

Poem Series

Academic Level: High School, College, and Beyond.

Lesson Overview:

After reading *Love Letter to Who Owns the Heavens* by Corey Van Landingham, students will analyze the poems “Love Letter to Nike Alighting on a Warship,” “The Goodly Creatures of Shady Cove,” “Apologia From the Valley of Inheritance,” “I. Great Continental Divide,” “Bad Intelligence,” “Anti-Blazon,” “At a Planned Parenthood Rally, a Man Tells His Son I Want to Kill Him,” “A Bad Date,” and “Simone Weil Walks Alongside Her Brother After Supper.”

Lecture 1:

Corey Van Landingham’s diction in *Love Letter to Who Owns the Heavens* blends the past and present through a focus on liminal spaces. The first lecture will analyze the employment of myth and folk tale to convey negotiations between gender in the aforementioned poems. The connection between reality and myth initially seems definite, but the poems in *Love Letter to Who Owns the Heavens* foreground the deeply encoded norms of our societies.

Masculinity is a concept that mandates how boys and men learn to understand their role in society, and their gender roles are conveyed to them through ideas which may directly or indirectly address their perceived positions in their communities and society. Masculinity with respect to the social, political, and historical components of one’s society is closely connected to the environments that surround boys and men. This part of socialization cannot successfully be

analyzed or removed from these contexts. The social relationships formed involving men and boys will always be heavily influenced by these notions, resulting in a multitude of masculine identities through which men and boys navigate their lives. These gender roles also exist as a space that needs to be filled to satisfy the expectations of others. Whether it be in one's self-worth, sense of belonging, or positive values, the brand of masculinity one adopts in turn dictates which actions are socially acceptable and which are not.

Lines:

(From "Simone Weil Walks Alongside Her Brother After Supper")

After winter's thaw, the hollow-pit stomach

blunted with hunger, Phaedra's first words

char her ears—Let's go no farther. The wood-smoke

disgusts her. The physician, who kissed her hand

exiting, disgusts her. Too, the torn seam of her dress. Forgotten lines, disgust her. And in her head she

goes Bright god of fire goes O Sun. No, no farther from

heat, grabs her brother's wrist.

(From "Desiderata")

We met among ruins. I was so much the dog, in Athens, on the grass panting for you. In Segovia
 you pushed my cheek against the aqueduct until it bled. Darling, we are such sweet modern
 machines

when our parts are working. Someday we won't fall so apart, or need our blood. I'll project us
 onto a screen and feel exactly nostalgic.

My scent will be textable, too-much.

(From "Predator")

Nothing about the etymology

surprises. *Cervi luporum praeda*, as deer destined for wolves, dear Horace comparing

Carthage's doomed legions to beasts. Barbary lions pacing the Colosseum's bowels while, on
 high, the emperor's thumb

twitched. Buckling their knees, those last bladed elephants sighed. Who, then, the predator?

Who, pray tell,

the prey? Victors, the Roman poet knew, lap too from the darkest of pools. Centuries, vast

leagues

turning Rome to myth.

(From "King of Hearts")

Men have often chosen me to be the woman

they cry in front of. A museum they can walk into. I've held
 strangers' heads in my lap at parties. Turned confessional I was
 suddenly wooden and capacious. I was holier than I had ever
 been. When a man puts his hand in my mouth, I hope
 I can make him cry for me. When the cat drags the rabbit
 inside, I can't help listening for a heartbeat.

Essay Topics:

1. Consider the mentions of Rome in "Predator," "A Bad Date," and "Desiderata." How do these employments of Rome complement each other?
2. How does the speaker recontextualize gender roles in "King of Hearts"?

Lecture 2:

There is also a distinction between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities to consider. Hegemonic masculinities present themselves as the positioning of power between men and women, in which men are valued above women and other men in society. Subordinate masculinities occur, within the context of one's environment, because of producing, replicating, and maintaining manhood as it is valued within one's life. Men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable, but the same men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments. Consequently, 'masculinity' represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through specific practices. In this sense,

masculinity is a movable scale that works by mediating social interactions and values.

