor who publishes the heartfelt work of poets. Though the closing stanza is relatively easy to understand, Van Duyn presents this same idea in the preceding six stanzas in a more complicated manner.

"Memoir" begins, "As the conch tells the human ear / silence wants to be sound." This opening phrase conjures the image of a person holding a shell to his or her ear to listen to the sound of the ocean that emanates from within its empty hollow. This phrase makes an ironic association between silence and sound. Instead of being silent, the shell, which is devoid of life, speaks the sounds of the place from which it came and the place in which it was inhabited by life. This image can be likened to that of the "dry heart" that Van Duyn mentions in the next stanza. Both the heart and the shell symbolically speak the sounds, or words, of their past experience and both want to be heard or perhaps, in the case of the heart, understood or remembered.

Themes

Preserving the Poetry

One of the major themes explored in "Memoir" is the ability of the printed word to ensure that poetry is not lost with the ravages of time. Van Duyn introduces this theme in the first stanza when she says, "so the earshell beseeches the eye / to find the sounds it would lose, / and the eye prays that flying words / will be trapped in the amber of print." This opening stanza reflects the fear that poetry that is simply heard or seen in "scattered" places will be forgotten, misplaced, or otherwise lost. Van Duyn's use of the words "beseeches," "prays," and "trapped" signal this fear. By using these particular words, Van Duyn makes readers feel the urgent need and desperation of the hope that the words and sounds "will be trapped in the amber of print" or put into a permanent record, in this case a book. Van Duyn goes on to recognize "the man who will print" what the "heart has to let loose." She praises his ability to give the world the opportunity to hear "its own green, resplendent words." In the final stanza, Van Duyn summarizes her admiration for her editor, Harry Ford, saying, "Sound ear and sound eye keep in print / any rhyme the world makes with its words / that the heart cannot bear to lose." To Van Duyn, Ford is an expert at his craft. He has sound judgment and a well-respected ear and an eye for quality poetry that many poets through the years have entrusted with their poetry.

Poetry as an Oral and Visual Art

Throughout "Memoir," Van Duyn uses the words "eye," "ear," "sound," and "print" repeatedly. As four of the words that she selected to use as the ending words in each of the first six stanzas, these words play an obvious yet critical thematic role in the piece. One contribution these words make to the work is their ability to convey the important point that poetry is both an oral (or aural) and visual art. Poetry is thought to have begun as an oral performance art and with the advance of literacy it became a visual-based art as well. In a poem that praises her editor for preserving poetry in permanent printed collections, Van Duyn does not forget the form's history or the important role that recitation and listening still play in the creation and enjoyment of poetry. She opens the sixth stanza with the question, "what sound / amends Time's law that we lose?" and follows it with the answer: the "memoir read from fine print." For Van Duyn, poetry is still clearly an oral (and aural) art.

The Personal Nature of Poetry

Van Duyn mentions the "heart" in four of the seven stanzas. In the second and seventh stanzas, her use of the word clearly indicates the belief that poetry is a very personal art that reflects the heart and soul of its writers. In the second stanza, Van Duyn figures the heart as the creator of poetry when she writes that it is the "dry heart" that "has to let loose" the words that her editor, Harry Ford, will preserve in the "amber of print." In the final stanza, Van Duyn states, "Sound ear and sound eye keep in print / any rhyme the world makes with its words / that the heart cannot bear to lose." This line suggests that poets are strongly attached to their writing and that they are thankful that editors like Ford keep it alive by publishing it in books. One can understand this attachment in two ways: first, poets can be seen as caring about the art and form of poetry; second, they can be seen as being deeply connected to the ideas and feelings they express through the use of the form.

Nature

Many of the images that Van Duyn uses in "Memoir" come from nature. In the first two stanzas, she introduces the "conch," "amber," and the "pine" tree. These are powerful images that support the work's strongest theme: the preservation of poetry. The conch shell as described by Van Duyn holds a "silence that wants to be sound." In its written form, poetry is like the conch. It is silent, yet as an originally oral form, it begs to be read aloud or to be heard. Like the conch shell, which houses life, poetry can be seen as a container of life, as seen by poets. Van Duyn's statement that silence wants to be sound can potentially mean that poetry wants to be heard and not forgotten. The image of "amber" toward the end of the stanza confirms this reading. In this stanza, Van Duyn writes about the hope that poetry, or words and sounds, will be trapped in the "amber of print." Amber is a fossilized resin and therefore takes on the symbolic meaning of something permanent and preserved for eternity. Finally, Van Duyn likens her editor to a pine tree. She says, "Like a pine the man who will print." A pine tree is of course a producer of amber, and not mistakenly pine trees are logged for use in papermaking. Through the use of the pine tree image, Van Duyn figures her editor as the source and creator of both paper and the "amber of print." In the end, he is the one who ensures that poetry will continue to be heard because he publishes books of poetry that will stand the test of time.

