

Teaching Guide to Tony Barnstone's

PULP *Sonnets*

(with notes by the author)

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Introduction: Pulp, A Modern Mythology

Pulp Sonnets is based on decades of research into Victorian sensation novels, Gothic literature, pulp narratives, B movies, and comics, from which came so many genres of popular fiction. What is great about such “lowbrow” genres is that they are unrepentant fun. I’ve tried to make my sonnet sequences fun as well—but repentant fun. After all, what was enjoyable in 1930 in *Weird Tales* or *Amazing Stories* can be rough fare for a contemporary audience. So in these poems I turn the mirror back on the act of storytelling to cross-examine space-opera colonial narratives, hard-boiled gender stereotypes of the femme fatale and damsel in distress, and sexualized horror-movie violence.

I do so because these stories are still important reflections of our culture. They reveal deep workings of the American psyche. And they are our modern mythology: the epics, divinities, and heroes of Greece may have largely faded from popular consciousness, yet mythic tales remain the stuff of our dreams. For cunning Odysseus, we substitute the picaresque adventures of Dashiell Hammett’s wily Continental Op and his case-hardened progeny. For Hercules, we have Conan and the Incredible Hulk. For Oedipus solving the riddle of the sphinx, we have the modern detective, Sam Spade. The gods of Mount Olympus have reincarnated as superheroes in tights and capes. The minotaur, hydra, and harpies have given way to successive monstrous generations, from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* to the fiends of the Cthulhu circle of horror writers. The creators of these works were aware that they were creating a new mythology. In fact, the subtitle of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is *The Modern Prometheus*, and the underpinning of Hammett’s classic detective novel *Red Harvest* is the Arthurian myth of the Fisher King and the Wasteland. What blockbuster movie or imaginative television series does *not* have its roots in the classic pulp genres?

In his article “Caviar and Bread Again,” William Carlos Williams writes that the poet can through “a magnificent organization of those materials his age has placed before him . . . recreate it—the collective world. . . .” The poems in *Pulp Sonnets* seek to strike the pop-culture “materials of our age” against the flint of the sonnet form, to see what sparks will fly.

Tony Barnstone
Whittier College, 2015

Use of Form:

The use of traditional and nontraditional metrics in these sonnets creates formal effects that help highlight aspects of the pulp fiction and comics. In extended sonnet sequences, the continuing narrative and sonnet-crown-like echoes between a sonnet’s last line and first line of the next sonnet create a forward-driving effect. This, combined with the stop-action effect of a sequence broken into distinct sonnets creates a structural echo of serial-format fiction, and of the gestural disjunction of comic books in which the narrative is confined into discrete frames that are narratively linked by violent action. In addition, a number of the poems are written in original variations on the

traditional sonnet, such as a form I invented called the *terzavillanet*, which is a sonnet written in *terza rima* tercets with an interwoven rhyme scheme and with villanelle-like repeated lines, and another form I created that I call the *hourglass sonnet*, in which each line diminishes by one foot to the skinny center and then expands outward again. Such formal variations are organically integrated into the content, as in the case of the *hourglass sonnet*, which dramatizes the case of a woman wasting away from anorexia.

The Documentary Method:

The book is the product of twenty years of research and writing. The technique used to produce the book is what has recently come to be called “documentary poetry,” which is to say, poetry that is based on adaptation, refraction, and transformation of historical and literary source texts. One of my previous books, *Tongue of War: From Pearl Harbor to Nagasaki*, was also created using this technique. In that project I spent 15 years spent researching war letters, diaries, histories, oral histories, and interviews with American and Japanese soldiers, scientists such as Oppenheimer, politicians such as Truman, and citizens survivors of the Rape of Nanjing, of Hiroshima and of Nagasaki. In *Pulp Sonnets* (in the tradition of Robert Browning and Robert Frost) I use dramatic monologue to let the characters speak for themselves in the vernacular of their class, location, and social situation. I research primary materials (including pulp short stories and novels, and original crime reports) in order to develop these voices, and secondary materials (theoretical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, philosophical, and theological studies of the pulps and the comics) to develop the larger themes of the project.

High Culture and Low Culture:

A reader might ask about this project, “Why should I take serious a foray into low culture materials?” I would answer that in the field of literary studies, sociological, historical and cultural studies approaches to the text are widely accepted practices, and that the question of what sort of text merits critical analysis has long been resolved in favor of accepting low culture materials (Roland Barthes *Mythologies*, which included brilliant analyses of Greta Garbo’s face, professional wrestling and of children’s toys, was published in 1957, after all!) Further, the boundary between high and low blurs when you consider that early examples of crime and horror fiction are to be found in such classic literary texts as Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, Dickens’ *Bleak House*, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

Allusion and Allegory:

Among the techniques used in *Pulp Sonnets* are an extensive use of allusion, symbolism and allegory. This allows the poems to move quickly and powerfully to tell their haunted, adventurous and monstrous narratives, while at the same time suggesting literary depths beneath the poems. The *Captain Fantastic* series, for example, uses allusion to the log of Christopher Columbus and converts the spaceship into an overdetermined symbol (sometimes the rocket is a penis, sometimes the ship in space is the consciousness floating above the unconscious, and sometimes the spaceship is the

“ship of state”). All this adds up so as to create an allegory about the evils of colonialism and the “discovery” of the Americas.

I think of allusion as a kind of hypertexting: if a poem echoes some lines from Browning or Andrew Marvell or Milton or Jung or Christopher Columbus then those lines for a certain number of readers will open up a hyperlink to the another text, and suddenly the two texts are in dialogue with each other. The problem with allusion is that it can feel like an academic game and even be annoying if the readers feel they are not “getting it” because the texts behind the text are not familiar enough to them. On the other hand, I really wish the poems to be fun on a surface level first, but to have more and more depths of meaning on subsequent readings. And if the allusions don’t pop to mind, it doesn’t really matter: the poem means what it means to *you*, the reader. Those who are interested can always consult this guide and get a good sense of much of what was in my mind when writing these poems.

Bringing Poetry out of the Shadows:

More importantly, I would note that this project is part of my lifelong concern with bringing poetry out of the shadows and into the light. Although the subject matter of the book is low culture, the approach is literate, allusive, full of wordplay and humor, seeking to find the deeper reasons why we are attracted to the pulp genres. With some luck and good marketing, this book can help attract a new, young audience to poetry, seducing them in with flashy graphics and adventurous tales but giving them a full literary experience in the process. So many Americans feel that poetry is an elite art that they cannot comprehend without a graduate degree, but poetry is all around them. The condensed messages of print and media advertisement are a kind of debased poetry, using lyrical techniques to create jokes and metaphors, wordplay and sonic magic. The lyrics of songs are based on rhythm and rhyme as inevitably as any sonnet. Therefore, I have been working in recent years to collaborate with artists in other fields so as to take down the defenses against poetry. I’ve worked with the band Genuine Brandish to adapt my book of WWII poems into a CD of folk music titled *Tokyo’s Burning: WWII Songs*. I’ve been working with the artist Alexandra Eldridge to create a deck of Tarot cards combining original art with sonnets and writing exercises. And with *Pulp Sonnets* I’ve attempted in many ways to make the book is a model of inter-arts collaboration and cross-fertilization. One of the poems has been animated by a computer programmer/artist. A 28-sonnet sequence from the book, set in 1930s Chicago gangland, has been adapted into a web-based radio play, complete with foley work and accompanying soundtrack and professional acting. Another sonnet sequence has been adapted into a graphic novel. Most importantly, the entire book has been illustrated by the important Iranian artist Amin Mansouri so as to make poems that work graphically and textually on pages activated into fields of action.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE POEMS



KILLERS AND TRAMPS.

This is a section of poems based on classic American film noir—dark, black-and white-films about murder and the desperate lives of criminals. This is a style with lots of shadows and dramatic silhouettes, very gritty, very dark and it emerges from classic pulp fiction and hard-boiled detective novels of the Depression Era. Major influences on these poems were Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, Cornell Woolrich, and Dashiell Hammett.

THE CAT LADY.

When I was on my campus visit, applying for my job at Whittier College, I was asked one essential question: are you a cat person or a dog person? I like to think that I would have gotten the job if I had answered “dog person,” but I’m not certain. After all, several of the elder members of my department were, like the protagonist of this poem, “cat ladies,” whose houses were jungles of books and carpets through which skittish kittens and rescued ferals stalked. In fact, the protagonist is named after my dear colleague emeritus, Anne Kiley. When I was sixteen, I spent three and a half months in Kenya with a hippie beard and a bandana on my head, wearing just flip flops and a bright cotton kitanga around my waist. One day, on safari, we pulled our truck up close to a pride of lions, arranged in circle about the open ribcage of corpse of a wildebeest, its ribcage like a hand open wide in whose palm rested the stomach sack and intestines. The lions lolled in the sun, their bellies full, and groomed and licked each other, eyes half-lidded with pleasure, or rolled on their backs, scratching themselves against the earth. They reminded me of my own pet cats, Gypsy and Cheespah, and Nikta, and we leaned out of the truck windows, snapping pictures, feeling safe. But when the truck started up again, it gave out a gunshot report of a backfire, and the great male lion was instantly erect, his alert liquid yellow eyes fixing on mine, the pupils contracting, and I knew in that moment the beast was thinking, *murder*. I thought that this poem would be a good one to launch the book, as it is about how even the most domesticated cat—or person—retains the beast within.

Study Questions:

1. George Bernard Shaw writes, “Animals are my friends... and I don't eat my friends” and Robert Louis Stevenson writes, “Nothing more strongly arouses our disgust than cannibalism, yet we make the same impression on Buddhists and vegetarians, for we feed on babies, though not our own.” What keeps us from eating our pets? Is it a kind of taboo? In what circumstances might you be willing to break that taboo?
2. What keeps our pets from eating us? Do you think your pet might find it easier to eat you than vice versa?
3. What does this say about wildness and domesticity? Henry David Thoreau writes that “What we call wildness is a civilization other than our own” [Journal, 16 February 1859]. Are there rules to wildness, just like there are to domesticity?
4. In *Walden* Thoreau writes that “I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other,” yet in his journal he writes “Whatever has not come under the sway of man is wild. In this sense original and independent men are

wild — not tamed and broken by society” [*Journal*, 3 September 1851]. Does he contradict himself? Is there a place for wildness in civilization? For civilization in wildness? At what point do we have to embrace rules? What would a wild society look like?

THE CHEMIST.

“The Chemist” is based on “The Laboratory” by Robert Browning, and it happily pickpockets some of his lines in tribute to the maestro. Browning was a great early master of the dramatic monologue, a form that I have used extensively in other books and in this one. He is also a poet who was interested in depicting the darker aspects of humanity, and several of his poems speak from the point of view of murderers—notably “My Last Duchess” and “The Laboratory.” The latter poem was based on the life of the famous 17th century French murderess, Marie Madeleine Marguerite D'Aubray, marquise de Brinvilliers (1630-1676). This aristocratic killer confessed, when tortured, to colluding with her lover, Captain Godin de Sainte-Croix, in poisoning her father, Antoine Dreux d'Aubray, and two brothers, in order to inherit their property, and to planning to poison her husband, as well. She was beheaded and her body burned at the stake, though there is still some question as to the evidence against her and the probability of her guilt.

Readings: “The Laboratory” by Robert Browning

The Laboratory

Ancien Régime

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze through these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

He is with her, and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them!—I am here!

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder, I am not in haste!
Better sit thus and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me, and dance at the King's.

That in the mortar—you call it a gum?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
Sure to taste sweetly,—is that poison, too?

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
What a wild crowd of Invisible pleasures!
To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket!

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
But to light a pastille, and Elise, with her head
And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

Quick—is it finished? The colour's too grim!
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

What a drop! She's not little, no minion like me!
That's why she ensnared him: this never will free
The soul from those masculine eyes,—say "No!"
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
My own eyes to bear on her so that I thought
Could I keep them one half-minute fixed, she would fall
Shrivelled; she fell not: yet this does it all!

Not that I bid you spare her the pain;
Let death be felt and the proof remain:
Brand, burn up, bite into its grace—
He is sure to remember her dying face!

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose;
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee!
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it—next moment I dance at the King's!

Study Questions:

1. What is this powder the narrator is grinding up? Why does it smell like almonds?
(A: cyanide can be derived from bitter almonds)
2. What do you make of the final sentence of the poem? How will she “set him free”?
3. How does the illustration relate to the narrative of the poem?
4. The narrator of the poem is planning to kill her husband for cheating on her. Clearly, this is murder, but it seems to feel justified to her. When is killing justified? In

self-defense? In war? If it is your job, as a policeman or an executioner or a judge? If you are a doctor and the patient wants to die? If you are killing yourself? Never? The philosopher Immanuel Kant writes, "A society that is not willing to demand a life of somebody who has taken somebody else's life is simply immoral." Do you agree?

THE LOVER.

"The Lover" is based on a series of scenes in James M. Cain's classic pulp murder novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. I was fascinated by the unrestrained lust of the novel, the crudity and intensity of it, at the same time as I was disturbed by the novel's participation in the noir cliché of the femme fatale.

Readings: Excerpts from James M. Cain's The Postman Always Rings Twice.

"She was standing there in a red kimono, as pale as milk, staring at me, with a long thin knife in her hand. I reached out and took it away from her. When she spoke, it was in a whisper that sounded like a snake licking its tongue in and out." *from James M. Cain, The Postman Always Rings Twice.*

.....

"She was snarling like a cougar. I liked her like that."

.....

I took her in my arms and mashed my mouth up against hers.... "Bite me! Bite me!"

I bit her. I sunk my teeth into her lips so deep I could feel the blood spurt into my mouth. It was running down her neck when I carried her upstairs.

.....

"I said it, and I mean it. I'm not what you think I am, Frank. I want to work and be something, that's all. But you can't do it without love. Do you know that, Frank? Anyway, a woman can't. Well, I've made one mistake. And I've got to be a hell cat, just once, to fix it. But I'm not really a hell cat, Frank.' "

"They hang you for that."

"Not if you do it right."

.....

I began to fool with her blouse, to bust buttons, so she would look banged up. She was looking at me, and her eyes didn't look blue, they looked black. I could feel her breath coming fast. Then it stopped and she leaned real close to me.

"Rip me! Rip me!"

I ripped her. I shoved my hand in her blouse and jerked. She was wide open, from her throat to her belly.

"You got that climbing out. You caught it in the door handle."

My voice sounded queer, like it was coming out of a tin phonograph.

"And this you don't know how you got."

I hauled off and hit her in the eye as hard as I could She went down. She was right down there at my feet, her eyes shining, her breasts trembling, drawn up in tight points, and pointing right up at me. She was down there, and the breath was

roaring in the back of my throat like I was some kind of a animal, and my tongue was all swelled up in my mouth, and blood pounding in it.

“Yes! Yes, Frank, yes!”

Next thing I knew, I was down there with her, and we were staring in each other's eyes, and locked in each other's arms, and straining to get closer. Hell could have opened for me then, and it wouldn't have made any difference. I had to have her, if I hung for it. I had her.

.....

I pushed her over to the bed. She held on to her glass, and some of it spilled.

“The hell with it. Plenty more where that came from.”

I began slipping off her blouse. “Rip me, Frank. Rip me like you did that night.”

I ripped all her clothes off. She twisted and turned, slow, so they would slip out from under her. Then she closed her eyes and lay back on the pillow.”

Study Questions:

1. Read over the excerpts from James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. What aspects of the prose do you find replicated in the poem?
2. In what ways does the poem seem to go in its own direction?
3. How do the Cain excerpts and this poem with their “hell cat” imagery relate back to the first poem in *Pulp Sonnets*, “The Cat Lady”?

NEW YORK BLUES.

“New York Blues” is a tribute to the masterful short story of that name by Cornell Woolrich.

Readings: Excerpts from Cornell Woolrich's “New York Blues”

I think fear neutralizes alcohol, weakens its anesthetic power. It's good for small fears; your boss, your wife, your bills, your dentist; all right then to take a drink. But for big ones it doesn't do any good. Like water on blazing gasoline, it will only quicken and compound it. It takes sand, in the literal and the slang sense, to smother the bonfire that is fear. And if you're out of sand, then you must burn up.

--- from “New York Blues”

Now the evening's at its noon, its meridian. The outgoing tide has simmered down, and there's a lull-like the calm in the eye of a hurricane - before the reverse tide starts to set in.

The last acts of the three-act plays are now on, and the after-theater eating places are beginning to fill up with early comers; Danny's and Lindy's - yes, and Horn & Hardart too. Everybody has got where they wanted to go - and that was out

somewhere. Now everybody will want to get back where they came from - and that's home somewhere. Or as the coffee-grinder radio, always on the beam, put it at about this point: 'New York, New York, it's a helluva town, The Bronx is up, the Battery's down, And the people ride around in a hole in the ground.'

Now the incoming tide rolls in; the hours abruptly switch back to single digits again, and it's a little like the time you put your watch back on entering a different time zone. Now the buses knock off and the subway expresses turn into locals and the locals space themselves far apart; and as Johnny Carson's face hits millions of screens all at one and the same time, the incoming tide reaches its crest and pounds against the shore. There's a sudden splurge, a slew of taxis arriving at the hotel entrance one by one as regularly as though they were on a conveyor belt, emptying out and then going away again.

Then this too dies down, and a deep still sets in. It's an around-the-clock town, but this is the stretch; from now until the garbage-grinding trucks come along and tear the dawn to shreds, it gets as quiet as it's ever going to get.

This is the deep of the night, the dregs, the sediment at the bottom of the coffee cup. The blue hours; when guys' nerves get tauter and women's fears get greater. Now guys and girls make love, or kill each other or sometimes both. And as the windows on the 'Late Show' title silhouette light up one by one, the real ones all around go dark. And from now on the silence is broken only by the occasional forlorn hoot of a bogged-down drunk or the gutted-cat squeal of a too sharply swerved axle coming around a turn. Or as Billy Daniels sang it in *Golden Boy*: While the city sleeps, And the streets are clear, There's a life that's happening here.

--- from "New York Blues"

Study Questions:

1. Summarize what happens in the poem explicitly and what you surmise is the back-story that brought the narrator to this position.
2. What do you make of the title? How does it relate to the song quoted in the poem? If you don't know the song, you can find it on YouTube or by searching the web for "New York, New York," from the 1944 musical *On the Town*.

NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES.

This poem is an adaptation of the opening chapter of the classic Noir novel *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* by Cornell Woolrich. Woolrich almost certainly got the title of his novel from "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes" by Francis William Bourdillon (b. 1852)

Readings: "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes" by Francis William Bourdillon, plus musical adaptations of the same title

The night has a thousand eyes,

And the day but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes, 5
And the heart but one;
Yet the light of a whole life dies
When love is done.

There's also a cheesy song by Bobby Vee of the same title, which you can hear on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBxo8V6R0tc>

There is, as well, a jazz piece by Coltrane of the same title here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZ5ebjyZ44I>

Study Questions:

1. Read the poem by Bourdillon and talk about how the imagery and themes of that poem relate to this sonnet.
2. Why do you think the woman wanted to jump off the bridge?
3. Why do you think the poem (like the story) chooses to start with the setting and then move to descriptions of various clues---the ring, the money, the handbag---before the protagonist finds the woman on the bridge about to jump?

A WOMAN LIKE A BULLET.

This poem alludes to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” by T. S. Eliot, and hopes to undermine and reimagine the classic noir misogynist caricature of the femme fatale, the fatal woman, who appears so intensely in James M. Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. The narrator in “A Woman Like a Bullet” is like a noir Prufrock, the man who doesn’t get the woman, and so the femme fatale becomes woman cast upon the eyelids’ screen (of memory and dream) by the magic lantern of the brain. She is not fatal, but she *feels* so, the pain of her loss like “a bullet in the spleen.” The poem also tries to replicate the rough humor of hard-boiled writers such as Raymond Chandler in lines “like a pistol in your silk-gloved, fine-boned hand / pointed approximately right at my left / ventricle.”

Readings: From T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”:

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!

But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
“That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all.”

Research Topics:

See the research topics for “The Ballad of Dottie and Pete,” below.

MEXICAN MOVIE, 1939.

I enjoyed having the outlaw El Diablo ride a white horse, since in Revelation, Death, one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, rides a pale horse. This poem was written as a challenge to myself, when Annie Finch told me she was editing an anthology of villanelles and asked if I had any to share. In fact, though I consider myself to have mastered the sonnet, I feel that I have generally failed to write a good villanelle. It is an immensely difficult form, in part because all the repetitions begin to feel inevitably, well, repetitious. Dylan Thomas can get away with in in “Do Not Go Gentle” because he is ranting and pontificating and chanting and roaring, but the terrific villanelle is a rare thing—much rarer than the successful sonnet. For me, the other stand-out villanelle in the tradition is Elizabeth Bishop’s “One Art,” in which she mitigates the repetitiveness of the form by lifting a technique from music: not just repetition, but repetition with variation. This is the technique that I used in the poem. I tried to mix up the repeating lines with many puns and homophones and to allow myself to switch out articles and prepositions but to keep the nouns, verbs and adjectives (what I call “the power words”) largely the same in the repeating lines. What is a villanelle doing in a book of sonnets? Well, I think of it like the flaw that Persian carpet makers would leave in their carpets: since only Allah is perfect, human designs should contain a flaw to show respect. Similarly, the Navajo rugs are woven to include a flaw in the pattern through which evil spirits might escape or through which the weaver, who has labored so hard that his or her spirit is entangled in the work, might be released. “Mexican Movie, 1939” is my spirit outlet.

Study Questions:

1. How do the names of the characters in the poem relate to the setting and the poem’s themes?
2. Is the protagonist sympathetic or wholly a villain to you?
3. What is his problem with God?
4. Can you find any puns in this poem?

THE CHOP SHOP.

The poems in “The Chop Shop” are loosely based on the case of Roy DeMeo and his crew, members of the Gambino crime family, who perfected the “Gemini method” of disposing of corpses. This method was named after the Gemini Lounge, where the crew

would hang out. The victim would be shot in the head with a silenced pistol, his head would be immediately wrapped in a towel to stanch the bleeding, and then he would be stabbed in the heart to stop the blood pumping. Then in the bathroom, the victim would be dismembered, wrapped in plastic, and disposed of in pieces at the Fountain Avenue Dump in Brooklyn. DeMeo is thought to have killed between 100 and 200 people. When things went wrong, DeMeo was ordered by his superior to kill his friend and second-in-command, Chris Rosenberg. I read about the case in the New York Times when it first broke, and it has always remained an immensely powerful thing in my imagination: how DeMeo took the logical step for the mass murderer of creating a murder factory where the act could occur often and safely for the crew.

Study Questions:

1. What do you make of the narrator in these poems? Is something *wrong* with him? If so, how do you know? Point to specific lines and phrases in the poems.
2. Can you summarize the plot of what happens in the two poems, point by point?

INSECTS AND CIGARETTES.

The poems in “Insects and Cigarettes” are based on a running metaphor of the human as an insect trapped in a glass by a sadistic God. The idea goes back to the Gnostic notion of God being separate from the Creator, a demi-God or Archon who keeps us trapped in ignorance on earth, so that when Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge they are eating from the fruit of the spirit. Thus, religions like Quakerism eschew the Christian idea that knowledge is evil, seeking especially intuition (versus external tuition) of the inner light. William Blake’s idea of Jehovah as a jailer God, Urizen (“Your Reason”), is based on similar notions.

Readings: William Lindsay Gresham, Cornell Woolrich and Han Shan

The idea comes up quite a bit in pulp fiction, as well. As William Lindsay Gresham says in his classic noir novel (based on the Tarot deck), *Nightmare Alley*,

What sense does it all make? What sort of God would put us here in this goddamned, stinking slaughterhouse of a world? Some guy that likes to tear the wings off flies?

I was also inspired by a quote from Cornell Woolrich’s *Blues of a Lifetime: The Autobiography of Cornell Woolrich*:

I had that trapped feeling, like some sort of a poor insect that you've put inside a downturned glass, and it tries to climb up the sides, and it can't, and it can't, and it can't.

A final inspiration was this poem by the Tang Dynasty Buddhist poet Han Shan:

This life is lost in dust.
Like bugs in a bowl
we all day circle, circle
unable to get out.
We're nothing like immortals,
our sorrows never end,
years and months flow off like water
and in an instant we're old men.

-Trans. Tony Barnstone and Chou Ping

Other allusions in the poems should be obvious (Han Christian Andersen's "The Little Match Girl" and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*.)

Study Questions:

1. How do you think the repeated insect imagery in these poems contributes to their themes?
2. Is there a philosophical or religious stance taken in these poems?
3. In "The Metamorphosis," a case is made for justifiable robbery. Is theft ever justified? How about when you download a song without paying for it or download or view a copyrighted movie or video without paying for it?

THE BALLAD OF DOTTIE AND PETE.

The characters in "The Ballad of Dottie and Pete" were inspired by Gloria in Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* and by a character in James M. Cain's short story "Pastorale." I consider this sequence the inverted reflection of "The Lover," in which it is not the femme fatale but the homme homicide who makes the brutal murder happen.

Research Topics:

James M. Cain as Source:

You can read "Pastorale" by James M. Cain as published in *The American Mercury* at <http://www.unz.org/Pub/AmMercury-1928mar-00291>. How does "The Ballad of Dottie and Pete" relate to "Pastorale"? What differences do you note? How does telling the story from the point of view of one of the criminals change the story—as compared with telling it from the point of view of a victim or a detective?

Pulp Fiction Techniques:

The Paris Review interview with James M. Cain is online here: <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3474/the-art-of-fiction-no-69-james-m-cain>. Read it. Do you find examples of Cain techniques such as "the love rack" or "the old switcheroo" in "The Ballad of Dottie and Pete"? How about in other poems in this section?

The Femme Fatale:

Research the theme of the “femme fatale” in Film Noir and pulp fiction. What characterizes this cliché of the genres? Why do you suppose the femme fatale was so popular with audiences in her time? What objections might a contemporary audience find with such a character? How about in the poem above, “A Woman Like a Bullet”? How does this poem seek to renew or play off of the clichés of the genre? See also the research topic “The Femme Fatale and the Damsel in Distress” below in the “Operation Ragnarok” section.

OPERATION RAGNAROK.

The poems in the “Operation Ragnarok” section, especially “Wet Work,” were loosely inspired by the book, *Assignment: Black Viking*, by Edward S. Aarons, a Sam Durell adventure. In order to research this sequence, I read an awful lot of trashy Cold War spy literature, gritty, violent films and novels filled with mystery, plots, conspiracies, with lots of sexy women, guns and knives, car chases and exotic settings (in this story, the setting is Norway). However, the real roots of the sequence go back to Norse myth, Nietzsche, *Paradise Lost*, *Frankenstein*, *Blade Runner*, Julio Cortázar’s short story “The Continuity of Parks,” Jorge Luis Borges’ story “The Garden of Bifurcating Paths,” and Paul Auster’s *City of Glass*. As the replicant Roy Batty says in the movie, *Blade Runner*, “It’s not an easy thing to meet your maker.” He wants to meet his maker, of course, in order to kill him, because like the cruel God referenced in “Insects and Cigarettes” his maker has manipulated him and given him great gifts, but gifts that are only to serve the masters, and that are controlled, ultimately, by the dark gift when his maker programmed death into his being. That is, God is cruel. Fate is slavery. Free will can occur only when the slave kills the master, when the creation kills the creator. This story has obvious debts to the Monster’s rebellion in *Frankenstein*, and before *Frankenstein* to Lucifer’s rebellion in *Paradise Lost*. But to rebel the creation must first wake up to the fact of being enslaved. Many postmodern fictions recast this archetypal story of rebellion against the creator as equivalent to the characters in a novel rebelling against the invisible author, or against the reader who consumes tragedies with a kind of gustatory pleasure.

Readings: Origin of Sequence in “Detective Suite: A Cut-Up Novel in Monotypes”

Elements of the “Jack Logan” and the “Operation Ragnarok” sequences derive from a text-and-art project I created when I was 21 years old, inspired by the illuminated manuscripts of William Blake, the blend of poem and image in the work of Kenneth Patchen, and the *Calligrammes* of Guillaume Apollinaire. The text in the sequence sought to emulate the wise-cracking similes of Raymond Chandler’s detectives and the tough guy prose he derived from reading Hemingway. A PowerPoint of the sequence can be viewed here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/v6o57my35lkglm/Detective%20Suite%20Powerpoint.pptx?dl=0>

A BACK ALLEY IN HONNINGSVÅG

This one was inspired by Wallace Stevens’ “Disillusionment of Ten O’Clock” and Emily Dickinson’s “I’m Nobody! Who Are You?” The Stevens poem alludes to William Blake’s “The Tyger,” (a poem which asks whether God created the Tyger as well as the lamb, evil as well as good). Like Blake’s “The Tyger,” this sequence asks “Who dreams up the world?” Another possible allusion, to the sailor’s adage (with roots in Shakespeare and Matthew), “Red sky at night, sailor’s delight. Red sky in morning, sailor’s warning” is meant to suggest the coming of a symbolic storm in the plot.

Readings

Wallace Stevens' "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock"

The houses are haunted
By white night-gowns.
None are green,
Or purple with green rings,
Or green with yellow rings,
Or yellow with blue rings.
None of them are strange,
With socks of lace
And beaded ceintures.
People are not going
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.
Only, here and there, an old sailor,
Drunk and asleep in his boots,
Catches tigers
In red weather.

Emily Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" (260)

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell one's name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!

William Blake's "The Tyger"

The Tyger.

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears;
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



Study Questions

1. The protagonist of the poem is a spy who has escaped from a dangerous situation in Sudan to Norway, where his contacts have all been murdered. He is trying to understand who is killing all his friends and allies:

I'd like to understand. I'm nobody,
but who are you, assassin? Mystery,
it's all a mystery. The film is cut.

Compare his questioning to that of the William Blake poem, "The Tyger."

2. The Blake poem is a "theodicy," a poem that questions why God permits evil to exist in the world. Is "A Back Alley In Honningsvåg" also a theodicy? How so or how not?

WET WORK

Study Questions

1. In "Wet Work," the theme of questioning continues: "What's next? I ask the sky. No answer." And later he solves "the riddle of her black bikini." How do we read the fact that he can't get answers from the sky but can figure out a bikini's ties?
2. As in the previous poem, the issue of "cutting" comes up. In the last poem the lines were "Mystery, / it's all a mystery. The film is cut." Here, the lines are "The rest is cut / off suddenly." How does the issue of being cut off or of communications being broken or of film being cut into scenes tie into how this narrative works?

DEATH AND THE AUTHOR.

"Who writes the tale I read" suggests the postmodern complex of ideas noted above (in which author: character is made equivalent to God: human). The figure of the detective trying to unravel the mystery becomes equivalent to humans seeking understanding of fate and God. See the discussion of Structuralist theorist Tzvetan Todorov's ideas about the figure of the detective at the end of the "Jack Logan, Fighting Airman" section (under "Absent Identity, Reading as Detection, and Unreliable Narrators").

Although we know Sigrid as first Damsel in Distress and then Femme Fatale, these roles are mediated through her portrayal by the protagonist of "Operation Ragnarok," and reflect as much on his attitudes as on her actions in the plot. And he is smart enough to at least understand that he's misunderstood her, as in the lines "why fall for her then blame / her for the fall?" which refer to the roots of western misogyny in the story of The Fall in Genesis. I was interested here in how women are often portrayed in literature and film in terms of archetype instead of psychological character. In fact, the arc of development of the popular fiction female character is often from one type to

another. A good example can be found in Joan Chen's character of Josie Packard in David Lynch's classic TV series *Twin Peaks*, who appears to be a Damsel in Distress in season one but is later revealed to be a dangerous Femme Fatale.

Readings: *Early Church Father Tertullian on Eve and Women*

Do you not realize that Eve is you? You are the devil's gateway, you desecrated that fatal tree; you first betrayed the law of God, you who softened up with your cajoling words the man against whom the devil could not prevail by force. The image of God, the man Adam, you broke him, it was child's play to you. You deserved death, and it was the son of God who had to die!

Quoted in Anıl Öztürk's "The Christian Men's Oldest Prejudice: Misogyny, Hate Or Fear?"

http://www.academia.edu/2030628/The_Christian_Men_s_Oldest_Prejudice_Misogyny_Hate_Or_Fear

For more Tertullian, go here: <http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf04/anf04-06.htm>

Study Questions

1. Can you think of any examples in the media, comic books, or in your reading of characters who are reduced to stereotypes of the Damsel in Distress or the Femme Fatale?
2. In what way do you see examples of these stereotypes related to religion? Some commentators see the figure of Sita in the Ramayana as an example of the Damsel in Distress who is later blamed for her abduction, switching back and forth between stereotypes of Virgin and Whore. Is there a Buddhist version of the Femme Fatale or Damsel in Distress and related stereotypes? A Muslim one? A Christian one? Can you find evidence for this in Tertullian's discourse on Eve? Explain.

AT THE FISHHOUSES

was inspired by Elizabeth Bishop's "At the Fishhouses," and "The Fish."

Readings: Elizabeth Bishop: "The Fish"

<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/fish-2>

Readings: from Elizabeth Bishop's "At the Fishhouses"

The air smells so strong of codfish
it makes one's nose run and one's eyes water.
The five fishhouses have steeply peaked roofs
and narrow, cleated gangplanks slant up
to storerooms in the gables
for the wheelbarrows to be pushed up and down on.
All is silver: the heavy surface of the sea,

swelling slowly as if considering spilling over,
is opaque, but the silver of the benches,
the lobster pots, and masts, scattered
among the wild jagged rocks,
is of an apparent translucence
like the small old buildings with an emerald moss
growing on their shoreward walls.
The big fish tubs are completely lined
with layers of beautiful herring scales
and the wheelbarrows are similarly plastered
with creamy iridescent coats of mail,
with small iridescent flies crawling on them.

Read the full poem here: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/182896>

Study Questions

1. How do the images and themes in “At the Fishhouses” relate to those of Elizabeth Bishop’s poem of the same title and to her poem “The Fish”?
2. In the Bishop poem “The Fish,” she is the fisher who brings up an ancient fish from the great ocean. Do you think the protagonist of the *Pulp Sonnets* poem “At the Fishhouses” is fish or fisherman? Why?

THE JOB.

In the lines “Leviathans, fish tales, / strange destiny, hair-breadth escapes, hairpin / plot twists, hair-raising peril--it’s my job /to suffer at your hands, assassin, God,” the pun on long-suffering Biblical figure of Job is intentional. The Bible monster Leviathan, described in detail in the Book of Job, is a sea monster later made equivalent to the whale. Leviathan is often interpreted by Christians as a figure for the devil, like the Whale who swallows Jonah, though Jewish literature identifies him as a monster so large he eats a whale a day. The whale as Devil interpretation can be seen in this anonymous poem from a Middle English bestiary. The figure takes on particular interest in Moby Dick, where Ahab battling the White Whale can be variously interpreted as human conflict with the Devil, with God, with Fate, or with Death.

Readings: **The Whale (Anonymous, from *The Middle English Physiologus*)**

The whale’s the biggest fish upon the sea,
You see it floating and think it must be

An island planted on the ocean floor.
When this enormous creature hungers for

A meal, its mouth gapes wide, its throat gives birth
To what must be the sweetest scent on earth,

So other fish are drawn to him in bliss

And linger in his mouth; not knowing this

A trap, they are sucked in, and when he snaps
his great jaws shut, small fish become his snacks.

In this way tiny fish become deceived,
Though bigger fish of course will not be seized.

This fish dwells healthily on the sea ground
Until a hurricane stirs things around

And the deep water's so disturbed the whale
Must rise and surface and wait out the gale

Which tosses ships about with turbid strife.
The sailors who dread death and live for life

See the whale and think it is an isle
Where they can shelter from the storm a while.

They moor upon it and with stone and steel
They kindle tinder and cook up a meal.

