One Is One Study Guide

One Is One by Marie Ponsot

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

The poem “One Is One” was published in Marie Ponsot's fifth collection of poetry in her more than fifty-year-long career of writing. Long spans of time seem to pass between her publications, but this does not dampen the public's interest in her work. Ponsot's fan base has been growing. A possible reason is that Ponsot's poems are very accessible, and “One Is One” is a prime example. Her themes are universal, and her language is simple and clear. As she grapples with her emotions in an attempt to control them, she reveals her vulnerability, something to which most readers can relate. The poem's uncluttered lines etch a path, leading to a destination that is not revealed until the very last phrases in the final stanza. The poem takes readers on a quiet journey that they do not even realize they are on until the poet forces them to look at themselves. “One Is One” is collected in the book *The Bird Catcher* (1998), which won one of the most prestigious poetry awards in the United States, the 1998 National Book Critics Circle Award.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: American

Birthdate: 1921

Marie Ponsot was born in Queens, a borough of New York City, in 1921. She has said that she never thought she would be a teacher because there were so many of them already in her family. She also never thought she would be a mother. But Ponsot has spent most of her life teaching, and she is the mother of seven children. One thing that has been consistent in her life, however, is her love of poetry. When she was a child, her mother would scoot her outside to play with the other children. Ponsot has confessed that although she obeyed her mother, her real desire was to return, as soon as possible, to the many books of poetry that lay about the family home. Her love of poetry was encouraged by her grandmother, who kept scrapbooks filled with poems and often recited them for every special occasion, including the setting of the sun each day.

Ponsot published her first book of poems, *True Minds,* in 1956. She was already the mother of five. Thirteen years later, her husband, the French painter Claude Ponsot, abandoned the poet and her children. Although Ponsot continued to write poetry, her main focus during that time was on raising her children, which also meant providing the money to buy their food. She worked as a translator for many years, having learned to speak and read French from her years of living in that country as a newlywed. Then, despite the fact that she thought she would never want to teach, Ponsot landed a job teaching composition at Queens College. These were by no means poetry classes that she taught. They were more like remedial writing classes, but she loved them. It would not be until many years later that she would teach poetry at Columbia University, where she maintains her adjunct professor status in the early twenty-first century.

After Ponsot turned sixty, a friend urged her to collect her poems and find a publisher. The result was the book *Admit Impediment* (1981). A few years later, in 1988, she published another collection, *The Green Dark*. *The Bird Catcher* (1998), in which the poem □One Is One□ was published, won the National Book Critics Circle Award for poetry. In 2002, she published the collection *Springing*, which contains poems that represent all Ponsot's years of writing. Ponsot has taught writing at the Beijing United University in China, at the Poetry Center at the 92nd Street Y in New York, and at New York University. She has won the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Prize as well as the Shaughnessy Medal of the Modern Language Association. In 2005, she was awarded the Frost Medal from the Poetry Society of America.

Plot Summary

Stanza 1

In the first line of Ponsot's poem □One Is One,□ the speaker identifies her subject. The first word in the poem is □heart.□ She refers to her heart throughout the poem in two different ways: the physical heart that lives in her chest, the organ that is so vital in keeping her alive, and the symbolic heart that represents her emotions.

In the first line, the heart that she speaks to is clearly related more to her emotions, because she is, in essence, cursing it. □You bully, you punk,□ she yells at it. This is an emotional response, possibly stemming from the speaker's own frustrations between her emotions and her rational thoughts. The speaker feels □wrecked□ and □shocked / stiff.□ She is shocked, but not as she might have been in any other dispute. This one has shocked her stiff. This image of a stiff body conjures up someone close to death, possibly holding her breath, her body locked as if lifeless.

In the second line, the speaker questions the heart: □You?□ Of course, this could also be directed at more than just her heart. It is difficult to determine that. She could be referring to the person or thing that has caused her emotions to flare. Either way, the speaker is obviously angry at this □you.□ □You still try to rule the world.□ Her emotions sound as if they are out of control, and it is she□the rational part of her□who wants to be the ruler or, at the least, to share the rule.

