Names of Horses Study Guide

Names of Horses by Donald Hall

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Contents

Introduction

Donald Hall began writing "Names of Horses" in 1975, and it was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1977. In this poem, Hall revisits his past and pays tribute to the horses that worked his grandparents' farm in New Hampshire. While poets often change the facts of memories from real life to fit their creative purposes, Hall is faithful to his memories. With the exception of the last, the names of the horses in the poem refer to actual horses Hall knew of as a child at Eagle Pond Farm. Thus the poem has a highly autobiographical dimension.

The first half of the poem reads like a list, a summary of the life of a work horse. Day after day, season after season, the same set of chores needed to be performed if the farm was to thrive. Summer meant haying, Sundays meant driving the family to church, and the horses were always present to lend their power in the service of man. In its direct address, the poem narrates the life of these horses, indirectly giving voice to otherwise mute creatures. At the same time, it educates the reader as to the details and harsh realities of life on a New England farm.

over, when its body can no longer bear the workload, it is taken to a field, shot, and buried. Farm work was often very hard, and trying to squeeze a living out of the rocky and sandy soil of Eagle Pond Farm left little room for sentimental attachments, little room to regard the older animals as pets. The unwritten law of the farm demanded that the horses no longer holding their own, those no longer contributing to the success of the farm, must be euthanized. Part story, part meditation on memory and time, in "Names of Horses" the life of a typical horse becomes Hall's means of expressing his complex vision of mortality and the inherent worth of these unsung creatures.

Author Biography

Donald Hall was born on September 20, 1928, in New Haven, Connecticut. Although he grew up in the depths of the Depression, the elder Halls never felt its full effect, and they never shirked on their son's education. Boyhood summers were spent on the farm in New Hampshire where his mother was raised, Eagle Pond Farm, where Hall heard his grandfather reciting poetry as they worked in the fields. At twelve, Hall made his first attempt at writing, and his first poem was published when he was sixteen. Hall enrolled in Harvard at a time when the university was a Who's Who of present and future American poets. Robert Bly, Adri-enne Rich, John Ashbery, and Frank O'Hara were among Hall's classmates, young writers honing their craft and establishing the styles by which they would become well known. In addition, two giants, Robert Frost and Archibald MacLeish, were on the Harvard teaching staff. Hall's poetry received several prizes during these years, and his winning streak continued at Oxford, where he was awarded the prestigious Newdigate Prize. This award gave Hall a welcome endorsement and led to more publications back in the United States, a residency at Stanford, and a three-year stint at Harvard's Society of Fellows. In 1957, Hall accepted a position at the University ofMichigan, where he was employed for seventeen years, and continued to produce his distinctive collections of poetry, moving slowly away from writing exclusively metrical, formal verse to adopting free verse and a diversity of styles. In addition, Hall branched out into a variety of genres, producing prose memoirs, art criticism, drama, and children's books. In 1975, Hall resigned his professorship and purchased Eagle Pond Farm, the setting for "Names of Horses." There he lived with his second wife, the poet and translator Jane Kenyon. The rural setting afforded them the time and seclusion to dedicate themselves to their writing full time. Hall's 1988 collection, *The One Day,* won the National Book Critics Circle Award, the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Donald Hall still resides at Eagle Pond Farm, where he is as prolific as ever.

Poem Text

All winter your brute shoulders strained against
collars, padding
and steerhide over the ash hames, to haul
sledges of cordwood for drying through spring and
summer,
for the Glenwood stove next winter, and for the
simmering range.
In April you pulled cartloads of manure to spread
on the fields,
dark manure of Holsteins, and knobs of your own
clustered with oats.
All summer you mowed the grass in meadow and
hayfield, the mowing machine
clacketing beside you, while the sun walked high
in the morning;
and after noon's heat, you pulled a clawed rake
through the same acres,
gathering stacks, and dragged the wagon from
stack to stack,
and the built hayrack back, uphill to the chaffy
barn,
three loads of hay a day from standing grass in the
morning.