Warmed by the fire, joyful, they eat and drink
But the fire burns the whale, who starts to sink,

And once he dives down to the ocean's ground
The sailors all are drowned without a wound.

The Significance

The Devil's powerful and schooled in wile
Like witches filled with sorcery and guile.

He makes men full of thirst and ravenous
For every kind of sin, desire and lust.

He draws the small ones with flowered breath
But once drawn in they find disgrace and death

The small ones have weak faith; only the great
In spirit and in flesh evade this fate.

Hear the Devil and you will not end well.
The hope you anchor there drags you to hell.

Translated by Tony Barnstone

Readings: The Leviathan (Job 41 1-34)

- ¹ Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope?
- ² Can you put a cord through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook?
- ³ Will he keep begging you for mercy? Will he speak to you with gentle words?
- ⁴ Will he make an agreement with you for you to take him as your slave for life?
- ⁵ Can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls?
- ⁶ Will traders barter for him? Will they divide him up among the merchants?
- ⁷ Can you fill his hide with harpoons or his head with fishing spears?
- ⁸ If you lay a hand on him, you will remember the struggle and never do it again!
- ⁹ Any hope of subduing him is false; the mere sight of him is overpowering.
- ¹⁰ No-one is fierce enough to rouse him. Who then is able to stand against me?
- ¹¹ Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.
- ¹² I will not fail to speak of his limbs, his strength and his graceful form.
- ¹³ Who can strip off his outer coat? Who would approach him with a [bridle](#)?
- ¹⁴ Who dares open the doors of his mouth, ringed about with his fearsome teeth?
- ¹⁵ His back has rows of shields tightly sealed together;
- ¹⁶ Each is so close to the next that no air can pass between.
- ¹⁷ They are joined fast to one another; they cling together and cannot be parted.
- ¹⁸ His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn.
- ¹⁹ Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out.
- ²⁰ Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds.
- ²¹ His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth.
- ²² Strength resides in his neck; dismay goes before him.
- ²³ The folds of his flesh are tightly joined; they are firm and immovable.
- ²⁴ His chest is hard as rock, hard as a lower millstone.
- ²⁵ When he rises up, the mighty are terrified; they retreat before his thrashing.
- ²⁶ The sword that reaches him has no effect, nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin.
- ²⁷ Iron he treats like straw and bronze like rotten wood.
- ²⁸ Arrows do not make him flee, sling stones are like chaff to him.
- ²⁹ A club seems to him but a piece of straw, he laughs at the rattling of the lance.
- ³⁰ His undersides are jagged potsherds, leaving a trail in the mud like a threshing-sledge.
- ³¹ He makes the depths churn like a boiling cauldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment.
- ³² Behind him he leaves a glistening wake; one would think the deep had white hair.
- ³³ Nothing on earth is his equal—a creature without fear.
- ³⁴ He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud.

Study Questions

1. Why does the protagonist call God an “assassin”?
2. Read over the “Whale” and “Leviathan” poems above. Why do you think “The Job” refers to them? How do they open up the poem’s themes?

THE MAN WITH THE GLASS EYE SPEAKS.

In my notion of a theological postmodern spy story, the assassin figure cannot just be some messenger angel. I was more intrigued by the idea that he might be a Nietzschean ubermensch ignorant of his boss’s true nature, who imagines that God the Author is dead and that therefore he can transvalue value, go beyond good and evil and define morality as self-interest (like followers of Ayn Rand): “What’s good is good for *me*.”

Readings: Ayn Rand, Howard Roark’s speech in praise of selfishness, from The Fountainhead (1943)

Thousands of years ago, the first man discovered how to make fire. He was probably burned at the stake he had taught his brothers to light. He was considered an evildoer who had dealt with a demon mankind dreaded. But thereafter men had fire to keep them warm, to cook their food, to light their caves. He had left them a gift they had not conceived and he had lifted darkness off the earth. Centuries later, the first man invented the wheel. He was probably torn on the rack he had taught his brothers to build. He was considered a transgressor who ventured into forbidden territory. But thereafter, men could travel past any horizon. He had left them a gift they had not conceived and he had opened the roads of the world.

That man, the unsubmissive and first, stands in the opening chapter of every legend mankind has recorded about its beginning. Prometheus was chained to a rock and torn by vultures - because he had stolen the fire of the gods. Adam was condemned to suffer - because he had eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Whatever the legend, somewhere in the shadows of its memory mankind knew that its glory began with one and that that one paid for his courage.

Throughout the centuries there were men who took first steps down new roads armed with nothing but their own vision. Their goals differed, but they all had this in common: that the step was first, the road new, the vision unborrowed, and the response they received - hatred. The great creators - the thinkers, the artists, the scientists, the inventors - stood alone against the men of their time. Every great new thought was opposed. Every great new invention was denounced. The first motor was considered foolish. The airplane was considered impossible. The power loom was considered vicious. Anesthesia was considered sinful. But the men of unborrowed vision went ahead. They fought, they suffered and they paid. But they won.

No creator was prompted by a desire to serve his brothers, for his brothers rejected the gift he offered and that gift destroyed the slothful routine of their lives. His truth was his only motive. His own truth, and his own work to achieve it in his own way. A symphony, a book, an engine, a philosophy, an airplane or a building - that was his goal and his life. Not those who heard, read, operated, believed, flew or inhabited the thing he had created. The creation, not its users. The creation, not the benefits others derived from it. The creation which gave form to his truth. He held his truth above all things and against all men.

His vision, his strength, his courage came from his own spirit. A man's spirit, however, is his self. That entity which is his consciousness. To think, to feel, to judge, to act are functions of the ego.

The creators were not selfless. It is the whole secret of their power - that it was self-sufficient, self-motivated, self-generated. A first cause, a fount of energy, a life force, a Prime Mover. The creator served nothing and no one. He lived for himself.

And only by living for himself was he able to achieve the things which are the glory of mankind. Such is the nature of achievement.

Man cannot survive except through his mind. He comes on earth unarmed. His brain is his only weapon. Animals obtain food by force. Man has no claws, no fangs, no horns, no great strength of muscle. He must plant his food or hunt it. To plant, he needs a process of thought. To hunt, he needs weapons, and to make weapons - a process of thought. From this simplest necessity to the highest religious abstraction, from the wheel to the skyscraper, everything we are and everything we have comes from a single attribute of man - the function of his reasoning mind.

But the mind is an attribute of the individual. There is no such thing as a collective brain. There is no such thing as a collective thought. An agreement reached by a group of men is only a compromise or an average drawn upon many individual thoughts. It is a secondary consequence. The primary act - the process of reason - must be performed by each man alone. We can divide a meal among many men. We cannot digest it in a collective stomach. No man can use his lungs to breathe for another man. No man can use his brain to think for another. All the functions of body and spirit are private. They cannot be shared or transferred.

We inherit the products of the thought of other men. We inherit the wheel. We make a cart. The cart becomes an automobile. The automobile becomes an airplane. But all through the process what we receive from others is only the end product of their thinking. The moving force is the creative faculty which takes this product as material, uses it and originates the next step. This creative faculty cannot be given or received, shared or borrowed. It belongs to single, individual men. That which it creates is the property of the creator. Men learn from one another. But all learning is only the exchange of material. No man can give another the capacity to think. Yet that capacity is our only means of survival.

Nothing is given to man on earth. Everything he needs has to be produced. And here man faces his basic alternative: he can survive in only one of two ways - by the

independent work of his own mind or as a parasite fed by the minds of others. The creator originates. The parasite borrows. The creator faces nature alone. The parasite faces nature through an intermediary.

The creator's concern is the conquest of nature. The parasite's concern is the conquest of men.

The creator lives for his work. He needs no other men. His primary goal is within himself. The parasite lives second-hand. He needs others. Others become his prime motive.

The basic need of the creator is independence. The reasoning mind cannot work under any form of compulsion. It cannot be curbed, sacrificed or subordinated to any consideration whatsoever. It demands total independence in function and in motive. To a creator, all relations with men are secondary.

The basic need of the second-hander is to secure his ties with men in order to be fed. He places relations first. He declares that man exists in order to serve others. He preaches altruism.

Altruism is the doctrine which demands that man live for others and place others above self.

No man can live for another. He cannot share his spirit just as he cannot share his body. But the second-hander has used altruism as a weapon of exploitation and reversed the base of mankind's moral principles. Men have been taught every precept that destroys the creator. Men have been taught dependence as a virtue.

The man who attempts to live for others is a dependent. He is a parasite in motive and makes parasites of those he serves. The relationship produces nothing but mutual corruption. It is impossible in concept. The nearest approach to it in reality - the man who lives to serve others - is the slave. If physical slavery is repulsive, how much more repulsive is the concept of servility of the spirit? The conquered slave has a vestige of honor. He has the merit of having resisted and of considering his condition evil. But the man who enslaves himself voluntarily in the name of love is the basest of creatures. He degrades the dignity of man and he degrades the conception of love. But this is the essence of altruism.

Men have been taught that the highest virtue is not to achieve, but to give. Yet one cannot give that which has not been created. Creation comes before distribution - or there will be nothing to distribute. The need of the creator comes before the need of any possible beneficiary. Yet we are taught to admire the second-hander who dispenses gifts he has not produced above the man who made the gifts possible. We praise an act of charity. We shrug at an act of achievement.

Men have been taught that their first concern is to relieve the sufferings of others. But suffering is a disease. Should one come upon it, one tries to give relief and assistance. To make that the highest test of virtue is to make suffering the most important part of

life. Then man must wish to see others suffer - in order that he may be virtuous. Such is the nature of altruism. The creator is not concerned with disease, but with life. Yet the work of the creators has eliminated one form of disease after another, in man's body and spirit, and brought more relief from suffering than any altruist could ever conceive.

Men have been taught that it is a virtue to agree with others. But the creator is the man who disagrees. Men have been taught that it is a virtue to swim with the current. But the creator is the man who goes against the current. Men have been taught that it is a virtue to stand together. But the creator is the man who stands alone.

Men have been taught that the ego is the synonym of evil, and selflessness the ideal of virtue. But the creator is the egotist in the absolute sense, and the selfless man is the one who does not think, feel, judge or act. These are functions of the self.

Here the basic reversal is most deadly. The issue has been perverted and man has been left no alternative - and no freedom. As poles of good and evil, he was offered two conceptions: egotism and altruism. Egotism was held to mean the sacrifice of others to self. Altruism - the sacrifice of self to others. This tied man irrevocably to other men and left him nothing but a choice of pain: his own pain borne for the sake of others or pain inflicted upon others for the sake of self. When it was added that man must find joy in self-immolation, the trap was closed. Man was forced to accept masochism as his ideal - under the threat that sadism was his only alternative. This was the greatest fraud ever perpetrated on mankind.

This was the device by which dependence and suffering were perpetuated as fundamentals of life.

The choice is not self-sacrifice or domination. The choice is independence or dependence. The code of the creator or the code of the second-hander. This is the basic issue. It rests upon the alternative of life or death. The code of the creator is built on the needs of the reasoning mind which allows man to survive. The code of the second-hander is built on the needs of a mind incapable of survival. All that which proceeds from man's independent ego is good. All that which proceeds from man's dependence upon men is evil.

The egotist in the absolute sense is not the man who sacrifices others. He is the man who stands above the need of using others in any manner. He does not function through them. He is not concerned with them in any primary matter. Not in his aim, not in his motive, not in his thinking, not in his desires, not in the source of his energy. He does not exist for any other man - and he asks no other man to exist for him. This is the only form of brotherhood and mutual respect possible between men.

Degrees of ability vary, but the basic principle remains the same: the degree of a man's independence, initiative and personal love for his work determines his talent as a worker and his worth as a man. Independence is the only gauge of human virtue and value. What a man is and makes of himself; not what he has or hasn't done for others. There is

no substitute for personal dignity. There is no standard of personal dignity except independence.

In all proper relationships there is no sacrifice of anyone to anyone. An architect needs clients, but he does not subordinate his work to their wishes. They need him, but they do not order a house just to give him a commission. Men exchange their work by free, mutual consent to mutual advantage when their personal interests agree and they both desire the exchange. If they do not desire it, they are not forced to deal with each other. They seek further. This is the only possible form of relationship between equals. Anything else is a relation of slave to master, or victim to executioner.

No work is ever done collectively, by a majority decision. Every creative job is achieved under the guidance of a single individual thought. An architect requires a great many men to erect his building. But he does not ask them to vote on his design. They work together by free agreement and each is free in his proper function. An architect uses steel, glass, concrete, produced by others. But the materials remain just so much steel, glass and concrete until he touches them. What he does with them is his individual product and his individual property. This is the only pattern for proper co-operation among men.

The first right on earth is the right of the ego. Man's first duty is to himself. His moral law is never to place his prime goal within the persons of others. His moral obligation is to do what he wishes, provided his wish does not depend *primarily* upon other men. This includes the whole sphere of his creative faculty, his thinking, his work. But it does not include the sphere of the gangster, the altruist and the dictator.

A man thinks and works alone. A man cannot rob, exploit or rule-alone. Robbery, exploitation and ruling presuppose victims. They imply dependence. They are the province of the second-hander.

Rulers of men are not egotists. They create nothing. They exist entirely through the persons of others. Their goal is in their subjects, in the activity of enslaving. They are as dependent as the beggar, the social worker and the bandit. The form of dependence does not matter.

But men were taught to regard second-handers - tyrants, emperors, dictators - as exponents of egotism. By this fraud they were made to destroy the ego, themselves and others. The purpose of the fraud was to destroy the creators. Or to harness them. Which is a synonym.

From the beginning of history, the two antagonists have stood face to face: the creator and the second-hander. When the first creator invented the wheel, the first second-hander responded. He invented altruism.

The creator - denied, opposed, persecuted, exploited - went on, moved forward and carried all humanity along on his energy. The second-hander contributed nothing to the process except the impediments. The contest has another name: the individual against the collective.

The 'common good' of a collective - a race, a class, a state - was the claim and justification of every tyranny ever established over men. Every major horror of history was committed in the name of an altruistic motive. Has any act of selfishness ever equaled the carnage perpetrated by disciples of altruism? Does the fault lie in men's hypocrisy or in the nature of the principle? The most dreadful butchers were the most sincere. They believed in the perfect society reached through the guillotine and the firing squad. Nobody questioned their right to murder since they were murdering for an altruistic purpose. It was accepted that man must be sacrificed for other men. Actors change, but the course of the tragedy remains the same. A humanitarian who starts with declarations of love for mankind and ends with a sea of blood. It goes on and will go on so long as men believe that an action is good if it is unselfish. That permits the altruist to act and forces his victims to bear it. The leaders of collectivist movements ask nothing for themselves. But observe the results.

The only good which men can do to one another and the only statement of their proper relationship is - Hands off!

Now observe the results of a society built on the principle of individualism. This, our country. The noblest country in the history of men. The country of greatest achievement, greatest prosperity, greatest freedom. This country was not based on selfless service, sacrifice, renunciation or any precept of altruism. It was based on a man's right to the pursuit of happiness. His own happiness. Not anyone else's. A private, personal, selfish motive. Look at the results. Look into your own conscience.

It is an ancient conflict. Men have come close to the truth, but it was destroyed each time and one civilization fell after another. Civilization is the progress toward a society of privacy. The savage's whole existence is public, ruled by the laws of his tribe. Civilization is the process of setting man free from men.

Now, in our age, collectivism, the rule of the second-hander and second-rater, the ancient monster, has broken loose and is running amuck. It has brought men to a level of intellectual indecency never equaled on earth. It has reached a scale of horror without precedent. It has poisoned every mind. It has swallowed most of Europe. It is engulfing our country.

I am an architect. I know what is to come by the principle on which it is built. We are approaching a world in which I cannot permit myself to live.

Now you know why I dynamited Cortlandt.

I designed Cortlandt. I gave it to you. I destroyed it.

I destroyed it because I did not choose to let it exist. It was a double monster. In form and in implication. I had to blast both. The form was mutilated by two second-handers who assumed the right to improve upon that which they had not made and could not equal. They were permitted to do it by the general implication that the altruistic purpose

of the building superseded all rights and that I had no claim to stand against it.

I agreed to design Cortlandt for the purpose of seeing it erected as I designed it and for no other reason. That was the price I set for my work. I was not paid.

I do not blame Peter Keating. He was helpless. He had a contract with his employers. It was ignored. He had a promise that the structure he offered would be built as designed. The promise was broken. The love of a man for the integrity of his work and his right to preserve it are now considered a vague intangible and an inessential. You have heard the prosecutor say that. Why was the building disfigured? For no reason. Such acts never have any reason, unless it's the vanity of some second-handers who feel they have a right to anyone's property, spiritual or material. Who permitted them to do it? No particular man among the dozens in authority. No one cared to permit it or to stop it. No one was responsible. No one can be held to account. Such is the nature of all collective action.

I did not receive the payment I asked. But the owners of Cortlandt got what they needed from me. They wanted a scheme devised to build a structure as cheaply as possible. They found no one else who could do it to their satisfaction. I could and did. They took the benefit of my work and made me contribute it as a gift. But I am not an altruist. I do not contribute gifts of this nature.

It is said that I have destroyed the home of the destitute. It is forgotten that but for me the destitute could not have had this particular home. Those who were concerned with the poor had to come to me, who have never been concerned, in order to help the poor. It is believed that the poverty of the future tenants gave them the right to my work. That their need constituted a claim on my life. That it was my duty to contribute anything demanded of me. This is the second-hander's credo now swallowing the world.

I came here to say that I do not recognize anyone's right to one minute of my life. Nor to any part of my energy. Nor to any achievement of mine. No matter who makes the claim, how large their number or how great their need.

I wished to come here and say that I am a man who does not exist for others.

It had to be said. The world is perishing from an orgy of self-sacrificing.

I wished to come here and say that the integrity of a man's creative work is of greater importance than any charitable endeavor. Those of you who do not understand this are the men who're destroying the world.

I wished to come here and state my terms. I do not care to exist on any others.

I recognize no obligations toward men except one: to respect their freedom and to take no part in a slave society.

Study Questions

1. Compare the assassin's monologue to the Howard Roark speech. How are they similar characters? How do their attitudes reflect on each other? In what ways are they different?
2. Sometimes poets use the rhyme words in a poem to create an embryonic poem within a poem that condenses the meaning of the poem into a brief summary. In this poem, the rhyme words read, "assassin, binocular, compassion, far, attacks, focus, parallax, hocus-pocus, stereopsis, vision, the cops is, elision, philosophy, good for me." Do you see a telegraphed version of the poem's themes in these rhyme words? How about in other poems in the book?

GOD COMPLEX.

As this is a spy fiction set in Norway, I thought to bring in some of the Norse myth I so enjoyed as a child: the one-eyed God of Gods, Odin; the female warrior, the Valkyrie; and the end-of-the-world vision of Ragnarok. Though the assassin is represented as Odin, he is not the one who pulls the strings of fate. He is more like a Gnostic Archon—a false God who thinks he's God but is actually subordinate to a hidden Creator.

Study Questions

1. We like to think of the protagonist of a story as someone we can identify with. What happens when the protagonist does morally questionable things, as is the case in this poem? How does it change your reading experience if you find yourself flinching from this sort of intense violence?

THE HERMENEUTICS OF SPYCRAFT.

Here the "giant snake / ... coiling underwater" refers to Jörmungandr (better known as Ouroboros), the great snake eating its own tail (tale) who will rise from the oceans in the end of days. It is a symbol of apocalypse but also of renewal. Ouroboros is in many ways parallel with Leviathan, who Isaiah describes as a serpent that will be killed in the Apocalypse.

Study Questions

1. What happens when a novel's character learns to *read*. What happens when a spy spies his maker?
2. How does the mystery/riddle theme of the first few poems in this sequence develop in this poem?
3. What do you think the title means?

THE POETRY OF MURDER.

Readings: "The Continuity of Parks" by Julio Cortázar

He had begun to read the novel a few days before. He had put it aside because of some urgent business, opened it again on his way back to the estate by train; he allowed himself a slowly growing interest in the plot, in the drawing of

characters. That afternoon, after writing a letter to his agent and discussing with the manager of his estate a matter of joint ownership, he returned to the book in the tranquility of his study which looked out upon the park with its oaks. Sprawled in his favorite armchair, with his back to the door, which would otherwise have bothered him as an irritating possibility for intrusions, he let his left hand caress once and again the green velvet upholstery and set to reading the final chapters. Without effort his memory retained the names and images of the protagonists; the illusion took hold of him almost at once. He tasted the almost perverse pleasure of disengaging himself line by line from all that surrounded him, and feeling at the same time that his head was relaxing comfortably against the green velvet of the armchair with its high back, that the cigarettes were still within reach of his hand, that beyond the great windows the afternoon air danced under the oak trees in the park. Word by word, immersed in the sordid dilemma of the hero and heroine, letting himself go toward where the images came together and took on color and movement, he was witness to the final encounter in the mountain cabin. The woman arrived first, apprehensive; now the lover came in, his face cut by the backlash of a branch. Admirably she stanching the blood with her kisses, but he rebuffed her caresses, he had not come to repeat the ceremonies of a secret passion, protected by a world of dry leaves and furtive paths through the forest. The dagger warmed itself against his chest, and underneath pounded liberty, ready to spring. A lustful, yearning dialogue raced down the pages like a rivulet of snakes, and one felt it had all been decided from eternity. Even those caresses which writhed about the lover's body, as though wishing to keep him there, to dissuade him from it, sketched abominably the figure of that other body it was necessary to destroy. Nothing had been forgotten: alibis, unforeseen hazards, possible mistakes. From this hour on, each instant had its use minutely assigned. The cold-blooded, double re-examination of the details was barely interrupted for a hand to caress a cheek. It was beginning to get dark.

Without looking at each other now, rigidly fixed upon the task which awaited them, they separated at the cabin door. She was to follow the trail that led north. On the path leading in the opposite direction, he turned for a moment to watch her running with her hair let loose. He ran in turn, crouching among the trees and hedges until he could distinguish in the yellowish fog of dusk the avenue of trees leading up to the house. The dogs were not supposed to bark, and they did not bark. The estate manager would not be there at this hour, and he was not. He went up the three porch steps and entered. Through the blood galloping in his ears came the woman's words: first a blue parlor, then a gallery, then a carpeted stairway. At the top, two doors. No one in the first bedroom, no one in the second. The door of the salon, and then the knife in his hand, the light from the great windows, the high back of an armchair covered in green velvet, the head of the man in the chair reading a novel.

Translation: David Page
from <http://www.continuityofparks.com/by-cortazar/>

Study Questions

1. They say that if you die in a dream you will never wake up. What happens when my own character finds me and kills me? Will that set him free, or will the world erase without the dreamer to dream it up?

Research Topics

Sources:

Read around in some of the texts that helped inspire this sequence: Norse myth, Nietzsche, Paradise Lost, Frankenstein, Blade Runner, Julio Cortázar's short story "The Continuity of Parks," Jorge Luis Borges' story "The Garden of Bifurcating Paths," Paul Auster's City of Glass, Elizabeth Bishop's "At the Fishhouses," and "The Fish," the story of The Fall in Genesis, the story of Job in the Bible, William Blake's "The Tyger," Wallace Stevens' "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" and Emily Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" How does a familiarity with one or more of these texts open up the themes of "Operation Ragnarok" for you?

Intertextuality:

For a more theoretical understanding of the use of sources in "Operation Ragnarok," read this excellent summary of theories of intertextuality: <http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem09.html> Do you see applications of ideas such as metatextuality, reflexivity, bricolage, anchorage, and relay in this sequence? How does an understanding of intertextuality open up or problematize the relationship between author and characters in this sequence? How does the Teaching Guide to *Pulp Sonnets* relate to the question of intertextuality? Is it merely an extended attempt at anchorage?

Metafiction:

In the late 20th century school of fiction called "metafiction" is characterized by an extreme self-consciousness about the techniques of fiction writing, which are often thematized and included in the fiction itself. A prime example of such fiction is John Barths' story "Lost in the Funhouse." You can read it online here: <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms/Colleges/College%20of%20Humanities%20and%20Social%20Sciences/EMS/Readings/139.105/Additional/Lost%20in%20the%20Funhouse%20-%20John%20Barth.pdf> How does "Operation Ragnarok" partake in the tradition of metafiction?

The Death of the Author:

One of the poems in this sequence is titled "Death and the Author," and we come to understand that the "Big Man" behind the assassinations in the plot is actually the author himself, who the protagonist kills at the end of the story. Read Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" here: http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf and

Michel Foucault's essay "What Is an Author?" here http://www.movementresearch.org/classesworkshops/melt/Foucault_WhatIsAnAuthor.pdf. In her book, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*, Camille Paglia criticizes them thusly: "Most pernicious of French imports is the notion that there is no person behind a text. Is there anything more affected, aggressive, and relentlessly concrete than a Parisian intellectual behind his/her turgid text? The Parisian is a provincial when he pretends to speak for the universe. Behind every book is a certain person with a certain history....Personality is western reality" (34). What is the difference between how Foucault and Barthes theorize the demise of the author? What is the difference between how Foucault and Barthes theorize the demise of the author? Are you more in agreement with Barthes, Foucault, or with Paglia?

The Femme Fatale and the Damsel in Distress

Research the roots of the fatal woman and the woman in distress in religious literature, myth, fairy tale and/or Arthurian legend. How do these two archetypes relate to each other? How do they relate to the economics of female sexuality (i.e., who "owns" a woman's body), to religious connection of sin to sexuality, to gender roles in patriarchal societies? Can you find examples where the Femme Fatale becomes the heroine instead of the villain? In your own reading and watching of TV and film, can you find examples of these archetypes? How are writers changing these images in contemporary media?

Classic Tropes: Theodicy ("God on Trial"), Misotheism ("Hatred of the Gods"), Distheism ("Bad God"), Deus Deceptor ("Deceptive God")

The confrontation of character and author, created and Creator, humanity and God in this sequence has deep roots in literature, going back to concepts elucidated by Classic authors such as Plato and more recent authors, from Descartes to Goethe to Robert Frost to Paul Auster. Do some research on the terms listed above and see if they open up "Operation Ragnarok" for you.

JACK LOGAN, FIGHTING AIRMAN: THE CASE OF THE RED BORDELLO.

This sequence was based on classic crime fiction from the dime magazines, with a nod to one of the subgenres of pulp fiction -- aviation pulp, which celebrated American pilots and their adventures. Although it is not a sonnet crown, it uses the crown technique of repeating the last line (in my case loosely) of the previous sonnet as the first line of the next sonnet. The idea is to create an ongoing linkage between individual sonnets, almost like transitions between cinematic scenes or like the stop-and-go motion of reading a comic book, panel by panel.

Readings: Jack Logan as Radio Play:

Go to the *Rattle* website to see the poem printed with Tony Barnstone's own illustrations and to hear it acted out with jazz background, sound effects and some amateur acting by me and professional acting by Jennifer Sage Holmes:
<https://www.rattle.com/poetry/jack-logan-by-tony-barnstone/>

Readings: Live Performance of This Radio Play:

To see a live performance of this radio play at Half-Off Books, Whittier California, filmed by Poetry L.A., go to YouTube here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sae_S4ZbeII

Readings: Origin of Sequence in "Detective Suite: A Cut-Up Novel in Monotypes"

Elements of the "Jack Logan" and the "Operation Ragnarok" sequences derive from a text-and-art project I created when I was 21 years old, inspired by the illuminated manuscripts of William Blake, the blend of poem and image in the work of Kenneth Patchen, and the *Calligrammes* of Guillaume Apollinaire. The text in the sequence sought to emulate the wise-cracking similes of Raymond Chandler's detectives and the tough guy prose he derived from reading Hemingway. A PowerPoint of the sequence can be viewed here:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/v6o57my35lkgm1m/Detective%20Suite%20Powerpoint.pptx?dl=0>

ACQUAINTED WITH THE NIGHT

This poem begins with a quote from the great hard-boiled detective writer Raymond Chandler about the society depicted in noir thrillers: "Their characters lived in a world gone wrong, a world in which, long before the atom bomb, civilization had created the machinery for its own destruction and was learning to use it with all the moronic delight of a gangster trying out his first machine-gun. The law was something to be manipulated for profit and power. The streets were dark with something more than night."

It is also a tribute to Robert Frost, who was often considered a pastoral poet of Americana, but whom in his famous 1985 introduction to Frost's birthday celebration

Lionel Trilling called “a terrifying poet. The “Dark Frost” Trilling was speaking of is one who questions whether the force behind the universe is an apocalyptic God who will turn out the light and destroy the land like some terrifying ocean storm, who questions whether our fates are determined not by a loving God but by “design of darkness to appall.” More specifically, I’m echoing Frost’s famous poem, “Acquainted with the Night,” which always struck me as a kind of poetic noir piece. Here is Frost’s poem:

Readings: Robert Frost’s “Acquainted with the Night”

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.
I have been one acquainted with the night.

This is also a famous example of the “terza rima sonnet,” in which the sonnet is broken up into tercets with a terza rima rhyme scheme, capped with a final couplet.

The poem also lightly alludes to one of my favorite poems by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado (after whom I was named):

Readings: Antonio Machado’s “Noche de verano”

Es una hermosa noche de verano.
Tienen las altas casas
abiertos los balcones
del viejo pueblo a la anchurosa plaza.
En el amplio rectángulo desierto,
bancos de piedra, evónimos y acacias
simétricos dibujan
sus negras sombras en la arena blanca.
En el cénit, la luna, y en la torre,

la esfera del reloj iluminada.
Yo en este viejo pueblo paseando
solo, como un fantasma.

translated from the Spanish by Willis Barnstone

Summer Night

A beautiful summer night.
the tall houses leave
their balcony shutters open
to the wide plaza of the old village.
In the large deserted square,
stone benches, burning bush and acacias
trace their black shadows
symmetrically on the white sand.
In its zenith, the moon; in the tower,
the clock's illuminated globe.
I walk through this ancient village,
alone, like a ghost.

Study Questions

1. Read the Frost and Machado poems above and then reread the Barnstone poem. What lines of connection do you see?

TRICKS AND STAG FLICKS

Research Topic: Rose as Trickster

This poem puns on the various meanings of “trick”: as a verb it means to fool; as a noun it means a joke or deception but also one who goes to a prostitute. The Trickster is also a figure who appears in many mythologies as a clever god. Since the speaker is an actress playing the part of her dead sister, Rose, in order to reveal who murdered her, she is turning tricks in different ways, and like Wily Odysseus, the trickster of the Iliad, she hopes to achieve her ends through this deception. Read Jung below on the trickster archetype and do your own research into this topic. How does this change your reading of the sequence?

Reading: Carl Jung on the Trickster Archetype

Article available here: <http://www.the16types.info/vbulletin/content.php/211-On-the-Psychology-of-the-Trickster-Figure-Jung>

THE NAME OF THE ROSE

This poem plays off of a famous line from *Romeo and Juliet*: “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet.” So also “Rose” of the poem is actually her twin sister Violet. At the back of my mind was Gertrude Stein’s

statement that “a rose is a rose is a rose” and the Umberto Eco medieval crime novel, *The Name of the Rose*, and the whole tradition of *carpe diem* poems in which the woman is compared to a flower.

The poem also references the Greek term for the Milky Way, Γαλαξίας, which comes γάλα, Greek for milk. Zeus wished to give his illegitimate son Herakles (Hercules) godly power and so he let him suckle on his wife, Hera’s breasts. Hera woke up and pushed away the baby, and the spilling milk became the Milky Way.

THE TRICK TURNS

This poem continues the sequence’s punning on the word “trick” and allusions to the woman-as-flower tradition in poetry.

THE ACT

“The Act” refers to Violet pretending to be her sister, Rose, but also to the sexual act and to the “act of faith” that is love. The poem alludes to “The Sick Rose,” by William Blake:

Readings: William Blake’s “The Sick Rose”

O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

The poem is about a rose blasted by a worm, yes, but also about a woman whose sexual encounter “in the night/In the howling storm” in her bed of “crimson joy” destroys her. This could be a reference to the blight of syphilis that afflicted so many, especially prostitutes, in Blake’s 18th-19th century London.

Research Topic: Flowers and Women

1. Trace out the use of flowers to refer to women throughout this sequence. How does this emerge from the *carpe diem* tradition in poetry? Try breaking down the metaphor: what aspects of a rose apply to the female lover in this tradition, and what aspects don’t?
2. What would happen if the tradition were reversed and men were referred to as flowers by their female lovers? How would this reverse expectations and power dynamics?

TWO BLACK BOOKS AND A STACK OF CASH

Here and in other poems in the sequence, I enjoyed researching and using early 20th century gangster slang, such as “the frail” for “the woman.”

ANGELS AND BUTTERCUPS

Part of the pleasure of the series was to find ways to convert the sonnet into an action sequence.

ANGEL FACE

The humor in this poem is modeled upon dark, wry humor of Raymond Chandler. See notes on “The Kiss” and “The Distressed Rose” below.

A HEAP OF BROKEN IMAGES

The poem alludes to Oliver Goldsmith’s “When lovely woman stoops to folly.” Goldsmith’s poem is ironically alluded to in “The Fire Sermon” section of T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” where the young female typist is date-raped by “the young man carbuncular”:

Readings: Oliver Goldsmith’s “When lovely woman stoops to folly”

When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy,
What art can wash her guilt away?

The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover
And wring his bosom, is—to die.

Readings: T.S. Eliot, from “The Fire Sermon”:

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at tea-time, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun’s last rays,

On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house-agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronizing kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit...

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

The title, "A Heap of Broken Images," also refers to "The Waste Land," where the spiritually parched desert of modernity is fragmented into a mirage of broken images:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats

Fragmentation, confusion, lack of spiritual clarity, are all in this image, but the poem ends on a hopeful note that somehow the patchwork quilt of the poem might lead to grace: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins."

Research Topic: Shoring Fragments Against the Ruins

1. Compare this poem to its source texts. How does it renew them? How does a reading of the source texts change your reading of the Barnstone poem?

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

This poem continues the set of allusions that appeared in “The Name of the Rose.”

TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW

The punning title sets things up for the poem that follows a few pages later, “Tough Guise.”

THE KISS & THE DISTRESSED ROSE

These two poems are where we see the darkest side of the male protagonist and an echo of the troubling violence, often against women, that was tied in the pulps to the roles the female characters so often played, such as the damsel in distress and the femme fatale, the virgin and the whore, and at times one archetype revealed to be the other.

At the back of my mind was Herrick’s “Delight in Disorder”:

Readings: Robert Herrick’s “Delight in Disorder”:

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness;
A lawn about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction;
An erring lace, which here and there
Enthrals the crimson stomacher;
A cuff neglectful, and thereby
Ribands to flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat;
A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
I see a wild civility:
Do more bewitch me, than when art
Is too precise in every part.

These two poems in particular also are an attempt to learn to use the hyperbolic and wry similes that were the signature of Raymond Chandler’s style. Here are some of his famous ones.

Readings: Chandlerisms:

"To say she had a face that would have stopped a clock would have been to insult her. It would have stopped a runaway horse."--*The Little Sister*

"I felt like an amputated leg." -- "Trouble Is My Business"

"She gave me a smile I could feel in my hip pocket"--*Farewell, My Lovely*

""She's a charming middle age lady with a face like a bucket of mud and if she's washed her hair since Coolidge's second term, I'll eat my spare tire, rim and all."
" -- *Farewell, My Lovely*

"The General spoke again, slowly, using his strength as carefully as an out-of-work show-girl uses her last good pair of stockings." -- *The Big Sleep*

""His smile was as stiff as a frozen fish." -- "The Man Who Liked Dogs"

"he looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food."--
Farewell, My Lovely

"She opened a mouth like a firebucket and laughed. That terminated my interest in her. I couldn't hear the laugh but the hole in her face when she unzipped her teeth was all I needed."--*The Long Good-bye*

"There were two hundred and eighty steps up to Cabrillo Street. They were drifted over with windblown sand and the handrail was as cold and wet as a toad's belly."--*Farewell, My Lovely*

"The voice got as cool as a cafeteria dinner."--*Farewell, My Lovely*

"The kid's face had as much expression as a cut of round steak and was about the same color."--"Red Wind"

"From thirty feet away she looked like a lot of class. From ten feet away she looked like something made up to be seen from thirty feet away."--*The High Window*

"She was as cute as a washtub." -- *Farewell, My Lovely*

"It was a blonde. A blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window."--*Farewell, My Lovely* (Chapter 13)

"I called him from a phone booth. The voice that answered was fat. It wheezed softly, like the voice of a man who had just won a pie-eating contest."--"Trouble Is My Business"

In Class Exercise: Chandlerize Your Prose!

