The Seafarer Study Guide

The Seafarer by Anonymous

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Introduction

"The Seafarer" was first discovered in the *Exeter Book,* a hand-copied manuscript containing the largest known collection of Old English poetry, which is kept at Exeter Cathedral, England. "The Seafarer" has its origins in the Old English period of English literature, 450-1100, a time when very few people knew how to read or write. Old English (the predecessor of modern English) is the name given to the Germanic tongues brought to England by the invading tribes who crossed the English channel from Northern Europe. Old English resembles German and Scandinavian languages, and one cannot read it without at least one year of intense study. Even in its translated form, "The Seafarer" provides an accurate portrait of the sense of stoic endurance, suffering, loneliness, and spiritual yearning so characteristic of Old English poetry. "The Seafarer" is divisible into two sections, the first elegiac and the second didactic. "The Seafarer" can be read as two poems on separate subjects or as one poem moving between two subjects. Moreover, the poem can be read as a dramatic monologue, the thoughts of one person, or as a dialogue between two people. The first section is a painfully personal description of the suffering and mysterious attractions of life at sea. In the second section, the speaker makes an abrupt shift to moral speculation about the fleeting nature of fame, fortune, and life itself, ending with an explicitly Christian view of God as wrathful and powerful. In this section, the speaker urges the reader to forget earthly accomplishments and anticipate God's judgment in the afterlife. The poem addresses both pagan and Christian ideas about overcoming this sense of suffering and loneliness. For example, the speaker discusses being buried with treasure and winning glory in battle (pagan) and also fearing God's judgment in the afterlife (Christian). Moreover, "The Seafarer" can be thought of as an allegory discussing life as a journey and the human condition as that of exile from God on the sea of life. For comparison, read Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Whatever themes one finds in the poem, "The Seafarer" is a powerful account of a sensitive poet's interaction with his environment.

Poem Text

This tale is true, and mine. It tells
How the sea took me, swept me back
And forth in sorrow and fear and pain
Showed me suffering in a hundred ships,
In a thousand ports, and in me. It tells
Of smashing surf when I sweated in the cold
Of an anxious watch, perched in the bow
As it dashed under cliffs. My feet were cast
In icy bands, bound with frost,
With frozen chains, and hardship groaned
Around my heart. Hunger tore
At my sea-weary soul. No man sheltered
On the quiet fairness of earth can feel
How wretched I was, drifting through winter
On an ice-cold sea, whirled in sorrow,
Alone in a world blown clear of love,
Hung with icicles. The hailstorms flew.
The only sound was the roaring sea,
The freezing waves. The song of the swan
Might serve for pleasure, the cry of the sea-fowl,
The death-noise of birds instead of laughter,
The mewing of gulls instead of mead.
Storms beat on the rocky cliffs and were echoed

By icy-feathered terns and the eagle's screams;
No kinsman could offer comfort there,
To a soul left drowning in desolation.
And who could believe, knowing but
The passion of cities, swelled proud with wine
And no taste of misfortune, how often, how
wearily,
I put myself back on the paths of the sea.
Night would blacken; it would snow from the
north;
Frost bound the earth and hail would fall,
The coldest seeds. And how my heart
Would begin to beat, knowing once more
The salt waves tossing and the towering sea!
The time for journeys would come and my soul
Called me eagerly out, sent me over
The horizon, seeking foreigners' homes.
But there isn't a man on earth so proud,
So born to greatness, so bold with his youth,
Grown so grave, or so graced by God,
That he feels no fear as the sails unfurl,
Wondering what Fate has willed and will do.
No harps ring in his heart, no rewards,
No passion for women, no worldly pleasures,
Nothing, only the ocean's heave;

But longing wraps itself around him.
Orchards blossom, the towns bloom,
Fields grow lovely as the world springs fresh,
And all these admonish that willing mind
Leaping to journeys, always set
In thoughts traveling on a quickening tide.
So summer's sentinel, the cuckoo, sings
In his murmuring voice, and our hearts mourn
As he urges. Who could understand,
In ignorant ease, what we others suffer
As the paths of exile stretch endlessly on?
And yet my heart wanders away,
My soul roams with the sea, the whales'
Home, wandering to the widest corners
Of the world, returning ravenous with desire,
Flying solitary, screaming, exciting me
To the open ocean, breaking oaths
On the curve of a wave.
Thus the joys of God
Are fervent with life, where life itself
Fades quickly into the earth. The wealth
Of the world neither reaches to Heaven nor
remains.
No man has ever faced the dawn
Certain which of Fate's three threats

Would fall: illness, or age, or an enemy's
Sword, snatching the life from his soul.
The praise the living pour on the dead
Flowers from reputation: plant
An earthly life of profit reaped
Even from hatred and rancor, of bravery
Flung in the devil's face, and death
Can only bring you earthly praise
And a song to celebrate a place
With the angels, life eternally blessed
In the hosts of Heaven.
The days are gone
When the kingdoms of earth flourished in glory;
Now there are no rulers, no emperors,
No givers of gold, as once there were,
When wonderful things were worked among them
And they lived in lordly magnificence.
Those powers have vanished, those pleasures are
dead.
The weakest survives and the world continues,
Kept spinning by toil. All glory is tarnished.
The world's honor ages and shrinks,
Bent like the men who mold it. Their faces
Blanch as time advances, their beards
Wither and they mourn the memory of friends.

The sons of princes, sown in the dust.
The soul stripped of its flesh knows nothing
Of sweetness or sour, feels no pain,
Bends neither its hand nor its brain. A brother
Opens his palms and pours down gold
On his kinsman's grave, strewing his coffin
With treasures intended for Heaven, but nothing
Golden shakes the wrath of God
For a soul overflowing with sin, and nothing
Hidden on earth rises to Heaven.
We all fear God. He turns the earth,
He set it swinging firmly in space,
Gave life to the world and light to the sky.
Death leaps at the fools who forget their God.
He who lives humbly has angels from Heaven
To carry him courage and strength and belief.
A man must conquer pride, not kill it,
Be firm with his fellows, chaste for himself,
Treat all the world as the world deserves,
With love or with hate but never with harm,
Though an enemy seek to scorch him in hell,
Or set the flames of a funeral pyre
Under his lord. Fate is stronger
And God mightier than any man's mind.
Our thoughts should turn to where our home is,

Consider the ways of coming there,

Then strive for sure permission for us

To rise to that eternal joy,

That life born in the love of God

And the hope of Heaven. Praise the Holy

Grace of Him who honored us,

Eternal, unchanging creator of earth. Amen.

Plot Summary

Lines 1-5:

The elegiac, personal tone is established from the beginning. The speaker pleads to his audience about his honesty and his personal serf-revelation to come. He tells of the limitless suffering, sorrow, and pain and his long experience in various ships and ports. The speaker never explains exactly why he is driven to take to the ocean.

Lines 6-11:

Here, the speaker conveys intense, concrete images of cold, anxiety, stormy seas, and rugged shorelines. The comparisons relating to imprisonment are many, combining to drag the speaker into his prolonged state of anguish. The adverse conditions affect both his physical body (his feet) and his spiritual sense of worth (his heart).

Lines 12-16:

The loneliness and isolation of the speaker's ocean wanderings are emphasized in these lines. The speaker highlights the opposition between the comfortable landlubber and the anguished, lonely, frozen mariner. Alone physically and without a sense of connection to the rest of the human race, the seafarer pushes on in his suffering.

Lines 17-19:

The speaker returns to depicting his adverse environment and the inclement weather conditions of hail, high waves, cold, and wind.

Lines 20-26:

The first of several catalogues, or lists of items using similar grammatical structures, appears in these lines; here the speaker invokes the names of four specific sea-birds that serve as his sole companions. The birds' plaintive cries only emphasize the distance from land and from other people. The speaker says that the swan's song might serve for pleasure, but in his case it will not. The swans, gulls, terns, and eagles only increase the mariner's sense of abandonment and illumine the lack of warm, human compassion in his stormy ocean wandering. The speaker metaphorically drowns in his loneliness.

Lines 27-30:

The speaker constructs another opposition, one between himself and the comfortable city dweller who puffs himself up with pride and drink. This city person cannot possibly know of the seafarer's suffering. The wilderness experience of the speaker cannot be translated for the sheltered urban inhabitant. The landlocked man cannot possibly understand the seafarer's motives; however, like all people, he will eventually be held accountable for his choice of lifestyle. This theme becomes predominant in the poem's second half.

