# The Reverse Side Study Guide

## The Reverse Side by Stephen Dunn

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# Contents

# Introduction

Stephen Dunn's poem "The Reverse Side" appears in his collection *Different Hours* (2000). Before *Different Hours* won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize, Dunn was already an established poet with ten books of poetry to his credit and numerous publications in prestigious periodicals. The Pulitzer brought his work to the attention of the general public, however, broadening his readership. "Dunn doesn't belong to a particular school of poets," writes Kevin C. Shelly in the magazine *Philadelphia*, "but the influences of William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens and Robert Frost are sometimes evident in his work."

"The Reverse Side" is a short philosophical meditation that explores the conflict between so-called fundamentalist and open-minded attitudes of living and is ultimately critical of those who choose moral certainty over tolerance of uncertainty. The poem suggests that a worthwhile way to live is to attempt to be as comfortable as possible with moral ambiguity. It is perhaps easiest to understand the poem when it is read in the context of the whole book, *Different Hours*, in which many other poems attempt to discern whether there are essential organizing principles in disorderly human lives.

# Author Biography

Stephen Dunn was born June 24, 1939, in the Forest Hills section of New York City. As of 2004, he was the author of twelve books of poetry, including *Different Hours* (2000), which won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Other books include *New & Selected Poems: 1974—1994* (1994), *Loosestrife* (1996), and *Local Visitations* (2003). He has also written two books of prose: *Walking Light: Memoirs and Essays on Poetry* (1993) and *Riffs and Reciprocities: Prose Pairs* (1998). In addition to a Pulitzer, Dunn has been awarded many honors and prizes, including the Academy Award in literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller foundations, and three National Endowment for the Arts creative writing fellowships.

As a young man, Dunn seemed destined for a very different kind of life. He was a valued basketball player for Hofstra University (where he majored in history), played basketball professionally for the Williamsport Billies from 19962 to 1963, and did a stint in the army as a sports writer for a regimental newspaper. Soon after, he landed a job as an advertising copywriter for Nabisco, a decision he explores in the poem "The Last Hours" in *Different Hours*. From 1964 to 1966, Dunn studied creative writing at the New School of Social Research. In 1966, he took a savings of $2,200 and went to Spain with his then wife (Lois Ann Kelly, whom he married in 1964) to test whether he might become a serious writer. From 1967 to 1968, Dunn worked as an assistant editor at Ziff-Davis Publishing Company in New York City.

Dunn describes his first novel in a 1996 radio interview with Angela Elam for *New Letters on the Air* as "a poor novel . . . deficient in plot and character but lots of liveliness in the language, and by doing that it instructed me that I should be writing poetry." Encouraged to pursue poetry by his friend, novelist Sam Toperoff, in 1970 Dunn earned his master of arts in creative writing from Syracuse University, where he studied with Philip Booth, Donald Justice, George P. Elliott, and W. D. Snodgrass. Dunn went on to work as a writer, editor, and teacher, and his poetry has been published in such prestigious periodicals as the *Nation*, *New Republic*, *New Yorker*, and *American Poetry Review*. Dunn has been Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, where he has taught since 1974.

# Plot Summary

## Epigraph

Dunn begins "The Reverse Side" with an epigraph, which is a short quotation used to introduce a literary piece. When a poem begins with an epigraph, the author typically intends the reader to read everything that follows in reference to that quotation. An epigraph usually provides a clue about a theme or situation in the poem or about the identity of the poem's speaker.

In the case of "The Reverse Side," the epigraph "The reverse side also has a reverse side" is an English translation of a Japanese proverb and serves as the source of the title of the poem. In the original Japanese, this proverb *Monogoto niwa taitei ura no ura ga aru mono da* literally means "in most things generally there is a reverse to the reverse." The Japanese word *ura* can mean "the reverse" as well as "a place which cannot be seen" or "a hidden implication," according to *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*. This proverb seems to encourage a curious and investigative attitude towards life, a willingness to look behind the obvious "front" that things present to the world, perhaps similar in meaning to the English proverb "there are wheels within wheels."

But the epigraph has a little mystery about it too. It invites readers to imagine an object with more than one side, and of course everything that has a front usually has a back. But is "the reverse of the reverse" the same as "the front?" Or is it an aspect slightly different from the front, which in turn has its own "reverse side?" If this is the meaning, the proverb seems to indicate that there are infinitely possible "reverse sides" of any object or subject, like what happens when a mirror reflects a mirror. By using this cryptic quotation which itself proves to have some mystery and many possible meanings, Dunn may have intended to send the reader into the poem already in a questioning or investigative mode.

## Lines 1—5

The point of view of "The Reverse Side" is first person plural, which seems to indicate that the speaker feels confident enough, perhaps based on life experience, to speak for or about a group of people. It also focuses the poem on general statements rather than on specific things having only to do with the speaker as an individual. The first line of the poem provides one other strong signal that the speaker means to focus on generalizations: it speaks about an abstract concept, "a truth."

The reader will not find any definite clues in "The Reverse Side" about the speaker's sex, age, or the place from which he or she is speaking. But the reader who experiences "The Reverse Side" in the context of all the other poems in *Different Hours*, or who is acquainted with Dunn's other books, may have good reason to suspect that

behind the "we" of this poem is some version of Dunn□that is, the version of Dunn that his writings present to the world. This would be a fair conclusion because Dunn has expressed thoughts and feelings similar to those in this poem in many other poems and prose essays.