At the end of the second line, the last word □though,□ together with a dash, promises a surprise in the next line, which the speaker is very eager to supply. □I've got you,□ she declares. She has identified her adversary, and she has it (her heart) □starving, locked / in a cage you will not leave alive.□ The cage, on a physical level, represents the ribs. The heart, of course, is encaged inside the speaker's body. But the word □starving□ implies a more emotional stance. The speaker suggests that she will starve her emotions, not allowing any more circumstances that will arouse feeling.

In the fifth and sixth lines, the image is that of a prisoner who is fighting against his captors. But it is also the image of the heart beating inside a body, as the □you□ in the poem pounds on the walls and thrills □its corridors with messages.□

Stanza 2

The poet begins the second stanza yelling: □Brute. Spy. I trusted you.□ In the middle of the third line of the second stanza, she accuses her heart of wanting □to go solo.□ She is also aware of □threats of worse things you (knowing me) could do.□ In other words, the speaker knows that even though she has the heart encaged, she is still not really in control. She is vulnerable to her heart. She relies on it. On a physical level, she relies on her heart for life. On a psychological or emotional level, she relies on her emotions to

bring meaning and color to her life. This vulnerability can be frightening. “You scare me,” the speaker says in line 11.

The last phrase in the second stanza, “a double agent,” leaves the reader hanging, as exemplified by the lack of punctuation at the end of the line and the space that is placed between it and the remaining part of the sentence that begins the third stanza. The reader is left to ponder what the speaker means by “double agent.”

Stanza 3

The answer to the puzzle that the speaker presents at the end of stanza 2 is quickly supplied in the first line of stanza 3: “since jailers are prisoner's prisoners too.” Jailers must all but live in the prisons they run, and they are forced to deal with criminals all through the day and night. The two elements, prisoner and jailer, are brought together as a tightly connected unit. They are at the same time separate and tied together. The speaker continues, in the second line of stanza 3, with the commands: “Think! Reform! Make us one.” What is not clear, however, is to whom the speaker is referring. Is she still addressing the heart? Whomever she is talking to (possibly even to herself), the essence of the message is that two seemingly opposing sides must learn to work together.

“Join the rest of us,” the speaker says at the end of the second line of stanza 3. Then she concludes the poem on the next line with “make its test of us.” This test is to be administered by happiness, or “joy.”

Themes

Love

If there is a theme of love in □One Is One,□ it is not obvious. Readers have to dig for it. Once the digging begins, readers probably will conclude that there is no other emotion that could arouse a person as much as the speaker of this poem is aroused. What other emotion could wreck and shock a person stiff? What other feeling would make the speaker of this poem want to starve her heart and lock it in a cage?

The closest the speaker comes to expressing love is when she uses the word □joy□ in the last line of the poem. She challenges her heart at this point to be one with her and to be strong enough to take on the test that joy will bring. It is very likely that the speaker is reflecting, in these last words of the poem, on the trials that love can put one through. In order for two people to be successful in love, they must become one, as the speaker points out in the poem's phrase □make us one.□ Whether the speaker is referring to two people (lovers) or two functions (emotion and rationality), becoming one requires a surrendering of going □solo.□

Emotions

Love may not be explicitly mentioned in this poem, but almost every other kind of emotion is suggested throughout Ponsot's poem. The poem begins with angry emotions, as the speaker berates her heart. Her emotions, as embodied by her heart, have wrecked her, and she is out to get revenge. Her heart, in retaliation, will □pound□ the walls of the cage in which the speaker has imprisoned it, expressing its own anger and frustration. □You reel & brawl,□ the speaker explains, speaking directly to her heart. But she is □deaf□ to her heart's □rages.□ These are all very strong emotions: anger, rage, frustration, despondency. There is also mention of threats being made and fear being experienced in response.

These emotions are wild and unruly, and the poem suggests that they must be controlled. The speaker can no longer stand being ruled by her emotions. It is her emotions that have wrecked her. She must do something to regain her balance, even if it means that she must lock her emotions away and stop listening to them.