1. Read over the list of Chandlerisms above and discuss as a class *how* he does what he does, particularly in his use of simile. Now take five minutes to write a few of your own Chandlerisms. Share them with the class.

TOUGH GUISE

This poem continues the meditation on gender and violence of the previous two sonnets, referencing Jackson Katz's *Tough Guise: Men, Violence and the Crisis in Masculinity*, and attempts to get at the ways in which women and especially men are so often trapped in the box of gender expectations that lead to men's violence against women.

Readings: Jackson Katz's Tough Guise: Men, Violence and the Crisis in Masculinity

Summary of *Tough Guise*:

<http://hope.journ.wvu.edu/tpilgrim/j190/toughguise.vidsum.html>

Jackson Katz on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3exzMPT4nGI>

Study Questions:

1. Why do you think it is that women are more often the victims of male violence than the other way around?
2. What can be done about it?

Research Topic: Violence against Women and the Crisis in Masculinity

View the Jackson Katz video on YouTube and then answer the questions above again.

THE DEATH TRAP

Hector Berlioz, French composer, wrote in an 1865 letter, "Time is a great teacher, but unfortunately it kills all its pupils."

THE CITY DEAD-HOUSE

In my mind when writing this was the poem of the same title by Walt Whitman:

Readings: Walt Whitman's "The City Dead-House"

By the City Dead-House, by the gate,
As idly sauntering, wending my way from the clangor,
I curious pause—for lo! an outcast form, a poor dead prostitute brought;
Her corpse they deposit unclaim'd—it lies on the damp brick pavement;
The divine woman, her body—I see the Body—I look on it alone,
That house once full of passion and beauty—all else I notice not;
Nor stillness so cold, nor running water from faucet, nor odors morbidic impress
me;
But the house alone—that wondrous house—that delicate fair house—that ruin!
That immortal house, more than all the rows of dwellings ever built!

Or white-domed Capitol itself, with majestic figure surmounted—or all the old
high-spired cathedrals;
That little house alone, more than them all—poor, desperate house!
Fair, fearful wreck! tenement of a Soul! itself a Soul!
Unclaim'd, avoided house! take one breath from my tremulous lips;
Take one tear, dropt aside as I go, for thought of you,
Dead house of love! house of madness and sin, crumbled! crush'd!
House of life—erewhile talking and laughing—but ah, poor house! dead, even
then;
Months, years, an echoing, garnish'd house—but dead, dead, dead.

Study Questions:

1. The tone of the Barnstone poem is significantly different from the Whitman poem that he references in the title. How would you describe the difference in their effects?

DRESSING THE MEAT

This poem continues my interest in reviving some of the great pulp slang like “pitching woo” for making love, “giggle juice” for booze, and “wood kimono” for coffin. See the note on “Spider Cat and Bad Eye” below.

Readings: *Hard-Boiled Vernacular*

Check out this link for more interesting hard-boiled vernacular:

<https://www.miskatonic.org/slang.html>

FROM TEMPEST TO OTHELLO

“I am that I am” is what God was said to have said to Moses when Moses asked his name, and it prefigures what Iago says in *Othello*, “I am not what I am.” See also the Popeye the Sailor 1933 episode, “I Yam What I Yam”:

Readings: *Popeye the Sailor 1933 episode, “I Yam What I Yam”*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VXU6a9PcNI>

Study Questions:

1. What do you make of Jack confusing Iago with Popeye the Sailor and perhaps with God?

SPIDER CAT AND BAD EYE

Another sonnet with an interest in slang. “Bad-eye” means “look askance at,” a bit like the Hawaiian “stink eye,” and Chi-town is Chicago. “Spitting wind” is singing and “jingle-brained” should be self-explanatory. See the note on “Dressing the Meat” above.

Study Questions:

1. Here and in the previous poem, the sequence uses 1930s gangster slang, but few contemporary readers would know immediately that a “wood kimono” is a coffin or that “giggle juice” is booze (though most folks would probably figure it out eventually). Does the slang add or detract from the poems for you?

WHEN IT RAINS, IT POURS

The conceit of this one is that mysterious gangster behind all things is made into the “first mover” of Sir Thomas Aquinas or the “unmoved mover” of Aristotle, the one who makes things happen secretly, setting the universe into motion, and Spider Floyd becomes his angel messenger.

Joy Morton founded Morton’s Salt in the 19th century and it was incorporated in 1910. In 1911 he and his team solved the problem that salt has a tendency to clump by adding anti-caking agent, magnesium carbonate and marketed the new, freely pouring salt with the phrase “when it rains it pours” and the iconic image of a girl with an umbrella in the rain holding a salt container and spilling it by mistake.

The sestet of the sonnet refers to the story of Lot’s wife, who is turned into a pillar of salt by God for looking back at Sodom, the city of sin, when told by angels to flee the city and not look back.

Readings: Genesis 19, Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed, New International Version

1The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 2“My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.”

“No,” they answered, “we will spend the night in the square.”

3But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. 4Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

6Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. 8Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”

9“Get out of our way,” they replied. “This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We’ll treat you worse than them.” They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

10But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. 11Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

12The two men said to Lot, “Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, 13because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it.”

14So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, “Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!” But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.

15With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.”

16When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them. 17As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”

18But Lot said to them, “No, my lords, please! 19Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die. 20Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.”

21He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. 22But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.)

23By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 24Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. 25Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. 26But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

27Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. 28He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah,

toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

29So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

from <http://biblehub.com/niv/genesis/19.htm>

Study Questions:

1. How does the theme of torrential rain relate to the action in this sequence?
2. Do you see parallels between the story of Lot's wife and the events in "Jack Logan"?

ANIMALS and NOTE LEFT PINNED TO THE PILLOW (SIGNED "VIOLET")

The Shedd Aquarium opened in May, 1930, and Al Capone was indicted for tax evasion in 1931, so the timing for my invented tale is roughly historically possible.

SMALL FRY, BIG FISH, AND THE DISH

"Bim" is short for bimbo, "dish" is a term for a woman, and "gunsel" is a term for gunman created by Dashielle Hammett in the *Maltese Falcon* as a way of slipping a vulgarity into the pulp magazine *Black Mask*; it actually is hobo slang from the Yiddish, and it means a young man kept as a homosexual partner or the passive recipient in anal sex. Here's the original quote:

"Another thing," Spade repeated, glaring at the boy: "Keep that gunsel away from me while you're making up your mind. I'll kill him."

Study Questions:

1. This sequence in particular uses many epithets that could be considered offensive, such as "bimbo" or (once you know its origins) "gunsel." How are we to distinguish between author and character in moments like this? When should writers worry about using offensive language? Would you support a cleaning up of literary language even if it meant that the characters were less authentic to their time, place, and milieu?

ANGELS FALLING FROM THE SKY and TAXES AND DEATH

Study Questions:

1. The title refers specifically to Spider Floyd who has "the face of an angel" and is right hand man to the gangster-God Al Capone. The angel who falls from the sky is well known in other contexts....The final line of "Taxes and Death" "I drop, but swear he'll take the fall," continues this line of allegory. How does the religious theme add meaning to this sequence as a whole?

A BOUQUET OF VIOLENCE and VIOLETS ARE BLACK AND BLUE

The titles steal the pun of “violence” and “violets” from the movie *Final Analysis*

Readings: from the Film Script of Final Analysis

In *Final Analysis* a psychotherapy patient, Diana, tells her therapist

I had the dream again.
I'm arranging flowers
on a table as a centerpiece.
I decorate the flowerpot
with fancy paper.
The paper feels like velvet.
I have three kinds of flowers.
Lilies, carnations...
- And the third kind?
- Violence.
Violence?
I didn't say violence! I said violates!
I said violets.
Violets.
They're just flowers.
I once did floral arranging.
Does everything have to be about sex?

Study Questions:

1. How do the puns in these poems relate the flower theme (Rose and Violet) to themes of sexuality and violence in this mob tale?

UNTOUCHABLE

The title references The Untouchables, the team of federal investigators led by Eliot Ness that took down Al Capone in 1931 (on tax evasion charges).

Readings from Raymond Chandler's "The Simple Art of Murder"

Raymond Chandler on the World of Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction:

The realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, in which a screen star can be the fingerman for a mob, and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket, where the mayor of your town may have condoned murder as an instrument of moneymaking, where no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing; a world where you may witness a hold-up in broad daylight and see who did it, but you will fade quickly back into the crowd rather than tell anyone, because the hold-up men may have friends

with long guns, or the police may not like your testimony, and in any case the shyster for the defense will be allowed to abuse and vilify you in open court, before a jury of selected morons, without any but the most perfunctory interference from a political judge.

It is not a very fragrant world, but it is the world you live in, and certain writers with tough minds and a cool spirit of detachment can make very interesting and even amusing patterns out of it. It is not funny that a man should be killed, but it is sometimes funny that he should be killed for so little, and that his death should be the coin of what we call civilization.

Raymond Chandler on The Detective's Code:

...down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. He talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in.

Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder" is available online at <http://www.en.utexas.edu/amlit/amlitprivate/scans/chandlerart.html>

Study Questions on Raymond Chandler

1. Study Question: Realism and Naturalism

Chandler makes the argument that hard-boiled detective fiction is simply being realistic. Thus, it emerges from the late 19th and early 20th centuries traditions of Realism and Naturalism. Do you buy this? In what way do such tales distort reality?

2. Study Question: Jack Logan's Code:

What is Jack Logan's code of behavior? What is Rose's code?

Study Questions Riffing Off of Tzvetan Todorov Theory of Detective Fiction

1. Absent Story and Present Plot

Tzvetan Todorov theorizes that a detective novel always centers around an absence--the absent story of what happened at crime vs. the present story of how that first story is revealed. Also, Todorov distinguishes between the story of what happens and the story of how we come to know what happens. This is the distinction between story and plot. Roland Barthes argues that reading the text is like a strip tease act, teasing the reader with glimpses of the truth of the body, taking away clothes until only the nude page is left. How does this act of narrative strip-tease, this mediation of one story through another, play out in the "Jack Logan" sequence?

2. Absent Identity, Reading as Detection, and Unreliable Narrators

Take this idea one step further: the detective story is always a quest for absent identity. Again this is a double, interlocking structure: as the Jack and Rose searches for the identity of various murderers their identities are slowly revealed to us. According to Todorov, Author:Reader = Criminal:Detective. The reader is identified with the detective, because like the detective he or she is trying to understand the absent story through the present plot. Further, the detective is the reader's proxy, his or her point of view, his or her window onto this world. The author, on the other hand, like the criminal, tries, through misdirection to conceal the nature of the crime; his or her power over the reader is based on withholding information to get the reader interested. But what happens when your alter ego in the text, the detective, is an unreliable narrator, brutal, or a liar? When Jack Logan punches Rose he can justify it to himself (after all, she is holding a gun on him at the time), but from the contemporary perspective his violence against her, as well as her judging her for (apparently) being a sex worker makes him a less sympathetic character. If our window on to the world is a flawed glass, what effect does this have? As a rule of reading, one always tends to give the narrator the benefit of the doubt: to doubt the narrator is to doubt your window onto the world, as if in life you became convinced that your ears and your eyes were lying to you. But of course perception is less a function of what is seen than it is of what is left unseen, what is beyond the picture frame. Is the willing suspension of disbelief broken for the reader of the "Jack Logan" sequence?

3. Unreliable Readers

Take these ideas one final step: here is a tale that records atrocious acts of violence for the reader's pleasure. How are you, as reader, complicit when you take enjoyment from brutal violence of a thriller that is narrated for your gory pleasure?

Readings: "Twenty Rules For Writing Detective Stories" By S. S. Van Dine

The detective story is a game. It is more--it is a sporting event. And the author must play fair with the reader. He can no more resort to trickeries and deceptions and still retain his honesty than if he cheated in a bridge game. He must outwit the reader, and hold the reader's interest, through sheer ingenuity. For the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws--unwritten,

perhaps, but none the less binding: and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them.

Herewith, then, is a sort of Credo, based partly on the practice of all the great writers of stories, and partly on the promptings of the honest author's inner conscience. To wit:

1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.
2. No wilful tricks or deceptions may be played on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself.
3. There must be no love interest in the story. To introduce amour is to clutter up a purely intellectual experience with irrelevant sentiment. The business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar.
4. The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit. This is bald trickery, on a par with offering some one a bright penny for a five-dollar gold piece. It's false pretenses.
5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions--not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession. To solve a criminal problem in this latter fashion is like sending the reader on a deliberate wild-goose chase, and then telling him, after he has failed, that you had the object of his search up your sleeve all the time. Such an author is no better than a practical joker.
6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that will eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter; and if the detective does not reach his conclusions through an analysis of those clues, he has no more solved his problem than the schoolboy who gets his answer out of the back of the arithmetic.
7. There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice. Three hundred pages is far too much pother for a crime other than murder. After all, the reader's trouble and expenditure of energy must be rewarded. Americans are essentially humane, and therefore a tiptop murder arouses their sense of vengeance and horror. They wish to bring the perpetrator to justice; and when "murder most foul, as in the best it is," has been committed, the chase is on with all the righteous enthusiasm of which the thrice gentle reader is capable.
8. The problem of the crime must be solved by strictly naturalistic means. Such methods for learning the truth as slate-writing, ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic séances, crystal-gazing, and the like, are taboo. A reader has a chance when matching his wits with a rationalistic detective, but if he must compete with the world of spirits and go chasing about the fourth dimension of metaphysics, he is defeated *ab initio*.
9. There must be but one detective--that is, but one protagonist of deduction--one *deus ex machine*. To bring the minds of three or four, or sometimes a gang of detectives to bear on a problem is not only to disperse the interest and break the direct thread of logic, but to take an unfair advantage of the reader, who, at the outset, pits his mind against that of the detective and proceeds to do mental

battle. If there is more than one detective the reader doesn't know who his co-deductor is. It's like making the reader run a race with a relay team.

10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story--that is, a person with whom the reader is familiar and in whom he takes an interest. For a writer to fasten the crime, in the final chapter, on a stranger or person who has played a wholly unimportant part in the tale, is to confess to his inability to match wits with the reader.

11. Servants--such as butlers, footmen, valets, game-keepers, cooks, and the like--must not be chosen by the author as the culprit. This is begging a noble question. It is a too easy solution. It is unsatisfactory, and makes the reader feel that his time has been wasted. The culprit must be a decidedly worth-while person--one that wouldn't ordinarily come under suspicion; for if the crime was the sordid work of a menial, the author would have had no business to embalm it in book-form.

12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature.

13. Secret societies, camorras, mafias, *et al.*, have no place in a detective story. Here the author gets into adventure fiction and secret-service romance. A fascinating and truly beautiful murder is irremediably spoiled by any such wholesale culpability. To be sure, the murderer in a detective novel should be given a sporting chance, but it is going too far to grant him a secret society (with its ubiquitous havens, mass protection, etc.) to fall back on. No high-class, self-respecting murderer would want such odds in his jousting-bout with the police.

14. The method of murder, and the means of detecting it, must be rational and scientific. That is to say, pseudo-science and purely imaginative and speculative devices are not to be tolerated in the *roman policier*. For instance, the murder of a victim by a newly found element--a super-radium, let us say--is not a legitimate problem. Nor may a rare and unknown drug, which has its existence only in the author's imagination, be administered. A detective-story writer must limit himself, toxicologically speaking, to the pharmacopoeia. Once an author soars into the realm of fantasy, in the Jules Verne manner, he is outside the bounds of detective fiction, cavorting in the uncharted reaches of adventure.

15. The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent--provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it. By this I mean that if the reader, after learning the explanation for the crime, should reread the book, he would see that the solution had, in a sense, been staring him in the face--that all the clues really pointed to the culprit--and that, if he had been as clever as the detective, he could have solved the mystery himself without going on to the final chapter. That the clever reader does often thus solve the problem goes without saying. And one of my basic theories of detective fiction is that, if a detective story is fairly and legitimately constructed, it is impossible to keep the solution from all readers. There will inevitably be a certain number of them just as shrewd as the author; and if the author has shown the proper sportsmanship and honesty in his statement and projection of the crime and its clues, these perspicacious readers

will be able, by analysis, elimination and logic, to put their finger on the culprit as soon as the detective does. And herein lies the zest of the game. Herein we have an explanation for the fact that readers who would spurn the ordinary "popular" novel will read detective stories unblushingly.

16. A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no "atmospheric" preoccupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action, and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion. To be sure, there must be a sufficient descriptiveness and character delineation to give the novel verisimilitude; but when an author of a detective story has reached that literary point where he has created a gripping sense of reality and enlisted the reader's interest and sympathy in the characters and the problem, he has gone as far in the purely "literary" technique as is legitimate and compatible with the needs of a criminal-problem document. A detective story is a grim business, and the reader goes to it, not for literary furbelows and style and beautiful descriptions and the projection of moods, but for mental stimulation and intellectual activity--just as he goes to a ball game or to a cross-word puzzle. Lectures between innings at the Polo Grounds on the beauties of nature would scarcely enhance the interest in the struggle between two contesting baseball nines; and dissertations on etymology and orthography interspersed in the definitions of a cross-word puzzle would tend only to irritate the solver bent on making the words interlock correctly.

17. A professional criminal must never be shouldered with the guilt of a crime in a detective story. Crimes by house-breakers and bandits are the province of the police department--not of authors and brilliant amateur detectives. Such crimes belong to the routine work of the Homicide Bureaus. A really fascinating crime is one committed by a pillar of a church, or a spinster noted for her charities.

18. A crime in a detective story must never turn out to be an accident or a suicide. To end an odyssey of sleuthing with such an anti-climax is to play an unpardonable trick on the reader. If a book-buyer should demand his two dollars back on the ground that the crime was a fake, any court with a sense of justice would decide in his favor and add a stinging reprimand to the author who thus hoodwinked a trusting and kind-hearted reader.

19. The motives for all crimes in detective stories should be personal. International plottings and war politics belong in a different category of fiction--in secret-service tales, for instance. But a murder story must be kept *gemütlich*, so to speak. It must reflect the reader's everyday experiences, and give him a certain outlet for his own repressed desires and emotions.

20. And (to give my Credo an even score of items) I herewith list a few of the devices which no self-respecting detective-story writer will now avail himself of. They have been employed too often, and are familiar to all true lovers of literary crime. To use them is a confession of the author's ineptitude and lack of originality.

(a) Determining the identity of the culprit by comparing the butt of a cigarette left at the scene of the crime with the brand smoked by a suspect.

- (b) The bogus spiritualistic séance to frighten the culprit into giving himself away.
- (c) Forged finger-prints.
- (d) The dummy-figure alibi.
- (e) The dog that does not bark and thereby reveals the fact that the intruder is familiar.
- (f) The final pinning of the crime on a twin, or a relative who looks exactly like the suspected, but innocent, person.
- (g) The hypodermic syringe and the knockout drops.
- (h) The commission of the murder in a locked room after the police have actually broken in.
- (i) The word-association test for guilt.
- (j) The cipher, or code letter, which is eventually unravelled by the sleuth.

1. Study Question on Van Dine:

How well does the “Jack Logan” sequence adhere to Van Dine’s rules? Do you agree with Van Dine?

THEOGONY

The title comes from the Greek Θεογονία (Theo = god, gonía = birth), and specifically Hesiod's *Theogony*, which is an account of the creation of the world and the origin of the Greek gods. The origin of the American gods can be found in the origin tales of the superheroes and super villains of the comic books (many of whom were modeled upon the gods of various world traditions).

FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE

This poem was originally titled "Machine Woman," and it depicted a mechanical woman in a strip club so as to explore the question of the male gaze, which sees women in terms of sexual use---breasts, vaginas, shape of thigh and waist, mouth, lips, tongue. Specifically, that poem hoped to explore and undermine classic robot gender iconography, especially in movies such as *Metropolis*. The machine man is often a juggernaut, as in *Terminator*, whereas the machine woman is often turned into an Eve figure (in the misogynist tradition of seeing Eve as the source of sin), or into a machine for reproducing death instead of life, or into sexualized murder machines, as in *Blade Runner*, or into sex toys, as in *Westworld*. The poem evolved through many drafts into something very different, though still set in a strip club. It is now an allegory of Superman/Supergirl, but the intent is the same.

Study Questions

1. This poem is based on oral histories with and sociological studies of strippers, many of whom are were childhood victims of abuse in the home. As one woman says, "stripping feels like home." Does that mean that by revisiting the place of pain you confront it instead of repressing it? Or that stripping feels painful, like being raised in a home with abuser did?
2. Philosopher René Descartes describes the human being as "that machine which I suppose to have been made by the hands of God," and compares "the nerves of the machine" to "the pipes of the machinery of the fountains; its muscles and tendons are like the engines and springs use to move them; its animal spirits are like the water which drives them — the heart being the source, and the cavities of the brain the control pit." How does it change your idea of what it is to be human when you conceive of the human as a machine?
3. What is the difference between a machine person and a puppet or a doll? What do you make of the use of "puppet" and "doll" in this poem in referring to the narrator?

Readings

Laura Mulvey on the Male Gaze

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif

of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire....

The psychoanalytic background that has been discussed in this article is relevant to the pleasure and unpleasure offered by traditional narrative film. The scopophilic instinct (pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object), and, in contradistinction, ego libido (forming identification processes) act as formations, mechanisms, which this cinema has played on. The image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into, the structure of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favorite cinematic form - illusionistic narrative film. The argument returns again to the psychoanalytic background in that woman as representation signifies castration, inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat. None of these interacting layers is intrinsic to film, but it is only in the film form that they can reach a perfect and beautiful contradiction, thanks to the possibility in the cinema of shifting the emphasis of the look. It is the place of the look that defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it. This is what makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from, say, strip-tease, theater, shows, etc. Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. It is these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged.

--from "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"

Study Questions:

1. Later feminist critics often critique Mulvey's splitting of the gaze into male gazer and female recipient of the gaze and that there is little room in her theory for the female subject who might erotically enjoy the male body on the screen. What is your perspective on this?
2. How does the imagery of woman as puppet in "Fortress of Solitude" relate to questions of the male gaze and patriarchal society?

Research Topic: Later Feminisms and the Male Gaze

A good starting point to research questions of the male gaze and female subjectivity (though published a few decades ago) is Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994). Look at her second chapter, "From the Male Gaze to the Female Spectator" and dig around some more to find more recent debates about this subject. How do later generations of feminists approach the question of the gaze?

WONDER WOMAN AND THE GRAVITY MONSTER

This poem plays off of the classic comic book character, Wonder Woman, and like the previous poem is a meditation on the male gaze. The direct inspiration for the poem was Tony Hoagland's terrific poem "Beauty":

Reading: Tony Hoagland's "Beauty"

When the medication she was taking
caused tiny vessels in her face to break,
leaving faint but permanent blue stitches in her cheeks,
my sister said she knew she would
never be beautiful again.

After all those years
of watching her reflection in the mirror,
sucking in her stomach and standing straight,
she said it was a relief,
being done with beauty,

but I could see her pause inside that moment
as the knowledge spread across her face
with a fine distress, sucking
the peach out of her lips,
making her cute nose seem, for the first time,
a little knobby.

I'm probably the only one in the whole world
who actually remembers the year in high school
she perfected the art
of being a dumb blond,

spending recess on the breezeway by the physics lab,
tossing her hair and laughing that canary trill
which was her specialty,

while some football player named Johnny
with a pained expression in his eyes
wrapped his thick finger over and over again
in the bedspring of one of those pale curls.

Or how she spent the next decade of her life
auditioning a series of tall men,
looking for just one with the kind
of attention span she could count on.

Then one day her time of prettiness

was over, done, finito,
and all those other beautiful women
in the magazines and on the streets
just kept on being beautiful
everywhere you looked,

walking in that kind of elegant, disinterested trance
in which you sense they always seem to have one hand
touching the secret place
that keeps their beauty safe,
inhaling and exhaling the perfume of it—

It was spring. Season when the young
buttercups and daisies climb up on the
mulched bodies of their forebears
to wave their flags in the parade.

My sister just stood still for thirty seconds,
amazed by what was happening,
then shrugged and tossed her shaggy head
as if she was throwing something out,

something she had carried a long ways,
but had no use for anymore,
now that it had no use for her.
That, too, was beautiful.

Study Questions

1. Why does the narrator in “Beauty” find his sister’s giving up of her own beauty to also be beautiful? Why does she find it to be a relief? How does this relate back to “Wonder Woman and the Gravity Monster”?
2. How does this poem engage with Laura Mulvey’s idea of the “male gaze,” as relayed above in the notes to “Fortress of Solitude”?

THE LIVING FLAME & THE HUMAN TORCH

These two poems play off of various fiery and icy superheroes, and imagine their abilities as psychological projections.

Study Questions

1. Traditionally, desire has been associated with fire—not just as a rhyme word, but as a symbol. Can you think of common phrases (such as “I’m hot for you”) that emerge from this association?
2. In this poem, however, The Living Flame “burns like dry ice”—so he is both hot and cold. What is the nature of his desire? Why does he have to “imitate” desire? If he were not a superhero but just an ordinary person, what kind of person would he be?

3. How does the use of fire work in “The Human Torch,” versus in “The Living Flame”?
4. What do you make of the unusual rhyme scheme in “The Human Torch”? Can you determine its pattern?

THE BENT ADVENTURES OF INDIA RUBBER MAN.

“The Bent Adventures of India Rubber Man” was inspired partly by the cartoon superheroes Plastic Man and Mister Fantastic (from the Fantastic Four), both of whom have the ability to transform themselves wildly, with rubber-like skin and bones. As I dug into the topic, I discovered that there were real-life equivalents to Plastic Man in the India Rubber Men of traveling circuses and freak shows, who had Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, a disease that allowed them to contort and stretch in unusual ways.

I became interested in the psychological aspect of such malleability, and imagined my India Rubber Man as a man who grew up being savagely beaten by his father, turning him into person who would contort himself psychologically in order to avoid all conflict and to become whatever others wanted him to be. His girlfriend, Miss Elastic, is a version of him who is in even worse shape: a blow up doll from a sex store in San Francisco who is somewhat alive. Even more than India Rubber Man, she stretches and twists to become what people want her to be, to be their living fantasy, to fulfill their mental scripts, all of which keeps her a doll instead of a living woman with subjectivity and intention. Thus, she remains just a bag of air formed into the shape of a gender fantasy, anorexically unable to feed herself, to speak for herself, or even to really participate in the stretchy sex she has with India Rubber Man.

The Miss Elastic section of the India Rubber Man poems was originally written to accompany the artist Kim Russo’s series of watercolors about a lesbian love affair with a blow-up doll, titled “Companion.”

INDIA RUBBER MAN’S CREDO and THE ORIGIN OF INDIA RUBBER MAN

In Daoism, *wu wei* refers to “acting without action,” and is a way of creating powerful effects through passivity. Many lines in the poem echo lines from the classic Daoist text the *Dao De Jing*.

Research Topic:

Research the use of passivity and nonaction in Chinese and Japanese martial arts. How does “India Rubber Man” reflect on these techniques? Do you see him as powerful or powerless? Why?

INDIA RUBBER MAN AT THE TEMPLE OF SIN ADULT NOVELTY STORE (THE ORIGIN OF MISS ELASTIC) and THE ANTHEM OF MISS ELASTIC

These poems continue the meditation in this section on the male gaze and on how Miss Elastic is turned into a blow-up doll of male fantasy instead of a full person.

Study Questions

1. Reread the excerpt from Laura Mulvey on the “male gaze” above under the discussion of “Fortress of Solitude.” How do these poems manifest the workings of the male gaze, and what effect does it have upon Miss Elastic?

2. What is the difference between the flexibility of India Rubber Man and Miss Elastic?
3. Do you see India Rubber Man as having more subjectivity and intentionality than Miss Elastic? Note that Miss Elastic only gets to speak for herself in one out of the ten poems in the sequence.

MISS ELASTIC RESCUES INDIA RUBBER MAN FROM EVIL X-GIRLFRIEND

Study Questions

1. Is Evil X-Girlfriend actually a zombie, or does she just feel like one to India Rubber Man? Perhaps both?

INDIA RUBBER MAN AND THE FEAR AND TREMBLING AND SICKNESS UNTO DEATH and INDIA RUBBER MAN'S BUDDHIST CHRISTMAS

Readings: John (the Bible)

The first poem references John:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

Readings Friedrich Nietzsche's The Gay Science

The poem's title on the other hand references Kierkegaard's works *The Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death*, which deal with questions of faith and despair, and the last line refers to the famous moment in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* where he announces the "death of God":

Indeed, we philosophers and "free spirits" feel, when we hear the news that "the old god is dead," as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea."—

The second sonnet continues the religious meditation with its peculiar "trinity" of India Rubber Man, Miss Elastic and the Buddha.

Study Questions:

1. What are we to make of the entry of religious and existential questions into this series of poems?

INDIA RUBBER MAN AND THE ANOREXIC DOLL

Readings: George Herbert's "Easter Wings" and "Love III":

This poem is well discussed in the introduction to this series, but I should note that the form of the poem is what I call "the hourglass sonnet," and is roughly based upon George Herbert's shaped poem "Easter Wings":

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne
And still with sicknesses and shame.
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

In Herbert to be "most thinne" at the thinnest part of the poem means that that is the moment when the protagonist's faith in himself and in God's love is most thin, but as he gains confidence so the poem gets fatter and he can take flight with God. So the poem is both shaped from fat to thin to fat again, and as two pairs of wings.

The other Herbert poem referenced in the poem is his Love III

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lacked anything.

“A guest," I answered, “worthy to be here”:
Love said, “You shall be he.”
“I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on thee.”
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
“Who made the eyes but I?”

“Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.”
“And know you not," says Love, “who bore the blame?”
“My dear, then I will serve.”
“You must sit down," says Love, “and taste my meat.”
So I did sit and eat.

This is not a shaped poem, but it is a fascinatingly sexual poem about eating the flesh of Christ. The speaker, finding himself “grow slack” after his “first entrance in” has little confidence in his penis, which he doubts is a guest “worthy to be here.” Of course the poem is not really about the penis but about the soul, which, as in “Easter Wings,” is found to be “Most poore” until graced with the love of Christ.

Study Questions:

1. Compare the Barnstone poem to the poems above by Herbert. Does it secularize the discourse of food and weight, or do the Herbert poems infuse the Barnstone poem with a spiritual discourse through intertextual echoes?

INDIA RUBBER MAN AND MISS ELASTIC IN THE MORNING and INDIA RUBBER MAN AND THE BATH

These poems, despite their humor, truly are love poems about two people damaged by family and society but who find solace in each other. Unfortunately, society doesn't recognize their love. Certainly behind the latter poem is the fact that this sequence was originally written about a love affair between a lesbian and a blow-up doll, to accompany a sequence by artist Kim Russo (as detailed in the introduction). When I first wrote this poem, gay marriage was not widely legal in the USA. Happily, that has changed with the recent Supreme Court decision legalizing gay marriage.

Study Questions:

1. This sequence is profoundly sexual, and in a way that might be disturbing to some readers, focusing as it does on the love of a semi-animated blow-up doll. Does the sequence evoke your sympathy for the lovers, despite their unusual nature?

2. Though the lovers in the sequence are male and female, the final line of the last poem asks us to consider their love in part as an allegory for the battle for gay rights, in the fact of religious opposition. Do you buy this? Or is this a side issue in the sequence, according to your reading of the poems?

BESTIARY

A bestiary is a collection of tales and descriptions about fantastic beasts and monsters, and so this is a section of monster poems. What does it mean to be a monster? When is the hero the monster, and when is the monster the hero? Why do we have monsters? Are monsters perhaps beneficial? Do we need to overcome our internal monsters in order to become integrated selves, and if so are the monsters in our minds, necessary parts of the self?

THE MONSTER SPEAKS.

This is a pretty close adaptation of a passage from Chapter 17 of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in which the Monster pleads with Dr. Frankenstein to make him a mate.

Readings: from Mary Shelley's Frankenstein:

"You are in the wrong," replied the fiend; "and, instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you. I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces, and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts, and destroy my frame, the work of your own hands. Shall I respect man when he contemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness; and, instead of injury, I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance. But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery. I will revenge my injuries: if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear; and chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear inextinguishable hatred. Have a care: I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you shall curse the hour of your birth."

Study Questions:

1. How does the Monster's rebellion against his creator, Victor Frankenstein echo the rebellion of the spy against "The Big Man" (the author) in "Operation Ragnarok"?
2. Look up the term "Misotheism." Do you think this is a misotheistic poem?

THING.

This is a poem about God the creator as a dark force, and was inspired in part by poems by Robert Frost, "Design" and "Once by the Pacific." In "Design" Frost asks what causes terrible fate, evil, violence, and answers, "What but design of darkness to appall?-- / If design govern in a thing so small." The joke here is that if darkness has designs, it is to appall us, and the word appall comes from the Old French *apalir*, "to make pale." Thus darkness and light are the same thing, and both of them are terrible. God the destroyer is also present in "Once by the Pacific," where he is presented as an apocalyptic force of violence manifested in the ocean:

Readings: Robert Frost's "Once by the Pacific"

The shattered water made a misty din.
Great waves looked over others coming in,
And thought of doing something to the shore
That water never did to land before.
The clouds were low and hairy in the skies,
Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes.
You could not tell, and yet it looked as if
The shore was lucky in being backed by cliff,
The cliff in being backed by continent;
It looked as if a night of dark intent
Was coming, and not only a night, an age.
Someone had better be prepared for rage.
There would be more than ocean-water broken
Before God's last Put out the Light was spoken.

In many cultures, the Creator is described as a force moving in darkness, in the time before light. Is this God or Devil or just a force? It is unknown. What is to distinguish a God from a monster, and what makes us think He, She or It would care for us? "Thing" adapts one of the Indian holy texts of the Rig Veda to pose these questions:

Readings: from the Rig Veda, "Hymn of the Creation"

Before being, before even nonbeing, there was no air, no firmament. So what
breathed? And where? And by whose order? And was there water
endlessly deep?
This was before death or immortality. There was no division between night and
day, yet instinctively there was breathing, windless breathing and
nothing else.
It was so dark that darkness was hidden in the dark. There was nothing to show
water was everywhere. And the void was a cloak about the Being who
sprang from heat.
Desire pierced the Being, the mind's first seed, and wise poet saints detected in
their hearts the knot of being within nonbeing,
and this rope they stretched over...what? Was there up? down? There were seed
spillers and fertile powers, impulse above and energy below,
but who can really know and say it here? Where did this creation come from?
The gods came later, so who can know the source?
No one knows creation's source. It was born of itself. Or it was not. He who
looks down from the ultimate heaven knows. Or maybe not.

Trans. Tony Barnstone and Willis Barnstone

Study Questions:

1. Look up the term "Dystheism." Do you think this is a dystheistic poem?

2. Much of the Rig Veda “Hymn of Creation” is about how the creation of the world is unknowable. Do you believe this? How does this theme play out in “Thing”?

A STRANGER’S NEWSPAPER

This poem has fun alluding to several other poems, such as William Blake’s account of the source of evil in the world, “The Tyger”:

Readings: William Blake, “The Tyger”:

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Walt Whitman’s poem “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” is also echoed in “A Stranger’s Newspaper.”

