



Reader's Guide

from David Hernandez
author of *Hoodwinked*

Author Asks

1. In the poem "Everything I'm About to Tell You Actually Happened," there is an incident about halfway through the poem that clearly did not actually happen. How does this piece of information color the other events in the poem? Is there any "truth" in the poem whatsoever?
2. Memory, as well as deception, is a recurring theme in the collection. What is the argument that "Remember It Wrong" makes regarding memory? How is it different than the argument made in "D.F.W."?
3. Many of the poems in *Hoodwinked* are written in couplets or without stanza breaks. How do these two forms affect your reading of the poems? Do they shape the character of the speaker?
4. Only one poem is written in a fixed form: "Doom (1975)". How does the structure of the villanelle relate to the event taking place? Imagine what the poem would look like if it had been written instead in free verse—What would be gained? What would be lost?
5. Some of the poems in the book employ anaphora, including "Mosul," "Victory Song," and "Road Trip". Is this poetic device important to the subject matter of these poems? What does it bring to the table?
6. The diction in "The Pompous Man" is atypical from the rest of the collection. How does the mode of speech characterize the speaker? Does the length of the sentences also factor in?
7. In "Moose in Snow," the animal goes through a sort of transformation—from an actual moose to, at the end, a reproduction of a painting of a moose. In what ways is this evolution connected to the last five lines of the poem?
8. In an interview with Robert Hass by Sarah Pollock that was published in *Mother Jones* in 1997, Hass claimed that "the job of poetry, its political job, is to refresh the idea of justice." Some poems in *Hoodwinked* can be classified as political, including "American Water," "Snowman," and "Fear and Logic." How do these poems hold up to Hass's assertion?
9. Insects and animals figure prominently in the book. In the first section alone there are butterflies, buffalo, a moose, a bear, fly maggots, "bug-eyed" fish, and a cart-pulling donkey. How do these creatures of the world function symbolically within the larger themes of the collec-

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tion?

10. At the end of “Trompe L’Oeil,” the speaker imagines himself walking through the “endless green tunnel” created by the two wall-to-wall mirrors reflecting off each other. Are there poems in *Hoodwinked* where the speaker unintentionally makes this journey?

Writing Exercises

1. “Panoramic” came out of a writing exercise I conceived while thumbing through Charles Simic’s *Dismantling the Silence*. I had only read the first lines of each poem, starting from the beginning of the book. When I got to “I came to a field” (the first line in “Pastoral”) I knew I had a setting for my poem, but I was also intrigued by the phrase “I came to.” I allowed my mind to wander, picturing a field, the swaying grass, a lone figure walking by the field and “coming to” one thing after another, and soon my fingers were clattering on the keyboard:

I take a short walk down a long road and **come to**
a small bird made smaller by a flurry of ants.

I come to a chain-link fence, a grassy **field**
harassed by October wind. **I come to** a panorama.

I turned back to Simic, the next poem, the first line: “Take down its ears first.” I reconfigured the line, changed *its* to *my*, and gently pushed the poem forward with the intention of making a list:

First, my ears take down a hawk, its red shriek
tapering off to silence. **Second**, my eyes unpin

its stretched wings from a ragged cloud.
Third to seventh isn’t worth mentioning,

but **eighth** is: mourners having a picnic.

The next first line in Simic’s book didn’t interest me like the others, nor did the first line of the following poem, so I skipped them. Because I could. Because I was creating the writing exercise *as I was writing the exercise*. And if the exercise called for breaking the rule, so be it!

Then Simic “gave” me a keeper: “When I eat pork, it’s solemn business” (from “To All Hog-Raisers, My Ancestors”). I love the sentiment and humor of the line, although I wasn’t too crazy about the word *pork*. So I thought spork and dreamed up the following: “It’s solemn business eating with a plastic **spork** // while wearing funeral attire.”

So here’s your writing exercise: Grab a book of poems by one of your favorite poets and read the first line of the very first poem. Scramble the words around, change a few if you’d like. If

nothing intrigues you about the line, then move on to the next poem. Then the next. Look at this writing exercise as a collaboration between you and your favorite poet, except you are making modifications to their lines. And be grateful that s/he isn't looking over your shoulder.

2. Ever since I was a little kid I wanted to be an artist, spooling out waxy vines on the wall with a crayon. My obsession with art carried on through high school and into college. However, eventually I began filling my sketchbook more with poetry than drawings, and I recognized that my wish to be an artist was being replaced. Art is still a part of my life, and oftentimes I will write an ekphrastic poem; *Hoodwinked* kicks off with a poem inspired by a Damien Hirst exhibit, and in the third section of the collection there are two poems based on performance art pieces (“Challenging Mud” and “Doomed”).

Write a poem inspired by a work of art. Sit down with your chosen piece for a while and let your eyes study every square inch, then jot down the nouns you recognize, the adjectives associated with those nouns. Start the poem by describing the work (or one aspect of it) in great detail. Once you have 10-15 lines written, step away from the poem and consider what you want to ultimately say. What is the overall mood of the artwork, and what is your relationship to that emotion? What other element—historical or personal—can you connect to the piece? The key is to not merely describe what you see, but to apply another layer that is entirely your own.