Style

The sestina is a poetic form that is believed to have been invented in Provence by a poet named Arnaut Daniel. Daniel was a member of Richard Coeur de Lion's court (Richard I, also known as Richard the Lionhearted) and was respected as one of the best troubadours of the time. Following Daniel's use of the sestina, both Dante (1265—1321), author of *The Divine Comedy*, and Francesco Petrarch (1304—1374), poet and founder of humanism, adapted the form as well.

The word "sestina" comes from the word *sesto*, which is Italian for sixth. The name of the form is appropriate in that a poem written as a sestina is based on the number 6. In its most traditional form, a sestina includes six stanzas each written with six unrhymed lines followed by a final stanza, called an envoy, with three lines. One of the sestina's unique qualities is its repetition of the words that end the first six lines of the poem. Writing in this form, poets reorder the first stanza's end words and use them as the end words in the subsequent five stanzas. In a formal Provençal sestina, the pattern of the end words is as follows: ABCDEF, FAEBDC, CFDABE, ECBFAD, DEACFB, BDFECA. In the seventh stanza, the end words appear again; however, this time they are put in the following order: AB, CD, EF.

Van Duyn employs this medieval form in "Memoir," using the end words "ear," "sound," "eye," "lose," "words," and "print." Though she stays true to the traditional pattern in the first six stanzas, Van Duyn improvises slightly by using words that are visually similar to or that contain one of the six original end words. For example, in the second stanza, she substitutes "loose" for "lose," and in the fourth stanza "print" becomes "voiceprint." In the fifth stanza, "imprint" replaces "print," and in the sixth stanza, "words" shows up as "Foreword." In the seventh stanza, Van Duyn breaks entirely from the traditional form in which two words appear in each line in the original AB, CD, EF order. She uses all six words in the stanza; however, she creates a new pattern with them. Van Duyn crafts the first line with four of the six original words ("sound," "ear," "eye," and "print") in the order BABCF, and in the second and third lines, she uses the remaining two words, "words" and "lose" in the order E, D.

Historical Context

Politics and Economics

The eighties were a conservative era for Americans. Republican Ronald Wilson Reagan, an ex-movie star and a former California governor, became the nation's fortieth president in January 1981, after a record low voter turnout of 54 percent of registered voters. Serving two terms, Reagan implemented "supply-side" economic policies and trumpeted a major tax cut. The nation's first Republican-led Senate since 1948 supported Reagan's efforts. In retrospect, Reagan has become known for lowering personal income taxes on individuals, sustaining a low rate of inflation, increasing the government's expenditures on the military and defense, reducing social program funding, and forging a cooperative relationship with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Many Americans also still remember the assassination attempt on Reagan's life just sixty-nine days after he first took office. At the close of Reagan's term, the United States had enjoyed its longest peacetime prosperity; however, it faced both trade and budget deficits.

Yuppies as Social Icons

In the United States, the 1980s have become known as the "me decade." Encouraged by the nation's economic success, Americans developed an appetite for the "good life." Young urban professionals became the social icon. Yuppies, as they came to be known, epitomized the "good life" mind set. They were motivated by money and played hard, enjoying the luxuries that their financial freedom afforded them.

