Station Study Guide

Station by Eamon Grennan

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

"Station" is a poem written in free verse by Eamon Grennan, an Irish poet who has spent most of his adult life in the United States. It was first published in 1991 in Grennan's collection *As If It Matters* (Dublin, Ireland, 1991; St. Paul, MN, 1992). It is also available in Grennan's *Relations: New and Selected Poems* (1998).

In "Station," the speaker and his young son are at the Hudson Valley train station in upstate New York. The boy's parents are divorced, and he is about to leave his father and go to visit his mother. The poem describes the scene at the train station and the thoughts of the boy's father, who knows this is a turning point in his relationship with his son; not only is the boy going away, he is also about to enter adolescence. This is a stage, a "station," along the boy's path to adulthood, and the father knows that things will never again be the same between them. He also realizes that he cannot find the right words to say to his son on this occasion.

One of a number of prominent Irish poets who live in America and teach at American universities, Grennan has written nine books of poetry. He has a growing reputation as one of Ireland's most accomplished contemporary poets. Grennan's work is notable for its concern with personal relationships, particularly within the family. His poems often describe the small details of domestic life, and a number of them explore the poet's relationship with his three children.

Author Biography

Eamon Grennan was born November 13, 1941, in Dublin, Ireland, the son of Thomas P. (an educational administrator) and Evelyn (Yourell) Grennan and was raised in middle-class suburban Dublin. Grennan's interest in literature was first awakened by a young teacher named Gus Martin, at a boarding school run by Cistercian monks that Grennan attended. Martin managed to communicate to the adolescent Grennan his own enthusiasm for Shakespeare and other writers.

Grennan studied literature at University College, Dublin, where, as Grennan later wrote, he was fortunate to have teachers who nurtured his literary interests. Grennan was awarded a bachelor of arts degree in 1963 and a master of arts degree in 1964.

In the late 1960s, Grennan attended graduate school at Harvard University, where he continued to be inspired by what he described in the preface to *Facing the Music: Irish Poetry in the Twentieth Century* (1999), quoting Edmund Spenser, as "the brightness of brave and glorious words." He had a particular interest in Shakespeare and wrote his dissertation on Shakespeare's history plays. He earned a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1973. The following year, Grennan became a member of the English faculty at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. Grennan went on to become the Dexter M. Ferry Jr. Professor of English at Vassar. He also taught Irish Studies at Villanova University.

In 1972, Grennan married Joan Perkins. They were divorced in 1986. Grennan's subsequent partner was Rachel Kitzinger, a college teacher. He has three children, Kate, Conor, and Kira.

Grennan's first three collections of poetry were all published in Ireland: *Wildly for Days* (1983), *What Light There Is* (1987), and *Twelve Poems, Occasional Works* (1988). With the publication in the United States of his fourth collection, *What Light There Is and Other Poems* (1989), Grennan began to gain a reputation among American as well as Irish readers. This collection was followed by *As If It Matters*, published in Ireland in 1991 and the United States in 1992, which includes the poem "Station." *So It Goes* was published in both countries simultaneously in 1995. *Relations: New and Selected Poems* followed in 1998.

Grennan received a National Endowment for the Arts award in 1991 and a Guggenheim fellowship in 1995. He won the James Boatwright Poetry Prize from *Shenandoah* magazine in 1995.

Other publications by Grennan are his translation of *Selected Poems of Giacomo Leopardi* (Dublin, 1995; Princeton, NJ, 1997). This book won the PEN Award for Poetry in Translation. *Facing the Music* is a collection of Grennan's previously published essays, spanning the years 1977 to 1997. His other works include *Selected and New Poems* (2000) and *Still Life with Waterfall* (2002). The latter was awarded the 2003 Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, which annually honors the most outstanding book of poems published in the United States.