Sundays you trotted the two miles to church with
the light load
of a leather quartertop buggy, and grazed in the
sound of hymns.
Generation on generation, your neck rubbed the
windowsill
of the stall, smoothing the wood as the seas
smooths glass.
When you were old and lame, when your shoulders
hurt bending to graze,
one October the man, who fed you and kept you,
and harnessed you every morning,
led you through corn stubble to sandy ground
above Eagle Pond,
and dug a hole beside you where you stood
shuddering in your skin,
and lay the shotgun's muzzle in the boneless
hollow behind your ear,
and fired the slug into your brain, and felled you
into your grave,
shoveling sand to cover you, setting goldenrod
upright above you,
where by the next summer a dent in the ground
made your monument.
For a hundred and fifty years, in the pasture of

dead horses,

roots of pine trees pushed through the pale curves

of your ribs,

yellow blossoms flourished above you in autumn,

and in winter

frost heaved your bones in the ground□old toilers,

soil makers:

O Roger, Mackerel, Riley, Ned, Nellie, Chester,

Lady Ghost.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-4:

The first stanza begins with a list of grueling labors. The reader determines quickly that the identity of the being addressed as "you" (or "your") is not a person, but a horse. The animal is a beast of burden, a "brute" performing the farm chores that are too difficult for humans alone. The chores are not easy for the horse either, who must "strain" against its burden.

The inclusion of the horse's devices, its network of harnesses, collars, and padding, are important details. They lend the speaker of the poem an air of authority, giving the reader access to the life and procedures of a working farm, a world foreign to most. But most importantly, the contraptions the horse is wearing show the animal is physically linked to its owner, is under the master's complete control. The "ash hames" are the curved supports (here, made of the wood of the ash tree) that are attached to the collar. These are in turn fastened to the traces, which connect the horse to the sledge, or sled, and allow the animal to pull it along.

In other words, the horse is tied directly to the heavy load it is hauling.

A strong sense of time and process also informs this stanza. The hauling here is just one link in a chain of necessary chores. The wood is being collected and stockpiled for drying, in preparation for the next winter.

Lines 5-8:

Notice how the first two words mirror the opening of the first stanza, except this time "All winter" has become "In April." Time is moving on, and with the passing of the seasons there are new and different duties to be tackled on the farm. Fertilizer needs to be spread on the fields. With "all summer" the poet matches even more closely the poem's opening words. Without a moment of rest, it is summer and time to cut and gather the hay. In capturing the rigors of the hayfield, Hall employs two distinct poetic devices. The first is the use of onomatopoeia, or a word that attempts to imitate the sound it describes. (Hiss, hum, and click are also examples of words that capture sounds.) Here, Hall has invented a word, "clacketing," in an attempt to replicate the noise and rumble of the mowing machine. The word is similar to another actual word, clack, meaning to make a clatter. But Hall extends his word into clacket, which rhymes with racket, also meaning a loud outburst. The invented word has more dimensions and a stronger impact in conveying the sense of a constant, jarring sound.

Hall ends the stanza with a second imaginative use of language: personification. This is when a writer attributes human qualities to an otherwise lifeless object. Here, the sun is said to have "walked high" in the summer sky. While this is a unique and original description of the sun rising across the sky, it also accentuates the role of time, which is

so important to the poem, and the slow progress of the horse's endless labor. As the horse performs the same monotonous actions, the sun slowly creeps higher in the sky, sending more and more heat down upon the laborers, making their jobs even more difficult.

Lines 9-12:

This stanza continues the account of the hay season. While there are hints of repetition in the second stanza ("manure" and "mowed/mowing" appear twice), the use of rhyme and sound come to the forefront here. The repetition takes on two forms: full rhyme ("stack," "hayrack," and "back"; and "hay" and "day") and internal rhyme, or sounds that rhyme within a word. This is evident in "rake" and "acres" and in "dragged" and "wagon." As the sounds cascade through the poem, creating linkages in the rhyme and repetition, Hall's rhymed wordplay adds rhythm and unity to the work and aids the reader's movement through the poem. Not only are the sounds pleasing to the ear, they form the bond that holds the poem together, with each line or stanza flowing effortlessly into the next. The repetition of words and sounds allows the poet to make an important, yet unspoken, point: The work never ends, and each task is comprised of the same movements repeated endlessly. Here, the repeated sounds reflect or enact the repeated chores of the horse.

Lines 13-16:

Hall chose not to focus on the people who work the farm, who must brave the elements as well as the horses to keep the farm running. But if the reader extends any sympathy to them as well, the poet attempts to downplay their significance in this stanza. While the people, the horse's masters observe the Sabbath, the day of rest, there is no such rest for the animal. Although their Sunday task is hardly as grueling as the farm-work, the horse "trotted" carrying its "light load." Whether it is for work or recreation, the horse is a human tool.