The first line of the poem, which begins "It's why," shows that the person speaking is already referring the reader back to the epigraph. Beginning with "It's why" also gives the reader the experience of dropping into the middle of the thoughts of a person, a little like coming into a movie after it has already begun. The indefinite pronoun "it" may cause the reader to scramble a little to catch up, maybe asking "What's why?" before referring back to the epigraph.

The first five lines present the idea of a deck of cards shuffled "inside" a person as an analogy. That is, these lines find similarity between how shuffling a deck of cards will produce a different deal each time, with how human beings can have contradictory thoughts or feelings, seemingly almost at random. It is also important to notice that the speaker says "some of us" experience thoughts and feelings this way. The speaker uses the pronoun "we" but is not speaking for everybody in the world. With this qualification the speaker lays the groundwork for points that will be made later in the poem, about other people who may not like to admit that they have contradictory thoughts and feelings.

Poems often operate as much by what they do not say, as by what they do. The end of the first five lines of Dunn's poem provides a good example. The speaker begins by saying "when we speak a truth," then provides an image of how some people immediately sense inside themselves a contradiction of something they just said. But the speaker does not finish the fifth line of the poem by saying "then we speak the opposite of what we said." The speaker only says "there it is." Presumably "there" means "inside us," where the deck of contradictory feelings is shuffled. By demonstrating□by omission□that contradictory feelings sometimes or often go unspoken, the speaker adds more information about what it is like to experience feelings this way.

## Lines 6—7

Though lines 6 and 7 follow the period at the end of the poem's first sentence and come after the white space following the first stanza, they are a continuation of the thought of the first sentence. "And perhaps why" in line 6 refers to the same "why" as the first two words of the poem. In lines 6 and 7 the speaker provides an example of contradictory feelings: "as we fall in love / we're already falling out of it." The example is still given in general terms□no individual people falling in and out of love are specified. But this example is more specific than the extremely generalized "truth" of the first stanza, which shows that the speaker is starting to support and refine the points that were made in the first stanza.

Lines 6 and 7 also add an important aspect to what the reader is learning about the speaker's view of the world. He or she regards love—the subject of so many passionate poems and other proclamations throughout history—as an impermanent state. Almost at the same moment we fall into it, the speaker says, we begin to fall out of it. The speaker qualifies this statement in a subtle way, using "perhaps," just as in the first stanza the statement about contradictory feelings is qualified by "some of us." The way the speaker shows humility about making these assertions may earn the reader's trust and agreement more than if the statements were absolute in their claims. By these small qualifications, the speaker, who seems to be working out these thoughts as the poem progresses, allows for the possibility of error or for another point of view—for "the reverse side."

## Lines 8—10

The third stanza begins as the first stanza did with "It's why," signaling that the speaker is continuing to work through thoughts on the same subject. The statements of the first two stanzas are carefully qualified. But in the third stanza the speaker makes a more assertive statement, indicating there is a group of people who react to the complexity of life differently than the "some of us" of the first stanza. This statement manages to be both sympathetic and critical toward people who insist there is only one way of looking at things, no "reverse side." The speaker suggests these people act this way either because they are "terrified" (in which case it is easy to have sympathy for them) or because they are "simple."

"Simple," unlike "terrified," is a word with multiple meanings, some of which imply sympathy on the speaker's part and some of which imply judgment or criticism. When the adjective "simple" is applied to people, it can have the positive meanings of unaffected, natural, or straightforward, but it can also have the negative connotations of ignorant, intellectually weak or silly. Because Dunn's speaker has expressed opinions to this point with some humility, the reader may feel that both positive and negative meanings are intended. That is, the speaker means to be both understanding and critical about an aspect of human nature. The speaker's complex attitude, as evidenced by his using the words "terrified" and "simple" together, is in itself an illustration of the point that the speaker is making: that every subject has multiple, sometimes contradictory, characteristics. Another meaning of "simple," not usually applied to people but also pertinent to Dunn's poem, is something that is not complex or intricate. By using the short but complicated word "simple" this way, Dunn's speaker expresses the opinion that nothing, if we allow ourselves to look closely enough, is free from complexity.

Each reader may have different ideas about "the great mystery" to which Dunn's speaker refers in line 10. The phrase brings to mind the language that philosophers and theologians have used for centuries to inquire into the nature of life and death, concepts of good and evil, the question of whether there is a God, and the purpose of the whole of existence itself. At this point in the poem, Dunn's speaker seems to feel that the reader has been carried along enough by the humble tone of the previous two stanzas

that the statement about "the great mystery" may be made as though the existence of this mystery is a matter of mutual agreement and is self-evident.

Likewise, readers may come up with different answers for who the people are that "latch onto one story, / just one version." In attempting to answer this question, the reader steps into the very moral complexity about which the poem is speaking, because every word one might think of to characterize such people has a "charged" positive or negative connotation. Depending on who is doing the speaking, and who is being spoken about, one person's "fundamentalist" or "terrorist" may be another's "saint" or "freedom fighter," just as one person's "tolerance" may be another's "permissiveness."