When I heard the learn’d astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,

When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in
the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

Another poem that inspired mine was the following sonnet by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Readings: Edna St. Vincent Millay's "If I should learn, in some quite casual way"

If I should learn, in some quite casual way,
That you were gone, not to return again—
Read from the back-page of a paper, say,
Held by a neighbor in a subway train,
How at the corner of this avenue
And such a street (so are the papers filled)
A hurrying man—who happened to be you—
At noon to-day had happened to be killed,
I should not cry aloud—I could not cry
Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place—
I should but watch the station lights rush by
With a more careful interest on my face,
Or raise my eyes and read with greater care
Where to store furs and how to treat the hair.

For comic book fans, much of the star and falling angel imagery gets picked up beautifully in Alan Moore's *Watchmen* and they become central to the apocalyptic vision of that book.

Study Questions:

1. Why are gods like zombies?
2. In the Whitman poem, the narrator is dismayed by how the astronomer presents the stars to his audience through measurements versus through their sublime beauty. In the Blake poem the stars are personified as supernatural creatures, perhaps angels weeping at the Fall or at the entry of evil into the world. How does the star theme play out in "A Stranger's Newspaper."
3. Look up the term "Theodicy." Is this poem a theodicy? Why or why not?

THE FIRST DARK KNIGHT.

This is a poem about the Devil, Satan, Lucifer, Ahriman, a fallen angel, but it is also about the comic book figure Batman. God in his different aspects is the Riddler, the Joker, and Two-Face, all enemies of Batman.

Study Questions:

1. In what way is God a riddler, a joker, a two-faced being in this poem?
2. If the Devil becomes like Batman, how does that change your understanding of him?

THE BLOWFLY THING.

“The Blowfly Thing” was inspired by “I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--” by Emily Dickinson, by John Donne’s “Death, Be not Proud,” and by the two movies titled “The Fly” (1958 and 1986), both of which were interpretations or adaptations of the short story by George Langelaan. In the “Fly” movies, a scientist teleports himself, but a fly gets into the machine with him, so that he slowly turns into a monstrous human fly. In the Dickinson poem, at the moment of death when the King (Jesus) appears in the room to the dying narrator, a fly comes between her and the light. Flies lay their eggs in corpses, so that they create life out of death, so this poem is also about coming back from death—a parody of the Jesus story.

Readings: “I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--”(591) by Emily Dickinson

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air -
Between the Heaves of Storm -

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset - when the King
Be witnessed - in the Room -

I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable - and then it was
There interposed a Fly -

With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -
Between the light - and me -
And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see -

Readings: John Donne’s “Death, Be not Proud” (Holy Sonnet 10):

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so,
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,

And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
And better then thy stroake; why swell'st thou then;
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

THE TWO-HEADED MAN.

Study Questions:

1. How to interpret this one? The rational brain fighting the unconscious? Cain and Abel? The Jungian notion of the split self? Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Some other way?

THE SPHINX.

Detective fiction theorists often find in the story of the sphinx's riddle the origins of the detective tale. Detection is a question of solving a riddle, the answer to which is "man" or "humanity."

Study Questions:

1. What is the role of fate (or the Greek mythological creatures the Fates) in this poem?

WAYS OF LOOKING AT A VAMPIRE.

The title alludes to Wallace Stevens' "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."

Study Questions:

1. Read "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" online here: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174503>. In what ways does this vampire sequence echo the structure of that poem?

I AM LEGEND.

"I Am Legend" is based on the extraordinary novella of that name by Richard Matheson, which has several times been adapted to film (as *The Last Man on Earth*, with Vincent Price, as *The Omega Man*, with Charlton Heston, and as *I Am Legend*, with Will Smith). This classic tale flips the monster narrative and allows us to see that to the vampires it is the human who is monstrous, stalking them during the terrible daylight hours, killing them when they are helpless and asleep, hating them for being different.

There is a Sufi tale about a man who has a vision from Allah that tells him that on a certain day all the water in the rivers and lakes will be infected and all who drink from that water will go insane. He tells everybody his vision, but no one listens. So he gathers a supply of clean water in jugs and on the foretold day drinks only from his uninfected water. Everyone else, however, drinks the bad water and goes completely nuts, speaking nonsense and behaving bizarrely. Again he goes out into the street and tries to tell people what has happened, but now they see *him* as the crazy one, because he hasn't gone insane like they have and his normal speech and behavior is utterly

bizarre to them. In the end, it's too much. How can he live as the only sane man in a world of the insane? Better just to go nuts. He drinks the water, goes crazy, and lives happily to the end of his days.

Study Questions:

1. In what ways is the "I Am Legend" poem like the Sufi tale recounted above?

THE REVENANT.

Revenants are "corpses [who] come out of their graves and wander around, animated by I don't know what spirit, to terrorize or harm the living," according to the 12th century English historian William of Newburgh. "The Revenant" is an adaptation of a revenant account in Newburgh's *Historia*. Here is the conclusion of that account:

Readings: From William of Newburgh's *Historia*:

...two young men (brothers), who had lost their father by this plague, mutually encouraging one another, said, "This monster has already destroyed our father, and will speedily destroy us also, unless we take steps to prevent it. Let us, therefore, do some bold action which will at once ensure our own safety and revenge our father's death. There is no one to hinder us; for in the priest's house a feast is in progress, and the whole town is as silent as if deserted. Let us dig up this baneful pest, and burn it with fire."

Thereupon snatching up a spade of but indifferent sharpness of edge, and hastening to the cemetery, they began to dig; and whilst they were thinking that they would have to dig to a greater depth, they suddenly, before much of the earth had been removed, laid bare the corpse, swollen to an enormous corpulence, with its countenance beyond measure turgid and suffused with blood; while the napkin in which it had been wrapped appeared nearly torn to pieces. The young men, however, spurred on by wrath, feared not, and inflicted a wound upon the senseless carcass, out of which incontinently flowed such a stream of blood, that it might have been taken for a leech filled with the blood of many persons. Then, dragging it beyond the village, they speedily constructed a funeral pile; and upon one of them saying that the pestilential body would not burn unless its heart were torn out, the other laid open its side by repeated blows of the blunted spade, and, thrusting in his hand, dragged out the accursed heart. This being torn piecemeal, and the body now consigned to the flames, it was announced to the guests what was going on, who, running thither, enabled themselves to testify henceforth to the circumstances. When that infernal hell-hound had thus been destroyed, the pestilence which was rife among the people ceased, as if the air, which had been corrupted by the contagious motions of the dreadful corpse, were already purified by the fire which had consumed it.

Study Questions:

1. Many of the poems in this book are adaptations of prose texts, such as the log of Christopher Columbus, passages from classic horror novels, or, as above, historical

texts. What does this do to the “originality” of the poems? Should poems be original? Why or why not?

2. Do you see these poems as written through a kind of translation? Do you think a translation of a great poem from another language is as valuable as the original poem?

THE FLEA.

“The Flea” was, of course, inspired by John Donne’s “The Flea.”

Readings: John Donne’s “The Flea”

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;
Thou know’st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, nay more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w’are met,
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that, self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph’st, and say’st that thou
Find’st not thy self, nor me the weaker now;
’Tis true; then learn how false, fears be:
Just so much honor, when thou yield’st to me,
Will waste, as this flea’s death took life from thee.

Study Questions:

1. How does the argument of the Donne poem change when it is spoken by a vampire?

THE LURKER AT THE WINDOW.

Study Questions:

1. Is the monster in this poem a real monster, a more of a human parasite?

2. This poem seems to be a critique of those who lurk around the edges of other peoples' marriages and relationships, clawing at the window casements, hoping to find their way in. Why is it that "cheating" is so deeply offensive to the narrator?

THE SECOND DEATH OF DRACULA.

This is a close adaptation of Bram Stoker's account of Dracula's death in his classic novel. I was finding it hard to get everything I wished to into the sonnet form, so I chose to add two lines, making a 16-line Meredithian sonnet, after the practice of the great sonneteer George Meredith:

Readings: from Bram Stoker's Dracula:

The leader, with a quick movement of his rein, threw his horse out in front, and pointing first to the sun--now close down on the hill tops--and then to the castle, said something which I did not understand. For answer, all four men of our party threw themselves from their horses and dashed towards the cart. I should have felt terrible fear at seeing Jonathan in such danger, but that the ardour of battle must have been upon me as well as the rest of them; I felt no fear, but only a wild, surging desire to do something. Seeing the quick movement of our parties, the leader of the gypsies gave a command; his men instantly formed round the cart in a sort of undisciplined endeavour, each one shouldering and pushing the other in his eagerness to carry out the order.

In the midst of this I could see that Jonathan on one side of the ring of men, and Quincey on the other, were forcing a way to the cart; it was evident that they were bent on finishing their task before the sun should set. Nothing seemed to stop or even to hinder them. Neither the levelled weapons nor the flashing knives of the gypsies in front, nor the howling of the wolves behind, appeared to even attract their attention. Jonathan's impetuosity, and the manifest singleness of his purpose, seemed to overawe those in front of him; instinctively they cowered, aside and let him pass. In an instant he had jumped upon the cart, and, with a strength which seemed incredible, raised the great box, and flung it over the wheel to the ground. In the meantime, Mr. Morris had had to use force to pass through his side of the ring of Szgany. All the time I had been breathlessly watching Jonathan I had, with the tail of my eye, seen him pressing desperately forward, and had seen the knives of the gypsies flash as he won a way through them, and they cut at him. He had parried with his great bowie knife, and at first I thought that he too had come through in safety; but as he sprang beside Jonathan, who had by now jumped from the cart, I could see that with his left hand he was clutching at his side, and that the blood was spurting through his fingers. He did not delay notwithstanding this, for as Jonathan, with desperate energy, attacked one end of the chest, attempting to prize off the lid with his great Kukri knife, he attacked the other frantically with his bowie. Under the efforts of both men the lid began to yield; the nails drew with a quick screeching sound, and the top of the box was thrown back.

By this time the gypsies, seeing themselves covered by the Winchesters, and at the mercy of Lord Godalming and Dr. Seward, had given in and made no resistance. The sun was almost down on the mountain tops, and the shadows of the whole group fell long upon the snow. I saw the Count lying within the box upon the earth, some of which the rude falling from the cart had scattered over him. He was deathly pale, just like a waxen image, and the red eyes glared with the horrible vindictive look which I knew too well.

As I looked, the eyes saw the sinking sun, and the look of hate in them turned to triumph.

But, on the instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat; whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris's bowie knife plunged into the heart.

It was like a miracle; but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumble into dust and passed from our sight.

I shall be glad as long as I live that even in that moment of final dissolution, there was in the face a look of peace, such as I never could have imagined might have rested there.

SNAKE PEOPLE.

THE WORMS OF THE EARTH and CLAW IN THE DARKNESS.

The "Snake People" poems are based on the short story "The Worms of the Earth" by Robert E. Howard, which imagines an ancient race of snakelike troglodytes from whom came tales of the "little people" living in barrows below the earth.

Readings: Robert E. Howard's "The Worms of the Earth"

This story can be read online at Project Gutenberg Australia at this link:

<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0607861h.html#worms1>

Readings: Jung on the Shadow as Saurian Tail

Taking it in its deepest sense, the shadow is the invisible saurian tail that man still drags behind him. Carefully amputated, it becomes the healing serpent of the mysteries. Only monkeys parade with it.

The Integration of the Personality. (1939).

Study Question:

1. What does the reptile-human--cold blooded, green skinned, sharp toothed, alien--represent to us? Do we all have something of the reptile within us, somewhere near the amygdala, the lizard brain, filled with dark and primal instincts? If so, are we ourselves the monsters?

THE WEREWOLF OF GREEN KNOLLS.

The Werewolf of Green Knolls” was inspired in part by the wild, violent sexuality of Peter S. Beagle’s “Lila the Werewolf” and partly by psychological case studies of people who thought they were possessed by a demon who had turned them into werewolves and so began to blaspheme, to become violently hypersexual, to grow hair and fingernails wildly, and to sleep in graveyards. I was interested in the internalization of a social fear of female sexuality that would make a woman need to imagine she was demon-possessed in order to be able to express her sexuality. In “The Werewolf of Green Knolls,” the protagonist is such a beaten-down woman at the opening of the sequence, though things change radically once the spirit of the wolf enters her.

POOCH.

Study Questions:

1. There are times when poets enjoy trying to get away with expected rhymes, such as “breath” and “death,” but it’s generally considered better to stretch a bit, with rhymes that are unexpected. Which are your favorite rhymes in this poem. Why?
2. Note all the fawning dog terms in the poem. Do you think that they work as a form of foreshadowing? How or how not?

SNARL.

The rhyme words in “Snarl” are largely derived from Robert Frost’s sonnet “Range-Finding.” The first lines are a tribute to Tom Waits’s great song “Diamonds on My Windshield,” which begins:

Diamonds on my windshield
Tears from heaven
Pulling into town on the Interstate
Pulling a steel train in the rain
The wind bites my cheek through the wing
Fast flying, freeway driving
Always makes me sing

Readings: Tom Waits, “Diamonds on My Windshield”

For the complete lyrics, go to this link:

http://www.lyricsfreak.com/t/tom+waits/diamonds+on+my+windshield_20138995.html

To hear the songs, go here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DmbkXTwbXc

LITTLE PIGGY.

Study Questions:

1. Certainly everybody knows the fairy tale of the Three Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf? How does a reference to that tale work in this poem?

THAT TIME OF MONTH.

Study Questions:

1. The title might be read as a bad and potentially offensive joke. On the other hand, consider that in many traditional cultures menstruation has been considered a time when women are taboo and when their presence can curse businesses and holy places. Do you think that lycanthropy's discourse of a once-a-month disease associated with the moon might have originated from traditional fears of women's menstrual cycles?

WOLF'S BEST FRIEND.

This poem and the last were particularly inspired by Peter S. Beagle's "Lila the Werewolf," which now reads as a pretty dated, even sexist tale, but which meshes well with the gender issues explored in this sequence.

WHINE and RABBIT'S REVENGE.

These two have fun punning on "mooning" and "lunacy." The second poem references the Rabbit novels by John Updike and the Grunge band Nine Inch Nails's song "Closer":

Readings: Nine Inch Nails, "Closer":

You let me violate you, you let me desecrate you
You let me penetrate you, you let me complicate you
Help me I broke apart my insides, help me I've got no soul to sell
Help me the only thing that works for me, help me get away from myself
I want to fuck you like an animal
I want to feel you from the inside
I want to fuck you like an animal
My whole existence is flawed
You get me closer to god
You can have my isolation, you can have the hate that it brings
You can have my absence of faith, you can have my everything
Help me tear down my reason, help me its' your sex I can smell
Help me you make me perfect, help me become somebody else
I want to fuck you like an animal
I want to feel you from the inside
I want to fuck you like an animal
My whole existence is flawed
You get me closer to god

Through every forest, above the trees
Within my stomach, scraped off my knees
I drink the honey inside your hive
You are the reason I stay alive

To hear the song online, go here: <http://vimeo.com/3554226>

FEEDING TIME.

The final poem imagines the werewolf as a kind of Grendel, from *Beowulf*. Grendel is very much like the humans whom he fights. He is a warrior, loved by his mother, who lives in a great hall. But he is described as a “border dweller” because he dwells on the literal border of society and the figurative border in that he doesn’t follow social norms, doesn’t pay the wergild, the blood money one owes for murder. The werewolf protagonist becomes one who dwells in parks, alleys, and border regions between town, hunting, refusing to be tame, refusing to be powerless.

Research Topic: Lycanthropy and Gender

Read the passages below and write a short paper about how you see gender roles reflected in the medical discourse about lycanthropy and mental illness.

Readings: Harvey Rostenstock, M.D. and Kenneth R. Vincent, Ed.D., “A Case of Lycanthropy”

This case study, published in The American Journal of Psychiatry Vol. 134, No. 10, October 1977, details one of the cases of women who thought they were werewolves and began acting out an unrepressed sexuality.

A 49-year-old married woman presented on an urgent basis for psychiatric evaluation because of delusions of being a wolf and "feeling like an animal with claws." She suffered from extreme apprehension and felt that she was no longer in control of her own fate: she said, "A voice was coming out of me." Throughout her 20-year marriage she experienced compulsive urges towards bestiality, lesbianism, and adultery.

The patient chronically ruminated and dreamed about wolves. One week before her admission, she acted on these ruminations for the first time. At a family gathering, she disrobed, assumed the female sexual posture of a wolf, and offered herself to her mother. This episode lasted for approximately 20 minutes. The following night, after coitus with her husband, the patient suffered a 2-hour episode, during which time she growled, scratched, and gnawed at the bed. She stated that the devil came into her body and she became an animal. Simultaneously, she experienced auditory hallucinations. There was no drug involvement or alcoholic intoxication.

Hospital course. The patient was treated in a structured inpatient program. She was seen daily for individual psychotherapy and was placed on neuroleptic medication. During the first 3 weeks, she suffered relapses when she said such things as "I am a wolf of the night; I am a wolf woman of the day...I have claws, teeth, fangs, hair... and anguish is my prey at night...the gnashing and snarling of teeth...powerless is my cause, I am what I am and will always roam the earth long after death...I will continue to search for perfection and salvation.

She would peer into a mirror and look frightened because her eyes looked different: "One is frightened and the other is like the wolf--it was dark, deep, and full of evil, and full of revenge of the other eye. This creature of the dark wanted to kill." During these periods, she felt sexually aroused and tormented. She experienced strong homosexual urges, almost irresistible zoophilic drives, and masturbatory compulsions--culminating in the delusion of a wolflike metamorphosis. She would gaze into the mirror and see "the head of a wolf in place of a face on my own body--just a long-nosed wolf with teeth, groaning, snarling, growling...with fangs and claws, calling out "I am the devil." Others around her noticed the unintelligible, animal-like noises she made.

For the full article see <http://www.primitivism.com/lycanthropy.htm>

Readings: Bahar Gholipour, "Real-Life Werewolves: Psychiatry Re-Examines Rare Delusion"

The first case report on clinical lycanthropy was published in 1852, and described a man admitted to an asylum in Nancy, France, who was convinced that he had turned into a wolf. "To demonstrate this," Blom explained, the man "parted his lips with his fingers to show his alleged wolf's teeth, and complained that he had cloven feet and a body covered with long hair. He said that he only wanted to eat raw meat, but when it was given to him, he refused it because it was not rotten enough."

Other patients in the reports had similar delusions about changes in their appearance. One saw the head of a wolf when looking at himself in the mirror; another was convinced the bones in her body had been replaced by a pig's, and one felt claws growing in her feet.

Read the full article here: <http://www.livescience.com/44875-werewolves-in-psychiatry.html>

Readings: Jennifer Oullette, "Bad Moon Rising: The Science of Werewolves"

In the mid 19th century, a Mexican Indian woman named Julia Pastrana had hypertrichosis terminalis: her face and body were covered with straight black hair and she achieved some measure of fame as the "Bearded and Hairy Lady"

on the freak show circuit. She could read and write in three different languages, but people still gawked at her as if she were just an animal.

The person responsible for exploiting her was none other than her husband, Theodor Lent, who had no compunction about selling her body to a Russian anatomist after her death to scrounge a few extra dollars out of his “investment.” And when the anatomist returned the mummified body, Lent took his wife’s remains on the road. Julia’s mummy was lost for many years, but was rediscovered in 1990 at the Oslo Forensic Institute in Norway, where it still resides today.

Many of those who suffered from hypertrichosis found themselves on the freak show circuit, figuring it was better to make the best of a bad situation and get paid for their unfortunate appearance. Other famous examples are Stephen Bibrowski, a.k.a., Lionel the Lion-Faced Man, the so-called “wolf-boy” Jesus Aceves, Annie Jones the Bearded Lady, and Fedor Jeftichew, known to fans of P.T. Barnum’s traveling circuses as JoJo the Dog-Faced Boy. It was certainly preferable to the fate of sufferers who had the misfortune to live in the 16th century: in 1573 an alleged werewolf named Gilles Garnier was burned at the stake.

Read full article here: <http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cocktail-party-physics/2012/10/31/bad-moon-rising-the-science-of-werewolves/>

THE HORROR OF HAUNTED VALLEY

This sequence is an attempt to get at the interest that happens when separate popular literature genres and subgenres overlap in a piece. For example, in the movie *Stargate*, the alien pharaoh king achieves eternal life by renewing himself in a futuristic sarcophagus, and when he emerges from it we first see his hand, with long animalistic fingernails rising and resting on the edge of the sarcophagus---an explicit echo of a classic vampire movie scene. Similarly, in *Angel Heart*, a neo-Film Noir detective movie, the detective has to decipher a mystery after being hired by a man named Lewis Cipher. Of course Lewis Cipher is Lucifer, and it turns out that the detective *is* the criminal, but since he has lost his memories he doesn't know it. Only when he realizes that he's the murderer of the story can Lucifer claim his soul. Cinematically, the film blends classic Film Noir high contrast, gritty, shadows with the brilliant haloing pyrotechnics of religious horror film movies.

Study Questions

1) What genres do you see overlapping in this sequence?

RED GLOW IN THE WOODS (CASE 001: DAN WEISS, 13, ANDREA TROYER 14

Dan Weiss and Andrea Troyer are old friends (now married). Andrew took her MFA in fiction at UC Irvine and Dan took his at the Iowa Writers Workshop. Dan's novel is *Lucky Wander Boy*, written as D.B. Weiss. Currently (with another friend, David Benioff) Dan writes the TV series *Game of Thrones*.

BAGGED CATS (CASE 002: ANTHONY MILLER, 18, AND JOHN FITZGERALD, 19)

Anthony Miller is a Los Angeles journalist and John Fitzgerald is a poet whose fourth poetry collection was published in 2014.

Study Questions

1) Compare the diction of this poem with the previous one. How do the characters emerge from the language they use? For example, when Dan shouts "Titty-twist!" and makes slang grammar errors, such as "When 'Drea and me," what does this say about his age and maturity level? How about when John says that "it's too gay / to do the kitty sacrifice without / some booze" before they murder the stray cat he's captured?

THE FIRE SACRIFICE (CASE 003: SHERIFF KIM OJA, 37) and PICNIC IN THE WOODS (CASE 003, ADDENDUM: SHERIFF KIM OJA, 37, DAN WEISS, 13, ANDREA TROYER, 14, ANTHONY MILLER, 18, AND JOHN FITZGERALD, 19)

Kim Oja is an actress who has appeared on television shows such as NCIS, Frasier, Beverly Hills, 90210, Two and a Half Men, Son of the Beach, The O.C. and as Ice in

the Justice League of America film. Other films include *Deliver Us from Eva*, *Air Rage*, and *Switch*.

Study Questions

1) In “The Fire Sacrifice,” as in the previous two poems, the protagonist is attracted to a red glow in the woods. Later, the eyes of the reanimated corpses are described as glowing red, as well. Why “red”? What associations do you have with the color red? Would the effect be the same if it had been a green glow? A yellow one?

NO REFUNDS, NO RETURNS (CASE 004: JOHN FITZGERALD, 19, KATHY STRONG, 20)

Kathryn Strong Hansen is a professor specializing in 18th British century literature at The Citadel in Charleston, S.C.

PRIEST OF THE STRANGE (CASE 005, BILAL SHAW, 33, PROPRIETOR, GOLDEN DAWN: AN ESOTERIC, THEOSOPHICAL AND MASONIC BOOKSTORE) and UNHOLY GHOST (CASE 005: ADDENDUM, BILAL SHAW, 33)

Bilal Shaw is a Kashmiri scientist at ID Analytics in San Diego. In 2010, he completed his doctoral degree in quantum information science from the computer science department at USC. He also translates into English from the great Urdu poetry of Mir and Ghalib.

Study Questions

1) Why does Bilal Shaw decide to go out into the woods? What happens to him when he gets there?

ILLEGAL ALIEN (CASE 006: QUETZIL CASTAÑEDA, AGE UNKNOWN)

Ron Alcalay is an old buddy from graduate school. We taught freshman comp together and have been friends since.

Study Questions:

- 1) The use of “alien” to refer to an otherworldly being was first recorded in the 1920s, but gained widespread popularity in the science fiction of the 1950s. This was also the time when newspapers began to refer to undocumented immigrants as “illegal aliens.” For an interesting article on this, see: <http://www.psmag.com/politics-and-law/the-world-outside-of-america-is-basically-outer-space-right> How do you see tales of alien invasion overlapping with the ideology of border protection in contemporary America?
- 2) The movie *District 9*, explicitly presents otherworldly aliens as immigrants, placed into camps and policed, as did the television series *Alien Nation*. Where else do you see Hollywood overlapping these tropes?
- 3) In *District 9* and *Alien Nation*, aliens become sympathetic characters and protagonists, despite societal prejudice against them. Clearly, in “Illegal Immigrant,”

Ronaldo Alcalay is presented as a heroic figure, as well. Do you think that such attempts to “humanize” the alien in such narratives works to undermine the genre’s implicit prejudices? Or is the genre too polluted by the parallel discourse of racism to be redeemed by such interventions?

Research Topic: Aliens and Immigration Fears and Policies

The classic Ridley Scott *Alien* series presents a frightening vision of alien life as violent, invading, predatory, parasitical, and symbolically raping its victims by planting its fetuses into their stomachs. Take a look at this article by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which details and debunks numerous similar claims about undocumented workers in the United States. How do such fears of immigrants jibe with the United States’ self-image as a nation of immigrant and the ideal of the American Dream?

LOST GIRL (CASE 007: NATHAN POTTER, LINDA GOLDMAN)

Nathan Potter is a data plumber who works for a not-for-profit company to develop and maintain a software that provides scientific data services for the earth science community. Linda Goldman is a lawyer at Ogletree Deakins in Los Angeles.

Study Questions

1) In some ways, this poem fits into the tradition of the elegiac love poem, though with a zombie twist. Compare or contrast it to William Butler Yeats’s “He wishes his Beloved were Dead,” in which Yeats imagines the death of the woman who spurned his advances for decades, the Irish revolutionary Maude Gonne, because if she were dead then she might love him as she didn’t when she was alive:

Were you but lying cold and dead,
And lights were paling out of the West,
You would come hither, and bend your head,
And I would lay my head on your breast;
And you would murmur tender words,
Forgiving me, because you were dead:
Nor would you rise and hasten away,
Though you have the will of wild birds,
But know your hair was bound and wound
About the stars and moon and sun:
O would, beloved, that you lay
Under the dock-leaves in the ground,
While lights were paling one by one.

REVELATION NOW (TRANSCRIPT: CIA RADIO INTERCEPT, SPEAKER THOUGHT TO BE BILAL SHAW, 33)

This one has lots of apocalyptic references: to the movie *Apocalypse Now*, to Jörmungandr (better known as the worm Ouroboros), the giant snake eating its own tail who will rise from the oceans in Ragnarok, to the Chinese myths of the archer who

shoots down 9 of the 10 suns and his wife who steals the potion of immortality and is banished to the moon, to the Chinese tale of the rabbit in the moon, and to the great dark fantasy novel by Ray Bradbury, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*.

Study Questions

- 1) What does the imagery of the poem suggest about Bilal Shaw's state of mind in this poem?
- 2) What does the poem reveal, plot-wise, about the reason why the dead are coming back to life and why the aliens have appeared in this sequence?

NEW UNDER THE SUN (CASE 008: BRIAN TURNER, INFANTRY TEAM LEADER, 40), DIARY ENTRY: BRIAN TURNER, IN THE BUNKER, DIARY ENTRY: BRIAN TURNER, IN THE BUNKER, and FINAL DIARY ENTRY: KIM OJA, IN THE BUNKER

Brian Turner is a poet and memoirist, who often writes about his experiences as an infantry team leader in the Iraq War. He is author of *Here, Bullet; Phantom Noise; and My Life as a Foreign Country*. "Swan" in "Brian Turner, In the Bunker, Diary Entry" is Ward Swan, copywriter, director and stand-up comic, who has written for film, TV, video games and advertising.

Readings: Susan Sontag, from "The Imagination of Disaster"

Science fiction films are not about science. They are about disaster, which is one of the oldest subjects of art. In science fiction films, disaster is rarely viewed intensively; it is always extensive. It is a matter of quantity and ingenuity. If you will, it is a question of scale. But the scale, particularly in the wide-screen Technicolor films (of which the ones by the Japanese director, Inoshiro Honda, and the American director, George Pal, are technically the most brilliant and convincing, and visually the most exciting), does raise the matter to another level.

Thus, the science fiction film (like a very different contemporary genre, the Happening) is concerned with the aesthetics of destruction, with the peculiar beauties to be found in wreaking havoc, making a mess. And it is in the imagery of destruction that the core of a good science fiction film lies.

The lure of such generalized disaster as a fantasy is that it releases one from normal obligations. The trump card of the end-of-the-world movies—like *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1962)—is that great scene with New York or London or Tokyo discovered empty, its entire population annihilated. Or, as in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1959), the whole movie can be devoted to the fantasy of occupying the deserted city and starting all over again—Robinson Crusoe on a world-wide scale.

Another kind of satisfaction these films supply is extreme moral simplification—that is to say, a morally acceptable fantasy where one can give outlet to cruel or at least amoral feelings. In this respect, science fiction films partly overlap with horror films. This is the undeniable pleasure we derive from looking at freaks, at beings excluded from the category of the human. The sense of superiority over the freak conjoined in varying proportions with the titillation of fear and aversion makes it possible for moral scruples to be lifted, for cruelty to be enjoyed. The same thing happens in science fiction films. In the figure of the monster from outer space, the freakish, the ugly, and the predatory all converge—and provide a fantasy target for righteous bellicosity to discharge itself, and for the aesthetic enjoyment of suffering and disaster. Science fiction films are one of the purest forms of spectacle; that is, we are rarely inside anyone's feelings. (An exception to this is Jack Arnold's *The Incredible Shrinking Man* [1957].) We are merely spectators; we watch.

But in science fiction films, unlike horror films, there is not much horror. Suspense, shocks, surprises are mostly abjured in favor of a steady inexorable plot. Science fiction films invite a dispassionate, aesthetic view of destruction and violence—a *technological* view. Things, objects, machinery play a major role in these films. A greater range of ethical values is embodied in the décor of these films than in the people. Things, rather than the helpless humans, are the locus of values because we experience them, rather than people, as the sources of power. According to science fiction films, man is naked without his artifacts. *They* stand for different values, they are potent, they are what gets destroyed, and they are the indispensable tools for the repulse of the alien invaders or the repair of the damaged environment.

But alongside the hopeful fantasy of moral simplification and international unity embodied in the science fiction films, lurk the deepest anxieties about contemporary existence. I don't mean only the very real trauma of the Bomb—that it has been used, that there are enough now to kill everyone on earth many times over, that those new bombs may very well be used. Besides these new anxieties about physical disaster, the prospect of universal mutilation and even annihilation, the science fiction films reflect powerful anxieties about the condition of the individual psyche.

For science fiction films may also be described as a popular mythology for the contemporary *negative* imagination about the impersonal. The other-world creatures which seek to take “us” over, are an “it,” not a “they.” The planetary invaders are usually zombie-like. Their movements are either cool, mechanical, or lumbering, blobby. But it amounts to the same thing. If they are non-human in form, they proceed with an absolutely regular, unalterable movement (unalterable save by destruction). If they are human in form—dressed in space suits, etc.—then they obey the most rigid military discipline, and display no personal characteristics whatsoever. And it is this regime of emotionlessness, of impersonality, of regimentation, which they will impose on the earth if they are

successful. “No more love, no more beauty, no more pain,” boasts a converted earthling in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). The half earthling-half alien children in *The Children of the Damned* (1960) are absolutely emotionless, move as a group and understand each others' thoughts, and are all prodigious intellects. They are the wave of the future, man in his next stage of development.

These alien invaders practice a crime which is worse than murder. They do not simply kill the person. They obliterate him. In *The War of the Worlds*, the ray which issues from the rocket ship disintegrates all persons and objects in its path, leaving no trace of them but a light ash. In Honda's *The H-Men* (1959), the creeping blob melts all flesh with which it comes in contact. If the blob, which looks like a huge hunk of red jello, and can crawl across floors and up and down walls, so much as touches your bare boot, all that is left of you is a heap of clothes on the floor. (A more articulated, size-multiplying blob is the villain in the English film *The Creeping Unknown* [1956].) In another version of this fantasy, the body is preserved but the person is entirely reconstituted as the automatized servant or agent of the alien powers. This is, of course, the vampire fantasy in new dress. The person is really dead, but he doesn't know it. He's “undead,” he has become an “unperson.” It happens to a whole California town in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, to several earth scientists in *This Island Earth*, and to assorted innocents in *It Came from Outer Space*, *Attack of the Puppet People* (1961), and *The Brain Eaters* (1961). As the victim always backs away from the vampire's horrifying embrace, so in science fiction films the person always fights being “taken over”; he wants to retain his humanity. But once the deed has been done, the victim is eminently satisfied with his condition. He has not been converted from human amiability to monstrous “animal” blood lust (a metaphoric exaggeration of sexual desire), as in the old vampire fantasy. No, he has simply become far more efficient—the very model of technocratic man, purged of emotions, volitionless, tranquil, obedient to all orders. The dark secret behind human nature used to be the upsurge of the animal—as in *King Kong*. The threat to man, his availability to dehumanization, lay in his own animality. Now the danger is understood as residing in man's ability to be turned into a machine.

From a psychological point of view, the imagination of disaster does not greatly differ from one period in history to another. But from a political and moral point of view, it does. The expectation of the apocalypse may be the occasion for a radical disaffiliation from society, as when thousands of Eastern European Jews in the 17th century gave up their homes and businesses and began to trek to Palestine upon hearing that Shabbethai Zevi had been proclaimed Messiah and that the end of the world was imminent. But peoples learn the news of their own end in diverse ways. It is reported that in 1945 the populace of Berlin received without great agitation the news that Hitler had decided to kill them all, before the Allies arrived, because they had not been worthy enough to win the war. We are, alas, more in the position of the Berliners than of the Jews of 17th-century Eastern Europe; and our response is closer to theirs, too. What I am suggesting

is that the imagery of disaster in science fiction films is above all the emblem of an *inadequate response*. I do not mean to bear down on the films for this. They themselves are only a sampling, stripped of sophistication, of the inadequacy of most people's response to the unassimilable terrors that infect their consciousness. The interest of the films, aside from their considerable amount of cinematic charm, consists in this intersection between a naively and largely debased commercial art product and the most profound dilemmas of the contemporary situation.

Full article available online here:

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/the-imagination-of-disaster/>

Study Questions:

1. Susan Sontag notes that there is very little horror in sci fi but that the alien is often blobby and zombie-like. They are often made uniform in features, not only in their uniform militarized dress. Sontag notes that a subset of sci fi invasion films feature aliens who make their victims undead, volitionless drones, as in this poetry sequence. Does this fear of uniformity suggest a societal or political allegory to you?
2. Why do we estheticize disaster? What is fascinating about horror? Why do we like violence? Why would we choose to dream a nightmare?

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC, WIZARD OF SCIENCE, AND THE QUEST FOR THE NEW UNIVERSE.

The Captain Fantastic poems were largely inspired by Christopher Columbus' log of his first voyage to the new world. Many of my readymade poems cannibalize the work of the masters, though the technique used differs from project to project. The 'power word' technique is fun, but increasingly I have been moving towards a kind of poetic journalism in which I transform non-poetic texts into poetry. For example, I found inspiration in the log of that great explorer, conquistador of spice and gold and slavery, and servant of the Inquisition, Christopher Columbus.