Again, the vast sense of time is evoked here as the poet notes that "generation on generation" the horses have brought their masters to church. Now the reader is fully aware that Hall isn't addressing a single horse, but all the animals that have worked and died on his grandparents' farm. The stanza closes with a simile, a comparison using the word "like" or "as," to further this sense of constant work performed over long stretches of time. He claims that as long as it takes for the sea to smooth the edges of glass through a long process of erosion and the wash of waves, generations of horses have rubbed smooth the sill of the stall.

Lines 17-20:

Now many seasons have passed, and the horse has outlived its usefulness to the owner. There is no sentimentality on the part of the farmer. The horse was never a pet but a "machine," no different from the hay rake. Having become more a liability than an

asset to the farmer, the horse is led out for the last time through the fields it helped to till. Hall's tone is straightforward and matter-of-fact. The reader is unsure of the attitude of "the man who fed you and kept you, and harnessed you every morning." These are the actions the farmer could have done fondly, out of love of the animal, or just to protect his investment and to ensure he got as much work out of the horse as possible. As the farmer prepares the horse's grave, the animal stands "shuddering," a well-chosen word that contributes an ambiguous note to the stanza. Is the word meant sentimentally, as if to suggest that the horse perceives its life is nearly over and waits in fear for its final moment? Or is the shuddering meant to highlight the horse's uselessness and justify the killing, as the once powerful muscles have succumbed to old age and now been reduced to uncontrollable twitches? It is this lack of perfect clarity that helps drive the poem, piquing the reader's curiosity to read on in search of answers.

Lines 21-24:

The poem is very direct and explicit in its portrayal of the horse's death. One gunshot and the animal is rolled into its grave and buried. Hall continues to employ the repetition of sounds and phrases to great effect. However, the recurrence of similar structures ("into your brain" and "into your grave") and the use of internal rhyme ("shoveling," "cover," and "above") serve a new function in the poem, one of larger significance. Now it is not the monotony of performing the same tasks Hall is attempting to convey, but a larger cycle: the life-cycle of the horse from its seasons of labor to the moment, now, when its body has given out. So the poem does not end with the horse's death. It is just part of a larger chain of events that encompass, or surround, the animal's life. Hall does not pause to sentimentally eulogize the animal's years of service to the farm. By the end of the stanza, half a year has passed, and the only trace of the horse's existence is a "dent in the ground."

Lines 25-29:

The scope of the poem broadens with this stanza. The story of the horse's life is also a comment on time, the seasons and years that have marked each horse' s regimen on the farm. But now, time has accelerated even further. It is 150 years later, and the pasture has become a veritable horse cemetery. The stanza ends with a subtle, yet ironic, comment on the horses' lives of servitude. Even in death, they are still working; they are "soil makers," their bones churning and tilling the earth from within as the soil expands and contracts with each change of seasonal temperature.

Line 29:

Hall ends the poem with its only single-line stanza, interrupting the expected pattern of quatrains, or four-line stanzas, to present a roll-call of horses that have worked the farm. With this list of names comes the full explanation of the title. The reader more fully

understands the scope of the "you": that Hall is not addressing a single horse, but many. In telling the story of one, he is telling the story of all.

Themes

Mortality

"Names of Horses" has been called an animal elegy. The elegy typically centers upon the death of a person. But Hall's poem participates nonetheless in the long-standing tradition of this poetic mode, in praising the lives of the dead horses. The pasture where the generations of animals are buried becomes a sort of potter's field, or Flanders Field, a place where unknown soldiers are laid to rest. But whereas some soldiers who have fallen in the line of duty remain forever anonymous, Hall's poem attempts to rescue from the past the names that would otherwise be forgotten. In writing the poem, Hall honors the dead, recognizing their accomplishments and contributions as we would any virtuous person now deceased. The fact that the poem is addressing horses instead of a departed loved one or famous citizen makes the work all the more original and compelling.