Lines 31-38:

The speaker again describes the changes in weather. As day turns to night and snow and hail rain down from black skies, the speaker says that he is once again drawn to his inexplicable wandering. The speaker cannot find words to say why he is magically pulled towards suffering and into foreign seaports. The phrase "seeking foreigners' homes" is a paradox, because, while he searches for the shelter of homes, the seafarer is isolated from the values represented by home: warmth, safety, compassion, friendship, and love.

Lines 39-43:

These lines introduce the central theme of the poem. The speaker displays his second catalogue, a list of earthy human virtues: pride, greatness, boldness, youth, seriousness, and grace. The speaker emphasizes that these virtues will all disappear, melting away in the presence of Fate. Even the person blessed with all these virtues feels fear at the onset of a journey on the sea. Thus, the speaker shows the possible allegorical reading that life itself is a journey on the raging sea; the seafarer may represent every person who must learn to rely on God's mercy and fear God's judgment.

Lines 44-46:

These lines continue the catalogue of worldly pleasures begun in line 39. The traveler on the stormy sea will never be comforted by harps, rewards, or the love of women, because he needs to wander and to face what Fate has in store for him. Readers should note that the concept of Fate, often described as a spinning wheel of fortune in Middle English poetry, is at odds with the Christian concept of divine providence or God's predestined plan.

Lines 47-57:

The speaker shifts away from deprivation and winter to fulfillment and summer. The imagery of orchards, flowers, and cities in bloom stands in stark contrast to that of icy winter winds and storms. The cuckoo, a bird of happiness and summer, contrasts with the earlier lists of winter ocean birds. The point is that these pleasant summer thoughts also bring the seafarer's wanderlust back again. The comfortable person mourns but does not understand the reason why he is called to abandon city life and search the frozen, stormy seas. Suffering and exile are not lessons well learned in good weather with city comforts; thus, the speaker implies that everyone must experience deprivation at sea to learn life's most important lesson□reliance on God.

Lines 58-64:

In this conclusion of the first major section, the seafarer says that his mind and heart constantly seek to roam the sea because that is acceptance of life itself. The paradox of the seafarer's excitement at beginning the journey shows his acceptance of suffering to come. Despite knowing of the isolation and deprivation, the speaker still is driven to resume his life at sea. Breaking his ties with humanity, the speaker expresses his thrill at returning to his tortuous wandering.

Lines 65-68:

The speaker announces the theme of the second section: that the joys of accepting God's will far exceed any form of wealth or earthly pleasure. Earthly wealth cannot reach heaven, nor can it transcend life. This section grows less personal and becomes mostly theological and didactic in nature.

Lines 69-72:

Describing three ways of death, the speaker says that no man is certain how life will end. The violent nature of Anglo-Saxon society is described by the possibility of death by an enemy's sword.

Lines 73-81:

The speaker writes that one wins a reputation through battle and bravery that only earthly praise comes to warriors who take risks and perform great feats in battle. In this section, one imagines the creation of funeral fires, songs, and shrines in honor of the great warriors.

Lines 82-88:

The speaker says the days of glory and honor have passed. Another catalogue laments the lack of rulers, emperors, gold-givers, and lords. The power of the nobles and aristocrats has vanished; glory must be sought in other ways than through bravery in battle.

Lines 89-95:

The theme of lost glory is continued. The speaker uses the simile of faded glory being like old men who remember their former youth. The old men turn white, their beards grow thin, and they mourn the memory of departed companions. The sons of nobles who formerly fought to win glory in battle are now dust on the ground.

Lines 96-98:

The speaker focuses on the spiritual aspect of life after death and how the soul knows no earthly comforts; the soul removed from the body feels nothing and cares nothing for fame.

Lines 99-101:

The metaphor of a brother placing gold coins on his kinsman's coffin shows the uselessness of wealth and reputation to the dead. The speaker writes that all earthly wealth and fame are meaningless in the next world. God's anger against a sinful person cannot be reduced at any price; thus, the speaker urges all to heed the warning not to get taken in by wealth and fame.

Lines 102-107:

The speaker shifts to the final, concluding section of the poem, the most religious part of "The Seafarer." The speaker writes that all fear God because He created the earth and the heavens. God moves everything on earth and in the skies, according to the speaker.

Lines 108-116:

The speaker presents his final catalogue, a list of lessons or commandments to be learned by the humble person who fears his judgment day. According to the seafarer, each wise person must be humble, strong, courageous, chaste, firm with his friends, and never resort to violence even if enemies seek to burn and destroy him. The man who thinks about God will be comforted by angels.

Lines 117-124:

The speaker admonishes that God and Fate are more powerful than any person's will. According to the seafarer, people should always consider God's purpose and think of their final resting place in heaven, their home. Here, the speaker talks of the joys, love, and hope that he feels await the faithful in heaven.

Lines 124-126:

The poem ends in a prayer of praise to God, the eternal creator of earth and its life. The traditional ending "Amen" raises the question about how, if at all, the concluding section connects or fails to connect with the more passionate, emotional song of the forsaken seafarer adrift on the inhospitable waves in the first section.

Themes

Alienation and Loneliness

As a poetic genre, elegy generally portrays sorrow and longing for the better days of times past. To conjure up its theme of longing, "The Seafarer" immediately thrusts the reader deep into a world of exile, hardship, and loneliness. The speaker of the poem describes his feelings of alienation in terms of physical privation and suffering: "My feet were cast / In icy bands, bound with frost, / With frozen chains, and hardship groaned / Around my heart" (8b-1 1a). The cold that seizes his feet, immobilized in the hull of his open-aired ship while sailing across a wintry sea, corresponds to the anguish that clasps his mind. "Alone in a world blown clear of love," he listens to the cries of various birds whose calls take the place of human laughter, and he must sojourn with these feathered forces of nature without the warmth of the human bonds of kith and kin. For those whose cultural ideals exalt the fiercely solitary self-made individualist who struggles alone without help from family or friends, the poignancy of these lines may not be evident. Modern readers must remember that the Anglo-Saxon world was held together by a web of relationships of both family and fealty. Such a sense of isolation as the seafarer suffers in this poem was tantamount to a kind of psychic death for the people of that time. Because of his social separation, in fact, a *wr 'ce,* that is, an "exile" or "wanderer" in Old English, was most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of Fate mentioned in this poem. Without the human web of close interrelationships, he was more likely to be stricken down by "illness, or age, or an enemy's / Sword" (71-72a).

Human Condition

Despite the seafarer's miserable seclusion while at sea, yet another inward longing propels him to return to the source of his sorrow. The human condition, universal in so many ways and per-during through time and across cultural differences, consists of a fragile balance between longing and loathing. How often have people found themselves in a "love-hate" relationship with a job or avocation or, even worse, with another person?" Those who dwell in the safety of cities, well-fed and used to the pleasures of wine and song, cannot understand the "push-pull" the seafarer must endure. But the seafarer's equivocal position itself becomes a metaphor for the uncertainties and contradictions inherent within life itself: "Thus the joys of God / Are fervent with life, where life itself / Fades quickly into the earth. The wealth / Of the world neither reaches to Heaven nor remains" (65-69). These lines, so redolent of both sadness and resignation, find echoes throughout Western literature, whether of Christian *contemptu mundi* ("contempt of the world") or of existentialist angst before the absurd meaninglessness of life. The seafarer's response lies somewhere between these two opposing poles in the history of European thought. The Germanic heroic ideal of finding immortality in the living memory of one's people combines with the Christian goal of receiving a reward in the afterlife to give meaning to the seafarer's struggles in this world of pain, unfulfilled need, and unremitting sorrow.

Memory and Reminiscence

Yet a greater source of sadness for the seafarer lies in the disparity he sees between the present "fallen" world when compared to the glorious world of yore. The Germanic heroic era from the times of the great tribal migrations that ended the Western Roman Empire has been preserved in the literatures of the British Saxons, the Icelandic Norse, and the continental Germans who had remained in the older tribal areas of the Germanic peoples. These were the times of brave exploits that overwhelm and diminish any current glory: "Now there are no rulers, no emperors, / No givers of gold, as once there were, / When wonderful things were worked among them / And they lived in lordly magnificence. / Those powers have vanished, those pleasures are dead." (84-88). The contemporary world fares poorly in comparison: "The weakest survives and the world continues, / Kept spinning by toil. All glory is tarnished. / The world's honor ages and shrinks, / Bent like the men who mold it" (89-92). Like the Greeks before them, the Germanic peoples had a sense of the passing of a "Golden Age." One perhaps detects in the speaker's words a deeper longing for a wilder, more exhilarating time before the "civilization" brought by Christendom. Despite the poem's overt appeals to a Christian God, the memory of pagan heroism haunts "The Seafarer" with elegiac longing and explains why the speaker of the poem would seek out the pain and danger of seafaring as an alternative to the more settled life of the town. On the other hand, all the speaker's dissatisfaction with the world as it is also reveals a genuine expression of Christian revulsion before the fleeting emptiness of life. The very ambiguity of the two themes truly sustains the poem's force as good literature in spite of cultural changes over the years.