I started this project 20 years ago while working on a large textbook, *Literatures of Asia, Africa and Latin America*. Though I was the editor for Asia and the Middle East, I also did some work with the Latin American section, including choosing selections from Christopher Columbus's log of his first voyage to the Americas. I was very impressed with the unfolding drama of the voyage, the fear that came with the voyage into unknown seas, the threat of mutiny from the crew, the thick seaweed of the Sargasso Sea slowing the boats, the false hopes and false signs of land in a world of water, and then the extraordinary moment when a light was sighted at night, and in the morning a new land appeared and the crew had their amazing first encounter with the naked Arawak Indians. I was fascinated by his account of the attempt to communicate, the Indians mistaking the Europeans for gods, Columbus's mistaking them for Indians, Japanese, and Chinese. Columbus's paradisiacal vision of these Native Americans and the green world he had found was dazzling, but balancing his account of the beauty, simplicity and innocence of the native American is how he actually behaved towards them: his kidnapping of several men, his interrogation of them in search of gold and spice, and his musings on how easily they could be conquered and enslaved. Throughout the log, Columbus recounts the fantastic rumors of cannibals, of an island of women, of sirens of the sea, of men with faces like dogs, which gives the voyage a mythic aura, and towards the end there is great drama as he describes the sinking of the Santa Maria which forced him to leave behind a complement of men, whom he promised to come back for, but who had disappeared by the time the next expedition had arrived. It is one of the great stories of all time, epic on the scale of the Odyssey, adventurous and tragic, brave and idealistic, and yet containing the originary myths and roots from which would spring American capitalism, religious intolerance, and slavery.

The experience of reading the log reminded me of William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain*, in which Williams allowed the edited voices of great historical figures to speak in his prose directly to the reader, making history present tense. "Make it new," Ezra Pound advised, meaning not only that poets should innovate and transform their craft, but that they should make the past new. Thus in the modernist epics, Eliot makes new a variety of authors and texts that speak through his voice, from St. Augustine to the "Fire Sermon" of the Maha-Vagga, William Carlos Williams makes new the documents and newspaper stories that testify to the history of Paterson, NJ, and Pound makes new everyone from Malatesta to Confucius in the Cantos. Would it be possible for me to make this text new, to write my own mini-epic, learning from the techniques of collage, allusion, and adaptation that the great modernist poets used? I set out to do

so, disciplining myself by avoiding free verse, choosing instead to form the log entries into tetrameter sonnets. My wife was out of town, I was on a semester break from school, and I found myself working obsessively, writing the entire sequence of 20 sonnets (one of which I later discarded) in about seven days. Of course, it took me fifteen years of fiddling with them to bring them to their final state.

The books of lyric poetry that I admire the most are George Herbert's *The Temple* (in which the poems are architecturally arranged to build a temple to God), Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (a book of poetry constructed as an American Bible), and James Wright's *The Branch Will Not Break* (in which each poem echoes the language and iconography of the others, tying the lyrics together into a sequential meta-poem). I admire these books because they have found ways in which lyric poems can be molecularly joined to make a complex and serious argument that is as ambitious in its own way as that of an epic poem. I have long thought that I would like to write a book as sustained and organized as are these models. In my book of poems, *Impure*, I tried my best to link the poems together into something more than an anthology of diverse lyrics. I organized them by theme. I linked many of them together like Japanese renga poems in which the last line of one poem is echoed in the first line of the following poem. I planted recurrent imagery, referred directly in some poems to earlier poems, so that the reader who read the book sequentially would gain a certain reward. In the end, however, the poems were stubbornly independent, demanding their right to be themselves, though joined together in a republic. My novel in sonnets, *Sad Jazz*, and my history of WWII in the Pacific, *Tongue of War: From Pearl Harbor to Nagasaki*, and *Pulp Sonnets* all are my attempts to create such an integrated book of poems. It all started with the Columbus sequence, which gave me a technique that I could use to build a complex argumentative structure through a series of speaking voices.

The final step was to convert the entire sequence into a space opera (since the whole sequence was written in tetrameter sonnets, I converted it into pentameter sonnets, which gave me an extra foot per line to make the transition to space). After all, the literature of space exploration is often a manifestation of colonial dreams and nightmares, and even liberal science fiction like *Star Trek* imagines the Enterprise as the United States in miniature. The ship is the Ship of State and its destiny is national in international waters/galaxies.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN "AMONG THE FLAT EARTHERS!"

In order to launch Columbus into the voyage, I looked at Hamlet's monologue in which he considers launching himself into the undiscovered country of death and Tennyson's *Ulysses*, which imagines an old Ulysses as a "gray spirit yearning in desire / To follow knowledge like a sinking star, / Beyond the utmost bound of human thought." He longs to set sail for "that untravell'd world" and to sail west to seek "a newer world" which might also be the Happy Isles of death.

Readings: from William Shakespeare's Hamlet

To die, to sleep,
To sleep, perchance to Dream; Aye, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes Calamity of so long life:
For who would bear the Whips and Scorns of time,
The Oppressor's wrong, the proud man's Contumely,
The pangs of despised Love, the Law's delay,
The insolence of Office, and the Spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his Quietus make
With a bare Bodkin? Who would these Fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered Country, from whose bourn
No Traveler returns, Puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of.

Readings: Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses"

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life

Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

 This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

 There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Study Questions

1. Read the poems above. What are we to make of this sequence if we are to take seriously the intertextual suggestion that the journey into deep space might be a journey of no return into death?

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “MUTINY IN SPACE!”

It could be that Captain Fantastic is not such a nice guy.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “LOST IN SPACE!”

Study Questions

1. Traditionally, the ocean is a symbol of the unconscious, and the conscious mind is often figured as a ship upon the unknown deep. Do you see, therefore deep space working here as a kind of Id or unconscious? Is the voyage into space also a voyage below consciousness? If so, how does that affect your reading of this poem?

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “THE WRECK OF THE SPACE CRUISER SANTA MARÍA!”

Here are excerpts from the account in Columbus’s log of the sinking of the Santa Maria:

Readings: from the Log of Christopher Columbus:

“... at the passing of the first watch, 11 o’clock at night, I was three miles east of the point. I decided to lie down to sleep because I had not slept for two days and one night. Since it was calm, the sailor who was steering the ship also decided to catch a few winks and left the steering to a young ship’s boy, a thing which I have always expressly prohibited throughout the voyage. It made no difference whether there was a wind or calm; the ships were not to be steered by young boys.

I felt secure from shoals and rocks because on Sunday, when I had sent the boats to that King, they had gone a good 10 miles to the east of Punta Santa, and the sailors had seen this entire coast and the shoals that extend from Punta Santa a good nine miles to the ESE, and they saw where we could pass.... Our Lord willed that at midnight, when the crew saw me lie down to rest and also saw that there was a dead calm and the sea was as in a bowl, they all lay down to sleep and left the helm to that boy. The currents carried the ship upon one of these banks. Although it was night, the sea breaking on them made so much noise that they could be heard and seen at a three-mile distance. The ship went upon the bank so quietly that it was hardly noticeable. When the boy felt the rudder ground and heard the noise of the sea, he cried out. I jumped up instantly; no one else had yet felt that we were aground....

When I saw that some of my own crew were fleeing and that the sea was becoming more shallow, with my ship broadside to it, I did the only thing I could. I ordered the mast cut and the ship lightened as much as possible, to see if it could be refloated. But the water became even more shallow, and the ship settled more and more to one side. Although there was little or no sea, I could not save her. Then the seams opened, though she remained in one piece....”

After eliminating most of the log entry as extraneous to the dramatic purpose of the poem, I worked from the language and imagery of Columbus, casting it into rhyming iambic tetrameter quatrains, and forming it into a sonnet. By disciplining myself to keep each log entry within the limitations of a shortened (4-beat) rhyming sonnet, I hoped to transform and thus in some sense “own” the material. As can be seen by comparing the poem with the original text, the language is a combination of Columbus’s and my own. In fact, I took it is a matter of pride to stick as close as possible to Columbus’s language, while still injecting my own sense of dramatic pacing, and of recurrent iconography (the watery voyage of the dream is an image that I threaded throughout the series). The sonnet form was something of a Declaration of Independence for me: it stated to the reader that I was the author of this text, not Columbus. On the other hand, in doing so I felt that it obstreperously insisted upon the craft of the poems, whereas part of what I had fallen in love with in the original was the simplicity and directness of the log entries. The first solution I came up with was relatively simple: I converted each couplet of the sonnet into a single line. In this way, I hoped to disguise the sonnet as a seven-line metrical poem with internal rhymes. Later, however, I decided to disguise the craft even more, to convert end-rhymes into internal rhymes, and to re-present the poems as if they were free verse:

I felt secure from rocks and shoals
and around midnight went to sleep.

The sailor at the helm stole a few winks
since the sea seemed deep
and calm as water in a bowl.

The whole crew slept and left a boy alone to steer.
The stars like coals went dead.

We drifted like a toy boat swept
through coral reefs of dream,
and ran aground so quietly that only I woke up.

The seams and timbers ruptured and the sea
poured in, stranding us on the bank.

We fought the sea all night—then sank.

December 25, 1492

Interestingly enough, I feel that this poem is somehow more authentic because it disguises its sonnet nature. It is more authentic to the source text, so that if the reader does go back to the Columbus log, he or she will recognize the voice, some of the imagery, yet simultaneously see the transformative hand of the poet. (Discussion excerpted from “An E-View with Tony Barnstone” by Rebecca Seiferle, *The Drunken Boat* (2005), <http://www.thedrunkenboat.com/tbarnstoneview.htm>.)

Note: I had trouble publishing these sonnets at a time when formal poetry was still the unwanted stepchild of the American literary community, so I disguised them even further—turning the whole sequence into prose poems, though still iambic pentameter and rhyming, secretly—and the whole sequence was taken and published by Andrei Codrescu at *Exquisite Corpse*. As with the others, this poem was transformed into a pentameter sonnet when set in outer space.

Research Topic: From Columbus to Captain Fantastic

1. Read the original versions of the poems, which were adaptations of the log of Christopher Columbus here: http://www.corpse.org/archives/issue_8/poesy/barnstone.htm. Compare them with the versions set in outer space. Which do you find more powerful? Why?

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “TRAPPED IN SARGASSO SPACE!”

This sequence was modeled upon the Sargasso Sea sequence in Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which reads in part:

Readings: from Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;

The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “THE PARADISE PLANET!”

This poem plays off of Columbus’ own description of the New World as a kind of green paradise inhabited by naked innocents, and, in contrast, how utterly motivated he was to find gold and spice and conquest for his royal backers. He was a kind of snake in the garden.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “THE SAVAGES OF PARADISE!”

The sex sequences here and in the next poems come from my attempt to track down Pierre Grange, the French author. The name means Stone Barn, and in fact Grange is a literary joke, the nom de plume that my father and I use when we wish to slip in a faux reference in a work or make other sly manipulations of a text, but it turns out that there were some French writers by that name, one of whom wrote a history of frogs and the other of whom wrote a study of syphilis. Syphilis, it is rumored, came back from the Americas with Columbus’ crew. If that is so, then sex must have happened during this or one of Columbus’ later voyages. Was it consensual or rape? It is impossible to know, but I fear the latter.

Study Questions:

1. Consider the words “savage” and “civilized.” These terms have largely fallen by the wayside today. Why so? What do they imply, and what policies and practices do they support?

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “CANNIBAL PLANET!”

In two log entries (translated by Robert H. Fuson) Columbus writes:

Readings: from the Log of Christopher Columbus:

I also understand that, a long distance from here, there are men with one eye and others with dogs’ snouts who eat men. On taking a man they behead him and drink his blood and cut off his genitals. (Columbus 1617)

The Indians aboard[speak of] people ... with one eye in the forehead, as well as others they call cannibals, of whom they show great fear. When they saw I was taking that course, they were too afraid to talk. They say that the cannibals eat people and are well armed....Perhaps these people may have captured some of the other Indians; when the captives did not return to their own country, it was said that they were eaten. The Indians we have encountered believed the same thing at first about us Christians. (Columbus 1619)

As noted above, in coming up with my own version of this text, I was thinking about the source of syphilis, which some historians speculate came back to Europe from the Americas with Columbus’ crew. Thus, the crew, perhaps Columbus himself, must have had sex with (or raped) the Arawak Indians whom they encountered on their voyages. I

tried to tie the cannibalism to the sexuality, thinking at some level of the carnivorous sexuality of George Herbert's erotic religious poem 'Love III':

Readings: George Herbert's "Love III":

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lack'd anything.

'A guest,' I answer'd, 'worthy to be here';
 Love said, 'You shall be he.'
'I, the unkind, the ungrateful? ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.'
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 'Who made the eyes but I?'

'Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.'
'And know you not,' says Love, 'who bore the blame?'
 'My dear, then I will serve.'
'You must sit down,' says Love, 'and taste my meat.'
 So I did sit and eat.

The original poem I came up with, drawing from these various texts is a tetrameter sonnet:

The Cannibals

The natives say there are some places
where *canibales* live who feast
on men, behead them, drink like beasts
at the bloody spout, their wild faces
with just one eye and snouts of dogs.
They slice your genitals off clean-
a raw delicacy — and steam
them, serve them rare, or feed like hogs
at your red corpse. Some natives fled
from us at first. We looked like wild men.
But now they welcome us like children.
Sunset spills like the wine Christ bled
while one girl lets me taste her meat.
I kneel before her flesh and eat.

When I decided to convert the Columbus poems into ones set in space, I added one foot per line (pentameter) to give space to create the new environment.

For a longer discussion of these issues, see my article at *Jacket* 32 (April 2007), “The Cannibal at Work: Five Discourses on Translation, Transformation, Imitation, and Transmutation” <http://jacketmagazine.com/32/k-barnstone.shtml>.

Study Questions:

1. Read the Columbus log entry and the original poem above. How does the poem (and this sequence) change when the setting is changed to outer space?
2. Why is cannibalism taboo? Under what circumstances would *you* be willing to eat another human being?
3. What do you make of the religious dimension of the poem—cannibalism being compared to the Eucharist of the Catholic church? Does your opinion about this change when you consider that Columbus was an agent of the Spanish empire seeking wealth and spice but also seeking new lands to colonize and new peoples to convert to Catholicism?

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “STRANGE GODS!,” CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “RETURN TO THE PARADISE PLANET!,” and CAPTAIN FANTASTIC IN “THE PLANET OF WOMEN!”

These poems continue the meditation on Columbus as Milton’s Lucifer, who has winged his way across the unknown depths of Chaos to come at last to Paradise. Another famous literary moment in the back of my mind here was the moment when Nick reflects back dead Gatsby and the American dream, caught up in the image of the green light of Daisy’s house across the water shining like the fresh green breast of the New World:

Readings: from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*:

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes — a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

The idea for the planet of women comes from the Columbus logs. The Arawaks did in fact tell Columbus of such an island and he was distressed that the coming of winter forced him to sail back to Europe when he wished to explore further and find this mythical island. The notion of an Amazonian lost civilization of women has been a persistent American myth, and it appears fascinatingly in such feminist texts as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and of course the *Wonder Woman* comic book series.

Readings: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland

Herland can be found online at this link: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32/32-h/32-h.htm#link2HCH0008>

Research Topic: Amazon Women

Research the notion of the "Amazon woman" in literature and popular culture (the comic book character Wonder Woman, for example, is a princess from a civilization of Amazon women). What are we to make of these tales of matriarchal cultures? Do they emerge from sexualized male fantasies, utopian or dystopian notions of alternative communities, something else?

THE TOMB IN THE WOODS

“The Tomb in the Woods” was loosely inspired by the Solomon Kane stories of the great pulp writer Robert E. Howard, of Conan the Barbarian fame. The sequence involves the hero coming to a crossroads in his life (like Dante or like Robert Frost in “The Road Not Taken”), encountering an ancient tomb, through which he descends deep into the earth, encountering along the way doppelganger-like shadows, the strangely-preserved dead, and a culminating monster which he must overcome before ascending again to the light. This tale draws from the descent-to-the-underworld tales of Orpheus, Persephone, and of Inanna, as outlined in Sir James G. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, in Joseph Campbell’s chapter on “The Ritual Love-Death” in *Primitive Mythology: The Masks of God*, and in Dante’s *Inferno*. Formally, the sonnets are written in an adaptation of terza rima to the sonnet form, in homage to Dante and his chosen form.

PROLOGUE

Myths of the god who dies and descends to the underworld only to ascend again and be reborn figure forth an agricultural mythos of the death of the old plant in winter, the descent of the seed into the soil, and the rebirth of life in spring. The descent into the underworld is also a descent into the under-mind in much modern and Modernist writing and theory. Drawing upon the Jungian conception of poetic creation, William Carlos Williams uses the myth of Persephone in his conception of creativity, so that the descent into the underworld is an act simultaneously of violence and of fertility; “violence and creation are simultaneous,” he writes in one of his poems, since in the ideology of the avant-garde the new advance is made through violent schism with the old. As Joseph Campbell writes in *Primitive Mythology: The Masks of God*:

The leading theme of the primitive-village mythology of the Dema is the coming of death into the world, and the particular point is that death comes by way of murder. The second point is that the plants on which man lives derive from this death....Reproduction without death would be a calamity, as would death without reproduction.

Study Questions

- 1) Why do you think so many tales, from religious texts and myths to popular and literary texts such as J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* series and the Harry Potter series involved a descent into and reascent from the earth or from the land of the dead? Can you think of other examples of this from literature, film or television?
- 2) In this poem, the plant bursting from the soil is metaphorized as a green snake. Once you’ve read the whole sequence, how does this foreshadow but also change your reading of the monstrous snake who appears in the sequence’s last poems?

IN A FOREST SAVAGE, ROUGH, AND STERN

This sonnet echoes the imagery of Dante’s first canto, in which the protagonist loses his way, both physically and spiritually, so that the descent is simultaneously natural,

supernatural, and psychological. Solomon Kane comes to a similar forking of the ways in “Skulls in the Stars”:

Readings: from Robert E. Howard’s “Skulls in the Stars”:

There are two roads to Torkertown. One, the shorter and more direct route, leads across a barren upland moor, and the other, which is much longer, winds its tortuous way in and out among the hummocks and quagmires of the swamps, skirting the low hills to the east. It was a dangerous and tedious trail; so Solomon Kane halted in amazement when a breathless youth from the village he had just left, overtook him and implored him for God's sake to take the swamp road.

The whole story is online here: <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0600851.txt>

Study Questions

1. Do you think the “steel blade” in this poem works as a phallic symbol? If so, how does this relate to the themes of agricultural renewals and underworld descent in the sequence?
2. Read the Robert Frost poem “The Road Not Taken” (<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173536>) and the first canto of Dante’s *Inferno* (<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/inferno-canto-i>) and compare them with “In a Forest Savage, Rough, and Stern.”

EACH OPEN ARCHWAY BREATHES OUT CLUTCHING DREAD

This one ends on a call-out to Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII, the famous “All the world’s a stage” soliloquy, with its dark final vision of our exit from that stage into the next stage—death.

Readings: Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms.
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress’ eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon’s mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,

Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Study Questions

- 1) The Shakespeare passage alluded to in this poem works self-reflexively (that is, it turns the mirror of art back onto itself). By metaphorizing the world as a stage, Shakespeare makes us aware that we are watching theater, breaking the willing suspension of disbelief that carries us away in the living dream of theater, film, literature. “Each Open Archway Breathes Out Clutching Dread” does the same in lines where the narrator presents himself as a character told in a tale by the gods or as a puppet on a stage. That’s interesting, but what are we going to do with it? How does it change your reading of the poem? Of the sequence?
- 2) How does this self-reflexiveness relate back to other self-reflexive sequences in the book, such as “Operation Ragnarok” and “The People in the Wall”?

JUST PUPPETS ON A STAGE OF DARKNESS

This one reaches out to Ecclesiastes 3 and T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.

Readings: From Ecclesiastes:

- 1 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
- 2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- 3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
- 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- 5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
- 6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- 7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- 8 a time to love and a time to hate,

a time for war and a time for peace.

Readings: from T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”:

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

Study Questions

- 1) Compare this poem to the poems to which it alludes from Ecclesiastes and Eliot.
- 2) At the end of the poem there are several lines devoted to a monster shadowing the narrator—perhaps it is his own shadow, or perhaps it is the darkness itself. Take a look at the note for the next poem and at the Borges poem “To the Mirror” below. If duplication of the self is a kind of vampirism, then what does this say about the act of creating characters in creative writing?

I HEAR THE DARKNESS WHISPERING

In this poem and in the previous one, I am playing with the idea of a person’s shadow as a kind of dark mirror image, as in Corinthians 13:12, “and now we see as through a darkened mirror.” Like “The Mirror Vampire” in “The People in the Wall” sequence that follows this one, I’m riffing off of some ideas in a sonnet by Jorge Luis Borges, “To the Mirror,” in which he sees the mirror’s duplicating of the self as a kind of soul-sucking vampirism. Here’s my translation of the poem:

Readings: Jorge Luis Borges, “To the Mirror”

Why is it you persist, incessant mirror?
Why duplicate me, to the smallest gesture
of my hand? Why suddenly reflect there
in the shadows? You, uncanny brother,
you are the other me that ancient Greek
spoke of. You've watched forever. From a glaze
of old and watery crystal do you gaze
at me? It's useless to be blind. You seek
me and it's worse that I can't see, can't tell;
that really is your horror, magic thing

who multiplies the cipher of our being
then sucks our blessings into your strange well.
And when I'm dead, you'll duplicate another,
another, then another, and another...

Study Questions

1) See study questions for previous poem.

GIANT COILS OF DARKNESS WINDING

Robert E. Howard penned many tales that featured adventurers battling giant snakes, often in caves and underground crypts. You can find “The Valley of the Worm” and “The Black Colossus,” for example, available for free online.

For Jung, the descent into the underworld is a descent into the mind to battle the monsters of the mind and claim the treasure which grants us transformation and rebirth into a complete self. As we put it in the introduction to *Human and Inhuman Monster Poems* (Everyman Pocket Library 2015, co-edited with Michelle Mitchell-Foust):

Readings: Introduction to Human and Inhuman Monster Poems

The hero, then, is the one called to heal this split world which is the split self. Thus the hero who descends into the underworld is really the self going down into the mind, and the winged, fanged, gibbering, fire-breathing monsters the hero battles are manifestations of our repressed drives, drives that have turned exaggerated, distorted, monstrous because of the weight with which we have repressed them. And perhaps if we battle those monsters, we find the treasure that can heal the partial self and make it whole. The Jesus tale is one of many such descents in world religions and mythology (Inanna and Ishtar and Isis) designed to heal the spiritual split. As Plato puts it in the *Symposium*, “the innate eros of humans...draws us to the primeval state” that “joins two into one, healing humanity’s nature.” Through love, the self can look boldly into the mirror and accept the reflection there as a necessary familiar. We are no longer partial beings dwelling on a psychological border. When we return to the light, we are transformed, made more human by battling and ultimately embracing as part of our humanity that which we called inhuman. As Prospero said of Caliban: “this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.”

Readings: Carl Jung on “The Shadow”:

It is a frightening thought that man also has a shadow side to him, consisting not just of little weaknesses- and foibles, but of a positively demonic dynamism. The individual seldom knows anything of this; to him, as an individual, it is incredible that he should ever in any circumstances go beyond himself. But let these harmless creatures form a mass, and there emerges a raging monster; and each individual is only one tiny cell in the monster’s body, so that for better or worse he must accompany it on its bloody rampages and even assist it to the

utmost. Having a dark suspicion of these grim possibilities, man turns a blind eye to the shadow-side of human nature. Blindly he strives against the salutary dogma of original sin, which is yet so prodigiously true. Yes, he even hesitates to admit the conflict of which he is so painfully aware.

“On the Psychology of the Unconscious” (1912). In *CW 7: Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. P.35

The tendency to separate the opposites as much as possible and to strive for singleness of meaning is absolutely necessary for clarity of consciousness, since discrimination is of its essence. But when separation is carried so far that the complementary opposite is lost sight of, and the blackness of the whiteness, the evil of the good, the depth of the heights, and so on, is no longer seen, the result is one-sidedness, which is then compensated from the unconscious without our help. The counterbalancing is even done against our will, which in consequence must become more and more fanatical until it brings about a catastrophic enantiodromia. Wisdom never forgets that all things have two sides, and it would also know how to avoid such calamities if ever it had any power. But power is never found in the seat of wisdom; it is always the focus of mass interests and is therefore inevitably associated with the illimitable folly of the mass man.

With increasing one-sidedness the power of the king decays, for originally it had consisted just in his ability to unite the polarity of all existence in a symbol (see note). The more distinctly an idea emerges and the more consciousness gains in clarity, the more monarchic becomes its content, to which everything contradictory has to submit. This extreme state is reached, despite the fact that the climax always presages the end. Man's own nature, the unconscious, immediately tries to compensate, and this is distasteful to the extreme state, which always considers itself ideal and is moreover in a position to prove its excellence with the most cogent arguments. We cannot but admit that it is ideal, but for all that it is imperfect because it expresses only one half of life. Life wants not only the clear but also the muddy, not only the bright but also the dark; it wants all days to be followed by nights, and wisdom herself to celebrate her carnival, of which indeed there are not a few traces in alchemy. For these reasons too, the king constantly needs the renewal that begins with a descent into his own darkness, an immersion in his own depths, and with a reminder that he is related by blood to his adversary....

In *Mysterium Conjunctionis*, chapter IV, Rex and Regina, pp.135-136

If you imagine someone who is brave enough to withdraw all his projections, then you get an individual who is conscious of a pretty thick shadow. Such a man has saddled himself with new problems and conflicts. He has become a serious problem to himself, as he is now unable to say that they do this or that, they are wrong, and they must be fought against... Such a man knows that whatever is wrong in the world is in himself, and if he only learns to deal with his own shadow he has done something real for the world. He has succeeded in

shouldering at least an infinitesimal part of the gigantic, unsolved social problems of our day.

“Psychology and Religion” (1938). In *CW 11: Psychology and Religion: West and East*. p.140

We carry our past with us, to wit, the primitive and inferior man with his desires and emotions, and it is only with an enormous effort that we can detach ourselves from this burden. If it comes to a neurosis, we invariably have to deal with a considerably intensified shadow. And if such a person wants to be cured it is necessary to find a way in which his conscious personality and his shadow can live together.

“Answer to Job” (1952). In *CW 11: Psychology and Religion: West and East*. P.1

For a more good excerpts by Jung on the Shadow, see <http://jungcurrents.com/quotations-shadow/>

Study Questions

1) Read over the prose passages above. How does this change your reading of the two previous poems, with their evocation of a living darkness or shadow stalking the narrator?

THE CLIMB OUT OF THE UNDERWORLD

In William Carlos Williams’ poem “Spring and All,” he describes the plants at the end of winter, who “enter the new world naked,” in subtle echo of the exodus of Adam and Eve from the Eden at the end of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Book 12, line 646): “The world was all before them.” So, the final sonnet in the “Tomb in the Woods” sequence ends with an image of the protagonist emerging renewed from the underworld/unconscious, after confronting the archetypal monster-guardian, being stripped of his former attributes (like Inanna descending into the underworld naked in the Sumerian mythos). That is, out of disaster we forge the new self. Through being stripped and losing everything we can return to a more innocent, naked self. Through exile we discover the wider, unknown world. Through spiritual death we can be reborn into a stronger and maybe even wiser self.

For a translation of the Inanna episode, see <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr141.htm>

Readings: William Carlos Williams, “Spring and All”:

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast--a cold wind. Beyond, the

waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines--

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches--

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind--

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf
One by one objects are defined-
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance--Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken

Readings: From John Milton's Paradise Lost:

The brandisht Sword of God before them blaz'd
Fierce as a Comet; which with torrid heat,
And vapour as the Libyan Air adust,
Began to parch that temperate Clime; whereat
In either hand the hastning Angel caught
Our lingring Parents, and to th' Eastern Gate
Led them direct, and down the Cliff as fast
To the subjected Plaine; then disappeer'd.
They looking back, all th' Eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late thir happie seat,
Wav'd over by that flaming Brand, the Gate
With dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes:
Som natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon;
The World was all before them, where to choose

Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitarie way.

Study Questions

- 1) In his note above, the author says “That is, out of disaster we forge the new self. Through being stripped and losing everything we can return to a more innocent, naked self. Through exile we discover the wider, unknown world. Through spiritual death we can be reborn into a stronger and maybe even wiser self.” Do you believe this? Does the muscle really have to tear in order to grow?
- 2) Or is a disaster really a disaster? “The World was all before them” for Adam and Eve after the disaster in the Garden, but they were cursed and damned to die instead of being immortal. Isn’t that a disaster? Or is the freedom of choice they gained in the process some comfort for that disaster?
- 3) For poets like William Blake to leave the Garden is to move from the innocence of childhood to the experience of adulthood. Do we need to let our childhoods die in order to be reborn as adults? Or is there a way to keep some form of childish innocence as experienced adults? Blake thought so. Do you?

THE PEOPLE IN THE WALL

As with “The Tomb in the Woods,” this sequence riffs off of a sonnet by Jorge Luis Borges, “To the Mirror” (see the notes on “I Hear the Darkness Whispering” for a translation of that poem). At the core of the sequence is a tribute to the haunted house genre, which so often becomes in literature the haunted mind genre, as can be seen in famous ghost stories such as Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” and Henry James’s “The Turn of the Screw. As Emily Dickinson writes,

Readings: Emily Dickinson, “One need not be a Chamber—to be Haunted”

One need not be a Chamber—to be Haunted—
One need not be a House—
The Brain has Corridors—surpassing
Material Place—

Far safer, of a Midnight Meeting
External Ghost
Than its interior Confronting—
That Cooler Host.

Far safer, through an Abbey gallop,
The Stones a'chase—
Than Unarmed, one's a'self encounter—
In lonesome Place—

Ourself behind ourself, concealed—
Should startle most—
Assassin hid in our Apartment
Be Horror's least.

The Body—borrows a Revolver—
He bolts the Door—
O'erlooking a superior spectre—
Or More—

THE DOORS OF HIS FACE.

“The Doors of His Face” riffs off of imagery in Robert E. Howard’s “Pigeons from Hell.” The title is a tribute to my very first creative writing teacher, the fantasy writer Roger Zelazny, who allowed me to attend his workshop at the Indiana University Writers Conference when I was a teenager. My memory is fuzzy, but I believe that George R.R. Martin was in that workshop. The timing is right. One of Zelazny’s short story collections is titled *The Doors of His Face, The Lamps of His Mouth, and Other Stories*. I envision the antebellum haunted mansion as having a great double-door mouth and lamplit windows for eyes and at the back of my mind is Poe’s “The Fall of

the House of Usher,” where the house is describes as having “vacant eye-like windows.”

Readings: from Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was; but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveler upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled luster by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodeled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.

Read whole story online here: <http://www.bartleby.com/195/10.html>

Readings: from Robert E. Howard’s “Pigeons from Hell”

They had come rattling and bouncing over the stumpy, uneven old road that led through the pinelands, he and John Branner, wandering far afield from their New England home, in search of vacation pleasure. They had sighted the old house with its balustraded galleries rising amidst a wilderness of weeds and bushes, just as the sun was setting behind it. It dominated their fancy, rearing black and stark and gaunt against the low lurid rampart of sunset, barred by the black pines.

They were tired, sick of bumping and pounding all day over woodland roads. The old deserted house stimulated their imagination with its suggestion of antebellum splendor and ultimate decay. They left the automobile beside the rutty road, and as they went up the winding walk of crumbling bricks, almost lost in the tangle of rank growth, pigeons rose from the balustrades in a fluttering, feathery crowd and swept away with a low thunder of beating wings.

The oaken door sagged on broken hinges. Dust lay thick on the floor of the wide, dim hallway, on the broad steps of the stair that mounted up from the hall. They turned into a door opposite the landing, and entered a large room, empty, dusty, with cobwebs shining thickly in the corners. Dust lay thick over the ashes in the great fireplace.

They discussed gathering wood and building a fire, but decided against it. As the sun sank, darkness came quickly, the thick, black, absolute darkness of the pinelands. They knew that rattlesnakes and copperheads haunted Southern forests, and they did not care to go groping for firewood in the dark. They ate frugally from tins, then rolled in their blankets fully clad before the empty fireplace, and went instantly to sleep.

Read whole story online here: <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0600721.txt>

Study Questions:

1. In the Emily Dickinson poem quoted above, what is the “superior spectre” superior to? What does she mean that “One need not be a House” to be haunted and by contrasting “External Ghost” to “interior Confronting”?
2. What does that imply about the nature of ghosts, haunting, and houses and how might you apply that to this poem?
3. Read the excerpts from Poe and Howard. How does this poem reflect on and echo them?

LIBRARY OF FEAR

A classic plot trope for the haunted house genre is the question of whether the ghosts are real or mere psychological projections. Is it true that “This haunted house is in your head,” as Frank says? Perhaps. Or perhaps, as in the House of Usher, it’s not either-or but both-and. Setting the scene in a haunted library was a little joke. Perhaps at the back of my mind was the story “The Library of Babel” by Jorge Luis Borges, about an endless, labyrinthine library. This story was also alluded to in the great historical detective novel *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, where the library was the place of murder with the murderer being a blind scribe (i.e., the author, but also, intertextually, Borges himself, who worked as a librarian and who went mostly blind).

Study Questions:

1. Do you think Frank is right when he says “Jill, the red-eyed / ghosties are fancies of the Id ... / We’re safe. This haunted house is in your head”?
2. How does the contrast between Jill’s terror and Frank’s scoffing humor help build the tension in the poems?
3. In “The Library of Fear,” the illustrator has portrayed a transparent winged woman standing before a bookcase. A painting of Rodin’s “The Thinker” hangs on the wall. Overlaid on the image is a diagram of the human brain. What do you make of all these symbolic elements?

THE TURN OF THE SCREW.

“The Turn of the Screw” alludes to the eponymous Henry James psychological ghost story novella, and to one of my favorite poems, Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress.” Here is an excerpt:

Readings: From Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress.”

But at my back I always hear
Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust;
The grave’s a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Read the whole poem here: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173954>

Readings: From Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw."

The story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless, but except the obvious remark that it was gruesome, as, on Christmas Eve in an old house, a strange tale should essentially be, I remember no comment uttered till somebody happened to say that it was the only case he had met in which such a visitation had fallen on a child. The case, I may mention, was that of an apparition in just such an old house as had gathered us for the occasion—an appearance, of a dreadful kind, to a little boy sleeping in the room with his mother and waking her up in the terror of it; waking her not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also, herself, before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that had shaken him. It was this observation that drew from Douglas—not immediately, but later in the evening—a reply that had the interesting consequence to which I call attention. Someone else told a story not particularly effective, which I saw he was not following. This I took for a sign that he had himself something to produce and that we should only have to wait. We waited in fact till two nights later; but that same evening, before we scattered, he brought out what was in his mind.

"I quite agree—in regard to Griffin's ghost, or whatever it was—that its appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch. But it's not the first occurrence of its charming kind that I know to have involved a child. If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to TWO children—?"

"We say, of course," somebody exclaimed, "that they give two turns! Also that we want to hear about them."

Read the whole story here: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/209>

Study Questions:

1. The Andrew Marvell poem is a classic "carpe diem" poem in which the (typically male) narrator says to a recalcitrant object of his affection (usually female) that they must "seize the day" and be lovers because death will come if they wait too long. How does the interplay of sex and death change when placed into the Horror genre, as it is in this poem?
2. Contrast the meaning of "The Turn of the Screw" in this poem with the passage from the Henry James novella of the same title.

MY BOYFRIEND WAS A ZOMBIE

Part of the fun of the horror genre is all the feints and fakes, all the faux scares before the actual horror comes.

Study Questions:

1. How does this poem tease the audience with a scare? Why do we wish to be teased before the real horror is revealed in the Horror genre?

THE PEOPLE IN THE WALL

The poem winks at “The Bat” by Theodore Roethke:

Readings: “The Bat” by Theodore Roethke:

By day the bat is cousin to the mouse.
He likes the attic of an aging house.

His fingers make a hat about his head.
His pulse beat is so slow we think him dead.

He loops in crazy figures half the night
Among the trees that face the corner light.

But when he brushes up against a screen,
We are afraid of what our eyes have seen:

For something is amiss or out of place
When mice with wings can wear a human face.