Plot Summary

"Station" begins with a simple sentence announcing "we" are on a railway station platform and are about to say goodbye to each other. The train is waiting, ready to depart, and the speaker is already imagining how he might feel when his son is gone. He is aware, in a regretful sense, of all the things he and his son have never said to each other. The implication is that there may be no more time or no other opportunity to say such things.

The boy puts "his black dufflebag" on his shoulder and shifts his weight "from foot to foot," perhaps indicating his discomfort with the prospect of saying goodbye to his father. The son is impatient to be on his way, and he looks not at his father but at the windows of the train. His father imagines him sitting in the train and staring out of the window at the play of light ("platinum dazzle") on the water of the Hudson River.

The father wants to give his son some encouraging, uplifting words before he leaves, but he is also conscious of his own mixed feelings. Although his son is about to enter the big, wide world, it seems to the father that the boy is about to go into a "long tunnel." The boy is leaving one parent for another, and father and son both know their relationship, as well as the boy's life, will never be the same again. The air between them seems thick with thoughts that ought to be expressed but then suddenly thin again, as if the moment has passed. The father's attention goes to the birds that "croon to themselves" in the angles between the iron girders at the top of the building ("iron angles") and then fly off gracefully over the river.

In the third stanza, the moment of farewell comes. Father and son embrace, their cheeks resting against each other. The father is conscious of the difference in their skin, his unshaven and bristly, his son's smooth but also showing the first signs of growing hair ("faint fuzz"), which reminds the father that his son is on the verge of puberty and adolescence. The father also realizes neither he nor his son is happy at this moment. His heart aches because he cannot find the right words to say to his son at this moment of departure, and he knows his son dreads an emotional scene in which his father *does* find the right words.

A sudden rush of people moving around them and announcements over the loudspeakers indicate that the train is about to depart. The boy says he has to be going. He and his father touch quickly, and then the boy gets in the train and vanishes from the father's sight. A minute later the train departs, and the father walks alongside it, waving, even though he cannot see where his son is sitting. He imagines his son's journey to his mother's house. The train will go underground to cross the river, and the father imagines the boy's face visible through the reflections that fill the window and disappear before they can even be identified.

Themes

Life Journey and Transition

At the literal level of the poem, the journey the boy takes is from his father's home to his mother's home. But this journey also symbolizes the boy's journey in life, from childhood to adolescence and beyond, which is clear from the father's reference to the "faint fuzz" growing on the boy's face. The father sees this first sign of adolescence as a "beginning," the visible evidence that the boy is about to leave childhood behind. The significance of this beginning is conveyed by the father's use of the phrase "his next life." In other words, the coming change is so radical it will seem as if the boy is living a different, entirely new life, not merely an extension of the life he is now living, such is the gulf between childhood and adolescence. The images in the poem reinforce this meaning of a journey to maturity. The boy is like a young bird preparing to fly from its nest, and the train is a symbol for the process of life that carries him inevitably into adolescence and adulthood, and away from his father.

Communication

Each stanza emphasizes that this scene is an awkward goodbye between father and son. Much is felt but little is said. The father is keenly aware of all the things that should be said now, in this moment of parting, and of all the things that, when opportunity was there in the past, were never said. He may be referring to words of love or appreciation or understanding. It is a common experience in human relationships: when the time comes to part from a loved one, either for a short while or permanently, words fail. Feelings are deep and words cannot rise to the occasion.

The second stanza further emphasizes this fact. Father and son are both aware of the significance of the occasion, that things will never again be the same between them. The air is thick ("heaping between them"), which suggests it is full of unexpressed thoughts, but then the air goes thin again ("thinning to nothing") as the thoughts disperse. There is a sharp contrast between this scene and the actions of the birds that croon to themselves contentedly, unconcerned with things unsaid and able to fly at will, making effortless loops in the air. The father's growing confusion in this moment is suggested by the fact that he frames his thoughts not as statements but as questions, as if he has suddenly found himself in a situation in which nothing really makes sense anymore.