Style

"The Seafarer" was probably first sung by a poet in the mead-halls of princes and kings, accompanied by the traditional instrument, the harp; thus the communal and oral nature of ancient poetry is reflected in the poem's structure.

Old English poetry has a special structure. In its original form, each line is divided symmetrically into two halves, one stressed and the other unstressed in its emphasis. To better appreciate what Old English looks like, here are the first two lines, untranslated, of "The Seafarer":

Maeg ic be me selfum soth-gied wrecan, Sithas secgan hu ic geswinc-dagum

"The Seafarer" has two major parts, lines 1-64 (part 1) and lines 65-126 (part 2). Some scholars consider the poem a dramatic monologue by the same speaker moving between two subjects; others think the poem is a dialogue between a young, inexperienced sailor and an old, wise veteran of the sea giving advice about life's ultimate rewards. The poem has many repeated words and phrases that sound familiar, probably because they are borrowed from other sources such as the Psalms in the Bible. Missionaries from the Mediterranean and Ireland came to the native Celts in England during the 7th century; priests and monks may have transcribed old poetry and added their Christian views to a previously secular poem.

Old English poetry tends to use alliteration and rhythm. Another distinctive feature of Old English that is found in "The Seafarer" is kennings or compound words like "sea-fowl" or "whales' home." These compound words show how the speaker attempts to formulate new concepts in poetry working with a limited vocabulary. The many concrete, descriptive words show how part of an oral, traditional culture is preserved by the poets who sang these songs. The poem's vivid metaphors and images sharply portray the seafarer's tumultuous experience as he is tossed around in a boat on the wind-whipped ocean.

Historical Context

Without the interest of Church leaders and the patronage of West Saxon kings, modern readers would have no Old English literature to speak of. While the so-called Anglo-Saxon period of English history extends from 449 to 1066□from the beginning of the conquest of Britain by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, through the invasions and partial conquest of northern England by the Danish-and Norse-speaking Vikings, and until the defeat of the last Saxon King, Harold, by William the Conqueror□the literary period of the Old English peoples really only began after the conversion of these tribes to Christianity. Previous to this event, the literature of the migrating bands had been entirely oral. It consisted of ancient verse forms employing repeated stress patterns and alliteration, and it celebrated heroic figures of even earlier periods. But none of this oral literature could have survived the further invasions and cultural changes that later befell Britain if the tribes had not converted to Christianity and learned the art of letters. Furthermore, since the literate elite of the earlier part of this six-hundred-year period were almost entirely monks and other churchmen, without the abiding interest of ecclesiastical authorities in their ancestors' pagan roots, none of the poetry of the Angles and Saxons would have ever obtained to writing. Still, it was King Alfred (849-899) and his successors in Wessex who vigorously collected and preserved the literary heritage of their ancestors while extending the body of literature through translation and fresh composition.

"The Seafarer," an elegy and not a traditional Germanic epic (though an epic like *Beowulf* itself had elegiac sections), actually carries within itself evidence of a melding of cultures between Anglo-Saxons and the British. This merging points to a developing cultural synthesis between native and invader that was brought to an end by William's conquest with his French-speaking Viking retainers. The fact is that by the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, a body of English literature, an evolving amalgam of Germanic, Celtic, and Latin sources, was thriving with a growing readership, maturing in sophistication and complexity, and exploring new genres and themes. The Norman invasion cut off a process of development in English literature that would only begin again under entirely different cultural circumstances three hundred years later during the so-called "high" Middle Ages. Although modern readers are separated from the body of surviving Old English literature by the cultural watersheds of the Norman invasion, the Reformation and Renaissance, and the emergence of the present postmodern and post-Christian era, we must "stretch" our imaginations enough to try to appreciate this literature through the cultural lens of its original audience and understand it as a fascinating intermingling of pagan and Christian elements that conjoined Mediterranean, Celtic, and Germanic cultures into a surprising new aggregate.

The first Germanic people in Britain were hired by a British king named Vortigern as mercenaries to defend the Romanized Britons against their more barbaric cousins, the Caledonian Picts, to the north in what is now called Scotland. These hired guns were promised land in return for protection. Even though they were unlettered and uncivilized, Hengist and Horsa, the leaders of these expeditionary forces, quickly ascertained the social and military situation of the demilitarized Celts who had ceased from being

warlike after nearly four hundred years of Roman rule. These early Anglian settlers sent swift word across the North Sea to their relatives, the Saxons, Angles, and Jutes, to migrate over to these fresh lands which lay ready for seizure. The invaders quickly and easily gained a foothold in Britain and began pushing back the native Celts towards modern Wales and Cornwall in Great Britain and Brittany in northwestern France.

Ironically, however, the military conquest by the Angles and Saxons of the Celtic homeland began the cultural and spiritual conquest of these Germanic pagans by the Celtic Christians. TheIrish Church, founded by St. Patrick (390-460), himself a Romano-Briton, took on the task of evangelizing the new invaders. Early Irish monastic foundations in Lindisfarne and other sites spread not only a new faith but the cultural remnants of Rome's Mediterranean civilization to the unlettered rulers. One by one, the "kings" of the Germanic "kin" saw the cultural advantages of embracing the new religion. Still, the coming of St. Augustine (who died in 607), an envoy sent by Pope St. Gregory the Great to extend the power of the Roman Church into northern Europe, sped up the Christianization process. The Roman and Celtic clergy, representing very different liturgical and theological traditions, finally made peace and common cause at the Synod of Whitby in 664.

The epic *Beowulf* provides us a wonderful glimpse into early Germanic cultural life. In one scene, a "scop" takes up a chanted narrative of past and present exploits in the "mead-hall," where warrior retainers sit drunk but attentive to the singer-poet's measured recitation. Once Christianization was complete, however, the work of the secular scop as entertainer and tribal historian was at first supplemented and eventually taken over by the monastic scribe, who not only committed earlier poems to writing but also composed works of his own. One such work, "The Seafarer," definitely represents a movement beyond the traditional epic form, however. In many respects, "The Seafarer" echoes themes that abound in Welsh verse: longing for times past, sympathetic responses to the speaker's lament in the voices of birds, and so forth. Perhaps composed in the seventh century at the Mercian borderland between Anglian intruder and native Briton in the west Midlands, "The Seafarer" embodies the blending of pagan and Christian, Germanic and Celtic traditions that was the cultural promise of those times.

But more than this process of gradual cultural coalescence ended with the coming of the Normans. The entire social fabric that had existed among lord, retainer, and serf changed irrevocably as French-speaking usurpers took the place of paternalistic clan leaders. The death of the Anglo-Saxon cultural nexus meant the real birth of Feudalism in England.

Critical Overview

Most of the commentary on "The Seafarer" centers around the Christian messages and rhetoric in the second half of the poem and tries to argue whether a submerged paganism may be found beneath the Christian ideas. Some critics believe the second half of the poem was added later by a Christian scribe who found or heard an earlier Germanic or Celtic narrative poem. Critics are also interested in deciding how many speakers are present in the poem. Dorothy Whitelock argues in *Early Cultures in North-West Europe* that the poem should be read as a monologue. Whitelock posits that the speaker is a religious person who deliberately chose a life of wandering as a means of taming his senses in preparation for the joys and rewards of the afterlife. Whitelock demonstrates the prevalence of such views in Anglo-Saxon literature and writes that the seafarer would see no contradiction between his ascetic life being tossed on icy waves and his abstract yearning for God in the second half. I. L. Gordon in *The Review of English Studies* agrees, suggesting that despite apparent structural discrepancies and transitions, the poem should be accepted as the work of one person. The poem's tension between dramatic and moralistic tendencies is part of the poet's exploration of the theme of suffering, transience, and isolation. However, Gordon believes it is the elegiac background of the poem□not the Christian message□that gives "The Seafarer" its real uniqueness.