## Lines 11—14

The poem's fourth stanza begins to clarify who the people are who "latch onto one story." The speaker does this by contrasting these people with people who hold different attitudes, that is, the "some of us" of the first stanza. Whoever the "terrified and the simple" are, they are the opposite of who the speaker calls "the open-minded" in line 12, so we can assume that the speaker considers the "terrified and the simple" closed-minded.

But the fourth stanza does more than clarify who the speaker considers closed-minded. It also begins to express how difficult it is to keep an attitude of open-mindedness, even for people who believe it is the best way to live. "Image & afterimage," the speaker says, cause "even / the open-minded" to "yearn for a fiction / to rein things in." "Image & afterimage" refers back to the possible ways of looking at everything that the epigraph evokes. Without the responsibility to evaluate and understand these multiple aspects, the speaker acknowledges, life would be easier, implying a kind of sympathy for people who are not strong enough to meet the challenge. But the speaker clearly intends "a fiction," used the way it is in line 12, to mean "an untruth," to be a criticism of people who can persuade themselves to live with a lie. The examples the speaker gives in line 14 confirm this: "the snapshot, the lie of a frame." That is, a small photograph and a picture frame crop an enormous world to a manageable size. A picture frame is intended to focus the viewer on what is inside the frame, and to concentrate the attention by temporarily omitting other information. But the frame turns into a "lie" if the maker or viewer of the picture or the frame forgets, or denies, that the world extends in all its bewildering complexity beyond the frame.

There is another important "poetic event" in the fourth stanza, but it is small and easy to miss: the little word "oh" in line 11. "Oh" used in this way is a part of speech called an "interjection" or an "exclamation," and these are often found in what are called "lyric" poems. The lyric poem, rather than focusing primarily on telling a story, puts emphasis on expressing feeling through "musical language." That is, the lyric relies on the pure sounds that poetry can make to appeal to a reader's feelings, on a level different from literal, intellectual understanding. Until line 11 "The Reverse Side" uses fairly plain, conversational language characteristic of a "meditative" poem. But with the appearance of that little word "oh," the poem begins to shift into lyric territory. Human beings say

"oh" or "ah" in this way when we want to emphasize how deeply we feel. It is a word without particular meaning in itself, one that resorts to pure sound to convey emotion. In using it here, Dunn's speaker makes a shift from merely *thinking* about how complex the world is to *feeling* how difficult that fact sometimes makes human life.

## Lines 15—18

One characteristic of a poem that combines lyric and meditative elements is that once the leap is made from "thinking" into the lyric territory of "expressing feeling," the poem usually does not return to pure thinking about the subject. "The Reverse Side" conforms to this pattern: the final stanza asks a question that is at least partly unanswerable. The speaker's purpose, then, in asking such a question is to express emotion about the difficult predicament in which people find themselves when allowing themselves to investigate "the reverse side." By asking the question "how do we not go crazy," the speaker suggests that the very act of asking questions may support the sanity of people "compelled / to live with the circle, the ellipsis, the word / not yet written."

The images or ideas with which the speaker finishes the poem□"the circle, the ellipsis, the word / not yet written"□return the reader to the mysterious and ambiguous quality of the epigraph that begins the poem. Each of these images has multiple associations that apply to the speaker's thoughts and feelings about the morally complex nature of human life.

The circle has been used for centuries in human design to symbolize inclusiveness, unity, equality, emptiness, and eternity. The table at which King Arthur's knights sat was circular (round), as was the table at which the participants sat at the 1973 Paris peace talks that eventually concluded the U. S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The round table□Dunn's circle "we are compelled / to live with"□equalizes the status of all people who sit there and gives priority to no particular point of view. As such it is a symbol of an attempt at open-mindedness, a willingness to entertain opposing points of view.

An ellipsis is a punctuation mark used to indicate that letters or words have been omitted in written or printed language to focus the reader's attention on the words that remain. For Dunn's speaker, the ellipsis may represent thoughts or feelings that are difficult to formulate and, once formulated, are difficult to express or to live with.

The "word / not yet written" may be unwritten for a multitude of reasons. The word may be, as the previous image of the ellipsis hints, difficult to write because it might offend others or put the writer in danger. Writing the word may be beyond the writer's emotional, intellectual, or spiritual capacity. The word may not yet exist; it may need to be discovered or invented.

Taken together, "the circle, the ellipsis, the word / not yet written" represent the pressures of the real world on the sanity of people who want to remain open to the confusing complexity of that world. The speaker asks, on behalf of this group of people (the "some of us" of the first stanza), "how do we not go crazy." The question may be

understood as a cry, a lament, a kind of groan that builds on the "oh" of line 11, and the question is in itself an attempt to relieve the pressure of the predicament the question describes.

# Themes

## Negative Capability

Dunn does not refer in "The Reverse Side" to the English poet John Keats (1795—1821) or Keats's concept of "Negative Capability," which Keats outlined in a famous 1817 letter to his brothers. But Dunn's poem is unquestionably concerned with the idea of Negative Capability, and Dunn proved he was well acquainted with the concept when, in a 1996 *New Letters on the Air* radio interview with Angela Elam, he said

[W]hen I was younger, as most people are when they're younger, I needed certainties, or I craved certainties, maybe because you just live a life that's full of ambivalences, which I still do. But now I'm much more happy in the "Negative Capability" sense. . . . Keats praised Shakespeare for his "Negative Capability," that he was at home with doubts and uncertainties, and I'm increasingly at home with doubts and uncertainties.