The third stanza is even more explicit about this gap of silence. In the case of the boy, there is only a fluttering of "feathered syllables" in his throat; actual words are a long way off. The word "fluttering" suggests the ineffective struggles of a young bird trying to fly from its nest and reflects the previous stanza's image of crooning, effortlessly soaring birds. The father feels only confusion; he is unable to find the right words to say in the

present moment, and he can no longer understand the nature of his relationship with his son. It is as if in this moment of departure everything is falling apart.

The fourth stanza brings further attention to the inadequacy of the farewell between father and son: "One quick touch / and he's gone." In spite of the awareness on both sides of the need for words, it appears that nothing at all is said. Instead one quick touch□not even a hug□is left to carry all the weight of meaning that cannot be summoned in words.

Style

Imagery

The poem has many contrasts between light and dark. These contrasts suggest the mixed feelings the father has about his son's departure. Light is first suggested by the phrase "platinum dazzle" and the phrase "he's entering into the light / of the world." This imagery continues when the father feels the first growth of down on the boy's face, which he knows he can see "when the light is right." He refers to it as the boy's "next life / in bright first touches."

These images of light are opposed by images of darkness, like the "long tunnel," which implies darkness and enclosure. The phrase "long tunnel" expresses the father's gloomy thoughts about his son's departure. Also the railway station is a "station of shade" (contrasted with the "shining water" on the river). "Shade" can also mean "ghost," which would link it to the line "ghostly faces behind smoked glass" (referring to the passengers in the train), as well as to the insubstantial, fleeting shadows evoked at the end of the poem.

Alliteration

The poetic device used most frequently in the poem is alliteration, which is the repetition of initial consonant sounds. The most sustained example is stretched over three lines at the end of the third stanza, when the father imagines what is going on in his son's mind, as he, the father, tries to find the right things to say: "fluttering in dread / of my finding the words, feathered syllables / fidgeting in his throat." The repetition of the "f" sound gives the impression of a stutter, of words about to come out but not finding a way. The image of a young bird about to fly from its nest is appropriate, since it suggests the boy who is on the verge of a new stage in his life, on the way to adulthood. Another example of the sustained use of alliteration comes in the final stanza, with the repetition of the "g" sound: "ghostly faces behind smoked glass□/ groans away on wheels and shackles, a slow glide."

Assonance

The lines quoted above also show the use of assonance, the repetition of vowel sounds occurring in nearby words. This can be heard in the long "o" sound in "ghostly," "smoked," "groans," and "slow," which emphasizes the slowness with which the train begins to pull away. Another example of assonance, again with the long "o" sound, comes in the second stanza in the lines "and we both / know in our bones it won't ever / be the same again." The identical vowel sounds in the words "both," "know," "bones," and "won't" give way sharply to the vowel "e" in "ever"; the sudden change in the vowel sound is in keeping with the sense that something will not "be the same again."

A further example of assonance is the long "i" sound in the lines "when the light is right, his next life / in bright first touches." The sequence "light," "right," "life," and "bright" brings out the positive nature of the father's thought at this point. These lines are also notable for the internal rhyme (a rhyme that occurs within a verse-line rather than at the end) in "light," "right," and "bright."

Historical Context

Divorce in America

The experience of the boy in "Station" dividing time between divorced parents has become increasingly familiar to American children during the last quarter of the twentieth century. The divorce level first began to rise in the 1960s and continued to rise even more sharply in the 1970s. In 1975 projections from statistics supplied by the Current Population Survey suggested that about one-third of married people between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five would end their first marriage in divorce. By 1996 this figure had in fact been exceeded, with 40 percent of people in that category then divorced. The divorce rate peaked in 1979 and 1981, when 5.3 per every 1,000 couples were divorced. The figure dropped somewhat to 4.7 per every 1,000 couples in 1989 and 1990. In 1990, 16.8 per every 1,000 children under the age of eighteen were affected by divorce.