W. A. Davenport in *Papers on Language and Literature* argues that the modern reader is most attracted to the personal voice of suffering and the sympathetic evocation of pain in the first part. Davenport believes that the voice of "a distant poet speaking directly across the centuries about passion and longing" contradicts the second half and its impersonal, religious views. Thus the poem must be read as imperfect and corrupted by the later additions. The modern reader cannot accept both parts as the work of one poet; readers end up seeing it as the expression of two minds, therefore as an antithetical and ironic poem. C. L. Wrenn in^ *Study of Old English Literature* also focuses on the poem as a dialogue of inner voices depicting the Anglo-Saxon love of the sea and its alternate pains and turmoil. Wrenn describes "The Seafarer" as the most poetic of all Old English elegies; perhaps this is why several modern poets such as Ezra Pound have translated it. Wrenn believes the poem's catalogue of various ways of death (line 71) must have been borrowed from a Latin tradition. Also, "The Seafarer's idea of penance, pilgrimage, and deliberate exile from ties with human society is especially Irish in its nature, perhaps inherited by the Anglo-Saxon poet from the influence of Irish Christianity.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

MichaelLake

Michael Lake, a published poet who holds an M.A. in English from Eastern Illinois University, currently teaches English in a Denver area community college. In the following essay, Lake examines the manner in which language informs "The Seafarer."

If every artistic act is ultimately a social act, then poems as verbal artifacts cannot be removed from their social milieu, the totality of ambient conditions and circumstances existing among poet and audience at the time of the poems' creation and reception. In other words, poems as socially and temporally conditioned expressions of meaning can only be decoded from within psycho-social and intellectual perspectives of the era in which they were written and first read. But if this is so, we may well ask whether any poem like "The Seafarer" could ever be understood on its own merits by a modern reader without a full critical and historical commentary supplying any defect in information that reader might have. Is it then possible for modern readers to engage "The Seafarer" as they would any other poem from any other era using a kind of reader's response to help craft its meaning for themselves? Perhaps this dichotomy is false. Maybe the fact that artistic acts are social acts also means that modern readers actually constitute an extension of the original poem's audience. However, the problem is not just how modern readers can join that audience but how the structure of the poem itself conveys its meaning to readers who sometimes must eavesdrop as a class of cultural and temporal tourists.

In the case of "The Seafarer", the first consideration is that of language. Unless readers invest a lot of time studying Old English, they cannot read the poem in its original form because the divergence between the Englishes of the poem's writer and today's readers actually constitutes two different languages. Readers must then depend upon the skills of translators to render the poem's actual meaning, if not its prosodic music. The problem with this compromise, however, is that the original poem depends upon structural relationships that only exist within the original language. Replicating such verbal effects in translation is nigh unto impossible because of the different syntactical dynamics that exist in the original and the receiving languages. Still, despite these difficulties, one can yet discern rhetorical and poetic features that structure the meaning of the poem even in translation. Realizing that what the poem means really resides in how the poem works as a vehicle of meaning, readers can approach interpreting "The Seafarer" confident of understanding and appreciating a poem whose cultural as well as linguistic particularities are so unlike their own.

Adopting a realistic, matter-of-fact approach towards discovering meaning within the poem's rhetorical structure prevents readers from falling into further false dichotomies, like asking whether "The Seafarer" should be read literally or allegorically. Accepting the inherent ambiguity of the poem without a specific need to resolve all thematic disparities allows readers to reconcile the interrelated themes of isolation, loneliness, human and divine comfort, the desire for earthly and heavenly glory, and the ultimate emptiness of

all earthly endeavors within the poem's inherent metaphysical presumptions about the nature of reality.

First, it must be said that out of all the cultural threads woven together in this poem, the pagan, both Germanic and Celtic, the heroic, the elegiac, the lay, and the Christian, the Christian thread holds the whole together. The poet who wrote "The Seafarer" (most likely a monk) brought together all the cultural riches at his disposal at the time to craft an ultimately Christian poem. This poem uses image, metaphor, irony, and allusion to craft its tale, just as any modern poem would, but it also employs a specifically medieval device: a moral. The moral of the poem can only be approached from within polar opposition. For, after all, the moral of the poem is that all opposites find resolution in God, the ultimate reality.

At its very beginning, the poem presents its first polar opposition: the deprivations of a life at sea with all its heavy cares versus the carefree life on the land. However, there is at the same time another polarity balancing the speaker's physical against his spiritual suffering: that which tears at the flesh as opposed to that which afflicts the soul. On both planes of opposition, though, the poem proceeds from generalities to specifics to draw its descriptive contrasts. It is clear from the beginning that the speaker's pain is both physical and psychic insofar as the sea "swept me back / And forth in sorrow and fear and pain" (2b-3). External and internal suffering are then set in a balance, so to speak. On the one side, we have a crystal image of the speaker's physical situation "when [he] sweated in the cold / Of an anxious watch, perched in the bow / As it dashed under cliffs" (6b-8a) with his "feet... cast / In icy bands, bound with frost, / With frozen chains" (8b-10a). And on the other we glimpse the speaker's interior condition given how the sea has "[s] ho wed me suffering" (4a) (that is, given him *"bitre breostceare"* or "bitter breast-care"), how "hardship groaned / Around my heart (10b-11a), and how "Hunger tore / At my sea-weary soul" (11b-12a). Taken together, the two opposites present an interesting duality: on one side we have a cold image of the frost acting as a fetter, and on the other, we have a rather "hot" image of care clasping the heart. In both his inner and outer dimensions, then, the speaker does not share the reality of those who enjoy the comfort of the land: "No man sheltered / On the quiet fairness of earth can feel / How wretched I was" (12b-14a).

The next few lines reinforce the poem's initial polarity and provide more concrete images of the speaker's inner and outer circumstances. With the concrete experience of a year at sea, the speaker knows full well the "paths of the exile" (15) *("wraeccan lastum"* in Old English) far from the erstwhile comforts afforded by the communion of "friendly kinsmen" (16) *("winemae gum"* in the original text). Unfortunately, here is where Raffel's text may fall down in relation to the original, because he has translated *"wraecca,"* the wretch banished into exile far from the protection of the tribe, as one "wretched" and "whirled in sorrow," and the comforts of the kinsmen are lost in "a world blown clear of love." But the concrete images of being berimed, "[hung with icicles," while "hailstorms flew" in showers about him carries forth the feeling of the original and reinforces the isolation and enclosure of the opening lines. Where Raffel's translation really fails is in setting up in the reader's mind the full significance of a dichotomy yet to be fully explored: the polarity between the isolated "exile" far from the support system of

the "kin," and the pagan and earthly joys and protections afforded by the *"duguth,"* the fighting band and extended family of any member of Anglo-Saxon society. In fact, the word only occurs twice in the poem, once properly translated as "host" (as in "heavenly host") in line 81a and another time incorrectly translated as "powers" in line 88. The opposition between the existential isolation of the *"wraecca"* and the communal life within a *"duguth,"* however, is fulcrum that moves the whole of *"The Seafarer"* to its ultimately Christian conclusion.

Hearing naught but the "roaring sea," the seafarer-exile evokes the life on land within a *"duguth"* by imagining the "song of the swan," the "cry of the sea-fowl," and the "croaking of birds" to take the place of human "laughter," and the "mewing of gulls" to replace the joys of the mead-hall where the warrior band (or *"duguth")* would gather to socialize and "recreate." Yet the fantasy fails because the bird voices that had feigned comfort are replaced with shrieks that drive home the seafarer-exile's utter loneliness, where "[no] kinsman could offer comfort there, / To a soul left drowning in desolation" (25-26). Basically, the "sea versus land" dichotomy has been expanded to include the "exile *("wraecca")* bereft of *'duguth"'* polarity as well. All of these images serve to extend themes already established, however, by providing a new set of implied contrasts but with tactile and auditory stimuli embellishing an already developed aural style. Still, the images contrast with one another without an expressed relationship between them.

Nevertheless, even as the poem progresses toward a more detailed, concrete, and individualized expression of the speaker's existential experience, the imagery tends to "flatten out" a bit into a repetitive remonstration that those who live in "cities" *("in burgum")* have no idea "how wearily /I put myself back on the paths of the sea" (29b-30). Still, notice how a new polarity is conjured here between the "passion of cities, swelled proud with wine" and the seafarer-exile's resigned return to the "paths of the sea" ^*brimlade"* in the original). This contrast actually sets up a later dichotomy between ascetic determination and earthly recklessness.

The real significance of the passage is that it leads to a reversal of the conditions first described in the poem. Indeed, one could say that a climax and a thematic shift change the direction of the whole poem here. Instead of on the sea, the frost and hail now fall on the land and bind the land fast, not the speaker's feet, and the speaker's "heart," instead of suffering with care, begins "to beat, knowing once more / The salt waves tossing and the towering sea!" (34-35). Though some may say that the shift is sudden and unexpected, the fact is that such an opinion assumes that the poem fails to eliminate the polarities between sea-exile-woe and *land-duguth-weal* or that the poem has failed to clarify the distinction between the internal and external states of the speaker. Lines 31-33a provide abridge from one set of polar opposites to another, a transformed set of contraries that actually reverse the order of the earlier polar hierarchy so that the life on the sea appears as a new higher good as opposed to that on land. The only way this sudden shift makes sense, however, is from within the subsuming perspective of the whole poem. And this perspective is that life anywhere outside of God's presence is bound to be hardship and suffering. As far as the speaker is now concerned at this point of the poem, "the mind's desire urges ... the spirit to travel" (a perhaps more literal rendition of lines 36-37 than Raffel's).