Democracy: An International Phenomenon

Anti-Communist sentiment in the United States was high in the 1980s, perhaps in part because of the strong rhetoric used by President Ronald Reagan. No friend to Communism, Reagan supported anti-Communist efforts throughout the world, including those in Central America, Asia, and Africa. In addition to strongly condemning Communism, Reagan worked with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to eliminate each country's intermediate-range nuclear missiles. The two signed a treaty in 1987, signaling a tremendous advance in the United States's relationship with the Soviets. Gorbachev continued to please the world's superpower with his democratic social reforms, known as *glasnost*, and his market-focused economic and governmental policy changes, known as *perestroika*. Like the Soviet Union, other nations also began to embrace democratic principles during the 1980s. Throughout the world, democratic movements were taking shape, challenging and even toppling totalitarian Communist governments in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Rumania. In 1989, the Berlin Wall that isolated West Berlin from Soviet-controlled East Germany fell. Its destruction literally and symbolically signaled the end of the barriers that divided East and West within Germany and internationally. The cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union was ending.

The Rise of New Formalism in Poetry

During the late 1970s and the early 1980s, a shift occurred in the type of poetry being written by young poets in the United States. Instead of publishing work written in free verse, a form of poetry with no specific rhyme, meter, or other technical requirements, young poets began to publish work written in traditional poetic forms, like that of the villanelle and sonnets. In *Can Poetry Matter?*, Dana Gioia identifies the intent of these new formalists to reach "a general audience that poetry had long ago lost," rather than to please "the elite readership of critics and fellow artists." By deviating from the current status quo in contemporary poetry, these new formalists, according to Gioia, sought to "break the cultural deadlock strangling their art." While some argue that this new movement was simply a continuation of the formalist movement of the 1940s and 1950s, Gioia notes that the aesthetics of the two schools are actually quite different. Gioia suggests that, in addition to selecting different audiences, the new formalists and the old guard took "the tone, style, and subject of their work in fundamentally different directions." Of the writers of the earlier formalist movement, Gioia writes, "Their work was intellectually demanding, aesthetically self-conscious, emotionally detached, and intricately constructed." Contrarily, she notes that, although the new formalists "remained committed to the standards of excellence embodied in high culture," they "looked to popular culture for perspective" and sought the "accessible genres, the genuinely emotional subject matter, the irreverent humor, the narrative vitality, and the linguistic authenticity" it offered.

Critical Overview

With a career spanning more than thirty-five years, Van Duyn has established herself as one of the great American poets. Her lengthy list of honors and awards speaks to the ongoing positive reception of her work; however, she is not without detractors. In "Mixed Company," which appeared in the *New York Review of Books* in 1965, Robert Mazocco notes Van Duyn's technical acumen but says, "there's no intensity, no confrontation here, only the idea of such things." In "A Clutch of Poets," which appeared in the *New Republic* in 1973, Louis Coxe comments on Van Duyn's use of metaphor, saying that "it is so extended that it finally trails off into not much of anything. The poet seems unwilling to quit while she is ahead and goes on telling us past the point of interest or charm." Even those who offer high praise of Van Duyn's work, sometimes temper their comments with critical asides. Cynthia Zarin, who reviewed *Near Changes* in the *New Republic* article "Periscope Gaze" in 1990, notes that "there were some poems in which it seemed that Van Duyn thought perhaps *too* hard before she spoke. The labor was a little too apparent, and in some cases the poems simply went on too long." Despite such criticism, Zarin is also quick to point out that Van Duyn's work is "notable for its formal accomplishment and for its thematic ambition." Zarin is particularly complimentary of "Memoir," stating that it reveals a "new strength" in Van Duyn's writing. Calling "Memoir" a "remarkable sestina," Zarin uses it as an example of how Van Duyn's "poems now seem to be propelled by inner necessity rather than by a premeditated structure, by the imagination rather than by its aftermath, logical reduction." Similarly impressed, Jessica Greenbaum writes about *Near Changes* in the *Women's Review of Books* article "Intimations of Mortality." She comments that Van Duyn's "work is instantly recognizable for the intelligence with which she juggles rhyme, wit, formality, storytelling, analysis and emotion." Of "Memoir," Greenbaum notes Van Duyn's expert and complex use of language, pointing out that this poem "is intensely codified and requires uncoiling." Like Van Duyn's earlier critic, Thomas Landess, who called Van Duyn's lyrics "tough-minded" in his *Sewanee Review* article about *To See, to Take*, Edward Hirsch finds *Near Changes* replete with both cerebral and emotional intensity. In his *New York Times Book Review* article "Violent Desires," Hirsch calls *Near Changes* "a major addition to the corpus of [Van Duyn's] work." Taking this thought a step further, Alfred Corn, in his review of *Near Changes* in *Poetry*, concludes that "Van Duyn has assembled, in a language at once beautiful and exact, one of the most convincing bodies of work in our poetry."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Robeson is a freelance writer with a master's degree in English. In this essay, Robeson discusses Van Duyn's affinity for formal poetry and poetry as a visual and aural art form.