The passage in Keats's letter that Dunn refers to is

[A]t once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.

Keats's letter and Dunn's poem both suggest that a worthwhile way to live is to attempt to be as comfortable as possible with the moral complexity of the world, rather than to cling to any simplified "fiction" (as line 12 of "The Reverse Side" puts it) that misrepresents how ambiguous life can be. But though Dunn's poem presents as brave the choice to live with "Negative Capability," it does not say that it is an easy or comfortable choice. To the contrary, the poem's last sentence is a lament about how difficult a choice it is.

## Fundamentalism

"The Reverse Side" never speaks of "fundamentalism," a word loaded with the judgment of a particular point of view. People who hold points of view labeled as "fundamentalist" by others do not often use that label to refer to themselves. But Dunn's poem is critical of the "terrified and the simple" who "latch onto just one story." For some, this is an apt definition of "fundamentalist." Racial, religious, and cultural groups have for centuries engaged in sometimes violent conflict to define or enforce who is inside and who is outside their group. This struggle may involve an attempt to decide which beliefs are "orthodox," a word *The New Oxford American Dictionary* defines as "conforming to what is generally or traditionally accepted as true; established and approved" and also "not independent-minded; conventional and unoriginal." Ideas that do not conform to orthodox beliefs or standards might be labeled "heresy." Throughout history, in parts of the world where groups with conservative religious ideologies have

come to power, people with beliefs outside the norm have been in danger of being severely punished or even killed. In the last decade of the twentieth century, various media have often applied the word "fundamentalist" to religious and cultural groups that cling to conservative values, such as strict and literal interpretation of religious scripture, inflexible ideas about the roles of men and women in society, and opposition to Darwin's theory of evolution. For their part, people labeled "fundamentalist" often insist they are merely trying to maintain ancient religious or human values against what they view as immoral developments in the modern world.

## Oppression

For the most part, "The Reverse Side" focuses on the personal difficulty of living in a morally ambiguous world, rather than on larger political considerations. But the point of view expressed in the poem does have implications that extend into the political arena. Following the poem's logic, it can be argued that dangerous political and cultural consequences result from *not* living with tolerance. When powerful people insist on conformity in ideas or beliefs, the result may be oppression and persecution of certain classes of people. Methods that have been used to enforce conformity have ranged from suppressing the ways ideas are shared (such as the Nazis burning books during World War II) to genocide (the deliberate killing of a racial, political, or cultural group, such as the massacre of the Tutsi minority by Hutu extremists in Rwanda). The individuals or groups who have used such tactics to enforce orthodoxy have often justified their actions as necessary to preserve important values or traditions. The modern era has been characterized by struggle between the idea that some values are important enough that almost any forceful action is justified in protecting them and the opposing notion that human disagreements can and should be worked out by peaceful negotiation in the political arena. Though "The Reverse Side" keeps its focus narrowed on the personal challenge of living with moral complexity, it participates in the same philosophical discussion as these larger considerations, and is influenced by them.

# Style

## Free Verse

"The Reverse Side" is written in "free verse," which may be simply defined as poetry without a regular pattern of rhyme or meter. In many languages when words are arranged in sentences, some words or syllables (parts of words) are stressed more than others. For instance, in the English word "before," the second syllable is emphasized more than the first. "Meter" in poetry is the organization of stressed and unstressed syllables into regular patterns. In casual speech people do not make an effort to organize stressed and unstressed syllables into patterns, but for much of history, poetry was expected to have an arrangement of a certain number of stressed and unstressed syllables in each line of the poem. The rhyming of certain words in poetry□a regular arrangement of words that sound alike□is a poetic device completely separate from meter, but rhyme and meter went hand in hand for many centuries as the two main formal characteristics of poetry. Many poetic forms were developed, such as the sonnet and the villanelle, which prescribed both rhyme and metrical patterns.

During the long period after ancient Hebrew and Egyptian poetry and before the seventeenth century, some individual poems were written without using meter and rhyme. But these exceptions were few and far between. In the seventeenth century a few poets began to feel hemmed-in by the demands of meter and rhyme and started to experiment with freer forms. By the nineteenth century, this became a major trend. In the late twentieth century, free verse gradually became the dominant style in which poetry was written in English, and poetry with traditional formal characteristics had to struggle against a reputation of being old fashioned. In "The Reverse Side," Dunn demonstrates the freedom of free verse when he breaks the uneven lines of his text to emphasize certain points. Line 13, for instance, ends with a dash. This punctuation momentarily "reins in" the progress of the sentence and the poem, a gesture that enacts or mimics the emotional meaning of this passage.

## Repetition

American poet Robert Frost (1874—1963) famously criticized free verse as "playing tennis without a net." But free verse uses devices other than meter and rhyme to give shape and structure to a poem. Some of these techniques, especially repetition and parallelism, are the same devices that ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Sumerian poets used. In "The Reverse Side," Dunn uses both devices. "Anaphora" is the technical word for repetition of a word or words at the beginning of two or more successive sentences or parts of sentences. Dunn's speaker begins several stanzas of "The Reverse Side" with "It's why," or "And perhaps why," and this use of anaphora ties the separate thoughts and examples together.