The fact is that the poet calls forth images and then qualifies his view of them while still keeping alive in the reader's mind the evanescent effects of the original images already so graphically depicted. Even though this may cause confusion for some, it bespeaks a kind of stylistical sophistication to others. While reaffirming the contrast between lifestyle on the land with the seafaring life at sea, the speaker brings up God for the first time in the next passage (39-46). In this mix, God cannot be ignored by anyone on the sea, where no one knows "what Fate has willed and will do" (43). This may not be so for landlubbers, because the same polarity already mentioned shows up again at this point of the poem. The ascetic seafaring life now contrasts with a looser and more frivolous life on the land, where "harps ring in [one's] heart" (44) and "passion for women" and "worldly pleasure" (45) play off against "the ocean's heave" (46). As stated above, the dichotomies remain in opposition to each other, but the contrariety between the elements has shifted. The privations of the sea are now a type for moral and spiritual purgation that sets seafaring at a higher moral order than the safe life within the *"duguth."* Still, the skill of the poet as rhetorician prevents him from pressing home his point just yet. He merely evokes an order of discontent that perhaps transcends the sufferings laid out earlier in the poem: "ac *a hafath longunge se the on lagu fundath,"* that is, "but ever hath longing he who sets out to sea" (Raffel has "But longing wraps itself around him"). It is as yet unclear whether this "longing" is for the carnal life of the settled land or for something higher.

Nonetheless, the fresh fullness of life burgeoning on earth in the spring is perhaps at least one part of the speaker's "longing." The change of spring in the air also spells the beginning of other sea journeys for "that willing mind / Leaping to journeys, always set / In thoughts traveling on a quickening tide" (50b-52). The fact that the mind is now "willing" or "eager" *("fusne"* in the Old English) to make its sea journey bespeaks a literal "sea-change" in the speaker's attitudes towards the seagoing life. And again, nature provides some response to the speaker's interior condition with the mournful cries of the springtime cuckoo, "summer's sentinel." Where the calls of the hatchling cuckoo may signify the fructification of the earth by nature to some, it may here bring about a polar opposite response. Here it reminds the speaker of the coming of "death's sentinel," the sea journey itself. As the speaker redundantly repeats, "Who could understand, / In ignorant ease, what we others suffer / As the paths of exile stretch endlessly on?" Perhaps only the cuckoo knows and answers with an equivocal call of invitation and warning.

The "push-pull" of the cuckoo's cry truly reflects the speaker's inner state of mind, in which his "heart wanders away" and his "soul roams with the sea," "returning ravenous with desire." The speaker's "soul" now flies "solitary, screaming, exciting me / To the open ocean, breaking oaths / On the curve of a wave" (62-64). These are a far cry from his earlier states of mind towards seafaring. The only explanation for this change of view can be found in the next section of the poem: all "the joys of God / Are fervent with life, where life itself / Fades quickly into the earth" (65-67). Only the "joys of God" are "fervent with life" while life itself is ephemeral. At last, the reason for the puzzling shift in perspective in lines 31-33a has become clearer. Life on the earth itself, whether with one's kinsmen or alone on the sea, is itself "empty" and "vain." Even the greatest strivings one can endure will only earn feeble praise, whether from earthly supporters or

even heavenly hosts. The only surety in life is death, and only God can give death meaning. Despite making the thematic shift more understandable, the poet as yet has still not succeeded in closing the structure of his hierarchy of goods upon the transcendent *sine qua non* that holds his opposing polarities in order.

Before getting to that, the poet shifts the poem's outlook yet again with a hefty section of elegiac reflection from 82 to 104 in Raffel's translation. One can't really call this section a "lament" as such because of the healthy dose of Christian transience that underpins its *Weltanschauung.* A lament, properly speaking, would resound with despair, not with acquiescence. Here the vanity of life on earth is almost rattled off like a shopping list of "things to expect if you're alive." There isn't any whining or mourning about it all, really, just the cold, hard facts that all things put together fall apart. Those scholars who have labored long at fashioning this section as some kind of pagan elegy (Celtic or Germanic) fail to see the poet's examples of indictments of the tribal *"duguth"* to escape loss and privation. The loss of heroic times says more about the nature of time itself than whether or not pagan times were being missed in this passage. Notice how the passing of glory is attended with the giving of gold in this passage, much as with any pagan burial custom, "but nothing / Golden shakes the wrath of God / For a soul overflowing with sin, and nothing / Hidden on earth rises to Heaven."

In this last section of the poem, all the conflicting polarities finally find resolution. The hierarchy of conflicting goods ultimately rises up to the top, for God alone is the unchanging good, and losing the joy of His presence is the ultimate evil. Rather than being fools who "forget," we should remember that "God [is] mightier than any man's mind" and our "thoughts should turn to where our home is." At last it is clear that neither being a "wretched" exile nor being *"duguth"* member can solve these deeper existential issues in themselves. To set sail into harrowing circumstances or to stay in the safety of the tribal band is all one when viewed from a transcendental point of view. All of life is a transitory journey, a brief sojourning before death takes all, good or bad. The "moral" of this medieval poem is that whatever we do, we should " [c]onsider the ways of coming there, / Then strive for sure permission for us / To rise to that eternal joy, / That life born in the love of God / And the hope of Heaven" (120-124). Otherwise, we merely suffer the pains of our exile without salvation ever finding us.

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

Bruce Meyer is the director of the creative writing program at the University ofToronto. He has taught at several Canadian universities and is the author of three collections of poetry. In the following essay, Meyer contends that "The Seafarer" describes a harsh, lonely, and fallen world that one must navigate through to reach one's true home in heaven.

The world that is presented in many Anglo-Saxon poems, such as "The Seafarer," is a cold, cruel place. It is a world that has only one redeeming feature□God's grace□and even that is mitigated by an overwhelming sense of entropy that pervades everything. As is the case in another notable Anglo-Saxon poem, "The Wanderer," the civilized world is perceived as something that has passed from immediate view and remains only

a faint memory, a series of ruins that suggest that the past was greater than the present. For the poetic personas of this world, there is a profound sense of living in a diminished universe, of a place less great than the past. What this sense of diminishment evokes is a deep sense of insecurity and rootless-ness in the present, a notable absence of order, and a grave sense of grief that is reflected, organically, in the inhospitableness of nature. In short, the world we encounter in many Anglo-Saxon poems is the realm of the elegy. Nature has fallen and taken the survivors with it.

In "The Seafarer," "The days are gone / When kingdoms of earth flourished in glory." The Anglo-Saxon mind located itself in a time and place that offered few creature comforts; it perceived its place in the continuum as having come after the great events of history and in the wake of the Roman Empire and its splendor. Like the vacuum we encounter in a more modern rendering of the same theme, Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead," the world presents a meager offering of possibilities, and the future is a stark, if not totally bleak, prospect. Life can only be filled with a restlessness because the absence of greatness is so tremendously encountered. The world of the Anglo-Saxon poem is place of ruins, a cold, "darkling plain" (to borrow the phrase from Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach") where the persona wanders homelessly from one place to the next, all the time feeling the bite and sting of a fallen Nature. One always has the feeling when reading Anglo-Saxon poetry that the world is locked in a perpetual winter, and in the chronology of English poetry, we really do not encounter a convincing thematic springtime until Geoffrey Chaucer returns from Italy in 1370 with the iambic line under his belt and the first inklings of the Renaissance Italian mind dancing fancifully on the road to Canterbury.

In the case of "The Seafarer," there is an Aeneas-like drive in the persona toward that "ever-retreating horizon," a restlessness that can perceive a better world where "Orchards blossom" and "towns bloom" but which is driven by an inward anxiety where "longing wraps around him" and his "heart wanders away." In this world, Nature is not man's respite, as it will become centuries later during the early Romantic era, but an animate, almost Ovidian setting where the elements work against human intention. The voice of "The Seafarer" explains in the second line that his life, "This tale" of "mine," is about "How the sea took me, swept me back / And forth in sorrow and fear and pain / Showed me suffering in a hundred ships, / In a thousand ports, and in me." The sea, a handy surrogate for Nature in these opening lines, takes the form of a nemesis in much the same way that Poseidon was the nemesis of Odysseus in *The Odyssey.* But unlike the very pointed intentions of the Greek gods who diced with so many fates in the vast scope of the Homeric universe, there is a blitheness to Anglo-Saxon nature, an ethos of misery for which Man, in the Christian context, is ultimately to blame. This is the realm of fallen Nature, where Man's free will, the very force that drives the seafarer anxiously from port to port, becomes his tormentor. The individual, in this context, is very much alone. He must bear, almost as an Everyman, the weight of a fallen world. Lament it as he may, there is no respite. The lot of the individual is so universal and so shared as the common destiny of humanity that there is no room for solace among shipmates, and everyone, ultimately, is a loner.