There is one option left short of imprisonment. If her emotions can manage to share the rule rather than going □solo,□ then instead of the negative emotions of fear, anger, and frustration, maybe the emotion of joy will emerge. The speaker shouts to her emotions in the second to the last line in the poem: □Think!□ This is, of course, ludicrous, as emotions do not have the capacity for thought. Emotions are the opposite of rationality. But the word □think□ implies the concept of control or discipline. Wild emotions may find no peace and may wreak havoc, but disciplined emotions may actually bring happiness and the experience of peace.

Imprisonment

The theme of imprisonment is stood on its head in this poem. There is the image of locking something up in a cage, which would indeed be a form of imprisonment. However, the speaker points out how this fails. She brings up the idea of the □double agent,□ and then she immediately explains that □jailers are prisoners' prisoners too.□ In other words, it is not just the captive who is imprisoned but also the one who must guard the captive. Captor and captive, they are a pair, and they depend on each other. They are equally locked away.

The speaker threatens to lock away her emotions and refuse to pay any attention to them because she has grown weary of the effect they have on her. However, she also realizes that in doing so, she will destroy the element that colors her life. If she ignores her emotions, she might not have to deal with the anguish they bring her, but she also will not enjoy the pleasure they provide. So she becomes a prisoner too. Looked at in another way, she cannot stop her heart from beating and continue to go on living. So in the conclusion to this poem, imprisonment is used only as a threat, since what the speaker really wants is for the unruly emotions to reform. Just as a thief may change his or her ways and be returned to society, if the speaker's emotions reform, they, too, can be set free. Therefore imprisonment would not be necessary.

Unification

The title of the poem expresses the theme of unification. Ponsot could have titled the poem simply □One,□ but she is making a different kind of statement here. The word *one* does represent unity, but the poet, in her choice of title, is emphasizing that she is talking about two things becoming one. The phrase □one is one□ feels more like a process than a result. In other words, there is the sense in the title of two things moving toward this goal. □Make us one,□ the speaker demands. It is not completely clear whether she is referring to her emotions or to a wayward lover. It is clear that she is suggesting that the anger and anguish will subside when unification is successfully completed, because that is when □joy may come.□

Of course, there is irony here. When the speaker addresses her heart, she is talking about something that is already a part of her. She can no more separate herself from her heart (or her emotions) than she can separate herself from her mind or her soul. She points this out very clearly when she talks about the □prisoner's prisoners.□ There is this feeling of being dependent and independent simultaneously. So the division is actually artificial. There is no real need for the □reform□ that the speaker requests. Unification is already present and unavoidable. Possibly all that is needed in order to have unification, therefore, is the awareness that it already exists. And since it is already there□since the two elements must work together□why not make the most of it? Instead of living together in mistrust and frustration, why not live together in joy?

Control

Another theme that is portrayed with some element of irony is that of control. The speaker first accuses the heart of wanting to □rule the world.□ This is the ultimate control, is it not? But with the heart in control, the speaker feels completely out of control. In order to regain her control, she must lock her heart away. If she does this, she first believes, she will be in better shape. However, upon thinking about it further, she realizes that even this may not save her. She is fearful of worse things happening than being out of control: □You scare me,□ she states, □bragging you're a double agent.□

The concept of a double agent embodies the irony of control. The speaker seems to be asking, who is really in control? And what is control? Can the rational mind controlling the emotions produce any better results than the emotions controlling the rational mind? Is there a point at which control makes no sense? Or, to look at it in another way, are not the rational mind and the emotions under the control of something beyond them both? For example, are they not both under the influence of life's experiences? This is what the speaker suggests when she states □joy may come, and make its test of us.□ Joy is coming from somewhere outside her heart and her head. In addition, it will come with its own set of challenges that neither can control.

Style

Personification

In □One Is One,□ the speaker talks to her heart. The technique that Ponsot uses is called personification. She gives human qualities to an object. In □One Is One,□ the personified object is the heart, which, in this poem, is also symbolic of the speaker's emotions.

The speaker talks to her heart as if it were an acquaintance, a lover perhaps. She yells at it, curses it, and blames it for trying to defeat her. She even grapples with her heart and threatens to lock it away. If it were not for the first word of the poem (which is □heart□), readers would conclude that the speaker is talking to another person. In other words, the speaker talks to her heart as if it were separate from her, something outside her. She even accuses her heart of trying to leave her, wanting to go □solo.□ But the speaker is not the only one who talks. The speaker suggests that the heart is capable of using language too. She speaks of her heart's □eloquent / threats,□ its □bragging,□ and its □rages□ to which the speaker attempts to turn a deaf ear.