Study Questions:

1. How do you interpret the lines “I pass / through myself wailing in the mirror and never / can break the glass”?

MIRROR HOUSE

I think everybody has heard “Hotel California” by the Eagles, a pretty spooky song, with lyrics like this excerpt:

Readings: from “Hotel California” by The Eagles

Mirrors on the ceiling,
The pink champagne on ice,
And she said, "We are all just prisoners here,
of our own device."
And in the master's chambers,
They gathered for the feast.
They stab it with their steely knives,
But they just can't kill the beast.

Last thing I remember, I was
Running for the door.
I had to find the passage back
To the place I was before.
"Relax," said the night man,
"We are programmed to receive.
You can check out any time you like,

But you can never leave!"

The pun on "checking out" as dying suggests that Hotel California is a kind of haunted hotel that traps souls, perhaps in the "Mirrors on the ceiling," even!

THE INBRED FOOLS!

Study Questions:

1. Part of the fun of the character of Mrs. Bundy in Hitchcock's *The Birds* is that she is an ornithologist, and so she can tell in no uncertain terms exactly why these stories of birds attacking humans are ridiculous. She is, of course, dead wrong, and soon, it is implied, to be simply dead. The investigator in "The Inbred Fools!" is of the same ilk. Why do you think that the scientist-as-fool is a stock figure in horror flicks?

THE DEATH BED

The title is a pun, of course.

Study Questions:

1. How does the theme of sleep and dream work in this poem?

THE MIRROR VAMPIRE.

"The Mirror Vampire" is an adaptation of the Jorge Luis Borges sonnet "To the Mirror," and it seeks to find a compromise form that draws from terza rima, the sonnet, and the villanelle, a form I call the terzavillanet. For a translation of the poem, see the notes to "I Hear the Darkness Whispering."

Study Questions:

1. Is there something weird and uncanny about mirrors? What?
2. How do the mirror, shadow, and "brother" themes in this sequence echo that of "The Tomb in the Woods" sequence?

THE ESCAPE

Does Steve really escape the house, or is he actually trapped inside its mirroring? Since Hamlet tells us that narrative is "to hold, as 'twere, the/mirror up to nature," stories mirror our lives and we mirror stories, telling ourselves we are this kind of character or that, the hero or the fool, acting out an adventure or a romance or a war story or a fairy tale or a horror story. We build our fragile selves out of such stories, but we can get trapped inside them, particularly when the story changes and we are not ready for it. When did the hero become the fool, the protagonist the antagonist, the love story a war tale?

Study Questions:

1. How can Steve ever really leave the house if the house is the mind? Or, how can Steve ever really leave the house if the house is the story you are reading in *Pulp Sonnets*?
2. When Steve runs out of the house and looks back, like the narrator at the end of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” he sees the house not as a face with doors for a mouth and windows for eyes, but as the top of someone’s head above the back horizon of a chair. Is this you, the reader? If so, what does this imply?
3. Is it possible to fall into the story by reading it? Can a story function like “The Mirror Vampire”?

HYPOCRITE LECTEUR,—MON SEMBLABLE,—MON FRÈRE!

The final sonnet addresses you, the reader, and tells you that it is of course ridiculous to think that by reading a tale you can get trapped in its mirror, haunted by it, even damaged or killed by it. Believe that if you can.

The title alludes to the final line of Charles Baudelaire’s “To the Reader,” in which he addresses the reader directly and makes him complicit in the evils depicted in his poem. This line makes the bravado move of breaking the fourth wall of the theater and bringing the audience into the poem, and it is this magical act, mimetic of the force of the imagination, that this little horror tale emulates.

Here is Robert Lowell’s translation of the poem:

Readings: Charles Baudelaire’s “To the Reader”

Infatuation, sadism, lust, avarice
possess our souls and drain the body's force;
we spoonfeed our adorable remorse,
like whores or beggars nourishing their lice.

Our sins are mulish, our confessions lies;
we play to the grandstand with our promises,
we pray for tears to wash our filthiness;
importantly pissing hogwash through our styes.

The devil, watching by our sickbeds, hissed
old smut and folk-songs to our soul, until
the soft and precious metal of our will
boiled off in vapor for this scientist.

Each day his flattery makes us eat a toad,
and each step forward is a step to hell,
unmoved, through previous corpses and their smell
asphyxiate our progress on this road.

Like the poor lush who cannot satisfy,
we try to force our sex with counterfeits,
die drooling on the deliquescent tits,
mouthing the rotten orange we suck dry.

Gangs of demons are boozing in our brain —
ranked, swarming, like a million warrior-ants,
they drown and choke the cistern of our wants;
each time we breathe, we tear our lungs with pain.

If poison, arson, sex, narcotics, knives
have not yet ruined us and stitched their quick,
loud patterns on the canvas of our lives,
it is because our souls are still too sick.

Among the vermin, jackals, panthers, lice,
gorillas and tarantulas that suck
and snatch and scratch and defecate and fuck
in the disorderly circus of our vice,

there's one more ugly and abortive birth.
It makes no gestures, never beats its breast,
yet it would murder for a moment's rest,
and willingly annihilate the earth.

It's boredom. Tears have glued its eyes together.
You know it well, my Reader. This obscene
beast chain-smokes yawning for the guillotine —
you — hypocrite Reader — my double — my brother!

T.S. Eliot alludes to this poem in “The Burial of the Dead” section of “The Waste Land.” Here is an excerpt:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying “Stetson!
You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,
Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!
You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!”

Readings: from Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny"

Hoffmann is the unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature. His novel, *Die Elixire des Teufels* [*The Devil's Elixir*], contains a whole mass of themes to which one is tempted to ascribe the uncanny effect of the narrative; but it is too obscure and intricate a story for us to venture upon a summary of it. Towards the end of the book the reader is told the facts, hitherto concealed from him, from which the action springs; with the result, not that he is at last enlightened, but that he falls into a state of complete bewilderment. The author has piled up too much material of the same kind. In consequence one's grasp of the story as a whole suffers, though not the impression it makes. We must content ourselves with selecting those themes of uncanniness which are most prominent, and with seeing whether they too can fairly be traced back to infantile sources. These themes are all concerned with the phenomenon of the 'double', which appears in every shape and in every degree of development. Thus we have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another — by what we should call telepathy —, so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing — the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations.

The theme of the 'double' has been very thoroughly treated by Otto Rank (1914). He has gone into the connections which the 'double' has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death; but he also lets in a flood of light on the surprising evolution of the idea. For the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death', as Rank says; and probably the 'immortal' soul was the first 'double' of the body. This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is found of representing castration by a doubling or multiplication of a genital symbol. The same desire led the Ancient Egyptians to develop the art of making images of the dead in lasting materials. Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man. But when this stage has been surmounted, the 'double' reverses its aspect. From

having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.

The idea of the 'double' does not necessarily disappear with the passing of primary narcissism, for it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of the ego's development. A special agency is slowly formed there, which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our 'conscience'. In the pathological case of delusions of being watched, this mental agency becomes isolated, dissociated from the ego, and discernible to the physician's eye. The fact that an agency of this kind exists, which is able to treat the rest of the ego like an object — the fact, that is, that man is capable of self-observation — renders it possible to invest the old idea of a 'double' with a new meaning and to ascribe a number of things to it — above all, those things which seem to self-criticism to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of earliest times.

But it is not only this latter material, offensive as it is to the criticism of the ego, which may be incorporated in the idea of a double. There are also all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will. [Cf. Freud, 1901b, Chapter XII (B).]

But after having thus considered the *manifest* motivation of the figure of a 'double', we have to admit that none of this helps us to understand the extraordinarily strong feeling of something uncanny that pervades the conception; and our knowledge of pathological mental processes enables us to add that nothing in this more superficial material could account for the urge towards defence which has caused the ego to project that material outward as something foreign to itself. When all is said and done, the quality of uncanniness can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since surmounted — a stage, incidentally, at which it wore a more friendly aspect. The 'double' has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons.

The other forms of ego-disturbance exploited by Hoffmann can easily be estimated along the same lines as the theme of the 'double'. They are a harking-back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and from other people. I believe that these factors are partly responsible for the impression of uncanniness, although it is not easy to isolate and determine exactly their share of it.

The factor of the repetition of the same thing will perhaps not appeal to everyone as a source of uncanny feeling. From what I have observed, this

phenomenon does undoubtedly, subject to certain conditions and combined with certain circumstances, arouse an uncanny feeling, which, furthermore, recalls the sense of helplessness experienced in some dream-states. As I was walking, one hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *detour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before, without any further voyages of discovery. Other situations which have in common with my adventure an unintended recurrence of the same situation, but which differ radically from it in other respects, also result in the same feeling of helplessness and of uncanniness. So, for instance, when, caught in a mist perhaps, one has lost one's way in a mountain forest, every attempt to find the marked or familiar path may bring one back again and again to one and the same spot, which one can identify by some particular landmark. Or one may wander about in a dark, strange room, looking for the door or the electric switch, and collide time after time with the same piece of furniture -- though it is true that Mark Twain succeeded by wild exaggeration in turning this latter situation into something irresistibly comic.

If we take another class of things, it is easy to see that there, too, it is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of 'chance'. For instance, we naturally attach no importance to the event when we hand in an overcoat and get a cloakroom ticket with the number, let us say, 62; or when we find that our cabin on a ship bears that number. But the impression is altered if two such events, each in itself indifferent, happen close together — if we come across the number 62 several times in a single day, or if we begin to notice that everything which has a number — addresses, hotel rooms, compartments in railway trains — invariably has the same one, or at all events one which contains the same figures. We do feel this to be uncanny. And unless a man is utterly hardened and proof against the lure of superstition, he will be tempted to ascribe a secret meaning to this obstinate recurrence of a number; he will take it, perhaps, as an indication of the span of life allotted to him. Or suppose one is engaged in reading the works of the famous physiologist, Hering, and within the space of a few days receives two letters from two different countries, each from a person called Hering, though one has never before had any dealings with anyone of that name. Not long ago an ingenious scientist (Kammerer, 1919) attempted to reduce coincidences of this kind to

certain laws, and so deprive them of their uncanny effect. I will not venture to decide whether he has succeeded or not.

Study Questions:

1. Due to a copyeditor's error, the last lines of the poem were changed from "Imagining's a book/ or mirror, not a fiend. Don't look!" To "Imagining's a book/ or mirror, not a friend. Don't look!" Strangely enough, the poem still makes sense despite the error. How does this change of a single word change the poem for you?
2. In what ways does "The People in the Wall" create "uncanny" effects through its use of mirroring, as defined by Sigmund Freud above?
3. Later in the essay, Freud writes:

There is one more point of general application which I should like to add, though, strictly speaking, it has been included in what has already been said about animism and modes of working of the mental apparatus that have been surmounted; for I think it deserves special emphasis. This is that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on. It is this factor which contributes not a little to the uncanny effect attaching to magical practices. The infantile element in this, which also dominates the minds of neurotics, is the over-accentuation of psychical reality in comparison with material reality — a feature closely allied to the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts. In the middle of the isolation of war-time a number of the English *Strand Magazine* fell into my hands; and, among other somewhat redundant matter, I read a story about a young married couple who move into a furnished house in which there is a curiously shaped table with carvings of crocodiles on it. Towards evening an intolerable and very specific smell begins to pervade the house; they stumble over something in the dark; they seem to see a vague form gliding over the stairs — in short, we are given to understand that the presence of the table causes ghostly crocodiles to haunt the place, or that the wooden monsters come to life in the dark, or something of that sort. It was a naïve enough story, but the uncanny feeling it produced was quite remarkable.

Do you see such uncanny effects being produced in this sequence? How about in "Operation Ragnarok"?

4. Read "The Continuity of Parks" in the notes to "Operation Ragnarok" and consider the final image of that story and of this poetry sequence. How do you interpret the character attacking the reader of the tale?

CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES

Building the Scary Monster out of Apt Metaphors

In this exercise, the class will create a monster, piece by piece out of metaphors and similes that are apt comparisons with its body parts and special powers.

- 1: First, the teacher asks, what are the parts of the monster? –and writes them on the board (tail, talons, teeth, scales, wings, horns, ears, arms, breath, etc.) What are its powers? (lazer ray vision, transformation into other shapes, regeneration, etc.)
- 2: Next, for each part of the monster and each power, the teacher asks the students to give him or her adjectives that describe what the part looks, smells, sounds, or feels like, and writes down the adjectives the students gives. So for breath, the list might be rotten, hot, smoky.
3. Then the teacher asks, what other things are rotten? Hot? Smoky? and writes them down. Perhaps for rotten it's month-old garbage, for hot it's a volcano, for smoky it's a house on fire.
4. Then the teacher and the class puts the body part together with the thing it's like:

The monster's breath is rotten as month-old garbage!
Watch out for his breath, hot as molten lava!
Its breath is smoky as a house on fire!
5. Repeat this exercise with each body part until you have a good list. Now put it together, having the students vote on which lines they like best.
6. You've written a collaborative scary monster poem, built out of metaphors and similes!

Building the Funny Monster out of Inapt Metaphors

1. In this exercise, you repeat the process above but in part “3” the students should choose things that are not like the adjectives. That is, instead of creating apt metaphors and similes where both parts of the metaphor have things strongly in common, you create inapt metaphors and similes where the two things compared have little in common.

2. So, you might ask, what things are not rotten, not hot, not smoky?

3. Now you put them together and instead of creating a scary monster you will have created a funny one:

The monster’s laser ray vision is as strong as a flashlight with a dying
battery!

The monster’s breath smells rotten as Listerine!

His teeth are as sharp as hammers!

Writing the Archetypal Character

Jung notes that in modern literature the motifs of mythology often appear “clothed in modern dress,” and the examples he gives could easily have been pulled from Williams’ poetry: “instead of the eagle of Zeus, or the great roc, there is an airplane; the fight with the dragon is a railway smash; the dragon-slaying hero is an operatic tenor; the Earth Mother is a stout lady selling vegetables; the Pluto who abducts Persephone is a reckless chauffeur, and so on.” In this writing exercise, you are to choose a figure from mythology, comic books, movies, Hollywood, history or literature and write about them from a contemporary angle. Learning from Jung, we can see that the deeper meanings that such figures embody run below the surface of our world at all times. You might choose to put your figure in a contemporary environment (Zeus in the Mac Store, shorting out the iPhones with the current in his fingertips) to see what sparks might fly.

Crafting the Amazing Opening or the Amazing Ending

Rhetorical and ideational parallelism is a very strong way to open or close a poem. For example, Ezra Pound's famous lyric "In a Station of the Metro" reads in full:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd.
Petals on a wet black bough.

Here the white faces picked out of the Metro crowd are implicitly compared to the petals picked out on the bough, and this comparison transfers a glaze of wetness to the Metro platform and suggests that the crowd is dressed in dark tones in the rain, which sets off the lighter-toned petal-like faces. The faces are parallel to the petals, as the black-clad crowd is parallel to the black bough, and this parallelism creates an implicit metaphor or simile: the faces are *like* petals, the crowd is *like* a black bough.

A similar technique is to use negative parallelism, as in Marvin Bell's poem "To Dorothy," which begins

You are not beautiful, exactly.
You are beautiful, inexactly.

Two part parallelism incorporating the negative comparison derives from the Latin rhetorical technique of *chiasmus*. Here is Alexander Pope in his epic poem "Essay on Man":

Each individual seeks a sev'ral goal;
But Heav'n's great view is One, and that the Whole.

Here, both a parallel structure is set up, and an inverted parallelism. In the first couplet, "parts" and "self" are parallel, as are "good or ill" and "Vice or Virtue." In the next couplet, the individual seeking a multiple goal is contrasted with Heaven which seeks a single, holistic goal. At the same time the individual is in inverse relation to the whole in the next line, and the "goal" of the individual is Heaven...thus, there is a cross-parallelism happening as well.

In all these poems, a balance of parallel elements in the lines makes the couplets epigrammatically memorable. Your job will be to convert the first or the last lines of one of your already-written poems into such a parallel, cross-parallel and/or negative parallel couplet in order to make your poem start and end with a bang, not a whimper.

The Documentary Poem

In this exercise you are to make a “found poem,” which is to say you are to work from a pre-text such as a novel or a newspaper article and convert it into a poem. This is what is sometimes called “uncreative writing,” a process in which you *find* the poem as much as you *create* the poem. You can begin by highlighting interesting images, phrases, turns of speech, or plot points or by blacking out anything that is not interesting to you. Then take the fragments that are left and arrange them, collage them, adapt them, and see if you can make them cohere into a poem. If it isn’t working for you, try to create a *collision* to see if that helps. Take another text and edit and highlight and blackout and cut it up until all that’s left are interesting pieces. Now *collide* the two collections of snippets. Perhaps you started with a tale of murder in the Bronx from the New York Times but then added in bits of a description of the eruption of volcanoes from a geology textbook. Suddenly, the murder becomes a kind of emotional eruption, the mouth of the volcano the barrel of the gun, the lava flowing like blood on the hardwood floors. Don’t get trapped by the technique you are using. Stick to the rules until the rules get too sticky. Then throw them out. Your ultimate loyalty is to the poem itself, not to this exercise, not to the professor or the class, not to your desire to be a good boy or a good girl. If the poem demands a different technique then your job is to discover what that technique is.

Renewing the Sonnet

In this exercise you will read Tony Barnstone's "A Manifesto on the Contemporary Sonnet" and choose one or more of the techniques he outlines to craft your own sonnet. Your sonnet can be a loose, free-verse sonnet or a strict, metrical sonnet, or anything in between. It can use true rhyme or some or all of the experimental rhyme techniques Barnstone identifies. It can use organic or mechanic form, high or low diction, straight syntax or worked-up rhetorical techniques. In brief, your job is to take the tradition of the sonnet and make it new, make it *yours*.

The Bout Rimes Poem

A bout rimes poem is a poem in which you take the rhyme words from someone else's poem and use them to end the lines in your poem. Thus, if you were to use the rhyme words from "A Woman Like a Bullet," you would start with these words and then fill in the lines leading up to them:

streaming
specters
seeming
vectors
hand
left
and
heft
denouement
are
screen
tenement
are
spleen

The Inverted Bout Rimes Poem

A bout rimes poem is a poem in which you take the rhyme words from someone else's poem and use them to end the lines in your poem. An *inverted* bout rimes poem is the same, but you use the end words to *start* your lines. Thus, if you were to use the rhyme words from "Thing," you would start with these words and then fill in the lines after them.

Before
air
core
everywhere
dark
sea
spark
windlessly
nucleus
awhirl
men
world
Amen
us

In this way, your poem will be a rhyming poem, but the rhymes will be hidden at the start of the line, unexpected!

Making the Dramatic Monologue Dramatic!

In this exercise you will write a dramatic monologue, which is a poem that speaks from the first person point of view of a character who is not you—like an extended speech in a play. There are many things to think about when writing the dramatic monologue. 1. Language: what diction and syntax, what slang and rhetoric to use that is in character, that reflects the emotion the character is feeling, and that reflects his or her origin, social class, and attitudes? 2. Story versus plot: story is the story you are trying to tell. Plot is how you tell that story. Try to begin your story *in media res* (Latin. “in the midst of things”). Choose where to begin and where to end wisely. Often we put too much distance between the writing and the events, mediate it too much. Try starting with the climax and putting it in the present tense, not in the past. 3. Develop character: what your character is saying and how he or she is saying it should reveal his or her inner nature to the reader in some way. This is why fiction writers put characters into conflict: because under pressure we are more likely to reveal our true, hidden natures. 4. Make it natural: the best way to test this is to read it out loud or to have a friend read it to you and listen for whether it’s language sounds right, is dramatic, starts and ends at the right moment and develops character. 5. Even if the listener is never defined explicitly in the poem, you should have a good sense of who the dramatic monologue is being *spoken to*. A mass murderer will speak differently to his or her mother than to a judge and than to a fellow prison inmate. Remember, your narrator doesn’t have to be a reliable narrator. It can be more interesting if the reader realizes that the narrator is *lying* to the listener or to him or herself than if the speech too obviously reveals usually-hidden inner thoughts.

For more on the dramatic monologue, including good examples from film, see <http://www.wheresthedrama.com/monologues.htm>

Rocketing into Space and Sticking Your Landing

Often when writing a poem, the last line can be the stickiest problem: how to end with a bang, or, as it may be, with a whimper? How can you stick your landing after you do your amazing skating routine, without a stumble? One thing I like to do is to start with a line from another writer, as I did in “Acquainted With the Night,” where I started with this phrase from Raymond Chandler: The streets are dark with something more than night.” In this exercise, students will write poems that begin or end on a line from *Pulp Sonnets*—or both! To amp up the difficulty, students can if they like try to write poems with rhyme and meter. Another thing students could try to do that might be fun is to *start* with a last line and *end* with a first line.

Here are some suggestions for first lines:

The thing that tipped me off was all the cats.
Last time I saw her she was pale as cream
I listen. Listen to the city sing
I switch the light bulb off but dreams keep streaming
I put a cockroach in my mug and watch
The streets are dark with something more than night
Living’s an act of faith, not just a trick
The softest creature in the world is hard
She’s just a bag of skin puffed full of air
Out of the woods she comes at me, teeth bared.
Okay, I know, the goddamn world is dead,

And last lines:

They love you so much, they will eat you last.
I feel you still: a bullet in the spleen
Why do that when the man’s already dead?
With cheek to floor I watch my fingers twitch
to suffer at your hands, assassin, God.
What good are you? What’s good is good for me.
Either my head or else a phone is ringing.
At home I kneel between her legs and pray
Let’s have some zombie sex, then nap.
How do you kill a thing already dead?
I try to fill the emptiness with screams
Who can tell how many times we’ve died?
I wriggle like a snake with a new skin

The Frankenstein Method

Often I like to use translation techniques to create readymade poems. One method I use to do this is to create (in my pet term) the “Frankenstein Poem,” pieced together with wire and bolts from the dead limbs of the original poem. The idea is to take chainsaw to the source poem and chop out articles, pronouns, prepositions, leaving only the “power words” on the metal table: nouns, verbs, adjectives. I often drop out uninteresting verbs, such as “to be.”

So, for example, consider “The Metamorphosis” from *Pulp Sonnets*. Cut up on the surgeon’s table, with the skin and tendons and fat removed, the flayed and detached remnants of muscle and bone look like this:

Metamorphosis
cockroach mug watch
scrabble glass keeps trapped
think yeah wet match
spilled beer insect life tapped
glass climbed slid
scrabbled back trapped
walk Little Match Girl thin
cold watch mink coat people pass
cockroach climbs glass slides
exit bug break glass
man swing rock take
cold hand fur coat buddy pass
purse miss gun shush
tears hard generous

From these “power words” you build your own poem by using all these words in this order and adding as many of your own words as you like in between them. So you could begin,

Imagine the metamorphosis of a cockroach
into a printed mug or a Steampunk watch.
Capitalism will make money off anything.
You may as well just play Scrabble and raise a glass
because you will be kept trapped like that roach...

...and with some luck you’ll find yourself going entirely in your own direction. As I say elsewhere: *You know if your Frankenstein poem is ‘alive English’ in Lowell’s term if the electric charge takes hold and the monster stands up and walks out into the literary village. And if the critics storm your castle, torches in hand, you will have only yourself to blame. It’s dangerous to steal fire from the gods.*

Writing the Intertext

Write a poem that responds to, makes a retort to, quotes from, alludes to, steals from, plagiarizes, one or more other texts. Such poems are considered to be “intertextual.” In “Semiotics for Beginners” Daniel Chandler lists different kinds and features of intertextuality. See how many of these you can use in your creation!

- *intertextuality*: quotation, plagiarism, allusion;
- *paratextuality*: the relation between a text and its 'paratext' - that which surrounds the main body of the text - such as titles, headings, prefaces, epigraphs, dedications, acknowledgements, footnotes, illustrations, dust jackets, etc.;
- *architextuality*: designation of a text as part of a genre or genres (Genette refers to designation by the text itself, but this could also be applied to its framing by readers);
- *metatextuality*: explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another text (metatextuality can be hard to distinguish from the following category);
- *hypotextuality* (Genette's term was *hypertextuality*): the relation between a text and a preceding 'hypotext' - a text or genre on which it is based but which it transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (including parody, spoof, sequel, translation).
- computer-based *hypertextuality*: text which can take the reader directly to other texts (regardless of authorship or location)”
- *reflexivity*: how reflexive (or self-conscious) the use of intertextuality seems to be (if reflexivity is important to what it means to be intertextual, then presumably an indistinguishable copy goes beyond being intertextual);
- *alteration*: the alteration of sources (more *noticeable* alteration presumably making it more reflexively intertextual);
- *explicitness*: the specificity and explicitness of reference(s) to other text(s) (e.g. direct quotation, attributed quotation) (is *assuming* recognition more reflexively intertextual?);
- *criticality to comprehension*: how important it would be for the reader to *recognize* the intertextuality involved;
- *scale of adoption*: the overall scale of allusion/incorporation within the text; and
- *structural unboundedness*: to what extent the text is presented (or understood) as part of or tied to a larger structure (e.g. as part of a genre, of a series, of a serial, of a magazine, of an exhibition etc.) - factors which are often not under the control of the author of the text.
- *anchorage* in which “Linguistic elements can serve to 'anchor' (or constrain) the preferred readings of an image,” as in a caption for a photograph.

SAMPLE SYLLABI

The first syllabus below is a bit of a catch-all. It can be adapted to courses in literature, American studies or creative writing or to courses that are hybrids between literature and creative writing. I've included a very robust set of supplemental readings, but of course the professor can choose to teach only those that fit with the themes of her or his class.

Similarly, I've broken the course into ten classes, but it can easily be condensed into fewer classes or even just one class, by trimming back on the readings. For example, a literature course on horror writing might choose to use some or all of classes 6, 7, 9 and 10, whereas a course on science fiction might choose to teach only classes 7 and 8 and a literature/film course on pulp and noir might only teach class 2 and 4 (possibly 3). I've created some sample syllabi below.

A professor teaching a creative writing course might choose to drop most of the supplemental readings and focus on the creative writing exercises.

Syllabus for Popular/Genre Literature or Creative Writing Courses

<p>Class 1: Topic: Introduction to Pulp Sonnets Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tony Barnstone, "Introduction" ✓ Tony Barnstone, "A Manifesto on the Contemporary Sonnet" ✓ Tony Barnstone, "Poetry that Wears Spandex" 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: High culture and low culture Experimental sonnet techniques</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Writing the Archetypal Character</p>
<p>Class 2 Topic: Pulp Fiction and Film Noir Pulp Sonnets Reading: "Killers and Tramps" section Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Robert Browning, "The Laboratory" ✓ James M. Cain, from <i>The Postman Always Rings Twice</i> ✓ Excerpts from Cornell Woolrich's "New York Blues" ✓ "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes" by Francis William Bourdillon, plus musical adaptations of the same title ✓ T.S. Eliot, from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ✓ Excerpts from William Lindsay Gresham, Cornell Woolrich and Han Shan 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Wildness and Domesticity Uncreative Writing: Working from Sources Pulp Fiction Techniques The Femme Fatale</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: The Frankenstein Method</p>
<p>Class 3 Topic: Cold War Spy Fiction Pulp Sonnets Reading: "Operation Ragnarok" section Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wallace Stevens' "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" ✓ Emily Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" (260) ✓ William Blake's "The Tyger" ✓ Early Church Father Tertullian on Eve and Women ✓ Elizabeth Bishop: "The Fish" ✓ from Elizabeth Bishop's "At the Fishhouses" ✓ Ayn Rand, Howard Roark's speech in praise of 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics Gender and Religion Selfishness and Altruism Intertextuality Metafiction The Death of the Author Femme Fatale and Damsel in Distress Classic Tropes</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise:</p>

<p>selfishness, from <i>The Fountainhead</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ “The Continuity of Parks” by Julio Cortázar 	<p>Crafting the Amazing Opening or the Amazing Ending</p>
<p>Class 4 Topic: Adventure and Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction Pulp Sonnets Reading: “Jack Logan, Fighting Airman: The Case Of The Red Bordello” section Jack Logan as Radio Play & Live Performance of Radio Play</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Robert Frost’s “Acquainted with the Night” ✓ William Blake’s “The Sick Rose” ✓ Oliver Goldsmith’s “When lovely woman stoops to folly” ✓ T.S. Eliot, from “The Fire Sermon” section of <i>The Waste Land</i> ✓ Robert Herrick’s “Delight in Disorder” ✓ Chandlerisms ✓ Jackson Katz’s Tough Guise: Men, Violence and the Crisis in Masculinity ✓ Walt Whitman’s “The City Dead-House” 75 ✓ Hard-Boiled Vernacular ✓ Popeye the Sailor 1933 episode, “I Yam What I Yam” ✓ Genesis 19, Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed, New International Version ✓ from the Film Script of <i>Final Analysis</i> ✓ from Raymond Chandler’s “The Simple Art of Murder” ✓ (The World of Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction & the Detective’s Code) ✓ “Twenty Rules For Writing Detective Stories” By S. S. Van Dine 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics Realism and Naturalism Jack Logan’s Code Tzvetan Todorov Theory of Detective Fiction (Absent Story and Present Plot; Absent Identity and Reading as Detection; Unreliable Narrators)</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Renewing the Sonnet</p>
<p>Class 5 Topic: Comics and Superheroes Pulp Sonnets Reading: “Theogony” section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Laura Mulvey on the Male Gaze ✓ Tony Hoagland’s “Beauty” ✓ from John (the Bible) ✓ Friedrich Nietzsche from <i>The Gay Science</i> ✓ George Herbert’s “Easter Wings” and “Love III” 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Later Feminisms and the Male Gaze</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: The Documentary Poem</p>
<p>Class 6 Topic: Monsters Pulp Sonnets Reading: “Bestiary” section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mary Shelley, from <i>Frankenstein</i> ✓ Robert Frost’s “Once by the Pacific” ✓ from the <i>Rig Veda</i>, “Hymn of the Creation” ✓ William Blake, “The Tyger” ✓ Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “If I should learn, in some quite casual way” ✓ “I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--”(591) by Emily Dickinson ✓ John Donne’s “Death, Be not Proud” (Holy Sonnet 10) ✓ From William of Newburgh’s <i>Historia</i> ✓ John Donne’s “The Flea” 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: The Science of Horror The Monster as Hero; the Hero as Monster</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercises: Building the Scary Monster out of Apt Metaphors and Building the Funny Monster out of Inapt Metaphors</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ From Bram Stoker's <i>Dracula</i>: ✓ Robert E. Howard's "The Worms of the Earth" ✓ Jung on the Shadow as Saurian Tail ✓ Tom Waits, "Diamonds on My Windshield" ✓ Nine Inch Nails, "Closer" ✓ Harvey Rostenstock, M.D. and Kenneth R. Vincent, Ed.D., "A Case of Lycanthropy" ✓ Bahar Gholipour, "Real-Life Werewolves: Psychiatry Re-Examines Rare Delusion" ✓ Jennifer Oullette, "Bad Moon Rising: The Science of Werewolves" 	
<p>Class 7 Topic: Alien Invasion Pulp Sonnets Reading: "The Horror Of Haunted Valley" section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Susan Sontag, from "The Imagination of Disaster" 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: The Appeal of the Appalling The Alien as Other</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Making the Dramatic Monologue Dramatic!</p>
<p>Class 8 Topic: Science Fiction Pulp Sonnets Reading: "Captain Fantastic, Wizard Of Science, And The Quest For The New Universe" section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ From William Shakespeare's <i>Hamlet</i> ✓ Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" ✓ From the Log of Christopher Columbus ✓ From Coleridge's <i>Rime of the Ancient Mariner</i> ✓ From the Log of Christopher Columbus ✓ George Herbert's "Love III" revisited ✓ From F. Scott Fitzgerald's <i>The Great Gatsby</i> ✓ From Charlotte Perkins Gilman's <i>Herland</i> 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Science Fiction and the Ideology of Colonialism Primitivism and "the Other"</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Rocketing into Space and Sticking Your Landing</p>
<p>Class 9 Topic: Sword and Sorcery/Fantasy Pulp Sonnets Reading: "The Tomb in the Woods" section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ from Robert E. Howard's "Skulls in the Stars" ✓ Shakespeare, As You Like It, Act II, Scene VII ✓ From Ecclesiastes ✓ From T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ✓ Jorge Luis Borges, "To the Mirror" ✓ Tony Barnstone and Michelle Mitchell-Foust, "Introduction" to <i>Human and Inhuman Monster Poems</i>" ✓ Carl Jung on "The Shadow" ✓ William Carlos Williams, "Spring and All" ✓ From John Milton's <i>Paradise Lost</i> 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Dante, Frost and Roads Not Taken The Shadow and the Mirror in Jung and Borges Descents into Underworlds and the Quest for the Integrated Self</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: The Bout Rimes Poem or The Inverted Bout Rimes Poem</p>
<p>Class 10 Topic: Horror/Haunted House Pulp Sonnets Reading: "The People in the Wall" section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Emily Dickinson, "One need not be a Chamber—to be Haunted" ✓ From Edgar Allen Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Horror and the Uncanny Psychology and the Haunted Mind Science and the Fantastic</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Writing the Intertext</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ From Robert E. Howard's "Pigeons from Hell"✓ From Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"✓ "The Bat" by Theodore Roethke✓ From "Hotel California" by The Eagles✓ Charles Baudelaire's "To the Reader"✓ From Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny"	
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Syllabus for Pulp Fiction and Film Noir Classes

<p>Class 1: Topic: Introduction to Pulp Sonnets Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tony Barnstone, “Introduction” ✓ Tony Barnstone, “A Manifesto on the Contemporary Sonnet” ✓ Tony Barnstone, “Poetry that Wears Spandex” 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: High culture and low culture Experimental sonnet techniques</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Writing the Archetypal Character</p>
<p>Class 2 Topic: Pulp Fiction and Film Noir Pulp Sonnets Reading: “Killers and Tramps” section Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Robert Browning, “The Laboratory” ✓ James M. Cain, from <i>The Postman Always Rings Twice</i> ✓ Excerpts from Cornell Woolrich’s “New York Blues” ✓ “The Night Has a Thousand Eyes” by Francis William Bourdillon, plus musical adaptations of the same title ✓ T.S. Eliot, from “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” ✓ Excerpts from William Lindsay Gresham, Cornell Woolrich and Han Shan 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Wildness and Domesticity Uncreative Writing: Working from Sources Pulp Fiction Techniques The Femme Fatale</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: The Frankenstein Method</p>
<p>Class 3 Topic: Cold War Spy Fiction Pulp Sonnets Reading: “Operation Ragnarok” section Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wallace Stevens’ “Disillusionment of Ten O’Clock” ✓ Emily Dickinson’s “I’m Nobody! Who Are You?” (260) ✓ William Blake’s “The Tyger” ✓ Early Church Father Tertullian on Eve and Women ✓ Elizabeth Bishop: “The Fish” ✓ from Elizabeth Bishop’s “At the Fishhouses” ✓ Ayn Rand, Howard Roark’s speech in praise of selfishness, from <i>The Fountainhead</i> ✓ “The Continuity of Parks” by Julio Cortázar 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics Gender and Religion Selfishness and Altruism Intertextuality Metafiction The Death of the Author Femme Fatale and Damsel in Distress Classic Tropes</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Crafting the Amazing Opening or the Amazing Ending</p>
<p>Class 4 Topic: Adventure and Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction Pulp Sonnets Reading: “Jack Logan, Fighting Airman: The Case Of The Red Bordello” section Jack Logan as Radio Play & Live Performance of Radio Play</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Robert Frost’s “Acquainted with the Night” ✓ William Blake’s “The Sick Rose” ✓ Oliver Goldsmith’s “When lovely woman stoops to folly” ✓ T.S. Eliot, from “The Fire Sermon” section of <i>The Waste Land</i> ✓ Robert Herrick’s “Delight in Disorder” ✓ Chandlerisms ✓ Jackson Katz’s Tough Guise: Men, Violence and the Crisis in Masculinity ✓ Walt Whitman’s “The City Dead-House” 75 ✓ Hard-Boiled Vernacular ✓ Popeye the Sailor 1933 episode, “I Yam What I Yam” ✓ Genesis 19, Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed, New 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics Realism and Naturalism Jack Logan’s Code Tzvetan Todorov Theory of Detective Fiction (Absent Story and Present Plot; Absent Identity and Reading as Detection; Unreliable Narrators)</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Renewing the Sonnet</p>