What is curious about Anglo-Saxon poetic personas is their capacity to pursue loneliness. The persona of "The Seafarer" finds some brief consolation in "the song of the swan" that "might serve for pleasure, the cry of the sea-fowl, / The croaking of birds instead of laughter, / The mewing of gulls instead of mead" or "The passion of cities swelled proud with wine / And no taste of misfortune." Yet he continually trudges back, "wearily, "on the paths of the sea." What calls him back "eagerly" is his "soul." The suggestion here is that the world is a place without peace or repose, that pleasure and comfort are illusions because they too, like the glories of the past, quickly fade from sight. One is reminded of the Latin maxim *sic transit gloria mundi* (so passes the glory of the world) as a kind of operative axiom behind the Seafarer's psychology. On the one hand, the Seafarer needs to tell his story and relate his hardships in a world that is far from accommodating, while on the other he feels an obligation, in the Boethian sense, to perceive the wonder of Nature as God's work and to offer, accordingly, the correct response of praise, even if he must struggle to praise God through a litany of meteorological misery.

The key to understanding "The Seafarer" lies in the relationship between its form and its content. As a poem, it is a complex set of paradoxes. On one hand, it complains about how awful it is to live in Nature, while on the other hand it offers praises and thanks to God for a world "fervent with life, where life itself / Fades quickly into the earth." There is not much to celebrate here, yet that is how the poem ends. The poem is a mixture of forms: a prayer to the glories of God with an Amen tucked neatly at the end; a narrative that tells of a life of hardship, suffering and anxiety; and an elegy that acknowledges a loss or imbalance in Nature and grieves over the perceived absence. As a prayer to God, the poem asks for God's grace to see the seafarer through his constant journeys and travails and presents a thankful praise to God who "Gave life to the world and light to the sky." The poem is also narrative that recounts with a balance of almost epic objectivity and personal involvement the harshness of the world and the difficulties of moving through a nature that, although of God's making, is not "user friendly" to the average mortal. But it is as an elegy that the poem speaks loudest. The reader is not quite sure what has been lost in Nature or what has made conditions so lamentable, but he is aware that "The praise the living pour on the dead / Flowers from reputation: plant / An earthly life of profit reaped / Even from hatred and rancor, of bravery / Flung in the devil's face, and death / Can only bring you earthly praise / And a song to celebrate a place / With the angels ..." In other words, as Thomas Gray put it, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

The great elegiac question then arises: what is the purpose of life, and to this the poem answers to "fear God." "Death," he notes, "leaps at the fools who forget their God. / He who lives humbly has angels from Heaven / To carry him courage and strength and belief." The relationship between God and the fallen, miserable world of the poem is that of an exemplum and an argument. The world is an example of God's handiwork, yet it has fallen because of human weakness. The Seafarer warns, "Treat all the world as the world deserves / With love or with hate but never with harm" because "Fate is stronger / And God mightier than any man's mind." In essence, the world's misery is a contrasting example to God's goodness and capabilities. The hardships, the pain, and the sufferings are set before Man to remind him of the glories of Heaven, because Heaven

is "where our home is." To be an outcast in the world is only a paltry issue; to be an outcast from God is a pretty serious consequence. The allegory here is that humankind is meant to "navigate" the world in order to find that true home that always seems to be retreating on the horizon□a home called Heaven. The Seafarer notes, "To rise to that eternal joy, / That life born in the love of God / And the hope of Heaven" is the goal that lies beyond the hardship, the port at the end of the storm. In effect, the entire world, all of Nature is a cruel, unforgiving sea, but the good soul, the navigator, has his sights set on his destination. If the soul is restless, it is so because, like Odysseus, it is anxious to get home.

Source: Bruce Meyer, in an essay for *Poetry for Students,* Gale Group, 2000.

Adaptations

Selected Readings in Old English, read by Edward N. Irving, Jr., in 1996 forBrighamYoung University's Chaucer Studios, contains "The Seafarer" among other poems in the original Old English. You can order this tape directly via the web at http://English.byu.edu/Chaucer. You can also download a sample of Old English poetry at the same web address with the suffix /oldeng.htm.

Also out of BYU's Chaucer Studio comes another recording of Old English short poems along with riddles, made in 1990 by Rosamund Allen of the University ofLondon under the title *Old English Elegies and Riddles.*

Topics for Further Study

Given that many people have little idea of how those of former times viewed themselves or their cultural worlds, is it indeed possible for modern readers to relate to an art form and a cultural perspective that is so utterly foreign to postindustrial and postmodern reality? Should we even try to read "The Seafarer" from the original audience's point of view? If this seems impossible, then how should we read this poem? Can we read it any way we wish using reader's response?

Since "The Seafarer" constitutes a form of lyric poetry called elegy□that is, a private reflection upon the tragic aspects of life's transitory nature□how is it similar or dissimilar to elegies from later periods of English literature, such as John Milton's "Lycidas" or Thomas Grey's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"? Is there some quality that links all these poems together despite the vast differences that exist between them as to time and cultural perspective? If so, then what exactly in "The Seafarer" makes it elegiac?

Even if we no longer share cultural memory with the writer of "The Seafarer," we do share at least some sense of the passing of the good old days? Everyone has some sort of precious memory of their own glory days toward which they feel a mixture of joy and regret. It could be adventures from the golden days of childhood or the swift passing away of childhood's good feelings. Break up into small groups and brainstorm your own elegies of sorrow for the passage of time and the disappearance of your own "Golden Age."

Compare and Contrast

600-100 BC: Although Germanic peoples were first mentioned in writing some six hundred years before the common era, they did not "officially" burst into the Mediterranean world until the second century BC with the invasion of Italy by the Cimbri and the Teutons, who were finally routed by the Romans in 101 BC.

58-51 BC: Caesar decides to invade Transalpine Gaul in 58 BC when protests by various Gallic tribes in loose confederation with Rome arise against the Suevi, a German tribe that had recently conquered territory in Gaul, and when he hears reports of a threatened invasion by the Helvetii, a Celtic tribe from the area that is now in Switzerland. Not only does he force the Helvetii to withdraw, but he also kills the Suevi's leader, Ariovistus, in Alsace after an arduous offensive. Over the course of the various campaigns that constitute the "Gallic Wars," Caesar has many occasions to meet and defeat various Germanic tribes, like the Usipites and Tencteri, that were then crossing the Rhine into Celtic territories. Caesar's consolidation of Roman power in Gaul stops Germanic migration into the area for a while.

AD 9: Roman power in Gaul continues to grow after Caesar's adopted son, Augustus, settles his imperial claims at the end of the Roman Civil Wars and consolidates power. But in AD 9, Arminius (c. 17 BC-AD 21), a Cherusci tribal chieftain, leads a confederation of tribes in ambush and utterly destroys three legions under General Publius Quinctilius Varus in theTeutoburg Forest. Augustus wisely decides that the only defensible frontier for the Empire is at theRhine River and breaks off further Roman incursions into German territory.

AD 167-175, 178-180: Emperor Marcus Aurelia's Pius, famous Stoic philosopher-king of the middle Roman Empire, begins a series of campaigns against the Marcomanni and other Germanic tribes allied with them along theDanube River in what is now known as Austria. Even though Marcus Aurelius hands on troubles along the Danubian frontier to his son and heir, Com-modus, if he hadn't succeeded in defeating the Marcomanni, the Empire might well have ended much earlier than it does.

Third Century AD: The Roman world collapses into a nearly fatal crisis chiefly due to the unbridgeable gap between the rich upper classes in the cities and the unemployed urban poor and barely civilized peasants. Also, the wars that began under Marcus Aurelius persist, and increased taxation steadily devours the prosperity of the Empire. To meet rising military expenses and to supply the ever-growing bureaucracy, emperors, like Caracalla (d. 217), devalue Roman money and precipitate an economic crisis from "runaway" inflation. Defenses along the Rhine and Danube also disintegrate further under tribal attack, and the provinces of the Eastern Empire are overrun by Iranians. Finally, the command and control of the army completely breaks down. Between the years 235 and 284 only one out of more than two dozen emperors escapes violent death.