The recitation of the names at the end is like the listing of names on a memorial; though, instead of headstones, there are only shallow depressions in the ground, marking the location of each horse's grave. In summer, the goldenrod sprouts "upright above" them. Reciting the names is the best substitute for a memorial the poet can offer. Ironically, it also brings the horses more vividly to life for the reader. The last line gestures to the fact that the horses seemed to occupy an ambiguous role on the farm. Meant only for work, they were still given names as any household pet would. Naming is an attempt to attribute identity, to recognize the value of an entity's life. But this avowal of the horses' inherent worth seems at odds with the brutal treatment they face when their bodies are no longer strong enough for the labors they must perform. In reality, the horses are killed, buried, and forgotten. The poet cannot change the past or the fate each horse faced. But in the world of the poem, it is the poet who has the last word. He can honor the memory of the horses that are so enmeshed in his own reminiscences of his childhood.

Time

No poem could be a meditation of mortality without grappling with the passage of time: the cycle of seasons and the laws of nature, which govern the lives of all living things. The "toilers" on the farm, human and animal alike, are subject to time, powerless to stop its swift progress. With the regimen of chores, there is the sense that the workers are always racing against time, needing to get in enough cordwood to last through the winter, enough hay to feed the animals to fatten them up for sale or to keep them working. And chores, as is typical, are not performed only once; for, like the seasons, chores are a never-ending process, an attempt to stay just one step ahead. Hall loads each stanza with references to units of time. They act as constant reminders of time's passage, like the chiming of a clock: "winter," "spring," "April," "summer," "morning," "noon," "day," "Sundays," generation," "October." There is so much work to be done on

a day-to-day basis for each generation of farmer who works the land; yet, before long "a hundred and fifty years" have gone by. Time is inescapable, larger than any one thing, and life, symbolized in the "roots of pine trees" and "yellow blossoms," moves on in spite of those who have gone before.

Labor

Before there were combines, harvesters, and tractors, farm work was performed by hand. For hundreds of years, worldwide, little changed. The farmer's lot improved somewhat over time, but compared to the revolutionary advances of the twentieth century, technology crept along at a snail's pace. Thus, it is understandable why the farmer relied so heavily on the horse and other beasts of burden. This is one of the ironies that informs the poem. Whether the goal was a successful harvest, the hauling of wood, or getting to town or church quickly, it was the horse that made all of it possible. For a system whose success relied so heavily on the horse, there is a seeming callousness in ending their lives "when [they] were old and lame."

It is unclear exactly when the opening of the poem is set, but its origins may reach as far back as the early nineteenth century, a time when many upheld the value of hard work as among the highest of ideals. For some, this doctrine had a religious component, as a busy life kept one away from the temptations of sin. For others, it was purely economic: If you didn't work and work hard, you simply couldn't survive. In choosing the workings of a New England farm as his subject, Hall is taking part in the pastoral tradition, in which rural life is idealized for its simplicity and pure connection to the earth. Thus, perhaps for Hall, the listing of the labors of both farmer and horse is its own form of nostalgia. But the lesson learned from these past lives can be bittersweet. Some people face an existence no different from that of the horses: a life of constant labor with no recognition or rewards.

Style

"Names of Horses" is marked by simple, declarative diction. Diction is the specific word choices a poet makes and how the words are used to create a desired tone or effect. The poem's almost plain, matter-of-fact narration fits the subject matter, for the poet would threaten his authority or believability if he presented the horses' life and death in a sentimental way, or tipped-off the reader as to where his true sympathies lie. Instead, Hall just presents the facts of the case, reserving any sort of moral judgment. While there is often a celebratory note to the tone in Hall's praising the horses' feats and endurance, there is no condemnation of the horses' treatment or how their lives are viewed as disposable. That judgment is reserved for the reader.

The unusually long lines form a particularly noteworthy feature of the poem. Some lines are too long to fit the width of a standard page. Each line is intended to be read continuously, as one line of type, but methods of reproduction make it impossible. So, the long phrase is completed by carrying it to the next line and indenting. The visual aspects of the poem, how it looks on the page, are affected. Nonetheless, the intended effects of the long lines are not compromised. The long lines are well suited to the unfolding of a long tale; for although it is evident that "Names of Horses" is organized as a poem, it is really telling a story of the otherwise anonymous horses whose labor ensured the livelihood of their owners. Thus, If it weren't for the spaces between stanzas, the poem would look like a piece of prose, perhaps taken from a novel or story. Although the poem accomplishes much more than simply narrating a series of events, the long lines resemble sentences and help to visually cue readers that they are experiencing a version of the horses' history. After all, poems can be an alternative form of storytelling.

