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# Human Directional

## By Diane Raptosh

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A Study Guide for Students

### Synopsis

*Human Directional* explores and enacts what might be called the “ecstatic multiplicity of being,” testing and exploding boundaries between self and other, human and animal, individual and world. Within this process, the speakers take up a variety of themes ranging from the vicissitudes of love to animal rights and social justice issues. In so doing, the poems point the way to “the space of the thinkable,” illuminating that reverie is not retreat from reality but instead a possible means to reconstruct—imaginatively and compassionately—what is.

### Author Bio

Diane Raptosh’s fourth book of poetry, *American Amnesiac* (Etruscan Press), was longlisted for the 2013 National Book Award. The recipient of three fellowships in literature from the Idaho Commission on the Arts, she was the first Boise Poet Laureate (2013) and now serves as the Idaho Writer-in-Residence (2013-2016), the highest literary honor in the state. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies in the U.S. and Canada. She holds the Eyck-Berringer Endowed Chair in English at The College of Idaho, where she teaches literature and creative writing as well as directs the program in criminal justice/prison studies. A highly active ambassador for poetry, she has conducted writing workshops, given readings, and lectured on poetry in a variety of locations ranging from university auditoriums to maximum security prisons, school buses to riverbanks. She lives with her family in Boise.

### Study Questions

#### Section 1: First-Person Triangular

1. Think of the first poem, “Sign Twirler’s Guide to the Multiverse” as a map of sorts for how to read the entire book. Which of the speaker’s preoccupations seem to appear most frequently in section one? Which of the terms she lays out in that initial poem seem of particular significance to the overall section? Some possible terms, phrases, and actions to consider include but are not limited to the following: “reconstruct others’ // inner soliloquies,” “untuck sound’s omens,” “hook up reason // with passion-acumen.” Consider, for instance, what passion-acumen might be, and look for what could be instances of it in section one. Use a dictionary as needed.

2. In this section, as elsewhere, we find in poem after poem the boundaries that we traditionally associate with identity, selfhood and gender break down, only to point in new directions. Pick two poems from within this section and discuss—in concrete and precise terms—these new directions. Choose two poems that look very different on the page: choose, for example, one prose poem and one lyric poem (look up this term if necessary), or one multi-sectional poem and one “monostich” (one-line poem). Discuss how form and content work to reinforce each other in these poems.

3. Create a Match.com ad for the Sign Twirler. This may be serious and/or playful, as you see fit. Discuss why this ad would be well suited for the twirler.

Writing Prompt: The poem “Your Attention, Please” ends with the following line: “Reader. Have you ever been that grievously unmade?” Discuss the theme of becoming “unmade”—this act of “unmaking”—as it recurs in poems throughout section one. Focus specifically and with care on two poems in this section.

### Section 2: The Way to Green Air

1. Consider why this section is called “The Way to Green Air” and discuss in concrete detail how the poems in this section fit with that title.

2. Motherhood and family are prominent themes in several poems in this section. What is the significance of motherhood in these poems? Compare and contrast the mothers in two of the poems from this section. Alternatively, compare and contrast two very different notions of motherhood as represented by two poems of your choosing.

3. Pick a poem that you enjoy especially just for its sounds. Discuss why the sounds in this poem are fun or enjoyable. Write down the words that you find satisfying simply for how they sound. After that, consider how the sounds of these words help the poem move to its completion.

Writing Prompt: In the poems “Fifth and State” and “Department of Space Studies,” we are made aware that the sign twirler works for an organization that provides “title loans.” Discuss the significance of this fact as you review this section. Doing so, you might also think back to some of the earlier poems and sub-themes of the book.

### Section 3: Ninety-Degree Angle to the Chest

1. Consider the poem “The Hope of Sound.” Now that you have read the whole book and thought about sounds as an essential element of language and poetry, explain how sounds themselves might be a source of hope. In doing so, point to at least two other poems in this section.

2. Now that you have a feel for the book as a whole, discuss why the work includes so many different forms of poetry: dramatic monologue, lyric poems, prose poems, prose poems with

numbered sections, monostich or one-line poems, faux ads, as well as experimental forms which as yet have no names.

3. Discuss the significance of the Eduardo Galeano epigraph, which introduces the book: “The world, which is upside down, will one day stand up straight.” Now that you have finished the book, discuss what you believe to be its significance. Comment on at least one poem in each section while doing so.

Writing Prompt: The collection ends with the sign twirler laying the word “inwit” into the “church” of the mouth of the reader. What does “inwit” mean anyway? What might be its significance in the overall work and beyond?



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84 West South Street  
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766  
P: 570.480.4546  
[www.etruscanpress.org](http://www.etruscanpress.org)  
[books@etruscanpress.org](mailto:books@etruscanpress.org)