



Author Asks

from *Simone Muench*,
author of *Orange Crush*

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- 1 The book is divided into four sections—Record, Rehearsal, Recast, and Redress. How do these section titles comment on the book as a whole, and why do you suppose the book arcs in this particular order?
- 2 In “Photograph 3014: Execution of an Unknown Child” the poem is written in six frames. Why is this significant, and where else in the book does this motif of a “frame” come into play, either literally or figuratively?
- 3 Why is the collection titled *Orange Crush*, and what are the various permutations that both “orange” and “crush” undergo in the context of this collection? Also, what is an “orange girl” and what are some of her numerous manifestations in the manuscript?
- 4 Opening the third section of the book are two quotes: one by Buffy, “I say my power, should be our power” and the other by Dara Wier, “(we hadn’t been cursed or blessed) (we’d been syncopated).” Why are these two quotes saddled next to one another? In what ways are the dead and the living syncopated in this book, and to what purpose?
- 5 There are several other epigraphs that open each section of the book. Are these merely ornamental, or does each of these quotes speak to an issue being addressed in the book? How so?
- 6 The book continually two-steps between images of oppression and empowerment. Can you give examples of where each of these acts occur? What do you think the book is attempting to demonstrate with these constant power shifts?
- 7 As a follow-up to the previous question—the act of being suffocated and silenced (as well as the act of unsilencing) is referred to in many poems including “Pages from an Unknown Title” and “Bind.” What are the various ways these poems both underscore and respond to this act of silencing? How are the poem titles themselves significant to this issue?
- 8 In section two, the “Orange Girl Suite” titles are lifted from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Why do you think these were chosen as the titles, and what do they contribute, instead of something briefer and of the poet’s own invention?

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- 9** Why do the poems in the third section of the book, “The Orange Girl Cast,” actually star real living women? Why do they choose not to list the person’s last name when those names are subsequently given in the notes? And why are these particular poems written as prose poems in contrast to the rest of the book?
- 10** Besides some of the previously listed motifs of the book—frames, crushes, oranges—what are other recurring elements that you notice? How do they function?
- 11** Who is the speaker in “Where Does Your Body Rest?” In what ways does this poem differ from some of the others? Is the epigraph important to the poem? If so, why?
- 12** There are italicized refrains used in both the opening poem “Hex” and in one of the closing poems “Bind.” What is the purpose of these refrains? How do they highlight the argument of each poem?
- 13** The last poem, “Chiaroscuro,” is ostensibly about a drowned girl, so what is the significance of the book closing with this particular poem, which ends on the word “shine” and without any final punctuation?

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Writing Exercises

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Exercise 1: The Sonnet

I love assigning the sonnet via the bouts-rimes, as a way of getting more collaboration and interaction. I usually spend about fifteen minutes with my students discussing possibly rhymes for the exercise (I encourage alternating between straight and slant rhymes). Once everyone is in agreement, they are given creative latitude to stretch their rhymes however they see fit. (For example, one of my recent students, instead of employing the final couplet of “vasoline/kerosene” instead wrote “vasoline/care or seen.”) “her dreaming feet” arose out of a bouts-rimes class exercise. My students selected the rhymes and I wrote one as well in a gesture of solidarity. However, I abandoned some of their initial rhymes, and they will probably not forgive me for forgoing to rhyme “compass” with “jackass.” Another way I approach writing the sonnet (this is an exercise I use for myself as well as for both literature and creative writing courses) is to engage in a madlib exercise, using the exoskeleton of one of Karen Volkman’s fabulous sonnets. I excise all of the exciting language and leave only the husk of the sonnet form for us to fill in the blanks.

Exercise 2: Poem Stipulations

An additional exercise that I enjoy doing, and often assign to students, is group construction, in which student groups create 4-8 stipulations for a poem form. The idea is to work from the inside out, and the outside in, by creating a form that will then be utilized to write a poem, so that one is privy to both the architectural and imaginative sides of poem-building. It’s fun and extremely challenging. Invariably, I get some of my best class poems from this exercise. I often do this exercise when I feel as though I’m in a syntactic rut. Here’s the breakdown of the exercise for the classroom:

1. Divide class into groups of 4-7 students. (really, you can divide them however you like, but I tend to think this range is the best).
2. Each student is responsible for coming up with one or two stipulations (depending on group size) for the form of a poem (for a total of 7-8 rules). The trick is that every group member has to also agree to each rule.
3. Though I let them decide the rules, I stress that they need to create rules about punctuation, stanzaic construction, diction, etc.
4. Out of the 7-8 rules they agree on as a group, they get to decide on one that is optional.
5. They then each have to each abide by all of the rules and create a poem from it.
6. I usually spend class time going over each of the rules, to decide if anything is too difficult for all the students to accomplish. For example, I usually suggest that they make the hardest rule (say writing in terza rima) the optional one.
7. Listed below are a couple of group examples for rules that my students have created.

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Group 1

1. Can't use and, but, or, the, a, an
2. Can only use colons and dashes as punctuation, nothing else
3. Use the following words: bouncing bess, virescent, shale, japanese black pine, salt, brassiere
4. Create kennings (melding words together to form a new meaning like "onionlight")
5. Bleeding title
6. Has to ask a question in the poem
7. Has to use a quote from another poet

Group 2

1. Use the following words: cable car, musk, tendril, and Czech glass
2. Punctuation has to be a slash / and open punctuation, i.e. (or { or [etc.
3. It has to be written in a persona
4. At some point, words have to touch both margins
5. There must be 1-3 fully capitalized words
6. There must be a neologism
7. Use an excerpt from a real conservation

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Suggested Reading

Julio Cortazar, *Save Twilight* (trans. Stephen Kessler); *Hopscotch; Blow-up and Other Stories*

Ed. Penelope Rosemont, *Surrealist Women*

Robert Marteau, *Salamander* (trans. Anne Winters)

Joyce Mansour, *Screams* (trans. Serge Gavronsky)

Emily Dickinson, *Final Harvest*

Robert Desnos, *22 Poems* (trans. Michael Benedikt); *The Voice* (trans. by William Kulik)

Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (trans. John Felstiner)

Pablo Neruda, *Residence on Earth* (trans. Donald Walsh)

Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*

Benjamin Peret, *From the Hidden Storehouse: Selected Poems* (trans. Keith Hollaman)

Marina Tsvetaeva, *Selected*

El Lissitzky and Vladimir Mayakovsky, *For the Voice*

Margaret Atwood, *Selected Poems II*

Harryette Mullen, *Recyclopedia*

Sylvia Plath, *Ariel*

Yusef Komunyakaa, *Pleasure Dome*

Ronald Johnson, *The Shrubberies*

Other Recommendations and Influences

Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber*

Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*

Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*

Joss Whedon, *Buffy*

Coline Serreau, *Chaos* (film)

Mervyn LeRoy, *Gold Diggers of 1933* (film)

Bo Arne Vibenius, *Thriller: They Call Her One Eye* (film)

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