Despite the visual effects of the long lines, Hall still chooses to organize his poem into quatrains. This is an example of how form mirrors content. In other words, the regular, expected, and ordered patterns the quatrains establish reflect the essence of what Hall is attempting to relate. The structure of four-line stanzas-regular, repetitive, predictable-adds to the effect of a poem about the recurring cycles of time and the monotonous routine of the farm's chores.

However, at the end the poem abandons its strategy of order and balance with the inclusion of the sole one-line stanza. Again, this single line is another example of form matching content. The poem attempts to upset the order of its romantic, bucolic New England setting by drawing attention to an undervalued and overlooked element: the horses.

Historical Context

In an interview with Donald Hall, critic Alberta Turner asked him how the reception of "Names of Horses" would be affected since the subject had little familiarity for the modern reader. How would a reader approach such a poem "when the experience has become a historical curiosity associated with calendar towels and department store windows at Christmas"? Turner is referring to the nostalgic images of horse-drawn sleighs and teams pulling a wagon full of hay; in other words a romanticized vision of the old-fashioned "simpler" times. Clearly, Hall is writing about an era that has fallen away, a way of life and a style of working that were quickly disappearing from the American landscape in the twentieth century.

But in "Names of Horses," the local mirrors the universal. Telling the story of one farm is a way of capturing and honoring the life of all farms where soil is tilled, and the fields hayed, and where horses once bore the brunt of the labor. Throughout the nineteenth century, America was a largely agricultural nation that relied almost exclusively on the horse. While New England had already been settled and large farms established, vast tracts of virgin soil in the Midwest and Far West were being turned into fields of wheat, corn, and sugar beets. These massive swaths were known as agricultural belts, and they ranged from five hundred to two thousand miles in width. Farmers required huge teams of horses to plant and harvest their crops.

In Hall's part of New Hampshire, local agriculture had been practiced for centuries. But by the 1840s the railroad had come through, making it possible for farmers to ship their milk, corn, and hay to Manchester, Boston, and beyond. Slowly the nation was becoming commercially connected, and the horse was in its heyday.

The poem is intended as an elegy for horses, not as an account of the demise of widespread agriculture in the twentieth century. But with the death of the horses comes the death of an entire way of life: not the passing of the individual animals, but the system of horse-reliant labor as a whole. By the 1920s, farming had become more mechanized, and by the end of the century an increasing number of farmers were forced into bankruptcy, in part because of the cost of owning and operating tractors, combines, and other heavy equipment. So Hall's poem, in focusing on the life of the farm, cannot avoid including by association the people who labored there as well, and the proud tradition of which they were part. In answering Alberta Turner's question, Hall stated that his poem is "an elegy not merely for horses but for people who hayed and cut ice and went to church and spread manure and shot horses, by extension for the whole country of the dead." The horses do not work the farm alone. They are inextricably linked with their owners, with each dependent on the other for survival. When the horse ages, is injured, or is replaced by more efficient machines, the farmer's life is greatly impacted as well.

Critical Overview

"Names of Horses" can be counted among Donald Hall's best-known and most accomplished poems. Critics are drawn to the complexity of its vision as it addresses the large questions of time and mortality while exploring the events in the life span of a horse. As evidence of its complexity, critics have identified two seemingly opposite currents that course through the poem: the harsh reality of death (through the killing of the old and weak) and the comfort the poet draws from reviving memories of the past, no matter how painful. Writing in the *Harvard Advocate,* Richard Nalley notes how the poem engages overtly with death, and yet "there is a certain sentimentality and longing for the past" evident as well. The blending of these concerns creates a sense of bittersweet nostalgia. In the poem, Nalley states, "Hall wishes to make one feel an inclusive warmth and a fine sadness."

In a notice published in *National Review,* Guy Davenport looks at a very specific mode of death present in the poem: death by violence. The heartless killing of the horse serves as a reminder of how brutal reality can often be. "The taste" the poem leaves "in the mind is the bitterness of life's brevity." The comfort and luxury of remembering the past often comes at the expense of others. "Against the goodness of being alive," Davenport writes, "runs the harshness of the bargains by which we live: the toil and death of other creatures."