In personifying the heart, Ponsot provides a strong image of how the speaker feels. Her heart is so much out of her control that she believes that it is no longer a part of her. Her heart feels to her as if it has a mind and a life of its own. By using personification, Ponsot invites readers inside the speaker, so that they can look out of her eyes, can feel what she is feeling by imagining what it must be like when emotions are so powerful that they seem to exist somewhere outside the person they belong to. Words alone could explain these feelings to a certain extent, but by using personification, the poet provides an image that says it all so much more clearly and more powerfully.

Symbolic Language

Symbolic language makes use of images to portray feelings. The most obvious example in Ponsot's poem is the use of the heart, which symbolizes the speaker's emotions, from love to rage or anger. Although emotions are really reflective of chemical changes throughout the whole body, the heart centralizes them. And unlike the more popular symbolic heart, such as the ones used to suggest Valentine's Day, Ponsot uses the heart to symbolize all the speaker's emotions.

Other symbolic language is presented when the speaker refers to how the heart hates being imprisoned in the speaker's rib cage. This is, of course, absurd. The heart feels quite at home and protected inside the rib cage. But when the speaker's emotions are enraged and her heart pounds in reaction to these strong emotions, it is as if the heart is pounding in an attempt to get out. Likewise, the speaker's reference to the heart's wanting to go solo is also absurd. She mentions this to symbolize the feeling she gets when her emotions take over her rational thoughts. In other words, it is as if the

emotions want to be independent of her. It is not an actual truth. At the end of the poem, when she requests that the heart □join the rest of us,□ she is symbolically asking the heart to come back home. Of course, the heart never really left home and could not exist if it did not join the □rest of us,□ which is assumed to be the rest of the speaker□her other organs, on one level, and her other functions, on another. By using symbolic language, Ponsot is able to take abstract and intangible elements and create more solid images that make her message easier to understand.

Rhyme and Near Rhyme

Overall, Ponsot's poem does not follow any structured rhyming pattern. However, rhymes and near rhymes do appear in her poem. The poem is not dependent on the rhymes, but when they occur, they tend to tie certain elements together. For example, in the first stanza, the first and the third lines rhyme, as do the second and the fourth lines. This looks like a pattern, but it occurs only in the first stanza. There are no more end-line rhymes in any other part of the poem. In the first stanza, □shocked□ and □locked□ are paired, as are □though□ and □no.□ Each of these words has something else in common. They are all enhanced by the line that follows them. For example, the word □shocked□ in the first line is followed by □stiff□ in the second line, which emphasizes the degree of the shock. The word □though□ in line 2 provides a sort of turning point that is explained in the line that follows it. So the rhyming of these words may have been purposefully done to emphasize these turning points of the poem.

In the fourth line of the first stanza is the word □cage,□ which provides a near rhyme with the word □rages□ that appears in the second stanza, line 2. The heart, it is said, rages in its cage. Another near rhyme occurs in the second stanza in lines 3 and 5 with the words □eloquent□ and □agent.□ These near rhymes may merely enhance the sound of the poem, without attempting to affect the meaning. After all, the sound of a poem, the way the words flow, is an important element. One more rhyme occurs between stanzas 2 and 3. The word □do□ ends the fourth line of stanza 2, while the word □too□ ends the first line of stanza 3. Again, this rhyme may merely be present for the sound of it.

At the end of the poem, there are two rhyming phrases, □rest of us□ and □test of us.□ This rhyming pattern, because it comes at the end of the poem, lingers with the reader. It is rather catchy phrasing, almost like something that might be done in a commercial jingle, so the message sticks in the head. This rhyming is probably done for emphasis. It is somewhere in these rhyming phrases and around them that the real message of the poem is hidden.