Third Century AD: The Goths, a Germanic people who probably migrated from southern Scandinavia sometime before the time of Christ, settle by the Third Century into territories near the Black Sea and stage occasional strikes into Roman territory. Those who inhabit an area in what is now the modern Ukraine come to be known as Ostrogoths, or the "East Goths," and those who occupy a region along the Danube are called Visigoths, or the "West Goths."

Third Century AD: The Franks, also known as the Salians, Ripuarians, and Chatti, come to inhabit the lower and middleRhine Valley. In time, the Franks start to breach the Roman borderland around Mainz but are eventually driven back by Emperor Probus.

284-305: After much social, economic, and military disintegration, the Emperor Diocletian takes over the Empire and establishes total control over all aspects of Roman life. He adopts oriental court culture and protocols and transforms into an unending system the extraordinary measures adopted by the emperors of the third century to save the Roman state. Personal freedom is denied the peasantry, who then become tied to the soil of their birth. Artisans and higher civil servants are frozen into hereditary castes and taxed to the breaking point. Only rich landowners in fortified villas□a foreshadowing of medieval feudal lords□and the imperial bureaucracy predominate over the slowly collapsing social order.

Fourth Century AD: Both the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths live peacefully near the Empire and trade with the Romans for luxury goods. They also adopt a heretical form of Christianity called Arianism, the belief that Christ was human and not divine.

306-337: After having fought off numerous opponents, Constantine I successfully reorganizes the Roman Empire. He also decriminalizes Christianity and eventually converts to the emergent faith himself. He establishes a second capital at Byzantium and names it Constantinople after himself in 330. With two capitals as foci for the East and the West, he reorganizes the entire system of local government into prefectures, dioceses, and provinces under regional metropolitan control. Indeed, his reforms, though too late for the West, enable the Roman Empire to survive in the East until the year 1453. Still, Constantine's division of the Empire into two parts only becomes official in the year 395.

358: Emperor Julian, later known as "the Apostate" because of his desire to return the Empire to paganism, grants the Salian Franks an area of land called Toxandria between the Meuse and the Scheldt rivers in exchange for Frankish military allegiance and support.

370: The Ostrogoths are defeated by and forced into fealty with the Huns.

378-418: With further pressure from the Huns pushing both Gothic tribes across the Roman frontier, the Visigoths in 378 defeat the Eastern Romans of Byzantium at Adrianople. Repudiating an alliance they had forged with the Byzantines after their victory, the Visigoths turn to the West and sack Rome in 410 under their king Alaric I

and then continue migrating and marauding until 418, when they settle in Aquitaine in southwestern France.

Fifth Century AD: The Ripuarian Franks and the Chatti, cousins to the Salian Franks, had also struck across the frontier of middle Rhine during the first quarter of the fifth century. As a result of the invasion of Gaul by the Huns, a band of Ripuarians takes over Cologne.

406: The Vandals, another Arian Christian tribe that had originally migrated into what is now Hungary, also suffer attacks under Huns from the East. They eventually push across the frontiers of the Roman Empire in December 406, when they cross the Rhine into Gaul.

429-439: Having pushed on into Spain by 409, the Vandals under their new ruler Gaiseric (ruling from 429 to 477) use Spain as a launch pad for their invasion of North Africa, leaving the Iberian Peninsula for others to conquer.

449-1066: From the times of the first incursions by Hengist and Horsa until the death of Harold II at Hastings, the so-called Anglo-Saxon period of British history presents an integral continuum of steady social evolution. The whole pattern of early Anglo-Saxon society first centers on families, clans, and tribes and depends upon a class of warriors bound together in a filial system of reciprocity called a *comitatus* in Latin. Scholars believe this same system predominated for all Germanic peoples. The regional and tribal leader *{ealdormann* or *eorl)* counted on both military support and undying loyalty from his *thegns* ("thanes," that is, armed retainers), who in return presumed their leader would provide them with an organized defense and luxurious bequests for their services to him. From the seventh until the eleventh century this tribal system evolves incrementally because of extending filiations into larger and larger kingdoms, most significantly the East Anglian kingdom ofMercia, the North Anglian kingdom ofNorthumbria, and the West Saxon kingdom ofWessex. But by 959, all of England is rather loosely affiliated and united under the kings of Wessex, the greatest of whom was Alfred the Great (849-899). However, this West-Saxon lineage of kings is halted for a generation in 1016 when the Danish king Canute succeeds in conquering and holding England, thus crowning more than two centuries of sporadic Viking penetrations and seizures in England. Nevertheless, two Anglo-Saxon kings, Saint Edward the Confessor and Harold II, do return to reign again, but only for 24 years (1042-66) before the conquest of England by the Norman William I ends Anglo-Saxon cultural and political hegemony.

455: Having consolidated power over the western Mediterranean, Gaiseric successfully invades and sacks Rome in 455. Because of this act of utter destructiveness, the name "Vandal" has come to signify anyone who barbarically and wantonly destroys property.

461-81: After the Merovingians□one of the smaller bands into which the Salian Franks were divided, named after its chieftain Merovech□ extended Salian domination to the south, perhaps as far as the Somme River, Childeric I (d. 481), Merovech's son, continues to support the Romans until the death of the Roman Emperor Majorian in

461. He then leads an uprising against Aegidius, the Roman governor in northern Gaul. Aegidius, however, prevails in the struggle and exiles Childeric across the Rhine among the Thuringian tribe. Nevertheless, Childeric returns after a few years and defeats the Romans with the help of some Saxon allies. In the end, Syagrius, Aegidius's son and successor, is able to keep Childeric from moving his people south of the Somme, but in the meantime another Salian tribal chieftain has taken control of Liege.

476: Odoacer (or "Odovacar"), a member of either the Sciri or the Rugian tribe born around 433, deposes and replaces the child emperor, Romulus Augustulus, on August 28, 476, thus finishing off the already dying Western Roman Empire. In time, Odoacer also conquers Sicily and Dalmatia, menacing the possessions of the Eastern Roman Emperor, Zeno.

481-511: Clovis, Childeric's son, converts to Roman Catholicism and in time conquers most of Gaul to unify the Franks under his Merovingian dynasty.

488-493: Zeno, Emperor of the East, sponsors the Ostrogothic king Theodoric against Odoacer. Theodoric overruns Italy and assassinates Odoacer at a banquet on March 15, 493, a week after Odoacer had yielded up power to him.

493-553: The Ostrogothic king Theodoric rules over all of Italy from 493 to 526. But when Theodoric's daughter, Amalasuntha, is murdered by her husband and co-ruler, Theodahad, in 535, the Byzantines themselves invade the kingdom to reestablish their influence over the area. By 553 the Byzantines and the Lombards, another Germanic tribe, have divided Italy between themselves.

507-08: The last vestige of Visigothic presence in Aquitaine is driven out by Clovis, Merovingian King of the Franks. Over the years, however, Visigothic interests had already moved southward into Spain.

511-561: Upon Clovis' death, his kingdom is split up, according to Frankish custom, among his four sons: Theodoric (d. 534), Chlodomer (d. 524), Childebert I (d. 558), and Chlotar I (d. 561), who make their respective capitals at Metz, Orleans, Paris, and Soissons. After a bloody forty years of struggle, Chlotar is finally able to reunite the Merovingian holdings by the time of his death.

533-534: After Gaiseric's death, his descendants have problems safeguarding their borders. In 533 the Byzantine general Belisarius attacks the strongholds of the Vandals and in turn reduces their kingdom in North Africa to absolute ruins by 534.

561-613: Upon Chlotar's death, the Frankish kingdom is again divided among his four sons. This time, two of his sons, Sigibert I (d. 575) of Austrasia and Chilperic I (d. 584) of Neustria, begin a struggle for ultimate control over all Frankish lands that will last well beyond their respective deaths.

585-711: By 585 the Visigoths have extended and consolidated their control over the Pyrenees to Spain. Visigothic power in Spain then basically goes unchallenged (except

for exchanges with the Byzantines in the seventh century) until the Muslim invasion of 711, when they are utterly dispossessed of power.

629-639: In the long run, Chilperic's family prevails in its struggle for Frankish supremacy, and Chilperic's grandson, Dagobert I, becomes king of all the Franks, the last Merovingian king of any significance. After Dagobert's death, the kings of the Merovingian dynasty become captives of various magnate families.

Seventh Century: The Carolingians, a family of Ripuarian Franks that eventually took its name from Charles Martel, the grandfather of Charlemagne, had their origins in the union of the family of Arnulf, Bishop of Metz, with that of Pepin of Landen (d. 640), hereditary mayor of the palace in Austrasia, during the early Seventh Century. As mayors of the palace, the Carolingians are in fact the actual rulers of Frankish territories under the later Merovingian kings. Even though an attempt at taking away the crown fails in the mid-seventh century, family fortunes improve over the next hundred years.