<p>International Version</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ from the Film Script of <i>Final Analysis</i>✓ from Raymond Chandler's "The Simple Art of Murder"✓ (The World of Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction & the Detective's Code)✓ "Twenty Rules For Writing Detective Stories" By S. S. Van Dine	
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Syllabus for Horror/Monsters in Literature Classes

<p>Class 1: Topic: Introduction to Pulp Sonnets Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tony Barnstone, "Introduction" ✓ Tony Barnstone, "A Manifesto on the Contemporary Sonnet" ✓ Tony Barnstone, "Poetry that Wears Spandex" 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: High culture and low culture Experimental sonnet techniques</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Writing the Archetypal Character</p>
<p>Class 2 Topic: Comics and Superheroes Pulp Sonnets Reading: "Theogony" section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Dahlia Ravikovich's "Clockwork Doll" ✓ Forugh Farrokhzad's "Windup Doll" ✓ Sylvia Plath's "The Applicant" ✓ Laura Mulvey on the Male Gaze ✓ Tony Hoagland's "Beauty" ✓ from John (the Bible) ✓ Friedrich Nietzsche from <i>The Gay Science</i> ✓ George Herbert's "Easter Wings" and "Love III" 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Later Feminisms and the Male Gaze</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: The Documentary Poem</p>
<p>Class 3 Topic: Monsters Pulp Sonnets Reading: "Bestiary" section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mary Shelley, from <i>Frankenstein</i> ✓ Robert Frost's "Once by the Pacific" ✓ from the <i>Rig Veda</i>, "Hymn of the Creation" ✓ William Blake, "The Tyger" ✓ Edna St. Vincent Millay's "If I should learn, in some quite casual way" ✓ "I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--"(591) by Emily Dickinson ✓ John Donne's "Death, Be not Proud" (Holy Sonnet 10) ✓ From William of Newburgh's <i>Historia</i> ✓ John Donne's "The Flea" ✓ From Bram Stoker's <i>Dracula</i>: ✓ Robert E. Howard's "The Worms of the Earth" ✓ Jung on the Shadow as Saurian Tail ✓ Tom Waits, "Diamonds on My Windshield" ✓ Nine Inch Nails, "Closer" ✓ Harvey Rostenstock, M.D. and Kenneth R. Vincent, Ed.D., "A Case of Lycanthropy" ✓ Bahar Gholipour, "Real-Life Werewolves: Psychiatry Re-Examines Rare Delusion" ✓ Jennifer Oullette, "Bad Moon Rising: The Science of Werewolves" 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: The Science of Horror The Monster as Hero; the Hero as Monster</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercises: Building the Scary Monster out of Apt Metaphors and Building the Funny Monster out of Inapt Metaphors</p>
<p>Class 4 Topic: Alien Invasion Pulp Sonnets Reading: "The Horror Of Haunted Valley" section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Susan Sontag, from "The Imagination of Disaster" 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: The Appeal of the Appalling The Alien as Other</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Making the Dramatic Monologue</p>

	Dramatic!
<p>Class 5 Topic: Science Fiction Pulp Sonnets Reading: “Captain Fantastic, Wizard Of Science, And The Quest For The New Universe” section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ From William Shakespeare’s <i>Hamlet</i> ✓ Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “Ulysses” ✓ From the Log of Christopher Columbus ✓ From Coleridge’s <i>Rime of the Ancient Mariner</i> ✓ From the Log of Christopher Columbus ✓ George Herbert’s “Love III” revisited ✓ From F. Scott Fitzgerald’s <i>The Great Gatsby</i> ✓ From Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s <i>Herland</i> 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Science Fiction and the Ideology of Colonialism Primitivism and “the Other”</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Rocketing into Space and Sticking Your Landing</p>
<p>Class 6 Topic: Sword and Sorcery/Fantasy Pulp Sonnets Reading: “The Tomb in the Woods” section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ from Robert E. Howard’s “Skulls in the Stars” ✓ Shakespeare, <i>As You Like It</i>, Act II, Scene VII ✓ From Ecclesiastes ✓ From T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” ✓ Jorge Luis Borges, “To the Mirror” ✓ Tony Barnstone and Michelle Mitchell-Foust, “Introduction” to <i>Human and Inhuman Monster Poems</i>” ✓ Carl Jung on “The Shadow” ✓ William Carlos Williams, “Spring and All” ✓ From John Milton’s <i>Paradise Lost</i> 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Dante, Frost and Roads Not Taken The Shadow and the Mirror in Jung and Borges Descents into Underworlds and the Quest for the Integrated Self</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: The Bout Rimes Poem or The Inverted Bout Rimes Poem</p>
<p>Class 7 Topic: Horror/Haunted House Pulp Sonnets Reading: “The People in the Wall” section</p> <p>Supplemental Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Emily Dickinson, “One need not be a Chamber—to be Haunted” ✓ From Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” ✓ From Robert E. Howard’s “Pigeons from Hell” ✓ From Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress” ✓ “The Bat” by Theodore Roethke ✓ From “Hotel California” by The Eagles ✓ Charles Baudelaire’s “To the Reader” ✓ From Sigmund Freud’s “The Uncanny” 	<p>Research & Discussion Topics: Horror and the Uncanny Psychology and the Haunted Mind Science and the Fantastic</p> <p>Creative Writing Exercise: Writing the Intertext</p>

Syllabus for Science Fiction Course

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TONY BARNSTONE ESSAYS ON WRITING

I put down many of my thoughts on the sonnet form in my article, "A Manifesto On The Contemporary Sonnet: A Personal Aesthetics," also available online at *The Cortland Review*,

http://www.cortlandreview.com/features/06/december/barnstone_e.html. Of course, that article was written to accompany my two earlier sonnet sequences, *Sad Jazz: Sonnets* and *Tongue of War: From Pearl Harbor to Nagasaki*. My ideas have changed quite a bit over the years. In *Pulp Sonnets*, I often attempt to deny my own precepts. For example, I do try to come up with acrobatic rhymes, such as "the cops is" and "stereopsis," but I'm also interested in classic rhyme pairs such as "breath" and "death," "fire" and "desire," "love" and "dove," which can work to create an embryonic poem within the poem when you just read down the rhyme words of the poem. Also, it's fun as an author to try to get away with breaking the rules that platitudinize the act of writing.

A Manifesto on the Contemporary Sonnet

This is a little manifesto on what I call the “contemporary sonnet.”

Principle I: Make the Sonnet New.

To quote Ezra Pound, the poet must “Make it new.” William Carlos Williams took Pound’s dictum to mean that the poets must be relentless avant-gardists, the shock troops of the new. Thus, for Williams, “all sonnets say the same thing of no importance. What does it matter what the line ‘says’? There is no poetry of distinction without formal invention, for it is in the intimate form that works of art achieve their exact meaning....” Williams was so focused on inventing new (i.e. free verse) forms that a fixed form such as the sonnet was to him mere repetition, the stamping out of the same product again and again by a factory press. The form for Williams *is* the content.

On the other hand, Williams didn’t truly understand metrical form, despite his early, sophomoric, Keatsian attempts at writing formal poems. For Williams, the fixed form poem is like a container into which you pour content, and it is true that you can fill an urn with blood, or semen, or earth from Sicily, or hydrogen peroxide, and it will stay the same shape. But set forms are significantly more elastic than Williams gave them credit for being. “The Sound must seem an Echo to the Sense,” wrote Alexander Pope in his *Essay on Criticism*, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in defining what he called “Organic Form,” wrote:

The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material, as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such is the life, such the form.

For Coleridge and Pope, form should have an organic relation to sense, not merely be the vase into which content is poured. The well-wrought urn is shaped to match its content. And those who write in form today have found countless ways to reanimate the great tradition of the sonnet form. Inevitably, for those who become inveterate sonneteers, sonnet writing becomes a form of experimentation, of hybridizing and reinventing.

Alexander Pope writes, “But most by Numbers judge a Poet's Song,/And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong” (*Essay on Criticism*). But many contemporary sonneteers dispense with meter altogether, or use it in only a few lines of the sonnet, and rhyme slant and irregularly, perhaps just in the couplet or glancingly throughout the poem. The first example I have found of this poetic practice is actually in the work of Williams. Though his early attempts at writing sonnets were unmitigated failures (“I’ve fond anticipation of a day/O’erfilled with pure diversion presently,/For I must read a lady poesy/The while we glide by many a leafy bay”), later in life Williams wrote a poem modeled upon the sonnet form that was simply a free verse poem in fourteen

lines. Nevertheless, he titled it "Sonnet," as if to say, "Here is how you make the sonnet new; you turn it into free verse." Perhaps. Certainly, that is *one* way to do so.

The contemporary sonnet then becomes a 14 line poem, with the occasional rhyme and with just the ghost of meter. T.S. Eliot, in his "Reflections on Vers Libre," writes that "the ghost of some simple metre should lurk behind the arras in even the 'freest verse; to advance menacingly as we doze, and withdraw as we rouse. Or, freedom is only truly freedom when it appears against the background of an artificial limitation." For Eliot, the *definition* of good free verse is poetry in which can be glimpsed the ruins of meter. Robert Lowell wrote hundreds of unrhymed blank verse sonnets in his *Histories*, but when a sonnet has neither meter nor rhyme, what distinguishes it from free verse? Perhaps the fact that they are written in 14 lines. But why should line count be the deciding factor? After all, the great sonneteer George Meredith, wrote his novel-in-sonnets, *Modern Love*, in 16 line sonnets! And what of the poems in Gerald Stern's *American Sonnets*, which are meterless and rhymeless and vary wildly in line count? Are they sonnets simply because he calls them sonnets? I can't say. Each of us has to answer that question in our own way. Certainly, Stern's titling of his book asks us to think of his sequence of short lyrical poems in the context of the tradition of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence, and in that sense they are in conversation with tradition, seeking ways to expand or renew that tradition, which for me, at least, creates an instant spark of interest. In fact, I find the practice interesting enough to try occasionally: one poem in my first book is a free verse poem ravaged from the scraps of a three-sonnet sequence, and two poems in my second book (which is an extended sequence of sonnets) are simply 14 line poems in approximate sonnet shape. This is an extreme for me, but as I see it any practice is acceptable so long as it works as poetry.

It's clear that free verse has much to learn from the sonnet tradition. I would assert, however, that the reverse is true as well: the sonnet has much to learn from the predominant (one might almost say hegemonic) mode of American poetry, from free verse. Free verse esthetics can renew the sonnet form in more interesting ways than Williams' fourteen line experiment, if they are allowed to truly permeate the sonnet form.

The sonnet is addictive as heroin, because it gives the writer certainty about the world. When it truly is in you, it structures thought so that ideas come out in sonnet form, so that walking down the street it forms your streaming thoughts into iambic feet that match the rhythm of your steps. Free verse reminds me of a passage from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*:

Indeed, we philosophers and "free spirits" feel, when we hear the news that "the old god is dead," as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectations. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea."

After the much-heralded death of form in modernism (though, to paraphrase Mark Twain, "the rumors of its death have been greatly exaggerated"), free verse emerged

from the wasteland and set sail on a newly opened sea. Poets set sail like Columbus, unsure whether they would sail forever, sail off the waterfalling edge of a flat world, or encounter India or other new worlds. The problem is, there is something comforting about knowing the destination of your journey. Sonnet-mariners know they will arrive at a port after a voyage of 14 lines. With free verse, one travels into the fog, and must map the world again with every poem. With free verse one has to ask each time, “what makes this a poem?” Why should I break my line here and not there? What sort of stanza shape and length should I have? What voice shall I speak in, with what attitude, with what rhetoric, with what image structure? We have to come up with organic ways of making it poetry, because the mechanic form has been dispensed with. A hundred years later, these “new” lands of free verse form are no longer new, no longer radical or avant-garde. But they remain powerful enough that they have become the central practice of American poetry, while formal poets are on the periphery once claimed by free verse poets and by experimental, L*A*N*G*U*A*G*E, and elliptical poets who now dominate the conferences, MFA programs, and literary journals. Why not create a hybrid sonnet poetics that learns from free verse practices, that echoes free verse love of the vernacular, of biblical rhetoric (especially anaphora), of attitude, of the collapse of high and low, and of precise, archetypal, resonant images?

While free verse poetry often suffers from a lack of necessity, the necessities of form in the sonnet too often makes it feel artificial, distant, and more written than spoken. One solution is to abandon the sonnet construction in which each stanza is seen as a separate box, and the boxes stack up to make the whole: *octave, turn, tercet, tercet*, or *octave, turn, quatrain, couplet*. How about a sonnet constructed like Whitman’s poems, or Ginsberg’s, through anaphora, sentence rhythm, and breath? A biblical rhetoric that wraps through the form until the sonnet form is invisible, transparent? In my sonnet, “Marriage Psalm,” for example, I set out to use the Whitmanian anaphora that has inspired so many generations of free verse poets (notably Walt Whitman and Gerald Stern), adapting it to the sonnet form:

Marriage Psalm

Blessed is the mattress on which they feast.
Blessed the yellow sheet on which she lies,
blessed her skin and blessed are her breasts,
and blessed are the body’s lamps, her eyes
lighting the room, rolling in dream, in lies,
and blessed is the darkness that descends
and carries them through sleep. Blessed the ways
of limbs entwined, a tangle without end
that only lack of love or death or time
can untie. Blessed mouth that eats the wool
pants and the folded sweaters, blessed blind
pink worm that digs, the insect in the wall
that feeds on them like rot in fruit yet gives
them years alive with blessings in their lives.

Or consider this sonnet from Chad Parmenter's *Batsonnets*, a sequence of sonnets about the world of the comic book character Batman:

A Holy Sonnet for His New Movie

When Batman finally casts his batarang
across the Gotham skyline, don't you sleep,
my children. Don't you close your eyes to weep
or let them blur with tears; no watering

the roses in your cheeks; he's glittering
beyond these sponsors. Hallelujah. Keep
his theme inside your heart and go ye, reap
your sugar harvest at the snack machine

between the previews. Batfans, think how long
we tried to pray away the preshow night,
how low our spirits flew while he was gone.
Now fill your mouths with Batman candy. Bite
your tongue and swallow that amen. It's dawn
onscreen—here comes your Christ in vinyl tights.

Here is the true contemporary sonnet: conversational, idiomatic, tongue-in-cheek postmodern ("don't you sleep/my children"), blending high rhetoric and archaism ("no watering/the roses in your cheeks," "Hallelujah," "go ye") with pop culture reference ("batarang," "Batman candy"), regular Petrarchan metrics with slant rhyme (batarang/watering/glittering/machine). The content is honest, unembarrassed, adult and mature---not a safe, polite sonnet to show the "Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls" with their "comfortable minds." As Richard Wilbur says, "...I think that poetry which tries to fend off the inelegant, popular world is in danger of seeming prissy and stuffy." With poems such as this, the sonnet has entered the 21st Century. I am tempted to say that this is not your parents' formal poetry, though in fact you will find most of these techniques anticipated by e.e. cummings in his sonnets of the 1920's!

Counter-Principle Ia: Find Old Ways to Make the Sonnet New.

Yes, it is tempting to apply the modernist avante-garde principles of perpetual renewal and relentless invention to the sonnet, to follow the dictum of old Ezra. On the other hand, when we dig a bit further into Pound we find that his dictum was itself nothing new. He was cribbing his famous phrase from the Confucian classic *The Great Learning*, the Da Shue, which is also in Chinese the term for "University," so you might say that Pound went to school in China.

I think Robert Frost stated Pound's idea a bit more interestingly when wrote that he likes to find "old ways of being new." Frost notes that the modernists "ran wild in the quest of new ways to be new," and he complains that:

Those tried were largely by subtraction, elimination. Poetry, for example, was tried without punctuation. It was tried without capital letters. It was tried without metric frame on which to measure the rhythm. It was tried without any images but those to the eye: and a loud general intoning has to be kept up to cover the total loss of specific images to the ear, those dramatic tones of voice which had hitherto constituted the better half of poetry. It was tried without content under the trade name of poesie pure. It was tried without phrase, epigram, coherence, logic and consistency. It was tried without ability.... It was tried without feeling or sentiment like murder for small pay in the underworld. These many things was it tried without, and what had we left? Still something.

There is still something left after a century of free verse. In the words of the great Tang Dynasty statesman and writer Han Yu, to write in form is to “Dance in Chains.” That is, the joy of writing in form comes not in slavishly following the rule of prosody, of pouring content into a predefined form, but in creatively interacting with a tradition, renewing and modernizing it. It is in the interaction of dance and chain, of freedom and restriction, breath and rhythm, that the interest comes.

At the same time, there is a certain pleasure that comes from writing a sonnet that has traditional forms of elegance, and doing so with the studied ease that the best free verse writers have. As Alexander Pope would have it, “True Ease in Writing comes from Art, not Chance,/As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance” (*Essay on Criticism*). Consider this sonnet by Jorge Luis Borges, for example:

Proteo

Antes que los remeros de Odiseo
Fatigaran el mar color de vino
Las inasibles formas adivino
De aquel dios cuyo nombre fue Proteo.
Pastor de los rebaños de los mares
Y poseedor del don de profecía,
Prefería ocultar lo que sabía
Y entretejer oráculos dispares.
Urgido por las gentes asumía
La forma de un león o de una hoguera
O de árbol que da sombra a la ribera
O de agua que en el agua se perdía.
De Proteo el egipcio no te asombres,
Tú, que eres uno y eres muchos hombres.

---Jorge Luis Borges

Proteus

Before the oarsmen of Odysseus
strained their arms against the wine dark sea,
I see strange forms, as if in prophesy,
of that old god whose name is Proteus.
He was the herdsman tending to the seas
and had the gift of reading omens too,
but he preferred to hide most things he knew
and wove odd scraps into his auguries.
When urged by people he would take upon
himself a lion's shape, be a huge blaze,
grow treelike by the river, giving shade,
and then like water in a wave be gone.
Don't shrink from Proteus the Egyptian,
you, who are one, and yet are many men.

—Translated by Tony Barnstone

In the Spanish, Borges is doing some interesting things with the meter: using Petrarchan a-b-b-a quatrains and ending with a Shakespearean couplet; using trochaic substitution in the second and last lines, using widespread elision, and shifting from pentameter to alexandrines in the final section. It's a somewhat loosened metrical scheme. However, one of the pleasures of this poem is just how unapologetic it is about its sonnet structure. It is happy to place a clear volta after the octave, and it asserts its Shakespearean roots with a strong second turn in the couplet. Its form is argumentative and dialectical: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Furthermore, it uses fills each stanza with a single sentence, thus easing the tension between form and speech, and moving the mind with each sentence just the distance of one stanza.

Clearly, in this poem, Borges is thinking of the sonnet in terms of a series of stanza-length rhetorical movements. I like the way Rhina Espalliat described this effect in a panel on the sonnet at the West Chester Poetry Conference in 2005: the sonnet is a chest of drawers, with each stanza a drawer that pulls out to reveal its own contained content. There is something elegant about a good chest of drawers. The drawers hold things, they open and close smoothly, and they keep you organized. Without it, we are left with something closer to real life: a pile of laundry in the middle of the bedroom floor.

Principle II: Translate Foreign Language Sonnets into Sonnets in English:

The art of the translator is to make the past new by a kind of literary ventriloquism—one gives voice to the dummy without appearing to move one's lips. And yet how valuable can such a "new thought" really be to us when delivered thru translation? Walter Benjamín tells us in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that art is a crafted product of the individual genius revealing its own unique aura—it is

by definition "original," not reproduced, and certainly not created through the ventriloquism of working with already-written words. How then can the translator speak with his or her own lips, in an original voice, not in a diminished copy?

Some years ago, I translated several sonnets into English, and was happy with the fact that my translations were in fact sonnets in English, formally regular, though utilizing a combination of true and slant rhyme. Normally, formal poetry in other languages is translated into English as free verse. This is partly because free verse dominates the American poetry scene, and so by converting formal poetry into free verse the American audience is more likely to **like** the translated poetry. It is partly because translating into form is more work-intensive, and because it takes a specialized and somewhat arcane skill in which many translators simply haven't been trained. I don't pretend to be a linguistic genius, but I do know my form moderately well, and this I felt was an ability I could bring to the table that might make these translations somewhat unusual at least.

The sonnets I translated were by Jorge Luis Borges, Petrarch, and by the Chinese poet Feng Zhi. With the Borges, I worked from my own faulty Spanish and a good fat Spanish-English dictionary. With Petrarch I worked from bilingual editions, with a bilingual dictionary and multiple alternate translations to converting a prose translation into sonnet form. With the Feng Zhi, I used my minimal Chinese and collaborated with the Chinese poet and scholar Chou Ping.

To translate formal poetry into English as free verse is a fiction, one that is designed to make the reader comfortable with the translated poem, while simplifying the translator's task. But, if, as Robert Frost snidely commented, to write free verse is to play tennis without a net, *translating* formal poetry into free verse is like presenting a game of dodgeball as an excellent example of professional tennis. If I were to show you a donkey hung with a placard labeling it Grevy's zebra, you would most likely laugh. After all, they're simply different animals.

Counter-Principle IIa: Transform Sonnets in English into Sonnets in English

Now, here is the interesting thing: the process of translating these sonnets into English gave me something beyond the emotion, the meaning, the imagery, the rhetoric of the poetry. It gave me the engine that sets emotion, meaning, imagery and rhetoric into motion, a machine of language, Coleridge's "mechanic form." It gave me the sonnet. Suddenly I realized that I had the machine in my head, and that I could continue converting texts into sonnets ad infinitum. Thus, at that time, in the midst as it turns out, of a painful divorce, I began writing sonnets, and continued doing so daily, obsessively, for months. I began by working from the Petrarch sonnets, trying to adapt and imitate the rhetorical patterns, the Petrarchan sonnet form, and the conceits behind the poems into sonnets that would reflect my own situation. Here, for example, is my translation of Petrarch's Sonnet 195:

Sonnet 195

Relentlessly, my face and hair grow old

but still I need the hook and lure so sweet
and still can't let go of the evergreen,
the Laurel tree that scorns both sun and cold.

The sea will drain of water and the sky
of stars when I no longer dread and need
her gorgeous shadow; only then I'll cease
to hate and love love's wound I cannot hide.

I cannot hope to rest from breathless work
until I'm flayed, demuscled and deboned,
or till my nemesis will sympathize.

Though everything impossible occur,
still none but she or death can heal the wound
made in my heart with her amazing eyes.

And here is my adaptation, or transformation of that sonnet:

Perhaps She Needed to Be Cruel to Make Him Understand

Look at how his face grows fat, and look,
his hair curls only like a sea around
an island of bald rock, and yet he's found
he still can't worm free from this hidden hook.
A subtle needle threads its way through him,
and stitches everything he does with pain.
Each time she says "We need to talk" to him,
he sees the sun go blank, the oceans drain
into the toilet, planets rotting through.
He gnaws on every little thing she says
and feels the bones extracted from his flesh.
When she says, "I'd feel better without you,"
he feels his skin pulled off, his muscles flayed.
He needs her more the more she needs him less.

In this sonnet, I am picking up on the imagery of aging and hooks, on the apocalyptic and anatomical imagery, the exaggeration of pain, and modernizing the diction to make it a poem about a 21st Century divorce. The catachresis (that is, the extreme, exaggerated use of metaphor) in the Petrarch poem is wildly romantic, and certainly we see this in "Perhaps She Needed" as well, but hopefully the hyperbole of "the oceans drain" is saved for the modern reader by the anticlimax of "into the toilet," just as the understatement of "we need to talk" one hopes will contrast pleasingly with the emotional hyperbole of "he sees the sun go blank."

I found that approaching the sonnet as a translation game was for me a very generative creative mode. When you translate, you wear the skin of the author. It is a kind of spirit possession. In my own work, I have learned much about traditional form by wearing the skin of the Chinese sonneteer Feng Zhi, of Petrarch, and of Borges. In addition to learning their techniques in the process of translating their poems into sonnets in English, I have developed a technique of transformation that I have attempted to apply intralingually as well as interlingually. I might, for example, work from a Shakespeare sonnet, using some of his rhymes and filling in my own lines, or write poems in direct conversation with the imagery of a source poem. As an example, consider first the source poem, Shakespeare's Sonnet 49:

Sonnet 49

Against that time if ever that time come
When I shall see thee frown on my defects,
When as thy love hath cast his utmost sum,
Called to that audit by advised respects;
Against that time when thou shalt strangely pass
And scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye,
When love converted from the thing it was
Shall reasons find of settled gravity:
Against that time do I ensconce me here
Within the knowledge of mine own desert,
And this my hand against myself uprear
To guard the lawful reasons on thy part.
To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,
Since why to love I can allege no cause.

Here is my intralingual translation (or transformation) of Shakespeare's sonnet:

The Audit

The time has come he never thought would come
when he sees her see in him just defects.
As if his heavy love has kept her down,
what once she thought was perfect she rejects.
She takes an audit of his qualities,
subtracts affection, multiplies distress,
and so, in sum, she takes his sum and sees
the countless reasons she should need him less.
She knows him better than he knows himself
so if she finds his love to be oppression,
and reads all the good years as years of lies,
then he must turn his mind against himself

and see, laid out in infinite regression,
his net and gross of failure in her eyes.

In interlingual transformation there is, as in traditional translation, a *conversation* going on with the originals, but the game is different. The poem is a tribute to the original that is meant to update it for the present day. Translation is the creation of your own poem in your own language that pretends to be someone else's poem in another language. In writing transformations, however, I found myself happy to dispense with the idea of being secondary; as an author I felt in no way that I had diminished authority compared to some "original," or that my work needed the label of "copy" instead of "original creation."

Counter-Principle IIb: Translate Nonpoetic Texts into Sonnets

Translating the Borges and Petrarch sonnets began me on years of experimental sonneteering, in which I found myself, certainly because I started off with translation, engaging in an ever-increasing and widening gyre of translation, transformation and imitation.

I realized, for example that instead of working from a prose translation of Petrarch and sonnetizing it, I could work from a prose palette of my own materials and make a sonnet that translated the palette into sonnet form. I began to speak poems into a tape recorder while driving, writing down the best of that free flowing monologue when at home at the computer, and then translating that material into sonnets.

With these techniques in hand, I have continued to write sonnet sequences, many of which continue to originate from these translation, intralingual translation and transformation practices. I call this work readymade poetry, with reference to the readymade assemblages of Marcel Duchamp, because the sonnet is the last step in adapting and reworking readymade material into poetry. Over a period of 18 years I wrote a sequence of poems set in the Pacific Theatre during WWII, spoken from the points of view of participants in, observers of, and victims of Pearl Harbor, the Island Warfare campaign, and the atom bomb drops on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and based upon research into letters, diaries, histories, and interviews with American and Japanese soldiers, scientists such as Oppenheimer, President Truman, kamikaze pilots, prisoners of war, and citizens of Hiroshima who survived (published with BKMK Press as *Tongue of War: From Pearl Harbor to Nagasaki*). I consider this sequence a form of poetic journalism.

I know that it is out of fashion to speak of morality in poetry, but I really do see the book as having a serious moral basis. It is an attempt to create not a simplistic story with a single moral at the end, but a story that brings alive the experiences of the individual participants in all their variety, limitations, and complication—showing their anger, their mutual racial hatred and fear, their suffering, and their attempts to make peace with events of unspeakable horror. I see the sequence as a history in verse in which I allow the readers to inhabit multiple and warring perspectives on key events of the War in the Pacific, so as to draw their own conclusions. That is, the poems approach the attack on Pearl Harbor, the internment of Japanese Americans, war crimes such as

torture, cannibalism and medical experiments on live prisoners, the firebombing of Tokyo and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a Cubist painting depicts a guitar or a nude—simultaneously from all perspectives (thus the fragmented, planar effect of Cubist depth of field), or in a fashion similar to that of a philosopher who despairs of knowing objective truth, yet who might nonetheless accept a truth collated from multiple perspectives (as in Nietzschean Perspectivism). I wanted to allow the contradictions and complications of the moral questions here to remain contradictory and complicated, because as I delved deeper into my research it became clear that each person who speaks in the sequence would answer these and other questions in different ways, and feel justified in their responses. A radiation sickness victim on the ground who lost his or her home and family has a radically different perspective on the bombing of Hiroshima than an American soldier awaiting the final bloody invasion of the Japanese mainland.

The poem “White Pig, Dark Pig” is an example of such poetic journalism. For this sonnet, I researched transcripts, oral testimonies, reports and memoirs about cannibalism in New Guinea and the Philippines in Yuki Tanaka’s account of Japanese military atrocities in WWII, *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II*, Patrick K. O’Donnell’s *Into the Rising Sun: In Their Own Words, World War II’s Pacific Veterans Reveal the Heart of Combat*, and Studs Terkel “*The Good War*”: *An Oral History of World War Two*.” Here are some excerpts from Tanaka’s book:

There was absolutely nothing to eat, and so we decided to draw lots. The one who lost would be killed and eaten. But the one who lost started to run away so we shot him. He was eaten. You probably think that many of us raped the local women. But women were not regarded as objects of sexual desire. They were regarded as the object of our hunger ... All we dreamt about was food. I met some soldiers in the mountains who were carrying baked human arms and legs. It was not guerillas but our own soldiers who we were frightened of....

... Ogawa Shoji noted that toward the end of the war, Japanese soldiers referred to the Allies as "white pigs" and the local population as "black pigs." (Japanese army lieutenant higher above in Tanaka, 1996, p. 114)

Many other cases refer to the fact that Japanese cannibalism extended to the entrails and the genitals of the victims; in some cases the brains were taken out...

It seems clear that Japanese soldiers removed the bodies of Allied soldiers from the area in which fierce combat was occurring and carried them to a safe area to be cooked and consumed, while others held back the Allied forces in order to prevent them from recovering the bodies. This indicates that these incidents were not isolated or sporadic acts but part of an organized process. (Tanaka, 1996, pp. 118-119)

...and here is the sonnet I wrote based upon these source materials:

White Pig, Dark Pig

I didn't rape the women, didn't lust
for their dark flesh, not like you think. I dreamed
of food, not sex. A man does what he must
to live. I ate dark breasts and brains. It seemed
normal, almost. I met some soldiers near
the camp. They carried a cooked human arm
from a white pig (that is, a prisoner
from the West). They were lucky, with a farm
of endless white pigs to roast up. But we
had to track down the dark ones hiding, and
we starved. At last we drew lots, and the one
who lost we'd eat. The loser tried to flee.
He'd been my friend. I shot him with my gun,
then wept. I got his leg and his left hand.

(Japanese Soldier, New Guinea)

Although in these journalistic sonnets I often create composite character, I seek to do so while adhering to journalistic principles—to invent nothing, but instead to report clearly and without editorial judgment on what happened and to let the readers judge for themselves.

Like literary translation, the essence of readymade poetry is a transcendence of the self, in which the writer channels other lives and histories and cultures. By transcending the self and speaking from the point of view of others, the intense emotional effect of the confessional lyric can be duplicated, but the poem can be used to address larger historical and philosophical concerns than usually fit within the constraints of confessional poetry. The *art* of translation is an art of transformation, and it is one that need not be limited to the transmission of a poem from one language to another. The act of translating without translation is infinitely generative. It is fascinating to me, and it has permeated my creative writing practice.

(Mini)Principle III Diction: Avoid Overuse of Monosyllabic Words.

An early lesson I learned about writing in form comes from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, in which he rails against the limping use of many monosyllabic words to fill out a line of pentameter (using ten monosyllables himself to illustrate the problem): "And ten low Words oft creep in one dull Line." That's probably why I was happy to write a pentameter line consisting of only two words: "precipitation, electricity."

Counter-(Mini)Principle III: Diction: Use Monosyllables to Achieve Naturalness.

On the other hand, I wonder if this esthetic betrays a Latinate esthetic prejudice. Certainly I enjoy the way that Robert Frost makes peace with the Anglo-Saxon linguistic tradition and uses monosyllables to craft a poetry that sounds as natural as

free verse. In “White Pig, Dark Pig,” for example, the plainspoken voice of the Japanese soldier, reveals its sorrow in the straightforward simplicity of its monosyllabic diction: “At last we drew lots, and the one/who lost we’d eat. The loser tried to flee./He’d been my friend. I shot him with my gun,/then wept. I got his leg and his left hand.”

Principle IV: Use True Rhyme as a Mnemonic Device

In the past few years I have been thinking a good deal about the question of rhyme’s function in the sonnet. Why bother to rhyme at all? Why not just write blank verse sonnets? Some of the easy answers still make sense. Rhyme of course is a clue to memory, and literally makes the poem more memorable. 20 years ago, I was living in a small apartment in Beijing and teaching at the Beijing Foreign Studies University. One dark night, I had been working for several hours trying to perfect a sonnet on my portable computer. In those days --- it was the mid-1980s --- the primitive portable computers available were the size of a suitcase and didn’t have internal battery backups and programs that saved themselves automatically. Thus, when the power suddenly went off and left me swimming in ink darkness, the sonnet simply disappeared into the ether. However, I noticed that in the absolute darkness the pixels of light on my screen were still glowing for a few seconds, and so I ran my eyes down the fourteen rhyming words at the ends of the lines, and began chanting them out loud as I stumbled around the room, blindly seeking pen and paper. I scrawled these words down in the darkness, and when the lights came on again was able to reconstruct the entire sonnet, based upon these rhymes and how they fit into the sonnet’s metrical pattern.

Thus rhyme creates an effect of **expectation**. As in music, when you are trying to remember a memorized sonnet, the fact that you know that in two lines a rhyming end word will appear helps the sluggish brain to perform. Paradoxically, however, in the moment of composition this effect of expectation has the effect of introducing the unexpected into the poem. Whatever the topic of the poem, whatever the projected arc of the sentence rhythm and image flow, the rhyme word militates that a random element must enter into the poem. The poet Alan Michael Parker tells his creative writing students to avoid taking the first exit off of the freeway when they write. That is, allow your imagination to carry you further from home than the brain will feel comfortable traveling. Rhyme forces the writer to do just this, to stay on the freeway all the way from Indiana to Montana, from Austin to Boston.

However, centuries of using the same rhymes, breath and death, fire and desire, love and dove, sing and king, have begun to put roadblocks up that close off this mental voyage. The long road between breath and death has been shortened as it became the road more traveled, well-worn, paved, and clearly marked with large freeway signs. Even in the 18th Century, rhyme was in danger of being exhausted through overuse, so that Alexander Pope complains about the “Tuneful fools” who use expected rhyme:

While they ring round the same unvary'd Chimes,
With sure Returns of still expected Rhymes.
Where-e'er you find the cooling Western Breeze,
In the next Line, it whispers thro' the Trees;

If Chrystal Streams with pleasing Murmurs creep,
The Reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with Sleep.
Then, at the last, and only Couplet fraught
With some unmeaning Thing they call a Thought...

Counter-Principle IV: Use Slant, Sight, Repetition, Inclusion, Antonym, Homograph, Reverse Rhyme, and Bout Rimes Instead of True Rhyme

I take a highly experimental approach to rhyme, on the theory that the excitement that rhyme lends to formal poetry has been eviscerated by the overuse of rhyme in advertisement and popular song. Rhyme should function to open the poem to wildness. A rhyme scheme forces the writer to, in the words of poet Marvin Bell, become comfortable with randomness. Rhyme is, in fact, an arbitrary element in the poem, essentially a surreal move in which the poet chooses the word not based primarily on meaning, but upon its aural similarity to another word. Much of the pleasure of writing and reading formal poetry comes from the difficulty of the balancing act, as the poet surfs the chaos, keeping the head of the surfboard aimed at the shore while wave after wave of iambs and rhyme try to knock him or her into the sea. However, overuse of rhyme has caused the exact opposite to happen much of the time. As noted above, we know when we hear “fire” that the obvious rhyme is “desire,” as “sing” suggests “king,” and “breath” suggests “death.” In other words, rhyme no longer functions to shock us with wildness, but instead often creates a feel of predictability. Predictability is useful when in an oral culture, when one wishes to remember how to recite a poem out loud, but in contemporary print culture it can make the poem seem stale and trite.