Historical Context

Metaphysical Poets

When writing about Ponsot and her poetry, reviewers and literary critics tend to label her work as being closely related to that of the metaphysical poets, whom Ponsot has admitted are a great influence on her writing. Metaphysical poetry was once described by the poet T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) as bringing together reason and passion. Writers who are often classified as the metaphysical poets wrote in the seventeenth century and include John Donne (1572-1631), Andrew Marvell (1621-1628), Henry Vaughn (1621-1695), and George Herbert (1593-1633). Their poetry tends to appeal to the intellect rather than to the emotions and incorporates energetic imagery, which in the case of the metaphysical poets is called □metaphysical conceit.□ This is a figure of speech through which the poet creates a long, elaborate comparison between two dissimilar objects. It is used by these poets to enhance their poetry and to exhibit their wide range of knowledge of everything from commonly found objects to concepts that are more esoteric or obscure. For instance, in John Donne's poem □The Flea□ (1633), the poet compares a flea bite to the act of making love.

Another characteristic of metaphysical poetry is the attention put on trying to catch readers off guard. Other poets of the same time period as the metaphysical poets follow a rather predictable path. They state what their poems are going to be about and then elaborate on those points. The metaphysical poets, however, want to surprise their readers. Also in contrast to some of the poets who came before them, the metaphysical poets do not believe in the worship of the lover as a topic for their poetry. They look at love and sex through the lens of reality. Their poetry does not place women on some unreachable pedestal. The metaphysical poets are also interested in the deeper aspects of love, such as the psychological analysis of the emotions. John Donne, one of the more important of the metaphysical poets, often sets the pattern of his poems in the form of an argument. These arguments could be with anyone, from a mistress to God. The metaphysical poets went out of fashion for a hundred years or so, but thanks, in part, to the interest of T. S. Eliot, the work of the metaphysical poets regained popularity and influenced poets of the twentieth century.

The Beat Writers

Ponsot was friends with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, one of the beat writers, who also would go on to publish Ponsot's first collection of poetry. Ponsot's collection was overshadowed by another of Ferlinghetti's publications, *Howl* (1956), by the beat poet Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997). Although Ponsot's collection did not reap the popular support that Ginsberg's book received, her friendship with Ferlinghetti and her connection to Ginsberg often causes her to be considered one of the lesser known of the beat poets.

The beat poets and fiction writers are a small group of American authors that include, besides Ginsberg, such well-known characters as Jack Kerouac (1922-1969), Neal Cassady (1926-1968), and William S. Burroughs (1919-1997). Most of the beats came from New York, but they shifted their focus to San Francisco in the early 1950s. There they started to gain the public's awareness through poetry readings, in particular, those held at San Francisco's Six Gallery.

The beats are known for their total disregard or rejection of academic verse. They wanted to transform writing as well as change their assumed roles in American culture. They sought illumination through means as diverse as drugs, sex, and Buddhism. Kerouac is best remembered for his fiction writing, especially *On the Road* (1957). Cassady's collection of autobiographical stories and essays is called *The First Third* (1971). Burroughs's classic work is *Naked Lunch* (1959), a trip through the seedier side of life, from New York to Tangiers. This book has been said to be hard to read because of its brutal honesty about American culture.

Several musicians became fascinated with William S. Burroughs's work, including the London psychedelic-scene band The Soft Machine and the 1970s rock band Steely Dan. Then, in 1992, Kurt Cobain made an album with Burroughs, *The Priest They Called Him*, in which Burroughs reads some of his writing over Cobain's music.

Short History of Free Verse

Free verse (sometimes referred to in its French form, *vers libre*) is an informally structured style of writing poetry. There are no set rules of rhyming patterns or cadence. □One Is One□ is an example of free verse. Free verse was made popular in the early part of the twentieth century by such poets as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (1885-1972). Since then, free verse has become even more in style in contemporary writing, although it does have its critics. More traditional poets find the lack of structure somewhat degrading to the poetic form. However, Walt Whitman (1819-1892) wrote poetry that is considered the model of American free verse and that is hardly considered unpoetic. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) is a collection of poetry whose form was probably ahead of its time.