The rising divorce rate produced new challenges for the courts, which had to decide which parent was to be awarded custody. According to a report prepared by the National Center for Health Statistics, in 1990 the mother was awarded custody of the children 72 percent of the time, in divorces in which custody was awarded. Joint custody was the second most common arrangement (16 percent), while fathers were awarded custody in only 9 percent of divorces.

The increase in the number of divorces also steadily changed the nature of the American family. The number of single-parent families increased, as did the number of "blended" families, in which divorced parents remarried and created a new family unit with children from their previous marriages.

Many research studies in the 1980s examined the effects of divorce on children. The studies showed that effects varied according to the age of the child and that there were short-term as well as long-term effects. In the case of teenagers, research showed that parental divorce was correlated with lower academic performance, dropping out of high school, use of alcohol and drugs, and aggressive or promiscuous behavior.

Contemporary Irish Literature

Grennan is a notable contemporary voice in a long line of distinguished twentieth-century Irish poets. The most prominent of all was W. B. Yeats (1865—1939), who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923. After Yeats, the best known poet in Ireland was Patrick Kavanagh, although two Irish poets in exile in England, Louis MacNeice and John Hewitt, also produced notable work.

Around the time of Kavanagh's death in 1967, a new generation of Irish poets began to make their mark. The most renowned of these poets is Seamus Heaney (born 1939), who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1995 and who is widely considered

the greatest Irish poet since Yeats. Heaney was raised in Northern Ireland, and like most Irish poets of the time, his work was affected by the social unrest and violence that began in that province in 1969. From 1969 until the late-1990s, the Irish Republican Army fought a terrorist campaign to end British rule over Northern Ireland. Over 3,500 people were killed in the conflict, which pitted Protestants against Catholics. Heaney's volume *North* (1975) directly confronts the issue of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. Other Irish poets whose work was influenced by what were called the "Troubles" are Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Seamus Deane, and John Montague. Montague's epic poem *The Rough Field* (1972) explores Ireland's past and incorporates material drawn from the "Troubles."

Heaney is one of several Irish poets (including Grennan) who have spent at least part of their careers living and working in the United States. Although Heaney is a resident of Dublin, Ireland, he also teaches at Harvard University. Thomas Kinsella, who was born in Dublin in 1928, went on to a teaching career in the United States. His *Collected Poems* appeared in 2001. Since 1989 John Montague has regularly taught fiction workshops at the State University of New York at Albany. Eavan Boland, whose *Collected Poems* appeared in 1995, taught at Stanford University. Another leading voice in contemporary Irish poetry, Paul Muldoon, has lived in the United States since 1987; he is a professor at Princeton University, and in 1999 he was elected Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford.

The dispersal of Irish poets over a wide geographical area has stimulated a debate about how to define Irish literature. In the case of Grennan, the fact that he was living in the United States when the "Troubles" first broke out may explain why his work, unusual amongst his generation of Irish poets, is apolitical. Reviewers have suggested that his work is less easily identifiable as Irish than the work of some of his contemporaries.

Critical Overview

Although "Station" has not attracted specific comment from reviewers, the poem exhibits many of the qualities that typify Grennan's work and have won praise from critics. As Ben Howard writes in a review of *As If It Matters* for *Poetry*: "Grennan examines the tensions and banalities of middle-class life, the dynamics of marriage and parenthood, the trauma of divorce, the pain of separation from a son and daughter." Howard notes the influence on Grennan's work of Seamus Heaney and concludes that "his poems reflect a sensibility tempered by experience but ready for the next uncommon moment."

In an appreciative review of *As If It Matters* for *Hudson Review*, James Finn Cotter observes that Grennan "seeks for order in the ordinary world," and finds "Grennan's poems at their best possess . . . [a] sense of permanence and serious purpose. Here is poetry that will last, that will be read long after the present shadows have passed."