# Meditative and Lyric Modes

Poetry has several distinct modes, each with its own defining characteristics and uses. Three of these commonly used in the twenty-first century are the "lyric," "narrative," and "meditative" modes. Many poems written in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are a hybrid (mix) of one or more of these modes.

The narrative mode is the one that "The Reverse Side" uses least, as the poem does not focus primarily on telling a story. Instead, the poem is best read as a hybrid of the lyric and meditative modes. Ancient lyric poems were originally sung (with a "lyre," a kind of harp). The modern lyric poem can be characterized as a songlike outpouring of the speaker's thoughts and feelings, a poetic mode that usually excludes material that distracts such a focus. "The Reverse Side" sketches a moral predicament with a few economical strokes (compression and brevity being important characteristics of the lyric poem), then expresses how difficult that predicament is to live with.

The meditative mode is less focused on expressing feeling than it is on working out an idea or a philosophical argument. The lyric can sometimes be quite dramatic in expression or the way it makes emotional leaps. In contrast, the meditative poem usually explores its thoughts in a more plainspoken, subdued manner, and this is the way "The Reverse Side" begins. Emotion is hinted at, but thought and analysis are predominant in lines like "And perhaps why as we fall in love / we're already falling out of it." The meditative mode has been used for centuries to explore religious, philosophical, or political questions that impact on everyday life, and Dunn's poetry may be said to fall primarily into the meditative category. "The Reverse Side" is a good example of a poem that begins by meditating on concerns with both personal and cultural implications, then makes a leap to stronger feeling, based on that exploration. As was discussed above, the poem makes a clear leap into lyric territory with the question "How do we not go crazy" in line 15. Fear□in this case the fear of going mad□is exactly the kind of strong emotion the lyric poem specializes in expressing. And true to lyric strategy, once this strong feeling has been articulated, the poem ends quickly rather than introducing new elements.

# Historical Context

"The Reverse Side" was written in the mid-1990s and published in 2000. In the poem the speaker's attitude toward "the terrified and the simple" who "latch onto one story, / just one version of the great mystery" is a mixture of sympathy and criticism. But in his essay "The Hand Reaching into the Crowd" from his prose collection *Walking Light*, Dunn (speaking on his own behalf) expresses an opinion that is more openly critical of those he regards as closed-minded. Echoing "The Reverse Side" almost exactly, he writes "We *are* our stories, which is why it is useful to know many. The scariest people I know are the ones who avidly subscribe to one story, one version of the world." In the essay he does not say explicitly what reason he has to fear such people. But one may suppose that what frightens Dunn is the kind of violent conflict that has often erupted in human history when one group has tried to enforce belief in their "story" at the expense of other people's stories, or even other people. The mid-1990s saw many examples of such conflict, including "ethnic cleansing" (persecution and murder for racial or cultural reasons) in Bosnia and Rwanda that took the lives of hundreds of thousands of people; the bombing by Timothy McVeigh of a U.S. federal building in Oklahoma City, which killed 168 people and injured more than 500; and the burning of more than 100 predominately black churches in the southern United States. Each of these events was apparently motivated by conflict between individuals or groups seeking dominance over another individual or group with opposing racial, religious, or political views. In the political arenas of many nations, the same kind of conflict played out in a less violent way, between rival groups who wished to limit the actions or privileges of groups with whom they disagreed. One example from the mid-1990s is the continuing conflict in the United States between those who want prayer and other religious expression to be allowed in the public schools and those who oppose that development based on the belief that prayer in public schools violates the principle of the separation of church and state.

There is another historical context for the writing of "The Reverse Side," a context personal to Dunn. While it is risky to draw literal associations between a work of literature and events of an author's own life, Dunn himself has connected (in an online interview with Philip Dacey for the *Cortland Review*) the tolerance for moral ambiguity to events from his childhood associated with the relationship between his father and mother. In this interview, Dunn said about his father that "he lived a noble lie. . . , a lie that I alone was privy to. He was my introduction to ambivalence and moral complexity." In his essay "A History of My Silence" from *Walking Light*, Dunn explains that his father gave all the family's financial savings to Dunn's grandfather to help pay hospital bills for the grandfather's mistress. When Dunn's mother confronted his father about the missing money, Dunn's father said he lost it at the racetrack, and he stuck to that story (except with Dunn, who later found out the truth). Carlin Romano, commenting in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on how Dunn's childhood may have influenced Dunn's view of the world, writes "There were 'no orthodoxies possible' in that house, Dunn recalls."

Poetry, in general, is meant to be read without reference to the biography of the poet, and "The Reverse Side" can certainly be understood and enjoyed without knowing

anything about Dunn. But poetry is not read in a vacuum, either, so a reader may be justified in finding clues in Dunn's own other writings and recorded statements that point to a particular interpretation of "The Reverse Side."

# Critical Overview

Very few books of poetry caused much of a stir in the general culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the period when "The Reverse Side" appeared in Dunn's book *Different Hours*. But *Different Hours* did earn praise for Dunn from a small set of critics, and the book was awarded the 2001 Pulitzer Prize, one of the highest honors given for poetry.

A review of *Different Hours* by Bill Christophersen in *Poetry* refers to "The Reverse Side" specifically, commenting that the poem, among others in the book, conveys "the sense that truth is a chameleon." Several other critics comment on the tolerance or appetite for moral complexity strongly evident in "The Reverse Side," which is a feature of Dunn's poetry in general. Andrea Hollander Budy writes in her *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* review of *Different Hours*:

Dunn's speaker is a man who occupies the territory of the 'in-between,' staking claim to a place without definite answers to the philosophical questions posed throughout the book□and throughout Dunn's oeuvre. . . . He is one who defies labels and who is unafraid of admitting this.