Literary history is replete with distinguished "firsts" made by women poets. Although scholars believe that the art of poetry began around 5000 b.c., the first poet known by name was the high priestess of Inanna, Enheduanna, who lived from approximately 2285—2250 b. c. in Mesopotamia. Fast forward nearly four thousand years to 1650, and Anne Bradstreet makes her mark on literary history, this time in the United States. Bradstreet has the distinction of being the first published American poet. Fast forward yet again, this time to 1991, and Mona Van Duyn enters literary history as the United States's first female poet laureate.

In addition to sharing these notable firsts, these women are accomplished writers who used poetry as their means of expression. In doing so, they demonstrated an implied reverence and respect for the art's conventions and forms. For Van Duyn in particular, formal poetic structures seem to hold special interest, and writing in this formal style has become one of her trademarks. Although she does write some of her work in free verse, many critics refer to her as a formalist poet. In "Mixed Company," which appeared in the *New York Review of Books* in 1965, Robert Mazocco is critical of Van Duyn; however, he notes that "she crosses all her t's, dots all her i's." Writing "Periscope Gaze" for the *New Republic* in 1990, Cynthia Zarin applauds Van Duyn's "thematic ambition" as well as her "formal accomplishment."

In "Out-of-Body Concentration," an article that appeared in Annie Finch's *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by Contemporary Women*, Van Duyn comments on her affinity for formal poetry:

My love of poetry came from nursery rhymes and continued to be nourished on the rhymed verse in school anthologies of that day; college reading offered me an alternative love in the earlier surge of free-verse fashion . . . I have continued to write in both forms, according to the whim of the poem at hand. But I confess to a preference for the poems that come to me expressing, by whatever mysterious means . . . a wish to be formal.

Van Duyn continues, noting that, for her, writing a formal poem increases the personal satisfaction she feels, by "deepening and intensifying the out-of-body concentration, with its little flares of joy when the right word comes, which we all seek and find in writing poems of whatever kind." She goes on to say that while the writing of a free-verse poem leaves her free "to prepare a meal, sleep, have a drink with friends . . . a formal poem seems to follow [her] everywhere, makes [her] hard to live with, and gives [her] pleasure approaching the ecstatic."

Van Duyn's passion and regard for formal poetry are clear, and it is therefore not unexpected to find her allegiance to it manifested in her writing. On the surface, "Memoir" is a poem about the editor's role in preserving poetry for future generations. If one looks a bit more closely, however, "Memoir" can also be read as a poem about poetry itself. "Memoir" is about memory, an account of the past. In this case, the poem is the poet's memory of her relationship to the editor. The poem is also Van Duyn's statement about how publishing poetry preserves the life of which it speaks. More abstractly, "Memoir" can be seen as autobiographical in the sense that it is a poem that writes about itself, or a poem that writes about poetry.

In the final stanza, Van Duyn writes, "Sound ear and sound eye keep in print / any rhyme the world makes with its words / that the heart cannot bear to lose." This is clearly high praise for her editor, whose sound judgment helps her publish the poetry that springs from her heart. On a first read, one might assume that it is the "words / that the heart cannot bear to lose"; however, read in another way, one can see that the "rhyme" also has a claim on Van Duyn's heart. As a basic unit of poetry that helps distinguish poetry from prose, rhyme can be read as a symbol for formal poetry and its conventions. Thus, this final stanza reveals not only Van Duyn's credit to Ford, but it calls attention to her affection for poetic form.