In *Poet and Critic,* Brent Spenser takes a much lighter spin on the poem, noting that the recuperative power of memory is the main theme of the collection, *Kicking the Leaves: Poems,* of which "Names of Horses" is a part. The lessons learned from the past eventually erase the sadness of death or the sting of mourning for those lost. "The effort in these poems is to look for that part of the past that lives on into the present. They are, for the most part, poems about the gifts the past brings us, the gifts of the dead."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Chris Semansky's most recent collection of poems, Blindsided, *published by 26 Books of Portland, Oregon, has been nominated for an Oregon Book Award. In the following essay Semansky examines ways in which Hall represents the idea of work in "Names of Horses. "*

A seemingly unblinking and unsentimental paean to the generations of horses which have labored on the Hall farm, Donald Hall's poem, "Names of Horses," praises the idea of work, particularly physical work, as much as it praises the horses themselves. By describing the typical life of one family horse, Hall characterizes all of them and their importance to his family.

For Hall, work is what we do during life, both animals and humans. When we can no longer work, we lose much of our usefulness, our reason for being in the world.

Hall begins the poem with a description of the strenuous nature of the horse's work, detailing how the animal "strained against collars, padding / and steerhide" to carry wood that would ensure its owner's warmth for the next winter. By addressing the horse directly, and by cataloguing the various kinds of work the horse did for its owner, the speaker creates a sense of intimacy between himself and the animal. Readers are witnesses to this intimacy, in a position not unlike that of audience members listening to a eulogy. This poem, however, is as much elegy as it is eulogy, celebrating as it (implicitly) laments. By focusing on the physical details of the horse's work, the speaker underscores the effort that goes into the labor. It is this effort which marks the value of the work, and of the horse, for the speaker. Implicit in this poem is the awe that the speaker feels towards the horse, and his gratitude for the work the horse had done to keep his ancestors alive.

In addition to describing the horse's work, the speaker also describes the work of the seasons. In the opening stanza he details the work the horses do in winter, and in the next stanza moves to spring and summer. In the second and third stanzas he names the time of day and the kind of work the horse does during the day. Accretion of this kind of detail underscores the ritualistic nature of the work, both the animal's and the seasons', and it draws attention to the relationship between creature (i.e., human and animal) work and non-creature (i.e., natural processes) work and the relentlessness of time itself. Work, this poems implies, is the defining element of *all* life.

The fourth stanza again highlights the horse's value to its owners, describing its activity in human terms, when the speaker writes how on Sundays the horse "grazed in the sound of hymns" as it waited for its owners to finish the worship service. This metaphor, striking in its use of synesthesia (uncharacteristic for this poem), contributes to the eulogistic tone of the poem. This stanza introduces the idea□only implicit in the poem up until now□that it is not one horse we are reading about but rather one horse representing generations of horses. Hall writes: "Generation on generation, your neck rubbed the window sill / of the stall, smoothing the wood as the sea smooths glass."

This simile is fitting, for it suggests the ways in which individual identity folds into a kind of generic use-value when considered over time. Put another way, it is not an individual horse that the speaker describes and praises, but rather all horses which work. Just as the ocean's waves wear away the identifying markers of glass (e.g., the ridges, the ink, the shape itself), so too is the horse wearing away the identifying markers of the wooden window sill. Both the original wood and glass can be seen as signifying individual identity which, over time, is leveled into a type.

The fifth stanza develops the speaker's utilitarian attitude towards the horse and towards work. When in the eyes of its owner the horse has outlived its usefulness to its owner, it is time to kill the horse.

When you were old and lame, when your shoulders

hurt bending to graze, one October the man who fed you and kept you,

and harnessed you every morning, led you through corn stubble to sandy ground

above Eagle Pond, and dug a hole beside you where you stood

shuddering in your skin, and lay the shotgun's muzzle in the boneless

hollow behind your ear, and fired the slug into your brain, and felled you

into your grave, shoveling sand to cover you, setting goldenrod

upright above you, where by next summer a dent in the ground made

your monument.