Emily Nussbaum, in a review of *Different Hours* for the *New York Times Book Review*, remarks, "Dunn's poetry is strangely easy to like: philosophical but not arid, lyrical but rarely glib, his storytelling balanced effortlessly between the casual and the vivid." Several reviewers comment on the clear, simple diction (style of speech) of the poems in *Different Hours*. James Lawless, writing in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, notes, "These poems reinforce [Dunn's] reputation as a plainspoken man, whose sentences are easy but not simplistic." Joyce S. Brown, reviewing *Different Hours* for the Baltimore *City Paper*, similarly states

These poems, although thoughtful, require no hard work to grasp. Even their form is uncomplicated: free verse, short lines, often with stanzas lasting only two or three lines. The tone is above all honest, unadorned, in some cases as harshly critical of human turpitude as the prophet Jeremiah.

Most reviews of *Different Hours* were positive, but Kevin C. Shelly in an article in the magazine *Philadelphia* quotes an unnamed fellow poet as saying of Dunn: "His poems now are too intellectualized and removed. . . . He's trapped by becoming successful. He's full of himself. His poetry now is very introspective. . . . The more intellectualized poetry becomes, the less successful it is."

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

# Critical Essay #1

*Donnelly is a poet, editor, and teacher. His first book of poems titled The Charge* was published by the Ausable Press in 2003. In this essay, Donnelly demonstrates that Dunn's poem is a mix of two distinct modes of poetry.

In a March 2000 interview with Philip Dacey for the online journal the *Cortland Review*, Dunn said: "I've been refining how to write the poem of mind. I've tried for a poem of clear surfaces in service, I hope, of the elusive, the difficult to say." The poem "The Reverse Side" seems to be the perfect illustration of the goals Dunn describes in this statement. That is, it can be demonstrated that "The Reverse Side" is (primarily) a "poem of mind" with "clear surfaces" which takes up as one of its main subjects the "difficult to say." It is helpful to examine each of these three qualities in turn, to try to decide if Dunn has been successful in meeting the goals he set for himself and if meeting those goals is enough to produce a completely satisfying poem.

It may be assumed that Dunn meant by "poem of mind" a poem in the meditative mode, in contrast with a lyric or narrative poem. The main focus of a meditative poem (the mode toward which Dunn moved increasingly in the late 1990s) is the working out of an idea, or a philosophical argument, whereas the lyric puts emphasis on expressing feeling (usually strong feeling) and the narrative on telling a story. It can be argued that most poems of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century are a hybrid (mix) of two or more of these modes. Poets combine the modes because each mode provides a kind of poetic communication for which the others are not as well suited.

A poem of mind is one written from the "mind part" of the poet to the "mind part" of the reader; that is, from and to the intellectual aspect of human beings, the part that thinks, evaluates, deliberates, argues, etc. What other kinds of poems may there be? To continue the logic of Dunn's phrase, if there is a poem of mind, there are also poems of heart, gut, or sex organs, those parts of human beings that represent deep feelings, unconscious instincts, and uncontrollable passions. And there are poems of soul or spirit, which attempt to address whether there is any part of the human being that is eternal rather than mortal, and if so what that part is like and with what it is concerned. Of course human beings' thinking, feeling, instinctual, and spiritual capacities are not easily separated from one another, in art or in life□though at different periods of human history some people have tried, for aesthetic, religious, or philosophical reasons. In resistance to this attempt to divide human nature, it may be asserted that one definition of poetic success or greatness is the poem that speaks equally well to mind, heart, and spirit.

American poet Emily Dickinson (1830—1886) famously praised the kind of poems that "take the top of your head off" when you read them. It is instructive to interpret this comment almost literally; that is, she appreciated poems that put the "head" to one side, at least temporarily, to speak directly to heart, gut, and spirit. Even Dunn might concede that "The Reverse Side" is not such a poem. This poem seemingly wants to leave the head firmly *on*, because that is the part it is primarily speaking from and to. The poem's

ambition is modest; it does not want to shake the earth. It is satisfied to delve a little into a difficult philosophical problem without solving that problem—or even completely stating every aspect of it—then to shift to the lyric mode to give the poem a satisfying close.

About that shift to the lyric, the poetic mode that emphasizes an outpouring of feeling: when Dunn said that he had "been refining how to write the poem of mind," he implicitly acknowledged that this is not such an easy task. The pure poem of mind may not be completely satisfying because human beings are not pure minded. So Dunn borrows from the lyric mode, beginning with the exclamation "oh" in line 11—that little word without particular meaning in itself which resorts to pure sound to convey emotion. Then the poem expands in the lyric-emotional direction with its question "How do we not go crazy" in line 15. The fear at the root of this question is the poem's primary emotional gesture, the moment with the potential to create the most disorder, and it provides depth of feeling to a poem that otherwise has a fairly clear, unruffled surface.