Critical Overview

Ponsot, who is enjoying something of a reawakening of interest in her poetry, after writing for more than fifty years, was praised in a *New York Times* article, "Recognition at Last for a Poet of Elegant Complexity," written by Dinitia Smith. "A Marie Ponsot poem," Smith writes, "is a little like a jeweled bracelet, carefully carved, with small, firm stones embedded in it." Smith wrote this article after Ponsot had been awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for the collection *The Bird Catcher*. Smith goes on to say that Ponsot's poems are "full of carefully thought-out rhetorical strategies," pointing out, for example, Ponsot's tendency to use ampersands (&) instead of the word "and" in order to maintain the rhythm of the words in her poems. Smith then quotes Ponsot, who says her poems "are meant to be beautiful" and adds that this is "a very unfashionable thing to say."

In a *Publishers Weekly* article about Ponsot's work, Dulcy Brainard describes Ponsot's poems as "intellectually rigorous and full of language play" and says that they "nourish the spirit." In *Commonweal*, Suzanne Keen states her fondness for the endings of Ponsot's poetry. In particular, she likes the ending of "One Is One," which, she says, points out "how accessible, how aphoristic, and even quotable Ponsot's poems can be." Keen continues: "Yet there is never anything pat about the thinking or phrasing even in the most rigorously formal of the verses" in *The Bird Catcher* collection.

Lee Oser, writing for *World Literature Today*, describes the poems in this collection as having "an exasperating brilliance." Oser says of Ponsot that she is one who "drives her poetics by adapting to people, times, and landscapes, by changing hats and sometimes"it would seem"faces as well."

Barbara Hoffert, writing for the *Library Journal*, states that Ponsot's poems "should be sampled every day" because of their "gorgeous simplicity." Another *Library Journal* reviewer, Louis McKee, remarks that Ponsot's poems are "personal but charged with science and the natural world, with history and myth." In the *Women's Review of Books*, Marilyn Hacker describes Ponsot's poetry in this way: "Her work is comprehensible as part of the ongoing enterprise of poetry as she understands it, not limited to national borders or even to the English language, but an irreplaceable part of what defines the human mind and the human community." Donna Seaman, writing for *Booklist*, finds that because so much time elapses between the published collections, Ponsot's poems are "aged to perfection: complex and concentrated." She also characterizes Ponsot's poetry as "fluid and efficient."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Joyce Hart is a published author and former writing instructor. In this essay, she looks at the narrative behind the lines of Ponsot's poem to find just what the poet is saying about emotions.

In Ponsot's poem □One Is One,□ it is obvious that the speaker of the poem is upset about her emotions. She does not speak very kindly about them from the first words of the first stanza all the way through to the end of the poem, yet she does not want to completely rid herself of them. Even though she is disgusted with them, she does not want to banish them forever. Just exactly what does she want? Why does she want this? And how does she go about trying to solve the problem of her runaway emotions?

The speaker lets it be known from the first words of the poem that she considers her heart (and thus, her emotions) to be a bully. What is a bully? Is it someone who pushes another person around? Is it someone who makes another person do not what that person wants, but rather what the bully wants? If this is what the speaker means, she is saying that her emotions are beyond her control. The speaker next calls her heart a punk. The word □punk□ has several different meanings, ranging from □prostitute□ to an □inexperienced young man.□ However, in the speaker's frame of mind, readers can assume the meaning to be closer to □gangster,□ which again implies that her heart is forcing her do things that she does not want to do.

As a result of her heart's brutish activities, the speaker is a total wreck, but she is something more, too. She is shocked, which implies that she is surprised by her emotions. She has been caught off guard by them. Whether she is shocked by the essence of her emotions or by the strength of them is not completely clear. However, her next statement is that her heart is arrogant enough to believe that it can rule the world. What is the story behind this statement?

The speaker could be saying that she had thought her emotions could rule the world and was surprised to find out that this is not so. Or she could be saying that her emotions are stronger than she had rationally considered them to be and is therefore surprised by their strength (or by their arrogance, depending on how she looks at the situation). Since the speaker uses the word □still,□ as in □you still try to rule the world,□ the second choice seems the more likely. In other words, the speaker has seen this performance or attitude before. She has experienced these emotions in the past, so the surprise is that she thought her emotions had learned some kind of lesson from past experience. It sounds as if the speaker, who in this poem tends to represent the rational side of things, has reprimanded her heart before. How could you be so stupid, the speaker seems to be saying, to think that you could get away with this again? Or, looked at in another way, the speaker might be reprimanding herself for having allowed herself to be consumed or carried away with her emotions. She might be saying to herself, How could you be so stupid as to fall in that trap once again?