845: Having successfully mounted numerous short raids upon cities and villages around the North Sea from the late Eighth Century, Viking raiders adopt a new tactic. Instead of mounting short forays in spring and summer only to spend the winter back home, now larger bands begin to encamp on small islands at the mouths of major rivers. This tactic furnishes them with year-round bases near their quarry. Viking chiefs then combine to form larger armies in order to take advantage of fissures among the Anglo-Saxons and Franks and thereby extract larger and larger duties from Frankish and Anglo-Saxon kings.

878: Danish Vikings control large parts of eastern and northern England in a region that comes to be known as the "Danelaw."

911: A Viking leader named Rollo receives lands at the estuary of theSeine River from the Carolingian king, Charles III, for his pledge to defend the riverine approaches to Paris from the attacks of other Viking bands. This marks the beginning of what is to become the Duchy of Normandy.

Tenth Century: During the same period, Gotlandic and Swedish Vikings, traveling down theVolga River, begin making contact with traders from the Muslim Empire, who pay them in silver for their trade goods. TheDnepr River takes them to the Black Sea and Constantinople, seat of the Byzantine Empire, where they form an elite guard in service to the Byzantine Emperor. According to Russian accounts, these so-called "Varangians" eventually raise up the first ruling house over the Rus or East Slavs under their leader Rurik in Kiev.

987: Carolingian rule comes to an end in what is now called France after having already ceased in what is now Germany in 911.

Tenth through Eleventh Centuries: The Normans, Danish Vikings who had settled in northern France under the Norwegian chieftain Rollo and his descendants, continue their activities in true Viking style, despite their conversion to Christianity, by raiding northward toward Flanders. Rollo's son, William Longsword (d. 942), becomes the true

engineer of Norman triumph, however, by centralizing and enlarging the Duchy. Although disturbed by internal violence, particularly under Duke Robert I (reigning 1027-35) and during the minority of his son, Duke William II (later William the Conqueror), the state created by these early Norman rulers depends upon strong ducal authority and evolve administrative and feudal combinations to maintain it.

733-751: From 719 until his death, Charles Martel (c. 688-742), illegitimate son of Pepin of Heristal (d. 714), boosts the Carolingian family's fortunes even further by turning back a Muslim force at Tours in 733 and then completing his subjugation of southern France. Charles's son Pepin the Short finally deposes Childeric III, the last of the Merovingian monarchs and with support from the Pope becomes king of all the Franks in 751.

768-771: At his death, Pepin the Short, Charles's son, leaves joint ruler ship of the Carolingian domains to his two sons, Carloman and Charles (later known as Charlemagne). Carloman's death in 771 makes Charles sole ruler.

771-814: During his long rule, Charlemagne not only doubles the Frankish kingdom by conquests in Germany, Italy, and Spain, but also succeeds in bringing about a renaissance in the arts and sciences of that time. In 800 he is crowned Emperor of the West by the Pope of Rome.

793: Viking□whose name is eventually given to various North Germanic tribal groups and derives from the Old Norse verb *vika,* "to go off"□land on foreign shores for the first time and destroy the by-then-ancient Celtic monastery of Lindisfarne in Northumbria. This action establishes a pattern of marauding piracy that will persist for two more centuries.

804: Moving in across northern Germany just south of the "Danevirke"□a defensive barrier built by the Danes under a powerful local king in Schleswig, during their 39-year war with the continental Saxons□the Franks under Charlemagne begin to note in their annals the disturbing presence of barbaric peoples farther to the north of their Empire.

840-843: Louis I, Charlemagne's sole heir, inherits from his father both the Empire and its continuing problems: Viking intrusions, Muslim assaults, and a grasping nobility. In typical Frankish fashion, Louis then leaves his Empire to the joint ruler ship of his three surviving sons, Lothair I, Louis the German, and Charles II (Charles the Bald). After Louis's death in 840, however, the civil wars that had already begun during his reign continue and eventually lead to the division of the empire into three kingdoms under the Treaty of Verdun in 843.

1060-1091: Robert Guiscard, one of the many sons of Tancred of Hauteville, a Norman noble who had taken on allegiance with the Lombards against the Byzantine Empire in southern Italy, establishes himself as an independent ruler in Calabria and Apulia. Between 1060 and 1091 he and his brother, Roger I, undertake the conquest of Sicily from the Muslims.

1066: Not to be outdone by the sons of Tancred, Duke William II becomes King William I of England when he and his retainers defeat the West Saxon King Harold II in the

Battle of Hastings. He moves rapidly to establish a centralized monarchy in England on the Norman pattern.

1087: William dies, leaving a strong kingdom to his sons, William II and Henry I.

1102-1204: Abrogating his father's will, Henry I invades and subdues the Duchy of Normandy under his control. Although William the Conqueror had left Normandy to his eldest son, Duke Robert II (c. 1054-1134), the Duchy will not return to French control until 1204.

1139: Roger II succeeds in transforming earlier Norman conquests into the kingdom ofSicily, which serves as a foundation for further Norman extension into North Africa and Dalmatia during the later twelfth century.

1154: Ending a prolonged struggle for power between William's descendants, Henry II, son to Matilda, William's daughter, finally vanquishes his cousin, Stephen, William's nephew. In doing so, he inaugurates the Angevin dynasty's control over England.

Twentieth Century: The history of Western European peoples has ever been one of continual invasion and migration from early times until now. The presence of Germanic peoples all over the globe stands as evidence of the pervasiveness of this migration. The European colonization of the world since the sixteenth century is just a dimension of Germanic tribal migrations from ancient times.

Twentieth Century: Descendants of the Romanized and Latin-speaking Gauls of the former Roman province of "Gallia" are still called after the name of their erstwhile conquerors, the "French" ("Frankish"). French culture itself represents a centuries-long melding of Celtic, Germanic, and Roman influences.

Twentieth Century: Despite its long Moorish occupation, Spain still shows traces of its Visigothic past in both language and culture.

Today: Despite the addition of French to its linguistic and cultural mix, Modern English still represents a compromise between a variety of competing dialects. Like French and Spanish, it has become a world language of millions of speakers.

What Do I Read Next?

Those who are not only interested in Old English literature but also charmed by Burton Raffel's masterful translation should pick up Signet's 1999 reprint of Raffel's *Beowulf.* Considerably longer than "The Seafarer" elegy, this epic narrates the exploits of some of the great heroes of the Germanic tribal past.

Hard-core enthusiasts of Old English literature and Burton Raffel will also want to read *Poems and Prose from the Old English,* translated and edited by Burton Raffel with the editorial assistance of Alexandra Hennessey Olsen in Yale University Press's 1998 reissue of an entirely restructured and expanded version of Raffel's out-of-print classic. In fact, this edition includes the very translation of "The Seafarer" used here in *Poetry for Students* along with prose works by King Alfred the Great and other great prose stylists, lay and monastic, with more elegies, heroic poems, religious verse, and wisdom poetry.

Just to round out one's knowledge of the literature of the Old English period, any interested student should read Stanley B. Greenfield's *Critical History of Old English Literature,* published by New York University Press in 1965. Greenfield does an excellent job of providing in-depth analysis of the entire Old English corpus using modern translations only. Translations from Raffel's *Poems and Prose from the Old English* are especially featured in Greenfield's study.

Further Study

Crossley-Holland, Kevin, *The Anglo-Saxon World,* Wood-bridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1982.

Six hundred years of Anglo-Saxon history and culture have been anthologized in this convenient volume. Poetry (both epic and lyric), history, sermons, and other prose works are masterfully anthologized in this rich volume. For comparison's sake, students can even read a different translation of "The Seafarer".

Lee, Alvin A., *The Guest-Hall of Eden: Four Essays on the Design of Old English Poetry,* New Haven:Yale University Press, 1972, pp. 125-70.

Although Lee's four essays together constitute a thorough examination of form and meaning in Old English verse, the essay on these particular pages really illuminates the lyric elegiac tradition within the body of Old English poetry. It is excellent reading for those who want to go beyond an elementary understanding of the poetry of that time.

Pound, Ezra, " 'The Seafarer': From the Anglo-Saxon," *Pesonae,* New York: New Directions, 1950, pp. 64-66. Although Raffel's translation is in some ways culturally more faithful to the original "Seafarer," Pound's translation, made when he was quite young, is in terms of Anglo-Saxon prosody more nearly correct a translation because it provides the full flavor of the original poem's verbal music.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Poetry for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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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