It can be argued that the poem makes a retreat from the lyric mode with the examples the speaker gives (in lines 17 and 18) that symbolize the difficulty of living with an open mind: "the circle, the ellipsis, the word / not yet spoken." On the one (lyric) hand, these examples are mysterious; they do not spell out everything they may mean. They are content to gesture in the direction of meaning, and brevity and economy are quintessentially lyric characteristics. On the other (meditative) hand, these examples speak from and to the mind, rather than heart or gut. They are abstract, literary images, not easy to visualize, because they are mental rather than physical. "The Reverse Side" ends rather quickly after it reaches the outpouring of feeling in line 15—another characteristic of the lyric mode, which considers its goal accomplished when it has expressed strong emotion. But by illustrating its final point with mental images, the poem seems to retreat somewhat from the emotion that surfaced in line 15, back to the calmer meditative mode with which the poem began. *Except*—and here is an example of how small details in a short poem can have a large impact—the shortness of the poem's last line (with its implication of insufficiency), in combination with the line break that separates and disturbs the poem's final clause ("the word / not yet written"), may convey to the reader exactly the feeling of emptiness, unsupportedness, and insecurity the speaker is talking about in line 15. By these small devices, the poet infuses those abstract last images with a subtle undercurrent of anxiety.

One of the strongest clues that Dunn intended "The Reverse Side" to be read primarily as a poem of mind is the poem's plainspoken, conversational diction (way of speaking). The poem's modesty of ambition, and the qualified nature of the claims it makes, are reflected in its mild tone of voice. There is nothing fancy or distracting going on with the words in this poem that points to an overwhelming torrent of emotion, and no line of the poem would seem terribly out of place in a normal conversation. There are no "sound effects," like rhyme or meter, that call attention to themselves or try to appeal to a faculty other than the mind. The few examples of alliteration (repetition of consonants) such as "feel foolish," or of assonance (repetition of vowel sounds), such as "truth/foolish," "circle/word," receive so little emphasis as to seem accidental, as in conversational speech. This pared-down approach puts the focus squarely on the poem's philosophical debate and on the one emotional gesture. The relatively mild language of the poem is a

signal that nothing specific seems to be hugely at risk during the moment the poem is spoken. Though the speaker's predicament is difficult, there is time to work it out in this philosophical way—or there is not, and the speaker accepts that. The poem does not solve the problem it describes, and it does not make any enormous, unexpected discovery. Even when Dunn makes his shift to the lyric mode, it is not accompanied by a shift in diction; there is no verbal earthquake to mimic the speaker's distress.

"The Reverse Side" employs one poetic tactic that tilts it, in spite of the meditative subject matter and tone, in the direction of a lyric poem: it does not spell out everything. Beginning with the epigraph (the Japanese proverb that is quoted at the beginning of the poem), the poem is open to multiple interpretations. The last words of the poem—"the word / not yet written"—summarize the speaker's belief that not everything can or should be written or spoken, because it is impossible to do justice to the world's complexity with mere words. The unspoken, the hinted at, is the territory of the lyric, in contrast to the pure poem of mind which usually wants to set out its ideas with much less room for conjecture. The pure poem of mind makes its case clearly—maybe too clearly to be satisfying as a poem—because it values scoring points and winning its argument over doing justice to any gray areas and ambiguities. But "The Reverse Side" is not a pure poem of mind: by including mystery as well as clarity, it frustrates any attempt at a single interpretation and instead encourages speculation. In poetic terms, this strategy is always risky, because a reader can go astray and the poem can fail. But in this case the risk was worth taking, because the poem's gestures toward what cannot be spoken give it a depth it might not otherwise have had.

"The Reverse Side" has mystery, but it does not have drama—it retreated from the emotional language that might have taken it in a dramatic direction. So, for most readers, it will not be a "take the top of the head off" poem. It is more likely to be a "nod of the head" poem, in which the reader acknowledges that the world is morally complex and that this can be frightening. It is interesting to speculate what a person belonging to the category the speaker characterizes as "the terrified and the simple"—a closed-minded person, in other words—might think or feel as a result of reading this poem. A truly closed-minded person probably would not read the poem at all, or any poem, because such people avoid challenges to their "one version of the great mystery." They avoid them for good reason—because most good poems do resist one story about the world, and every great poem does. But in a sense *all* readers are closed-minded to some extent, because every person has some subject about which they feel extremely vulnerable, some topic under which it feels dangerous to dig lest a fact difficult to face be uncovered. "The Reverse Side" has succeeded if it causes the reader to wonder if there is in fact any cultural or personal story in his or her own life that is off-limits to examination or questioning.

A reader who hungers for greater drama, more musical or complex language, or who longs to have the top of the head taken off, may not be fully satisfied by "The Reverse Side." But the poem has its place in *Different Hours*, where it works as an intriguing gateway to the third section of the book and provides a moment of satisfying speculation and mystery among other poems that are more straightforward. The "house" of poetry is big: there is room for this relatively quiet, restrained poem that

combines aspects of the meditative and lyric modes. In other corners of the house of poetry is the gorgeous musical language of William Shakespeare and John Keats; the long, extravagant, "disorderly" odes of Walt Whitman, Federíco Garcia Lorca, and Alan Ginsberg; and the dark, intense, strange lyrics of Martha Rhodes and Louise Glück, to name just a few poets who might be contrasted with Dunn. The house of poetry as a whole, and even the work of these poets with far different temperaments, benefit from the presence of Dunn's modest voice, which attempts to speak in a way that is clear but never simplistic.