If true rhymes in English are largely exhausted, no longer startling, no longer bringing in an element of surreal unruliness into the poem, then perhaps it is necessary to open up the sonnet's semantic range by embracing alternate and even experimental forms of rhyme. I use experimental rhyme as a way of varying the palette available to the poet in the moment of composition. More importantly, I hope to reintroduce that wildness that I think is at the heart of rhyme, while still maintaining a high level of difficulty and visual and aural pleasure.

In most of my sonnets, I tend to use a combination of true, slant and sight rhymes, with a preference for full consonance. In this way, the palette of meanings is not limited to the expected rhyme (fire/desire, love/dove), and yet the pleasures of sound remain in the poem. If “desire” is the first exit off the freeway for “fire,” then keep going down the road, and perhaps take a detour into full consonance: fire and fear, fire and flare, and fire and flower are more interesting pairings. Fire and Darfur, fire and heretofore, and fire and atmosphere take us even further down the road.

In “The Rose Garden,” we can see a number of these techniques put to use:

The Rose Garden

A world perhaps can fit inside a word,
a sword asleep inside its sheath, but no
thing can be created out of no-

thing and no word can sing outside the world.
A rose is not a rose is not a rose,
as it turns out because the rose turns in-
to something else, some blossoming red thing
at the mind's core, inverted, just a ruse
within the mirror, mirroring without
becoming, much less being. So how to be
when all things multiply their glassy poses
inside our eyes, confusing us about
the real and really false? The world we see
is just some word that fills our eyes (with roses).

The first stanza uses inclusion rhyme (the word “word” is included in the word “world”) and repetition rhyme (“no” and “no-“). The second stanza uses inclusion rhyme (“in” and “thing”) and full consonance (“ruse” and “rose). The advantage of inclusion rhyme is that by its very nature it will tend to also work as consonance and assonance, as, that is, slant rhyme. The last six lines round out the poem with three sets of true rhyme. As a side note, I should mention that this poem is also an attempt to deepen my understanding of the basics of Classical rhetoric, such as chiasmus, in which two sets of words are arranged in reverse parallelism (“within the mirror, mirroring without”); polyptoton, in which repeated words derive from the same root but have different suffixes (“becoming, much less being. So how to be” and “the real and really false”); and epanalepsis, in which the end of a clause repeats the word that began it (“but no/thing can be created out of no-/thing”).

A traditionalist sonneteer might complain that the use of slant rhyme makes sonnet-writing too easy, that the difficulty of finding a fresh rhyme and still making the poem flow naturally is part of the pleasure. I can't deny that, but some of the rhyme games and experimental practices that I use in fact make the act of writing significantly *more* difficult than the use of standard true rhyme. In fact, I invented four of these rhyme experiments (homograph, antonym, reverse rhyme, and inclusion rhyme), in order to make the writing of the sonnet more difficult. As my friend Sholeh Wolpé says, “Tony, you are a masochist.” Here, then are some examples of what one might call radically experimental use of rhyme:

1. Antonym Rhyme

In the poem “Antonyms,” I set myself two structural games:

1) The poem is one of a series of what I call Amazing Shrinking Sonnets, in which the sonnet either shrinks from 7 iambs to 1 iamb, or shrinks from 4 iambs to 1 iamb and then expands like an hourglass back up to 4 iambs again. The latter structure is an attempt to adapt to sonnet form the hourglass shape of George Herbert's “Easter Wings,” though my hourglass sonnets shrink one foot per couplet, whereas Herbert's poem shrink one foot per line.

2) All the rhyme words in this poem are “antonym rhymes,” meaning that they are antonyms of each other. Although I use repetition rhyme (one/no one), sight rhyme

(not here/somewhere) and slant rhyme (retract/give...back), the sonnet was immensely difficult to write because of the intense restriction of the antonym game.

Antonyms

Although his love is on the incline,
she feels she just can't breathe, not here
with him, has to decline
this life and float somewhere,
to be away
where she can stay
forever,
one,
embracing never,
wanting no one.
She's chosen to retract
her love until his death.
He wishes she would give him back
his damage: half his life, each breath.

Although this sort of sonnet might seem an intensification of mechanic form, with the addition of antonym game and the hourglass game to the writing process, it also seeks to tap into organic form in terms of the poem's content. I love how Herbert worked the shrinking and expanding stanzas both into imitative form (the two stanzas are shaped like two pairs of wings, when viewed sideways) and into organic form, as the lines become slender as the protagonist becomes "most thin" and "most poor" and widen as his soul broadens into spiritual flight. Similarly, in "Antonyms, the use of antonym rhyme is meant to create a structural reflection of the inimical relationship between the man and the woman in the poem, and the shrinking and expanding form is meant to pick up on the contrast between her shrinking and his expanding love.

2. Homograph Rhyme

In another sonnet, "Homograph Hymn," I set out to write a poem in which the words in each rhyme pair are homographs of each other (homographs are words that have the same spelling but differ in meaning and pronunciation):

Homograph Hymn

Last year I dropped off thirty pounds, content
to live my salad days on lettuce, raven-
ously unfilled, or unfulfilled, the content
of my poor heart a wish, a croaking raven
from someone else's poem, an unwound
dockline, a white-winged sailboat in the wind

that tacked out of my life. Now I'm a wound,
and you a *nevermore*, and nights unwind
towards dawn with dreams that scavenge like a dove
whose manic B-B eye seeks through the refuse
for you. Today I ate some air then dove
back into bed alone. I won't refuse
the slightest anorexic hope. I close
my eyelash wings. No black bird brings you close.

3. Composite Rhyme

In "Aftereffect," the rhyme game was to rhyme on as many composite words containing the word "after" as possible, as a way of echoing the lustful reverberating aftereffect of the lover's presence:

Aftereffect

I'm reading at my desk, the afterword
of a new book, but cannot concentrate
because my mouth is filled with aftertaste
from an imagined kiss. And afterwards
I batter weights down at the gym, but after-
images hover in the mirror, floating dreams,
her green eyes watching me, the way she seems
to burst each time she detonates with laughter,
the way we stood too close that afternoon
at my place after lunch, and I moaned, "No,
it's hard to stop myself, you'd better go."
She hugged me fast and then she flew
to the door, laughing, while deep aftershocks
rang me and left me just these afterthoughts.

4. Repetition Rhyme

In "Laughing Poem," I was thinking about a statement that Robert Pinsky made when he came to visit my campus years ago, that we think that words rhyme because they sound the same, but in fact they rhyme because they sound different. This is true to some extent, though true rhyme is defined as two words that sound the same from the final stress to the end of the word, and sound different beforehand. Still, I was attracted to the idea that Pinsky seemed to be rejecting in that moment—that repetition is in fact a form of rhyme. In fact, it turns out that the earliest Italian sonnets were not rhymed, but instead used repeated words, as in a sestina. I often choose to use repetition rhymes in my poems, but "Laughing Poem" was the first I wrote to use the same word repeated throughout:

Laughing Poem

He started laughing. But what kind of laugh?
A funeral black laugh. A bad joke laugh.
A cracked man laugh. He couldn't stop the laugh,
it came out of his mouth, a dead life laugh,
a dead love laugh, a laugh at faith, a laugh
at his sad, laughable self. What a laugh,
she said "Don't fight for me," and what a laugh,
she said "I'm tired of you," and what a laugh,
she said "Let me alone." That's when the laugh
erupted. What a joke, he thought, and laughed
again, a tight chest laugh, a heave, a laugh
from the odd clown, from the numb mind, a laugh
and then collapse onto the couch, a *ha*
all teeth and tears and gasping, *ah, ha, ha.*

In the couplet that ends the poem, I gave myself the leeway to substitute a conceptual repetition rhyme for a true repetition rhyme (that is, the sound of laughter for the word "laugh").

5. Reverse Rhyme

In the next poem, "Reversal at the Battle of Midway," the rhyme game was to have the rhyme word of each pair be either the phonetic or the alphabetic reverse or each other (thus, "saw/was" and "keep/peak"). So, in the case of the example discussed above ("fire") the reverse rhyme would be "rife," and for "laugh" the reverse rhyme would be "fall."

Reversal at the Battle of Midway

The lookout yelled *hell-divers* and I saw
three black planes plunging towards my head. We shot
a frantic burst from the guns but it was
too late. Their bombs were off. I knew to toss
my body to the deck and quickly crawl
behind rolled mattresses we used to keep
safe from the shrapnel. Like a dark sky lark
diving to snatch a fly, from a high peak
above the cloud-cover, the next plane came
screaming. A flash, strange blast of warm air, then
a startling quiet. We'd been tricked. They'd hid
high up and sent planes skimming low to make

us waste a flight. Then we were in the net,
fueled planes on deck, nothing to do but die.

(Japanese Sailor, Aircraft Carrier Akagi)

“Reversal at the Battle of Midway” is based upon an oral history by Mitsuo Fuchida, posted online at <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/midway.htm>. The Japanese aircraft carrier Akagi participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor. She was sunk in the Battle of Midway on June 5th, 1942. The poem relates how the Americans turned the tide of the Battle of Midway, and ultimately of the war in the Pacific, by sinking a number of key ships in the Japanese fleet. The Americans first sent in a torpedo bombers low, and the Japanese zeros scrambled to engage them. Many of the American planes were shot down, and few of them got their torpedoes off. However, when the Japanese zeros settled back on the aircraft carriers to refuel, the American launched a surprise dive bomb attack from out of the cloud cover, catching the Japanese with fueled planes on deck, which acted as small bombs when hit by the U.S. munitions. As in “Antonyms” and “Aftereffect,” I came up with this rhyme game when searching for a way to mirror the poem’s content in the form.

6. Bout Rimes

Another rhyme game I particularly like to play is bout rimes, a French rhyme game in which the poet uses the rhyme words of someone else’s sonnet. Here, for example, is Seamus Heaney’s “The Forge”:

The Forge

All I know is a door into the dark.
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;
Inside, the hammered anvil's short pitched ring,
The unpredictable fantail of sparks
Or hiss when the new shoe toughens in water.
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,
Horned as a unicorn, at one end square,
Set there immoveable: an altar
Where he expends himself in shape and music,
Sometimes, leather-aproned, hairs in his nose,
He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter
of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;
Then grunts and goes in, with a slam and flick
To beat real iron out, to work the bellows.

...and here is my bout rimes adaptation of the poem:

The Forge

And when I surfaced topside from the dark
the air was red as if the world were rusting.
The zeros swooped around us in a ring
of fire, and smoke was blossoming, hot sparks
were shooting, fuel oil poured out on the water
and like a metal pot stuck in the center
on a gas stove, we cooked. I'll tell you square,
I lost it, on my knees like at an altar,
till all the beaten metal made dream music.
I almost died then, but smoke in my nose,
heat on my face, woke me. And through the clatter
inside my head I dove, swam from the rows
of ships, then turned and watched flames swell and flick.
I watched as that punk Death worked at the bellows.

(Seaman, USS Arizona, Pearl Harbor)

I chose to echo the blacksmith imagery of Heaney's poem in order to give figurative resonance to the bombing and sinking of the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor, but in other bout rimes poems part of the fun is to see what radically different poems can be constructed out of the same rhyme words. I particularly enjoyed doing a bout rimes poem based upon Heaney's "The Forge," because of his loosened use of rhyme. He rhymes plurals with singulars, accented syllables with unaccented ones, and dispenses with traditional rhyme schemes. If I get any hell from a sticklers for traditional rhymes, I like the idea of telling them, "Blame the Nobel Prize winner!"

In the poems above, and elsewhere, I set out to reexamine some of the prejudices of sonnet esthetics. Why not rhyme accented with unaccented syllables? Why not rhyme plural with singular nouns? Why not redefine what it means to rhyme in order to charge the poem with an unexpected music and to create organic relationships between rhyme and content? The advantage of experimental rhyme is that it broadens the palette of possibility, allows the sonnet to have more natural diction, to choose the just right word more often, and thus it norms the formal poem to the dominant free verse esthetic, makes old-fashioned poetry attractively contemporary, while still building the poem upon a solid skeleton of form.

Conclusion:

As I see it, much of even the best American poetry today suffers from a sad lack of wit, a paucity of rhetorical interest, and is thus remarkably unmemorable. In many free verse poems that I love and would have a hard time living without, little would be lost if a line were lost here and there, or if words were added to or subtracted from the line. How then to write lines that have a rhetorical necessity, a memorable and epigrammatic wit?

One way to do this is to go to school in the techniques of the past. We lost something as poets when the American educational system moved away from an education in the classics. We lost familiarity with Greek and Latin rhetorical tropes, and thus were no longer required to have training in the art of being witty.

We have lost also a traditional training in the use of form, so that even that specialized animal, the MFA or Ph.D. in creative writing, will often enter the market without the background, training, and ability to handle meter and rhyme effectively. Free verse poets are, of course, aggressively defensive about this, as formalist poets are about the centrality of free verse practice and the marginality of formal poetics. But, though traditionalist formal poets might pooh-pooh a free verse poet who titles a 14-line free verse poem “Sonnet,” who cares? Let it be a good poem, and let it learn from the formal tradition, and the two camps can meet in the middle. Though the free verse poet might launch an ad hominem attack against the formal poet, striving to associate right wing (even fascist) politics with the use of meter and rhyme, who cares? Such arguments are patently ridiculous, and the formal poet still has much to learn from the cranky free verse poet. To be contemporary, the sonnet needs to reinvent itself as something that goes beyond literary politics, something that speaks for our age, while learning from the sonnet tradition of ages past.

In his *Essay on Criticism*, Alexander Pope celebrates the consistency and the regularity of the formal poem:

No single Parts unequally surprize;
All comes united to th' admiring Eyes;
No monstrous Height, or Breadth, or Length appear;
The Whole at once is Bold, and Regular.

However, he continues that:

Whoever thinks a faultless Piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.

Though poets of each esthetic camp will take issue with one formal practice or another, the sonnet today is an immensely expansive form. It is large, it contains multitudes. It is large enough to include Whitman and Borges, to include free verse practices and esthetics and Greek and Latin rhetoric, large enough to include experiments with line, stanza, and rhyme. Whole continents can fit within those famous 14 lines.

Poetry that Wears Spandex

Let me start with a thesis: The great epic poems of Homer, Dante, and Milton have plots that today would be labeled Action-Adventure or Horror, and poets from Shakespeare to Emily Dickinson to Charles Baudelaire have treated supernatural subjects from fairies to ghosts to vampires. However, American poets as a general practice limit the acceptable topics of the poems that they write to confessional poems about their heartbreaks and family tragedies, meditations on nature as parables through which to demonstrate spiritual and philosophical concepts, and linguistic play and formal experimentation as a form of avant garde practice meant to demonstrate concepts derived from literary theory. They do this because poetry is a reduced and impoverished art form. They do this because they have given up. They do this because they have abdicated the role of the storyteller and the entertainer, and have allowed those to be the province of other art forms: the novel, the television show, the film, the graphic novel, and the video game.

Literary fiction has suffered from a similar impoverishment in the late 20th century. The fiction of character development leading to a moment of transformation at the apex or nadir of a positive or negative epiphany had no room for plot, adventure, fantasy, horror, magic, and excitement. In the past several decades, however, literary fiction writers such as Aimee Bender, Michael Chabon, Jonathan Letham, Sarah Waters, and George Saunders---under the influence of international fiction (and in particular of the work of Magical Realist writers such as Julio Cortazar and Gabriel Garcia Marquez) and perhaps of the interest given to comics by Pop artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein---have saved literary fiction from endlessly repeating the same formula. They write fiction that is Dickensian in its plotting, fantastic in its vision, magical in its world view, and that breaks away from the relentlessly narrow point-of-views of the first-person or third-personal limited confessional novels of the late postmodern period.

So, to round out my thesis, I would argue that after having largely given up their role as prophets of culture, poets – like literary fiction writers -- are writing about things that they rarely gave themselves permission to do in the period of what I might term the Decades of Dullness. There is a relatively new tradition of poetry sequences based upon low culture materials, and so these days it is not uncommon to find poetry written in ways that pay tribute to the spy, detective, crime, horror, sword and sorcery, vigilante, and pulp action genres. A short list of books in this mode might include Bryan B. Dietrich's *Krypton Nights* (a prize-winning book of formal poetry about Superman), James Cummins' *The Whole Truth* (a cycle of sestinas about Perry Mason), Chad Parmenter's *Batsonnets* (a sequence of sonnets about the world of the comic book character Batman), Jeannine Hall Gailey's *Becoming the Villainess*, and Kevin Young's *Black Maria* (poems based upon hard-boiled detective fiction).

Why is this important, or a phenomenon of which it is worth taking note? As Marshall McLuhan once wrote about advertising, “The historians and archeologists will one day discover that ads of our time are the richest and most faithful daily reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities. The Egyptian hieroglyph lags

far behind in this respect" (232-233). Even more than in advertising, a reflection of the deep psyche of the modern and postmodern worlds, and of a living mythological tradition, is to be found in B movies, pulp fiction and comic books. It is no coincidence that Robert E. Howard directly modeled his Conan the Barbarian stories after Plutarch's *Lives* and Bullfinch's *The Outline of Mythology* (Louinet 430-437). As modernist poet William Carlos Williams wrote in his article "Caviar and Bread Again: A Warning to the New Writer," the poet can, through "a magnificent organization of those materials his age has placed before him . . . recreate it--the collective world--in time of stress, in a new mode, fresh in every part, and so set the world working or dancing or murdering each other again, as it may be" (Williams 1969 103). The poems in this new movement seek to strike the low-culture "materials of our age" against the flint of the poem, to see what sparks will fly.

Classic pulp fiction and comic books reveal the deeper mythos of the American psyche; they function, in fact, as our modern mythology. The epics, gods and myths of Greece, except insofar as they have been popularized by Walt Disney movies, television series such as *Hercules*, and video games such as *God of War*, have faded from public consciousness, but mythic tales remain a staple of the public diet. For wily Odysseus, we substitute the picaresque adventures of Dashiell Hammett's wily Continental Op. For Hercules, we have Conan and King Kull. For Odysseus solving the riddle of the sphinx, we have the modern detective, Sam Spade. For the gods, the superheroes in tights and capes. The minotaur, hydra, and harpies have given way to successive monstrous generations, from Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster and Bram Stoker's Dracula to the monsters of the Cthulhu Mythos of H.P. Lovecraft and his circle of horror writers. The creators of these works were aware that they were creating a new mythology (thus, the subtitle of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is *The Modern Prometheus*, and the underpinning of Dashiell Hammett's classic detective novel *Red Harvest* is the Arthurian myth of the Fisher King and the Wasteland).

Now the counter-argument to my thesis was best expressed by the psychologist Frederic Wertham, who writes in his influential *Seduction of the Innocent* that comic books

are not poetic, not literary, have no relationship to any art, have as little to do with the American people as alcohol, heroin, or marihuana [sic], although many people take them, too. They are not authentic creations of the people, but are planned and concocted. They do not express the genuine conflicts and aspirations of the people, but are made according to a cheap formula. Can you imagine a future great writer looking for a figure like Prometheus, Helena or Dr. Faustus among the stock comic-book figures like Superman, Wonder Woman or Jo-Jo, the Congo King? (232-3)

However, low culture materials such as comic books, the stuff of children, have come of age at last. In fact, comics, long accused of being bad art married with bad writing, have finally gained a modicum of respect because of the work of writers such as Alan Moore, Frank Miller, Neil Gaiman, and Art Spiegelman. Spiegelman, who came out of the 1960s underground comix movement, spurred a whole genre of autobiographical comics, and the fact that the second installment of his WWII Holocaust graphic novel

Maus won the Pulitzer Prize in literature rang the death knell for the old idea that the medium determines the quality of the message. Recently, the Los Angeles Time Book Festival has created a new book award in the genre of the graphic novel.

So the question becomes, what can we learn by looking at poetry that emerges from this low-culture poetics movement that will help us as writers retake this vital territory from the movies, television and comic books? And if we do so, how can we create “authentic creations,” not toys made “according to a cheap formula”? Let’s begin by looking at a lovely poem by the 16th century poet Thomas Campion:

Thrice tesse these Oaken ashes in the ayre,
Thrice sit thou mute in this enchanted chayre;
And thrice three times tye vp this true loues knot,
And murmur soft, shee will, or shee will not.

Goe burn these poys'nous weedes in yon blew fire,
These Screech-owles fethers and this prickling bryer;
This Cypresse gathered at a dead mans graue;
That all thy feares and cares, an end may haue.

Then come, you Fayries, dance with me a round;
Melt her hard hart with your melodious sound : 10
In vaine are all the charms I can deuise:
She hath an Arte to breake them with her eyes.

from *The Third Book of Ayres*

The poem is written melodiously in rhyming iambic pentameter couplets, and this helps create an incantatory feel to the language, one that ties in with the subject matter of the poem: it is a recipe poem told in the imperative, and it is a recipe for a love charm, and so it is a witchcraft poem, one that invokes fairies to come and help the narrator melt the hard heart of the loved one with their melodious sound. The poem itself, in this sense, is the charm as well as the recipe. But, as Campion says in the poem’s final turn: all his charms (that is magical charms and seductive charms like this poem itself) are in vain, because her art is greater. The loved one has a greater magic, a greater art, and hers breaks his. We can note a couple of things about this poem: 1. It uses an extended metaphor to create wit and depth: art = magic. 2. It uses poetic form to heighten organic content. 3. Thus it converts the poem itself into an engine that performs a social action: the poem that laments its lack of art to seduce the loved one is paradoxically hoping to do just that through its admission of failure. 4. It takes magical and fantastic material and psychologizes them, anticipating in this the way that 400 years later Bruno Bettelheim, in his classic 1976 study *The Uses of Enchantment* applies Freudian psychological analysis to the plots and interpersonal dynamics and symbolism of fairy tales.

This approach has inspired many contemporary poets, from Anne Sexton in her fairy-tale-inspired book of poems *Transformations* onward. Consider, for example, a

few poems in what we might term the horror genre, beginning with “Monster,” by William Baer

It slithered down the funeral parlor halls,
coming like a plague, a death, a pox
on all their houses, sliming across the walls
above the silent dead-thing in her box.
It stared, then laughed grotesquely, unconcerned
and self-absorbed, but when her oh-so-grim
companion entered the room, the monster turned,
sensing an urge to rip him limb from limb,
but decided not to bother. No, instead,
it craved the dark, and left, skulking as far
away as it could get from the newly-dead.
Outside, it quickly scurried towards my car,
getting inside somehow, then turning the key,
staring in the mirror, looking at me.

The poem is a traditional Shakespearean sonnet, and its energy comes from the way that the double turn occurs. The monster who appears in the funeral hall decides NOT to act monstrously to the dead woman, decides NOT to tear her grim companion limb from limb. No, “the monster turned” as Baer writes, and it turned away, and went outside, and sat in the car, and turned the key, and looked in the mirror, and turned out to be “me.” The poem’s real turn is to reveal itself as a poem about the way that we can see ourselves as monsters, about the way that we define a “monster” as not just a supernatural creature, but also as one who breaks social bounds, as an outsider, as one who feels himself or herself to be a monster. The sonnet’s turn, in other words, is to turn us away from fairy tales and horror stories and to the realm of psychological pain. Thus, as with *Campion*, the form works intimately with the content, to help to dramatize that content and to turn the poem itself into a machine for creating double meanings and eventually revelation.

The key turn in the Baer poem is that monster *is* the poet, but that turn could not have been achieved as effectively if Baer hadn’t first done a revisioning of the monster story that goes back famously to John Gardner’s novel *Grendel*, which retells the *Beowulf* story by focusing on Grendel as the protagonist. This has been a veritable cliché in contemporary fiction and musical theater, as in *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, by Gregory Maguire and all of its sequels, but the trick is a good one and it still works, in poetry as in other genres. In Lawrence Raab’s wonderful revision of the great and terrible 1957 Roger Corman movie *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, in which intelligent, mutated crabs eat the brains of humans and absorb their intelligence, a crab monster speaks, very humanly as it turns out:

Even from the beach I could sense it--
lack of welcome, lack of abiding life,
like something in the air, a certain
lack of sound. Yesterday

there was a mountain out there.
Now it's gone. And look
at this radio, each tube neatly
sliced in half. Blow the place up!
That was my advice.
But after the storm and the earthquake,
after the tactic of the exploding plane
and the strategy of the sinking boat, it looked

like fate and I wanted to say, "Don't you see?
So what if you are a famous biochemist!
Lost with all hands is an old story."
Sure, we're on the edge
of an important breakthrough, everyone
hearing voices, everyone falling

into caves, and you're out
wandering through the jungle
in the middle of the night in your negligèe.
Yes, we're way out there
on the edge of science, while the rest
of the island continues to disappear until

nothing's left except this
cliff in the middle of the ocean,
and you, in your bathing suit,
crouched behind the scuba tanks.
I'd like to tell you
not to be afraid, but I've lost

my voice. I'm not used to all these
legs, these claws, these feelers.
It's the old story, predictable
as fallout--the rearrangement of molecules.
And everyone is surprised
and no one understands

why each man tries to kill
the thing he loves, when the change
comes over him. So now you know
what I never found the time to say.
Sweetheart, put down your flamethrower.
You know I always loved you.

It is a terrific ending, one that reminds me of the fable of the scorpion and the frog. The scorpion asks the frog to carry it across a stream, but the frog is afraid the scorpion will

sting it. The scorpion responds, “but if I sting you we both will drown, so you should trust me.” However, halfway across the scorpion does sting the frog and dooms itself to drown. “Why did you do that?” ask the frog? “I couldn’t help it,” responds the scorpion, “It is my nature.” So Raab’s poem dramatizes the way the monster is trapped in the monster role, and at the same time yearns for a better self, yearns to join with the loved one, running through the jungle in her negligée, even if the only way he can do so in his transformed state is by killing her. The crab may not have hands, but he has feelers, and for that matter, feelings.

In another version of the monster poem, Stephen Dobyns talks about the futility of “Hunting the Monster,” because although “The hunter shoots...”

his gun, fires his arrows, hurls his knife.
Each hits the monster with a plop,
then disappears like a brick into water.

The monster continues to grin. The hunter
flings stones, sticks, clods of dirt.
The hunter attacks with his fists, his boots.

The monster chuckles. At last the hunter
stumbles back. An ambulance is waiting.
The hunter is taken away weeping. I check

my appointment book for the next champion.
Tell me, is this not what it's like to live
in what boasts of being a civilized country?

For Dobyns, the turn is a bit more unexpected. The monster hunter is one of many who spend their whole lives preparing to battle the monster. The monster is different for each of us, defined by what we consider monstrous. In a great anticlimactic climax, it turns out that the monster cannot be defeated, cannot even be affected by our heroism. And so, like Sisyphus, we fall back again and again. What is the monster? It depends on how you read that final stanza. Is our country civilized because we allow ourselves to challenge our monsters, however ineffectually? Or is it that our country merely “boasts” of being civilized? Is our country itself not civilized but in fact monstrous, simply because we cannot affect it at all, despite our best preparations and most heroic actions? Perhaps this poem truly is an allegory of what happens when a democracy is run by an oligarchy of the rich and powerful and thus can no longer be affected by the people it purports to represent?

Let’s look at a fourth poem in the horror genre, Kim Addonizio’s brilliant zombie poem, “Night of the Living, Night of the Dead”:

When the dead rise in movies they're hideous
and slow. They stagger uphill toward the farmhouse
like drunks headed home from the bar.
Maybe they only want to lie down inside

while some room spins around them, maybe that's why
they bang on the windows while the living
hammer up boards and count out shotgun shells.
The living have plans: to get to the pickup parked
in the yard, to drive like hell to the next town.
The dead with their leaky brains,
their dangling limbs and ruptured hearts,
are sick of all that. They'd rather stumble
blind through the field until they collide
with a tree, or fall through a doorway
like they're the door itself, sprung from its hinges
and slammed flat on the linoleum. That's the life
for a dead person: *wham, wham, wham*
until you forget your name, your own stinking
face, the reason you jolted awake
in the first place. Why are you here,
whatever were you hoping as you lay
in your casket like a dumb clarinet?
You know better now. The sound track's depressing
and the living hate your guts. Come closer
and they'll show you how much. *Wham, wham, wham,*
you're killed again. Thank God this time
they're burning your body, thank God
it can't drag you around anymore
except in nightmares, late-night reruns
where you lift up the lid, and crawl out
once more, and start up the hill toward the house.

Here we have the first free verse poem of our discussion, and it would be good to talk a bit about how the freedom afforded by the form is elegantly controlled by Addonizio so as to emphasize the emotional plot. The poem is about zombies rising from their graves and stumbling up the hill toward the house. In the third line, however, Addonizio winks at the reader and lets us know that these zombies are not so different from us: they are “like drunks headed home from the bar” and maybe all they want is to lie down in their drunkenness in some room while the world whirls around them, not to eat our brains after all. Maybe, in fact, the poem is really about human beings in such despair that they drink themselves into a state where they are mumbling, stumbling monsters, not unlike zombies? We get that pretty clearly when the zombies are described as not only having leaky brains and dangling limbs but also ruptured hearts. If your heart were ruptured with emotional pain, the poem suggests, you might hate yourself and your life enough to drink yourself into a zombie stupor. What do you really want? It's hard to know. Perhaps you just want them to burn your body so you don't have to come back, like a lover who keeps drunk dialing or returning at 3 a.m. weeping to the door of the lover who kicked him or her out. Kill me, burn me, and set me free, the poem says. Then I won't have to repeat this endless movie plot, except in nightmares (which are made equivalent to movie reruns), when once again I start stumbling up the hill toward

the house. The poem's power comes in part through its revisioning of the horror movie plot. Addonizio has rung a new change on the classic elements of zombie-dom: relentlessness, despair, apocalyptic tone, the uncanny manifested in the return of the dead to life, the fuzziness behind it all (*why* are the dead coming back to life?) In popular culture, the zombies represent a dark vision of Christianity—it's not Christ coming back from the dead to save us, but zombies coming back to eat our brains; they represent conformity and mind control in the Cold War era; and they represent a disease metaphor in the era of AIDS. For Addonizio, they represent (as in the monster poems of Baer and Dobyns), a relentless despair and self-hatred manifested in repeated self-destructive action. And that obsessive, that compulsive repetition is manifested not just in the reference to repeated nightmares and movie reruns, but also in the way certain lines "rerun" in the poem, particularly those about heading up the hill toward the house.

It is the nature of endlessly recycled media, of reruns and remakes, to spiral outward and yet return again and again to the place of origin, to the force that sets the narrative in motion. This force can be a myth, and it can be a psychological complex, and it can be a sociological structure, and it can be all of the above at once. However, as Marshall McLuhan famously notes, "the medium is the message." That is, in the culture of spectacle, the way in which the spectacle manifests is itself the meaning of the spectacle. If in genre fiction, there are rules to the game, such as that elves can't mate with dwarves, or that the story begins with a murder and then becomes the story of revealing who the murderer is through determining who the murdered person was, all as a way of revealing who the detective is, these rules create structures off of which the revisionary genre narrative can play. In addition to such narratological structures, of course, there are also structures created by the platform through which the narrative is delivered. One kind of video game is a first-person point of view shooter game in which the player directs the point of view through environments, gathering useful materials and experience and trying to avoid damage, so as to power up and go from level to level without dying. Dying of course means going back to the beginning of the narrative and having to perform it all over again, hoping eventually to "beat the game." In others, the player plays through an avatar, a character who is inhabited and directed in a kind of spirit possession and forced to run through the same dangers again and again. In "Dirge for a Video Game Heroine: On Dying Again," Jeannine Hall Gailey allows the heroine to speak of the pain of death by demon bite or drowning or undead blood-draining or being shot off of a cliff:

...It is my job, after all, kill or be killed
along with changing outfits unseen between levels,

(kimono? catsuit? chain mail minidress?)
nimble switching from blade to Uzi,
slaying assassins with increasing speed and accuracy.
And twenty seconds later (mourning period over)

I am back, ready to die again on the whim of the joystick.
One moment, able to somersault over mummies
and scramble between swinging axes; the next, unable

to extract myself from the poisonous slime pit, and so

the last you'll see of me is my mouth making its "O" of surprise,
my eyes closing as if to sleep---this time, maybe, forever.

The drama here is that the narrative demands repetition, but it is not exactly in the same way that Addonizio's zombie narrative repeats. The zombie is trapped within the conventions of the genre. The video game heroine is trapped within the narrative structure of the video game platform itself. The move here, then, is somewhat different from the psychologizing or sociologizing moves of Baer and Dobyns. The move is to be self-aware, and to allow the narrative of the poem to comment upon its own narrative in terms of another medium's conventions. However, the danger is that an interest in the forms created by popular culture media might –like Andy Warhol's cool and campy irony and celebration of mass production, or Roy Lichtenstein's formal interest in Benday Dots – create a sense of emotional distance. And it's true: this first move creates a kind of humor or a kind of cool irony that gives the poems interest but that also drains them of heart. This then necessitates the second move, in which that self-reflexivity is psychologized (and here Addonizio and Gailey are in line with Baer and Dobyns). The second move provides the emotional heart of the poems, as the characters strain against their fates as if in a Theater of the Absurd.

Frankfurt School critic Theodor Adorno argues that "a rigid institutionalization [has] transform[ed] modern mass culture into a medium of undreamed of psychological control. The repetitiveness, the selfsameness, and the ubiquity of modern mass culture tend to make for automatized reactions and to weaken the forces of individual resistance" (160). Genre fiction and stereotypes dull us by presenting only a familiar typology. Therefore, art must not simply reflect the dominant culture, but must act as "an irritant" that wakes you from the dream of culture long enough to see how you are being manipulated by it. Max Horkheimer says the masses reject the avant-garde because it disturbs their unthinking and automatic acquiescence in their manipulation by the social system: "By making down-trodden humans shockingly aware of their own despair, the work of art announces a freedom which makes them fume" (280).

It might be true that capitalism in the postmodern age has colonized the mind, and that it does so through spectacular media that structures consciousness by its relentlessness, its repetitiveness, and its pervasiveness. We swim in media the way a fish swims in water; we are as likely to be able to imagine a world without media as a fish is likely to be able to swim through air or rock. You might say that poems that wear a cape and fight bad guys, poems that try to defeat the evil lord in his high dark tower, poems that shoot through the imagination in silver space ships, simply participate in the dream industry that keeps us economic slaves. But, equally, one might argue that the poems discussed above are not merely extensions of popular media's form of mind control, but instead are irritants that seek to bring us back to our humanity, and to find ways of reasserting control over the media that control us. In fact, one might argue that in many ways literature that shines a critical and self-aware light upon popular culture is more effective as an irritant than the hothouse avant-garde art that Horkheimer

champions, simply because they are more directly focused on the media that Horkheimer sees as oppressing us.

I'd like to believe that. But do I? Or is it all an illusion hidden within an illusion? Perhaps even despised poems, with their minimal marketplace value, participate in their own small way in our subjugation to the media. Perhaps their small resolutions, their small irritants, have the paradoxical effect of denying us the impulse to push back against the society of the spectacle simply because by providing narrative resolutions they snow us into thinking that the problems they pose are resolvable through poems.

After all, poems make nothing happen, as W.H. Auden writes, in his elegy to Yeats:

Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where executives
Would never want to tamper, flows on south
From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth.

Perhaps that is all we can expect of the poem, that it will be a way of happening, a mouth. And if that mouth is going to speak, well perhaps it should be able to speak about the things that are really on and in our minds: Batman and his Batarang, the Jedi mind trick, crab monsters on late night TV, villainesses in Spandex, and those damn zombies who keep climbing up the hill to eat our brains.