Hegemonic masculinity is the epitome of all that a man should be within the culturally accepted narrative of manhood, and subordinate masculinities are exhibited through the interpersonal power dynamics between specific groups of people with proximity. As a result, masculinity not only presents itself as a single trait, but also as a method of collective male practice that has as its effect the subordination of women, and formulated the concepts of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities.

Daphne Spain created the term “gendered spaces” in her book *Gendered Spaces* published in 1992. She studied the close relationship between space and status in different cultures, places, and social structures through anthropology, sociology, and geography. These gendered spaces include family and education. Spain discovered in her studies that women have a low status in societies that have housing separated by sex, so she created the concept of “spatial institutions” which she described as “... the social institutions of the family, education, and the labor force with their respective spatial corollaries of the dwelling, the school, and the workplace” (37). Many spaces, Spain demonstrated, have been gendered. These spaces were made with the intention of being specifically for women or men, but never both. More often than not, the systems that define these spaces “reflect rigid gender segregation that reinforces social and status differences both inside and outside the home” (37).

Lines:

(From “The Goodly Creatures of Shady Cove”)

... Newly aware of his power, he makes sure the girls observe this. He wants the other boys

to see the girls see what his hands can do.

For the first time, the girls are terrified of men.

O brave new world of the body. O beautiful

boys of America. Will you clap your friend

on the back? Will you sidle next to the young women and say something gentle?

(From "A Bad Date")

We're meeting to see if I will let him, tonight,

tie me to not-his-bed, to, with the instruments

he will deem necessary, knock against me while his wife watches.

(From "A Bad Date")

I'm trying to forget another

man, so I repeat what I have heard on the radio: to assuage traffic jams, engineers are studying ants. Sans egos, they get where they need to go. No flash. No honking. No aggressive driving.

Essay Topics:

1. What literary devices present in the poems influence the readings of subordinate masculinities within the text?
2. Compare the use of metaphors in "A Bad Date" and "The Goodly Creatures of Shady Cove." What does the text suggest about the relationship between gendered spaces and dominant and subordinate masculinities?

Lesson Overview:

After reading *Love Letter to Who Owns the Heavens* by Corey Van Landingham, students will analyze the poems “The Eye of God,” “Love Letter to the President,” “I. Elegy for the Sext,” “II. Cyclorama,” “FaceTime,” and “On the Theory of Descent.”

Lecture 3:

An epigraph is a short section of text, typically from another literary source, found before a written work, listed following the title. Epigraphs provide the reader with an idea to ponder or reflect upon while reading the poem. Five poems in *Love Letter to Who Owns the Heavens* by Corey Van Landingham use epigraphs, and one poem alludes to another author’s work in a similar fashion. Students will analyze the origins of these epigraphs and question their thematic function in the poems.

Lines:

The Eye of God

Because it is eternity, it embraces the whole of time, the past as well as the future. . . In many respects, the drone dreams of achieving through technology a miniature equivalence to that fictional eye of God.

—Grégoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*

Love Letter to the President

The Senate has quietly stripped a provision from an intelligence bill that would have required President Obama to make public each year the number of people killed or injured in targeted killing operations in Pakistan and other countries where the United States uses lethal force.

—The New York Times, April 28, 2014

I. Elegy for the Sext

But please, don't ask me who I am. A passionate, and fragmentary girl, maybe?

—Sylvia Plath

II. Cyclorama

In this way you look out on the perfectly painted sky . . . with nothing whatever between you & the landscape.

—General John Gibbon, Union Army 2nd Corps

FaceTime

It's like a modern Aladdin's lamp—you rub it, in this case it's a camera. You push a button and it gives you the things you want.

—Weegee

Essay Topics:

1. Consider how the use of epigraphs in select poems recontextualize their meanings?

2. The poem “On the Theory of Descent” is unique in this collection in that it does not directly feature an epigraph. How does the inclusion of the first line, “—Darwin,” change the various readings of the poem?