In a review in *America* of Grennan's *Relations: New and Selected Poems*, Robert E. Hosmer Jr. describes Grennan as a "master in his prime." He also makes a comment that could be directly applied to "Station": "Grennan's poems maintain a delicate balance of line and tone, filled with tender feeling, but never lapsing into embarrassing sentimentality or unbecoming bitterness, as he catalogues events in an ordinary life."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses "Station" and other poems by Grennan in the context of the poet's interest in silence and stillness.

"Station" is one of a number of Grennan's poems that deal with family interactions, both happy and sad. Some of these poems are directly about Grennan's three children, Conor, Kate, and Kira. *As If It Matters*, the collection in which "Station" first appeared, is framed by two such poems. The first poem in the book, "Two Climbing," is as much about fulfillment between father and son as "Station" is about awkwardness and loss. The poet and the twelve-year-old boy climb Tully Mountain in Ireland. Just as in "Station," not many words pass between them, but in the climbing expedition the silence is one of pleasure and fulfillment, not of confusion. Man and boy are pleased with themselves for having done "some dumb male thing," and this time Conor has no difficulty in finding the right word: "*adventure*."

Grennan's poem "Two Gathering" is about a trip made by the poet and his then nearly sixteen-year-old daughter Kate to gather mussels from a seashore in Ireland. It is a poem of celebration, both of Kate and of the beauty of the landscape. Once again, few words are exchanged between father and child. It seems that words are hardly needed as they go about their purpose: "In our common silence we stay / aware of one another, working together." As in "Two Climbing," the silence is broken not by the poet but by the child, who exclaims about the variety of colors in the mussels. The daughter's voice also breaks into the "wide silence" of nature earlier in the expedition. Both "Two Climbing" and "Two Gathering" are poems in which spoken words emerge out of contented silence and express the joy of discovery. How different is the silence between father and child in "Station," which describes a silence of suppression, of the word stopped in the throat, paralyzed in the mind, not flowing out sweetly on a bed of silence as in the happier poems, both of which, incidentally, are set outside, in nature, rather than in the enclosed stifling space of a crowded railroad station.

Grennan is a poet sensitive to silence and stillness, two words that appear often in his work. In his observation of nature, this perception of still moments in the midst of ongoing natural processes sometimes has an almost Wordsworthian or Keatsian quality. Grennan's appreciation of the deep meanings inherent in stillness and silence also draw him to paintings, especially those by the Dutch masters and the French painter Pierre Bonnard. It is Bonnard who supplies the inspiration for "The Breakfast Room," a poem in which the still life is presented as a kind of nothing on the verge of becoming something: "this stillness, this sense / that things are about to achieve illumination." And typically, since Grennan is a poet of family and ordinary domestic moments, he extrapolates from the painting into real life, suggesting that in anyone's kitchen at breakfast time there might be "a pause / on the brink of something always / edging into shape, about to happen."

It is this moment of "pause" in which there is silence that holds Grennan's attention. He is highly attuned to it and finds it in a wide variety of situations, often simple, domestic ones. In "Weather," for example, after the weather changes for the better after days of persistent rain, "the house is spinning / its own sure silence round your lives." In "Song," the poet listens to his daughter singing solo at her junior-high-school graduation and manages to access a still point within, which they both share, and in which he is able to communicate with her: "while into / our common silence I whisper, / *Sing, love, sing your heart out!*"

These silences are always positive. They suggest the connections between people and between people and things. They point toward a kind of ground of being that all life shares and that is apparent in moments when people cease their perpetual busyness. In an essay on the work of his fellow Irish poet Derek Mahon (in *Facing the Music: Irish Poetry in the Twentieth Century*), Grennan writes of Mahon's "recurrent preoccupation with silence," a phrase that might equally well describe Grennan's own work.