**Source:** Patrick Donnelly, Critical Essay on "The Reverse Side," in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

# Topics for Further Study

Dunn's poem uses the circle as a symbol of open-mindedness, inclusiveness, and willingness to entertain opposite points of view. The table at which King Arthur's knights sat was circular (round), as was the table at which the participants sat at the 1973 Paris peace talks that eventually concluded the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Research the long process that led to the choice of the round table at the Paris peace talks. What shapes for the table were proposed first, and why did the parties involved reject them? Draw up diagrams depicting each proposed shape. Next to them, list the pros and cons that were put forth for each suggestion.

Search a major U.S. newspaper for a story about groups or individuals in conflict over religious or cultural issues. Examine your own thoughts or beliefs about the two sides of the issue. Then do enough research about the side of the conflict opposite from your own opinion to enable you to write a brief, persuasive summary of this point of view in unbiased language. How, if at all, did researching the opposing viewpoints affect your own?

The publications of Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564—1642) brought him in conflict with Roman Catholic Church authorities. What theory about the way the solar system is organized did Galileo's publications dispute, and why did the church see Galileo's theories as threatening? How long did it take the church to admit that errors had been made by the theological advisors in Galileo's case? What is the meaning of the statement *Eppur si muove* ("Nevertheless it does move"), attributed to Galileo after his trial for heresy?

What two plays written by Pierre de Beaumarchais (1732—1799) showed sympathy for underprivileged people and the lower classes? Who regarded these plays as threatening, and why? Which violent political upheaval did the plays foreshadow? Which composers were inspired to turn these plays into operas, and how, in turn, were those operas regarded by the authorities in the countries where they were originally performed?

What novel written by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811—1896) is thought to have been influential in ending slavery in the United States, and how was it received when it first appeared? How did pro-slavery advocates draw upon the Bible to support the practice of slavery? How, in contrast, did anti-slavery advocates use Christian beliefs to call for an end to slavery? What is Abraham Lincoln supposed to have said to Mrs. Stowe when they met?

What novel by Indian-born author Salman Rushdie (born 1947) caused Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to issue a *fatwa* (death sentence) on Rushdie? What was it about the novel that upset many Muslims, and how did they show their anger? Which people connected with the publication of the novel were harmed?

# What Do I Read Next?

*Walking Light: Memoirs and Essays on Poetry* (2001) is a collection of Dunn's prose about his life and his thoughts on poetry. In several of the essays, including "The Hand Reaching into the Crowd" and "A History of My Silence," Dunn connects his views on moral complexity to events in his own life.

*New and Selected Poems, 1974—1994* (1994) is Dunn's selection of poems that he considered his best from his first eight collections as well as poems that were new in 1994.

Dunn has said in an interview with Philip Dacey for the online journal the *Cortland Review* that Fyodor Dostoevsky, author of the novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879), was the "first writer to wholly take over my consciousness." *The Brothers Karamazov* demonstrates in its examination of mid-nineteenth century Russian religion, politics, and ethics the kind of tolerance for moral complexity that Dunn admired and brought to his own poems.

*The Trouble with Islam: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith* (2003) is a critique of fundamentalist Islam by Irshad Manji and a call for a return to the spirit of openness and independent reasoning that she asserts was a feature of the religion in its early years.

Religious Movements maintains a web site at http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu that explores the concept and history of fundamentalism in the Christian churches. The site includes external links and a bibliography.

*Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* (1993), edited by Carolyn Forché, is an anthology of poetry that collects the work of poets such as Anna Akhmatova, Federíco Garcia Lorca, and Nazim Hikmet, who lived in violent times or who struggled against regimes with repressive ideologies.

Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) is a novel with the political mission to educate readers about the culture and religious pressures that force some young women in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia to undergo genital circumcision.

Religious Tolerance maintains a web site at http://www.religioustolerance.org with information about the history of conflict between groups that want more religious expression allowed in the public sphere (schools, municipal buildings, etc.) and groups that want to keep religion strictly separate from the state.

# Further Study

Hirsch, Edward, *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*, Harcourt, 1999.

This book is a collection of essays about poems from all over the world and from many different eras and includes a glossary of poetic terms and a bibliography.

Morris, John Graves, "Imaginative Imperatives and Intimate Ruminations: An Interview with Stephen Dunn," in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, Issue 28, Spring—Summer 2001.

In this interview, which took place in 2000, Dunn discusses the writers and life events that influenced his own writing.

Nims, John Frederick, and David Mason, eds., *Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry*, 4th ed., McGraw Hill, 2000.

This book provides a guide to the different forms of poetry, including free verse, and an anthology of poetry in English.

Young, Dean, *Skid*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002.

To understand the wide variety of tone of early twenty-first-century American poetry, it is instructive to read Dean Young's poems in contrast with Dunn's. Dunn and Young share an obsession with mortality and have the same appetite for moral complexity. Wit is characteristic of both poets. But while Dunn's poems are plainspoken, Young's are wildly surreal; while Dunn is relatively well-behaved and restrained, Young is extravagant and mischievous.

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Romano, Carlin, "From Snack Sonnets to Pulitzer Poetry," in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 29, 2001.

Shelly, Kevin C., "Poetic Injustice," in *Philadelphia*, May 2002.

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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.

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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.

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□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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