What exactly does it mean for one's emotions to □try to rule the world?□ It is clear that the speaker does not really mean the whole wide world. She is more than likely referring to her own private world. If her emotions are trying to rule her world, then she is saying that she has been experiencing everything through her emotions, to the exclusion of any rational thought. This could suggest that she had, for example, fallen in love with someone who was deceitful but that she chose to ignore the facts that were staring her in the face, to disregard the data that her rational mind had collected. Another possibility is that someone had hurt her emotionally and she had allowed her emotions to depress her and had wallowed in her sorrow, losing all desire to clean the slate and move on with her life.

Then the speaker says, □I've got you.□ This is the gotcha statement. For whatever reason the speaker has allowed her emotions to bully her, to wreck her, to try to rule her world, she is on to them now. She has caught and fingerprinted them and slammed them into jail. That is what you do with bullies and gangsters, after all. She is going to keep her emotions locked up no matter how much they □hate it.□ Hate is a very powerful emotion, in direct opposition to love, another potent emotion. The speaker is not really imprisoning her emotions, but what is she doing? If she hates locking her emotions away, why is she doing this? She must, readers can assume, love to allow her emotions to run free. She must love living her life through her emotions, in other words. But she just cannot stand to do so anymore. Remember that she is □shocked / stiff.□ She cannot afford to allow her emotions to remain undisciplined; she must confine them for her own good. Although allowing one's emotions free rein could make life exciting, it could also make life miserable. There are two sides to every emotion: one positive and healthy and the other morose. Happiness, for instance, can infuse a person with almost boundless energy, but depressive emotions can weigh so heavily that the spirit of life is all but extinguished.

In the second stanza, the speaker confirms these observations. □I trusted you,□ she says to her heart. She thought that she could fly on the positive emotions, but it sounds as if they took her too high, and she did not notice the flaw in the wings of her emotions until it was too late. She must have been hurt, because she refers to her heart as □brute,□ someone who is cruel or savage. Howl as her heart may, she will not listen to it anymore. It must be calling to her, which means that she is yearning to give in to her emotions once again. The pain reminds her not to do so, to become □deaf□ to her heart's calls. She has heard those calls before and remembers the threat of □worse things you (knowing me) could do.□ Although she remembers how high her emotions can take her, she also knows how low she can go. Her emotions know her. In other words, the speaker understands her own vulnerability, her weakness for the highs and the blindness they can cause. When she is high on emotion, she does not want to think. When she is depressed, she cannot think. Now that she has imprisoned her emotions, however, thinking is exactly what she wants to do.

□Think! Reform!□ With these words, she commands new behavior from herself. Here, she is not talking to her heart anymore. Hearts are not made to think. By the time the speaker reaches the last two lines of the poem, it appears that she is talking directly to herself□the self that she wants to become □one.□ □Make us one,□ she says. Who

else could she be talking to but herself? She is realizing that she is made up of two parts: the heart and the mind, the emotions and the rational self. She wants these two parts to come together, to take her through life via both her emotions and her thoughts. She wants to find a balance. She does not want to give up her emotions; she loves them. She just does not want ever to be blinded by them again. Neither does she want to go through life merely as a rational observer, gathering data but not feeling anything. She wants to enjoy life: □joy may come,□ she says. Joy is the emotion that she wants. It is peace that she craves. Still, she has learned something by the end of the poem. She knows that despite the fact that joy is a positive emotion, one that can make her feel good, joy can be demanding. It can □make its test of us.□ Whether the □us□ in this statement is directed at the two sides of her□heart and mind□or refers to the speaker and some other person is not clear. It is clear, however, that the speaker knows that it is through the rational mind, which is the disciplinarian, that she will experience the best of her emotions. She mentions the coming of joy only after she demands reform.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on □One Is One,□ in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Topics for Further Study

Research the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century and write a paper about who they were, how their poetry differed from the more traditional poets of their day, and what their poetry was about. Then memorize one of their poems and recite it for your class.