Perhaps the best example of this aspect of Grennan's poetry comes in the poem "Morning: the Twenty-second of March." The scene is once again the family home. On a spring morning, the poet listens to the various natural sounds outside, in particular the sound of a dove that sings and then falls silent. Something about the silence makes it transformative; it suddenly shifts the poet's consciousness into an object-less, timeless dimension of being:

□our life together hesitating in this gap

of silence, slipping from us and becoming

nothing we know in the swirl that has

no past, no future, nothing

but the pure pulse-shroud of light, the dread

here-now□reporting thrice again

its own silence. The cup of tea

still steams between your hands

like some warm offering or other

to the nameless radiant vacancy at the window,

this stillness in which we go on happening.

There are, then, two kinds of silence in Grennan's poetry. The first might be thought of as silence-as-being, a silence in which all life is embedded, even as it lives in its world of flux ("this stillness in which we go on happening"). It can be discerned in the most

ordinary moments of the day by those who happen to be alert to it. It is a "regenerative silence" (again, this is a phrase used by Grennan to characterize Mahon's work but applies equally well to his own), which promotes life, union, happiness.

The second kind of silence is a negative one. It is the silence of suppression, the silence that marks a breakdown in the flow of life between people. Instead of a kind of fullness-in-potential there is emptiness, a gap, an absence. Something should be there□speech, communication, continuity of life□but is not. It is a silence of desolation. It can be heard in Grennan's several poems about family separations, the radical breaks that occur in the lives of two or more people. These poems include "Station," as well as two poems Grennan wrote about divorce. (He was divorced from his wife of fourteen years in 1986.) In "Women Going," Grennan writes of the aftermath of divorce as "this absence beating its stone wings / over every ordinary corner of the day." One can imagine the father in "Station" feeling the same way after the departure of his son. In fact, he feels it even before the son steps on the train (the waiting train fills the station "with aftermath and longing," the word "aftermath" suggesting the desolation that will immediately follow the parting).

The second poem about divorce, "Breaking Points," is a searing examination of the despair felt by the husband (or anyone in a similar situation) as he leaves the house for the last time following the divorce: "we say / *What now? What else? What*?" It is as if life has come to a sudden halt. Everything stops, or seems to, in this void. The arrangement of the poem on the page emphasizes this blank void, since the next line containing only the two words "And now" is so deeply indented on the page that the unanswered questions in the previous line seem almost to hang in the air, alone. How different is this silence-as-void from the moments of generative silence and stillness that the poet experiences in calmer, more serene moments.

Both poems about divorce emphasize the pain and desolation of parting. These feelings are also apparent in "Station," although the implications of the final lines of the poem need some elucidation. In the last sentence, the father imagines his son sitting in the second train on his journey:

that pale face of his

carried along in the dark glass, shining

through shadows that fill the window

and fall away again

before we're even able to name them.

The alliterative music created by the phrase "shining through shadows," in combination with "fill the window / and fall," which further develops the play on the "i" and "a" as well as "f" sounds, is typical of Grennan's style. As far as meaning is concerned, at the literal level the observation is simple. As the train rushes on, the father imagines seeing not only his son's face in the window but also all the fleeting reflections from whatever the

train is passing outside. There is surely an undertone of regret and even melancholy here also. The use of the word "shadows" recalls the earlier occurrences of "shade," "ghostly faces," and "pale face," all referring to the train station or the people inside the train. It is as if the father is losing his son to a realm of shadows, where nothing has substance anymore. The switch from singular to first-person plural in the last line expands the thought from the personal to the general; the shadows vanish "before we're even able to name them," just as earlier the thoughts that should have been expressed were not; they too were like shadows in the mind and heart, felt but never articulated, never finding proper form. Also, the vanishing shadows in the last line suggest the frustrated human desire to categorize things and thereby to understand life. And hovering behind this meaning is perhaps yet another: the father's wistful feeling that his son has departed before he has been able to get to know him fully. There is a sadness in these concluding lines, however obliquely that sadness may be expressed. As such, it is a rather untypical conclusion from a poet who usually tries to emphasize the positive things that can be retrieved from daily existence and relationships. The situation of the father in "Station" is that he wants something to hold onto as he says goodbye to his son, but he cannot do it; he finds only shadows.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on "Station," in *Poetry for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Topics for Further Study

Divorce is common today. Research and report on how children are affected by divorce. What factors should be considered in deciding with which parent a child lives after a divorce? Why?