Interestingly, the speaker describes the horse's death in such a way that the reader has two conflicting responses. The first one is empathy for both owner and horse because the horse is hurting and because the owner *has* to kill him, there being no alternative. The second one, revulsion at the owner's act of killing, stems from the detailed description of the act and of the owner's calculated approach towards the killing. Hall's use of assonance (lame/graze; shoulders/hurt; brain/grave), consonance (stubble/sandy/pond; summer/dent/ ground/monument), and alliteration (stood/shuddering/skin; fired/fell) underline the visceral and graphic nature of the image and contribute to readers' feeling of shock. That the horse's killer/owner had already prepared the grave for the horse to fall into once shot highlights the owner's□over generations, each a Hall ancestor□own practical attitude towards work, even the work of killing. The matter-of-fact description of the killing, the efficient way in which it was carried out, and the poem's final image before the roll call of names, describing the horses as "old toilers, soil makers," all underscore the primary value of the horses to the Hall family as workers. The horse's work continues even in death. If in life the horse worked on nature, in death nature works on the horse. His bones nourished the "roots of pine trees" and "yellow blossoms flourished above ... [him] in autumn." The last stanza demonstrates that even the speaker's impulse towards eulogizing the horses, towards

remembering them as family members, is tempered by his description of what they have done for the family. The final line, a lament cataloguing the names of the Hall family's horses over the last century and a half, is also praise for work well done. Calling out the horses' names can be read as a way of evoking their presence, making their image palpable both to himself and to readers of the poem. Giving the horses names also marks a way of "personalizing" our image of the horses.

Hall himself is consumed with the idea of work, thinking and writing about it often. In his book, *Life Work* (which he thought about naming "Work and Death"), he draws a distinction between himself and manual laborers, claiming that he had never "worked" a day in his life. Hall writes: "I've never worked with my hands or shoulders or legs. I never stood on the line in Flint among the clangor and stench of embryonic Buicks for ten hours of small operations repeated on a large machine." This kind of activity, the "dirty work" of the body, is what the horses do, spreading manure, mowing grass, transporting wood. Hall praises it because it is precisely what he does *not* do. Coming from a fanning family who made their living working with their hands, Hall respects manual labor to the point of romanticizing it. For Hall, work is what we do during life, both animals and humans. When we can no longer work, we lose much of our usefulness, our reason for being in the world. And just as work unites humans and animals, so too does death, the great leveler. In "The Black Faced Sheep," a poem appearing in the same volume as "Names of Horses," Hall writes

that the rich farmer, though he names the farm for

himself,

takes nothing into his grave; that even if people praise us, because we are

successful,

we will go under the ground to meet our ancestors collected there in the

darkness; that we are all of us sheep, and death is our

shepherd, and we die as the animals die.

Hall wrote this poem and "Names of Horses" after quitting academia in 1975 and returning to the place of his birth, Eagle Pond Farm in Wilmot, New Hampshire in 1975. Much of his poetry after this date is rooted in place and family and more concrete, more personal than his previous writing. His poems frequently detail the work of the body, the earth, rather than the mind, and remind us of the material world in which we live and the bodies we inhabit.

Source: Chris Semansky, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2000.

Adaptations

An audio recording of Donald Hall reading "Names of Horses" was released by Watershed Tapes in 1985.

Donald Hall: Poetry and Prose is a two-cassette selection of the author's work, available from Audiobooks.

There are also several recordings of Hall reading the work of other poets.

Topics for Further Study

Donald Hall has cited Edwin Muir's "The Horses" (1956) as an influence upon "Names of Horses." Read Muir's poem and then compare and contrast this portrayal of the horses to Hall's. Find correlations in the Hall poem for the following lines from Muir: "We had sold our horses in our fathers' time/To buy new tractors" and "Since then they have pulled our ploughs and borne our loads./But that free servitude still can pierce our hearts." How do the themes and tone of "The Horses" differ from that of "Names of Horses"?

Look at the paintings and prints of Currier and Ives or Grandma Moses, artists who took their inspiration from scenes of New England and rural life. Analyze a piece of your choosing, considering the subject the artists have chosen to portray. How realistically is the subject represented? How does an artist create a sense of tone? Write a poem or prose poem about the scene you've just analyzed, giving voice to an otherwise overlooked element or portion of the composition.

Nostalgia heavily informs "Names of Horses." Choose a particularly memorable moment from your own past and write a paragraph capturing the event. Then rewrite the scene in the third person. How do the two versions differ?

Write a poem or prose poem on the life and death of a pet or animal. Address the animal in the second person. How does the "you" affect how the story is told?

Compare and Contrast

2,500,000 years ago: Equus, the modern horse, evolves. It spreads across North America.

10,000 years ago: The horse mysteriously dies out, disappearing from North America altogether.