By writing "Memoir" as a sestina, which is a complex and regimented poetic form, Van Duyn further confirms her regard for formal poetry. In addition to writing in this strict form, she comments on the form's importance in the fourth stanza. She says, "Who gives up the world for words / gives creation a bad black eye / in uncoupling sense and sound." To understand Van Duyn's coded allusion to the sestina, one must a make brief foray into a literary discussion of the form. In *Making of a Poem*, editors Mark Strand and Eavan Boland say that the patterns of repetition in a sestina "are constructed across a selected number of key words, so that in the end the sestina becomes a game of meaning, played with sounds and sense," and in *The Game of Love: Troubadour Wordplay*, Laura Kendrick says that "The aesthetic of early Provençal lyric is one of complexity and richness of sound and sense." It seems to be no mistake then that in the fourth stanza Van Duyn writes about "sense and sound." The pair seem to be inherently associated with the sestina, and by writing about their uncoupling in a negative sense, Van Duyn suggests that either to separate sound from sense or to separate sound and sense from poetry is to damage the creation of the sestina or, more broadly, formal poetry. Indeed, it is the unity of these two elements that gives "Memoir" its rich complexity.

In addition to valuing the formal qualities of poetry, Van Duyn sees poetry as both an aural (or oral) and visual art. In "Memoir," she commends her editor for publishing poetry, or for presenting it in a visual form, when she writes about his role in preserving poetry in the "amber of print." For Van Duyn, as for the twelfth-century troubadours who popularized the form of the sestina, the printed word plays a necessary part in the creation of poetry. Kendrick notes, "The troubadours' linguistic play virtually required . . . the written text, which preserved, at least in part, the phonetic groupings of speech patterns." Whereas a verbal rendition of poetry allows the performer to be ambiguous about his word choices (for example, "which" sounds just like "witch," and "to," "two," and "too" sound the same), written poetry demands clarity. In the sixth stanza, Van Duyn seems to humbly thank her editor for this clarity when she says, "Love's incoherence is sound." Left unprinted, the product of her heart can be difficult to understand, or incoherent.

Despite her clear appreciation for the written word, Van Duyn reminds readers that poetry is inherently an art that is meant to be spoken and heard. Again, it seems no mistake that Van Duyn chose to write "Memoir" using the medieval form of the sestina. In *The Game of Love: Troubadour Wordplay*, Kendrick notes that

For the medieval reader, the written text of a lyric was only a semblance or visible sign of the oral text; in order to be understood, the images on the manuscript page needed translation into sounds. The medieval reader read aloud.

Van Duyn's use of the sestina, which relies heavily on the interplay of sounds and the nuances of words, suggests that she similarly believes that poetry should be read aloud. In fact, she confirms this belief in the sixth stanza when she asks, "In a deathly silence, what sound amends Time's law that we lose?" She answers, "That memoir read from fine print." For Van Duyn, it is not simply the printing of poetry that prevents its loss; it is the process of reading that poetry aloud. As she notes in the very first stanza, "silence wants to be sound," meaning that poetry is meant to be shared verbally, not experienced in "a deathly silence." Van Duyn is clearly no stranger to what Kendrick characterizes as the "reductive" nature of the writing process or the "expansive" nature of reading, and it is precisely the complementary relationship between these two processes that Van Duyn seems to find necessary in the art of poetry. Kendrick continues:

The aurally oriented medieval reader was prone to recognize—or momentarily consider the possibility of—a great many puns based on identical or similar sounds with different graphic representations. Our visual orientation toward words . . . discourages us from considering alternate meanings, from engaging in this kind of wordplay as we read.

For Kendrick, and arguably for Van Duyn, sound (or oral renditions of poetry) adds depth and layers of meaning to the work. Thus, when Van Duyn says that "Love's incoherence is sound," she may also be pointing to the ways in which reading aloud heightens poetic ambiguities and thus enhances the complexity of the work. For those who are inclined to enjoy the intellectual pursuit of literary analysis, as one might presume Van Duyn is, this complexity is a welcome gift.

"Memoir"'s complexity has not gone unnoticed. Writing "Intimations of Mortality" for the *Women's Review of Books* in 1991, Jessica Greenbaum describes "Memoir"'s complexity. She notes that Van Duyn's language is "intensely codified" and that the meaning of the poem "seems as hidden and tightly coiled as the principles of a nautilus shell." Indeed, "Memoir" is a challenging poem, yet it is not without its rewards. In addition to being a lasting tribute to one of the publishing industry's most highly regarded poetry editors, it provides readers with valuable insights about Van Duyn's reverence for poetic form and for poetry as a visual and aural experience. These points are important reminders about the history of the form, and in reading "Memoir" aloud, one becomes even more thankful for the "amber of the print" and for the silence that "wants to be sound."