How does a free-verse poem differ from prose? Is free verse more effective than rhymed verse? Why or why not? Why are most modern poems written in free verse?

Why do parents and adolescent children sometimes find it hard to communicate with one another? Do parents often want to know too much about their children's lives? How do good parents strike the right balance between guiding their children in the right direction and letting them go their own way to learn from their own mistakes?

Compose your own free-verse poem about an incident in which you and one or both of your parents were unable to communicate something important to each other, something that really needed to be said. How did this incident affect your relationship with your parent(s)? What did it tell you about yourself or about your parent(s)?

What Do I Read Next?

Grennan's *Still Life with Waterfall* (2002) is filled with observations of the natural world, animal life, and human relationships. Some critics have identified a feeling of foreboding in many of these poems, as well as a search for continuity. Other critics have remarked on the subtle eroticism of some of the poems in this collection.

Modern Irish Poetry: An Anthology (1995), edited by Patrick Crotty, includes selections from Seamus Heaney, Eavan Boland, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian, Paul Durcan, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill (in translation from Irish), and others. Crotty argues that much twentieth century Irish writing can be interpreted as a quarrel with the dominating figure of W. B. Yeats.

Seamus Heaney's *Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966—1996* (1998) is a large, representative selection of poems made by the poet himself. Heaney includes poems from his previous twelve books of poetry, as well as some previously uncollected poems. The book also includes his Nobel lecture, "Crediting Poetry."

Paul Muldoon is one of the most celebrated contemporary Irish poets and his *Poems 1968—1998* (2001) illustrates the rich variety of his work, including the erotic as well as the political, and notably also his hundred haiku about suburban New Jersey.

Further Study

Brophy, James D., and Eamon Grennan, eds., *New Irish Writing: Essays in Memory of Raymond J. Porter*, Twayne Publishers, 1989.

Sixteen essays cover various aspects of modern Irish literature, including poetry, drama, and short stories. Grennan contributes an introduction and an essay on the poetry of Paul Duncan and Paul Muldoon.

Campbell, Michael, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

This guide to contemporary Irish poetry covers major figures such as Heaney as well as his precursors, including Louis MacNeice and Patrick Kavanagh, as well as other leading contemporary figures such as Thomas Kinsella, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, and Paul Muldoon. The book includes cultural and historical backgrounds, a chronology, and guide to further reading.

Fleming, Deborah, "The 'Common Ground' of Eamon Grennan," in *Eire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4, Winter 1993, pp. 133—49.

Fleming discusses a wide range of Grennan's poetry, examining his treatment of universality and the ordinary.

Tillinghast, Richard, "Eamon Grennan: 'To Leave Something Bright and Upright Behind,'" in *New England Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Spring 1993, pp. 189—95.

In this review of Grennan's collections *What Light There Is* and *As If It Matters*, Tillinghast discusses Grennan's concern with family, home, and the natural world; his spirituality that sometimes resembles Buddhism; and the presence of epiphanies in the ordinary moment. Tillinghast likens Grennan to American poet Richard Wilbur, but he also discusses what makes Grennan's poetry Irish rather than American or English.

Wrigley, Robert, Review of *Still Life with WaterFall*, in *Nation*, Vol. 277, No. 8, December 1, 2003, p. 38.

This review of Grennan's most recent collection is one of the most substantial treatments of the poet's work to date. Wrigley has nothing but praise for Grennan's artistry in presenting the natural world.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Poetry for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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