The twentieth century was a time of significant change for women in the United States. Choose a poem by a female poet from each twenty-year period (1900-1920, 1920-1940, and so on) for the entire century, so that you end up with five poems. Select your poems carefully to reflect the development of women over the course of the century. Then read each of the poems to the class, without telling your classmates when the poems were written. Let them guess from which of the time periods each poem was taken.

Research the different styles of contemporary poetry, such as free verse, concrete verse, lyric poetry, or any other type of poetry in which you might be interested. Define each form and provide an example of a poem to illustrate the style. Then present your findings to your class.

Find the various technical tools that poets use to create their works, such as metaphors, alliteration, caesura, synecdoche, and enjambment. Provide definitions for ten of them and examples of each term and invite your classmates to join you in an exercise, creating examples of your own.

What Do I Read Next?

Ponsot's publication *Springing* (2002) is a good place to find an overview of the poet's career. Poems from all of her previous collections, along with some that were never published before, are in this book. The evolution in her writing, as well as in her life, is evident.

Reportedly, one of Ponsot's favorite poets is the Nobel Prize-winning Irish poet Seamus Heaney, who has published a collection of poems called *Open Ground: Selected Poems, 1966-1996* (1999). His poetry is not light reading, so it is best taken in small doses, which gives it time to sink in. It is well worth the effort.

Josephine Jacobsen, another of Ponsot's favorite poets, is not a well-known poet, except by those who are serious about poetry. Jacobsen's 2000 collection, *In the Crevice of Time,* is a good place to start getting to know her.

Jane Cooper, a poet of Ponsot's generation, published *The Flashboat: Poems Collected and Reclaimed* in 1999. In this collection, she writes about her eighty years of life, from nursing ailing children to pondering the lives of women artists.

Jean Valentine won the Yale Younger Poets Award in 1965 for her first collection of poems. Those earlier poems have been likened to the work of the poet Sylvia Plath (author of *The Bell Jar* [1963]), who committed suicide. In later years, Valentine gave up her focus on the more depressing side of life and went on to write about political protest and mysticism. Her 2004 collection, *Door in the Mountain*, covers feminist topics, digging into the emotions of women in prison and the nature of the soul.

Further Study

Ciuraru, Carmela, ed., *Beat Poets*, Everyman's Library, 2002.

Ponsot published her first book of poems in the same year and through the same small publishing house (City Lights) that Allen Ginsberg's book *Howl* (1956) was published. The publishing house fostered many of the beat poets; for this reason, Ponsot is often considered one of the beat poets herself. To find out about these poets, this collection is a good place to start. The poems of Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, and Diane di Prima are featured in this collection.

Gardner, Helen, ed., *The Metaphysical Poets*, Penguin Classics, 1960.

Ponsot is often referred to as a metaphysical poet. This book is a good introduction to some of the metaphysical poets. There is an excellent introduction as well as copious footnotes to help readers gain insight into this form of poetry.

Hirsch, Edward, *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*, Harvest Books, 2000.

This book is a journey into poetry, including not only the poems of famous poets but also a glimpse into the poets' lives. Although he is a scholar, Hirsch makes his material very accessible as he describes his own love of poetry.

Knorr, Jeff, *An Introduction to Poetry: The River Sings*, Prentice Hall, 2003.

Knorr not only teaches his readers how to love poetry, he also breaks down the basic elements of the poetic form and thus informs his readers how a poem is put together, what devices poets employ, and how literary theory is used to understand poetry. This introduction to poetic literature is easy to read and understand.

Schneider, Pat, *Writing Alone and with Others*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

Schneider has taught people to write from the elementary school level to the college level. In this book, she describes some of the challenges writers must face, including the loneliness of having to work alone. In other parts of the book, she portrays the joys of encouraging one's creativity and learning to express it.

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Smith, Dinitia, □Recognition at Last for a Poet of Elegant Complexity,□ in the *New York Times*, April 13, 1999, Section E, p. 1.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

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Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

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:

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