Source: Dustie Robeson, Critical Essay on "Memoir," in *Poetry for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Critical Essay #2

Monahan has a Ph.D. in English. She teaches at Wayne State University and operates an editing service, The Inkwell Works. In this essay, Monahan explores Van Duyn's diction as a means for understanding the layers of meaning in her poem.

In the sestina "Memoir," from her Pulitzer Prize—winning collection, *Near Changes* (1990), Mona Van Duyn explores connections between the sense of sight and the sense of hearing. She connects these sensory perceptions to the processes of writing, reading, and publishing, which are themselves prompted by feelings, specifically memory of lost love. Van Duyn compares the longing to hear or receive communication from another person to the reception of printed text, which in being read conveys through the eyes the sounds of the written words and the voice of the speaker in the text. The poem's sounds in this way reach the reader through the reader's eyes. For her explication of the transmission of written/heard communication and the experience that is its impetus, Van Duyn chose the highly restrictive medieval French poetic form, the *sestina*. This form requires the repetition of six end-line words (end-line words are called *teleutons*). She employed *simile* (a comparison that uses "as" or "like"), *metaphor* (a comparison), and *puns* (wordplay using words that sound alike but have different meanings, called *homonyms*). Van Duyn also employed *synaesthesia* (a description of one kind of sensation in terms of another sensation or the mixing of sense perceptions).

The sestina consists of six stanzas and one final triplet (called the *envoy*). This poem form does not require end-line rhyme, but it dictates a precise order for the end-line words. The lines must place the end-words in correct order and at least some of the time be *enjambed* (enjambed lines run-on grammatically into the next line) in order to divert attention from the end-line word order. In the shifting order, each subsequent stanza's first line ends with the word that ends the previous stanza's last line; in this way, the stanzas seem hooked together. If one can identify the first stanza's end words as A, B, C, D, E, and F, then the teleuton order for the following five stanzas is as follows: F, A, E, B, D, C; C, F, D, A, B, E; E, C, B, F, A, D; D, E, A, C, F, B; B, D, F, E, C, A. Conventionally, the envoy's three lines must repeat the final three lines of the sixth stanza: E, C, A; the other teleutons, B, D, and F, must be buried in these three lines. However, Van Duyn departs from this pattern: in her envoy, the end-words are F, E, and D, and the first envoy line repeats in order, A, B, and C.

The first stanza of "Memoir" is one sentence that asserts, "silence wants to be sound." This idea is compared to what a "conch tells the human ear." The inanimate conch shell, something to look at, when placed to the ear, seems to whisper sounds reminiscent of the sea. (Thus, the shell seems to speak of what it has lost.) That the inanimate shell seems to resonate with a sound something like the sound of the sea suggests that "silence wants to be sound." In a correlative way, the outer ear ("earshell") begs "the eye to find the sounds" the ear "would lose"; that is, words disperse and fade away along sound waves, but words that are written down are "trapped in the amber of print." So what the ear may "lose" (not hear), the eye can retrieve if the words are written on paper. Just as the shell seems to have "caught" the sea, so too the page and ink catch words, which a person in the act of reading "hears."

Through the use of simile, the man who prints words, a publisher, is likened in the second stanza to a towering pine tree. His ability to "take in" the text is compared to the resin (or sticky sap) of the pine tree. That is to say, his appreciation of the text and decision to print it is based on his reception of it. His "inner ear" of imagination vibrates with the unheard yet imagined sound of these words. He is able thus to enclose these words, securing by his response to them the "resonate shape of their sound." (Describing a sound as having a shape is an example of synaesthesia.) The word "resin," which refers to the yellowish brown secretion from trees, connects back to the use of "amber" in the previous stanza; it also suggests a pun on "resonant" (to resinate is to infuse with resin; to resonate is to vibrate in response to sound waves). A writer is described here as a person with a "dry heart" who must "let loose" (express) words that adhere (or perhaps "cohere") in the printer's resonating reception of them. The "needle's eye" is an *allusion* (a figure of speech that refers to some literary figure, event, or text). The text suggested here is Matthew 19:24: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." The phrasing seems to imply that the man who hears and then prints the text is destined to fit through the narrow strictures of art and find a place in the secular heaven art itself creates.