1510s-1520s: Horses return to their native land on the ships of Spanish conquistadors. Hernan Cortes is probably the first person to reintroduce the animal, bringing sixteen horses to the New World in his invasion of present-day Mexico.

1865: Donald Hall's great-grandfather buys Eagle Pond Farm, the setting for "Names of Horses."

1878: Hall's grandmother Kate is born at Eagle Pond Farm.

1903: Hall's mother, Lucy, is born there.

1975: Donald Hall purchases the farm and moves to New Hampshire.

1830s: Horses and horse-drawn vehicles are the most common forms of transportation.

1910s: Use of the horse as a work animal reaches its peak in America.

1917: Henry Ford introduces the Fordson Tractor, the first commercial tractor.

1929-1941: The Great Depression cripples the nation economically. Unemployment and poverty become a national epidemic. Millions of horses and the farmers who own them are "tractored out," slowly replaced by the more efficient machines. By the time the nation recovers, at the end of World War II in 1945, more than one million tractors are in use on American farms, and the golden age of the horse has come to an end.

1919: There are 23 million horses in America. **1939:** The horse population drops to 10 million.

Today: There are just over 5 million horses in the United States.

What Do I Read Next?

Another famous literary horse is Gabilan from John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony.* This collection of four related stories center around young Jody Tiflin. In "The Gift," the best-known of the stories, Jody is presented a red pony by his rancher father. With the help of ranch hand Billy Buck, Jody learns the responsibility of raising and training the sorrel colt. The story traces the maturation of both the boy and his pony. The impact of Gabilan's death upon Jody informs the collection's subsequent tales.

Those who would like to learn more of Donald Hall's New Hampshire roots or sample some of his nonfiction should read his memoir *String Too Short to Be Saved: Recollections of Summers on a New England Farm.* In brisk prose, Hall offers a portrait of a world that strongly influenced both his love of nature and his love of poetry. Another good source is Hall's 1987 work *Seasons at Eagle Pond,* a tribute to the place where Hall spent many years which depicts the quaintness and nostalgia of New England life.

Robert Frost is widely considered the bard of New England, and like Hall he spent a large portion of his life in New Hampshire. Start with his work entitled *New Hampshire*(1923) or his second collection *North of Boston* (1914). Such classic poems as "Mending Wall," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and "Death of the Hired Man" capture not only his rural sensibilities but the profound simplicity that was Frost's signature.

Frost cast a long shadow over the New England writers that established themselves in the latter part of the twentieth century, as is evident *in. After Frost: An Anthology of Poetry from New England* (1996), which includes poems by Wallace Stevens, Donald Hall, and many of Hall's contemporaries.

Some critics have described certain trends in Donald Hall's work as "New Hampshire pastoral," referring to the long-standing tradition of literature that praises the simplicity and innocence of country and agrarian life. Traditional pastoral poetry took shepherds and shepherdesses as its subjects. Among the writers best known for their use of the convention are the classical poets Theocritus *{Bucolics)* and Virgil *{Eclogues),* as well as the English poets Edmund Spenser *(Shepeardes Calendar*), Robert Herrick, John Milton, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. The pastoral has survived into the modern era in a variety of forms, from the ironic eclogues (a poetic conversation between shepherds) of Louis MacNeice to W. H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety,* which the poet described as "a baroque eclogue." The works of these poets can be found in your library, or for an anthology devoted to the pastoral, read *Field Days: An Anthology of Poetry{l999).*

Further Study

Corbett, William, *Literary New England: A History and Guide,* London: Faber & Faber, 1993.

This brief overview traces the roots of the New England literary tradition and the literary ancestors who influenced Donald Hall and his generation.

Howard, Robert West, *The Horse in America,* Chicago: Follett, 1965.

One of strongest works on this topic, it provides a unique interpretation of history through the eyes of the horse. West traces the gradual replacement of human labor by horse power, including the eventual demise of the animal's role as a beast of burden. Also strong is his account of the horse's arrival in the Americas during the seventeenth century and its subsequent transformation of Native American life. Howard's is an indispensable resource for all things horsey.

Rector, Liam, ed., *The Day I Was Older: On the Poetry of Donald Hall,* Santa Cruz, CA: Story Line Press, 1989. Rector has collected a series of critical essays which provide the first full treatment of Hall's development as a writer and his overall contribution to American letters.

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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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