In the third stanza, the published poem goes out into a windy world of indiscriminate sound waves. The eye or center of a hurricane is compared to the "hush of print" that "retrieves" what the "blind wind would lose." In this stillness at the center, the "heart becomes all ear" and the "deaf-mute world hears the sound." The reader's "heart" or center of sensitivity becomes "all ear," and full receptivity of the text transforms a "deaf-mute world" into a hearing one. The world that is unable to hear and to speak is now able through printed text to receive "its own green, resplendent words." (Giving words a color is another example of synaesthesia.) Through publication, then, people who are perhaps readers but not writers are able to receive the world through words; they gather meaning through this form of hearing and speaking. Moreover, their awareness may identify the world of sensation with the meaning it is given in the text. Quite literally, individuals cannot hear words unless their eardrums feel the vibration of sound waves. Thus it might makes sense to say sensation is perception.

Naturally sound and sense occur together, the fourth stanza continues. To "give up the world for words" is to separate the world from its own sounds (sense). Doing so also gives "creation" (the created world or the artist's creation) a "black eye." The meaning here may be that to separate meaning from the world in which it occurs is to strike a blow against or mar creation. "Detective Time" takes the "voiceprint" (instead of fingerprint) of anyone who commits this "crime," and the voiceprint (sound) ends up "behind bars" (in jail). Art—in this case the poem—succeeds to the extent that it draws the attention of the "deaf-mute world" to the world's own "resplendent words." That is to say, the poem articulates meaning that might otherwise be lost in the world at large.

In an interview with Steve Paul in the *Kansas City Star*, Van Duyn stated that some poems in *Near Changes* contain imagery that is "more complex and . . . less accessible" than her earlier work. Indeed, the fifth stanza may be an example of this inaccessibility. Here, the processes of writing and reading are connected to the feeling that precipitates them. The poem shifts its focus from sense (writing, reading) to inarticulate sensation, specifically love. The sound of this feeling is incoherent; it does not make sense. Feeling sinks into the "mud-mum heart." Mud does not resonate; it engulfs, and to be "mum" is to be silent or to withhold secrets. In the sixth stanza love is described as the "beautiful babble" that forms the "Foreword" of the text.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker in the poem asks: "What sound / amends Time's law that we must lose?" The question contains a hint of the answer: a particular sound is able to "amend" (fix, restore, change) what over time has been lost. Memoir (not the memory itself but rather the text of that memory) "amends." Then the eardrum takes up the beat of the words let loose. Paradoxically, love causes the poet to express, to write. Expression casts the words into the world (into the wind); the words may be lost in sound dispersion or trapped in print. Publication (not broadcasting but printing) retrieves and fixes the words in place. In this way the text conveys meaning for the "deaf-mute world." Memoir, the text produced by memory, is an amendment to loss.

In poetry, *diction* (the choice and arrangement of words) plays an essential role, conveying often times the layers of meaning in a single text. Various definitions of a word and its usage in the text hint at the poem's layers of meaning. In the fifth stanza the poet's sleight of hand involves using coherent language to convey the incoherence of feeling. The syntax twists, and the meaning seems muffled.

By contrast, the envoy stands as a crystal clear statement or directive: "Sound ear and sound eye keep in print / any rhyme the world makes with its words / that the heart cannot bear to lose." Let it be the case, the speaker in this poem asserts, that the valid perceptions of ear and eye preserve in print that "rhyme" (or song) of the world that the heart of the writer cannot bear to lose (give up or witness as gone). Nature, like the whispering conch shell, lets us know "silence wants to be sound." The published text reflects the world's own sound and sense. Writing, publishing, and reading are the nets by which what has been loved is caught or saved. Living without printed words means letting what matters slide away, disperse into the wind, disappear.

In this collection of poems that are at least in part a reflection upon lost loves, the poem "Memoir" offers the poet's way of retrieving the past or refusing to give up what is only memory. In her essay "Matters of Poetry," Van Duyn describes writing poetry as "hard, lonely, glorious, transcendent play-work." The reward of this work for the reader, according to "Memoir," is the discovery of what the heart loves; the poem in being read reveals to the reader what the poet's heart holds.

Source: Melodie Monahan, Critical Essay on "Memoir," in *Poetry for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Adaptations

On October 7, 1992, Van Duyn read from *Near Changes* and *Firefall* in the Montpelier Room of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. From *Near Changes*, Van Duyn read "Near Changes," "The Block," "A Dog Lover's Confession," and "At the Mall." This sound recording is available through the Library of Congress using the call number RWC 9783.

Topics for Further Study

Research Johannes Gutenberg and his invention of the printing press in 1436. What preceded the printing press? How did the printing press revolutionize the way people communicate with one another?

Today, the publishing industry faces a new revolution: electronic books or e-books. Research the progress that has been made on this front. How do you think the availability of e-books will impact the publishing industry?

Visit your career center to research the educational requirements for working as a writer or an editor. Do most colleges and universities offer majors for students who would like to work in these fields? What are these majors, and what types of courses would you take if you selected one of these majors? How do you think a college degree would help you enter the publishing industry?

Contact printing businesses in your area to ask if they would give your class a tour of their facilities so that you can see firsthand how printing presses work. What kinds of technical advances in the printing process have there been since the 1400s? How has the use of computers impacted the printing industry?

Write a poem using the form of the sestina.

Write a historical overview about the twelfth- and thirteenth-century-French troubadour poets. Where in France did they come from, primarily? Whom did they produce poetry to entertain? What were the names of some of the most famous and respected troubadours? Did they write and/or perform poetry? Find out if there were any female troubadours and discuss how their poetry differed from their male counterparts.

Poets use many forms to write poetry. Research the following forms: the villanelle, the pantoum, the sonnet, the ballad, the heroic couplet, and blank verse. Where did each form originate? Who is credited with creating or popularizing the form? Do certain poets favor each form?

What Do I Read Next?

Valentines to the Wide World (1959) is Van Duyn's first collection of poetry.

Firefall (1993) is Van Duyn's latest collection of poetry.

If It Be Not I: Collected Poems 1959—1982 (1993) presents a compilation of Van Duyn's poetry from her previous collections, including *Valentines to the Wide World*, *A Time of Bees*, *To See, to Take*, *Bedtime Stories*, *Merciful Disguises*, and *Letters from a Father, and Other Poems*.

The Best American Poetry 2003 (2003), edited by David Lehman and Yusef Komunyakaa, provides readers with a survey of contemporary American poetry.

Edited by Aliki and Willis Barnstone, *A Book of Women Poets from Antiquity to Now* (1992) offers a survey of three hundred women poets from the earliest Mesopotamian poet Enheduanna to Gwendolyn Brooks, a twentieth-century African American.

Founded in 1912 by Harriet Monroe, *Poetry* is a monthly publication devoted to printing the poetry of both up-and-coming and established poets.

Further Study

Burns, Michael, *Discovery and Reminiscence: Essays on the Poetry of Mona Van Duyn*, University of Arkansas Press, 1999.

This book offers a collection of criticism about Van Duyn's work.

Finch, Annie, *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poetry in Form by Contemporary Women*, Story Line Press, 1994.

Finch's work is a compilation of poetry written by women who use traditional poetic forms. The book includes introductory comments by each poet, including Mona Van Duyn.

Greenbaum, Jessica, "Intimations of Mortality," in *Women's Review of Books*, Vol. VIII, No. 4, January 1991, p. 14.

Greenbaum praises *Near Changes* and briefly mentions the complexity of the language Van Duyn uses in "Memoir."

Padgett, Ron, ed., *The Teachers and Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*, Teachers & Writers, 2000.

Padgett gathers writing about approximately seventy poetic forms. In addition to defining each form, the writers of each section summarize the form's history and provide examples of it.

Strand, Mark, and Eavan Boland, *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, W. W. Norton, 2001.

In addition to providing readers with a description and history of many poetic forms including the sestina, the sonnet, blank verse, and the ballad, Strand and Boland offer a host of poems exemplifying each form.

Zarin, Cynthia, "Periscope Gaze," in *New Republic*, Vol. 203, No. 27, December 1990, pp. 36—40.

Zarin reviews *Near Changes* and applauds Van Duyn's skilled writing in "Memoir."

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□□□, "Out-of-Body Concentration," in *A Formal Feeling Comes: Poems in Form by Contemporary Women*, edited by Annie Finch, Story Line Press, 1994, pp. 227—28.

□□□, *Near Changes*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.

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Product Design
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Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

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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.

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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

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Editor, Poetry for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535