

Poetic Technique  
in  
Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*

by

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## Dedication

To my husband, Hans Mathias Thjømøe,  
for his steadfast belief in me  
and his support of my efforts in Norway

## Foreword

Also born in '52,  
She grew up in Chicago,  
Hometown of gangsters, cronies, blues.  
To the Illinois forests and plains she moves.  
There, studied literature and law,  
Landscapes, philosophy, played in a band.  
Returned to Chi-town in '90 for law  
School, leading to hearings work, a job through friends,  
For the State, an esteemed but envied attorney.  
Determined to find true love and a friend,  
She advertised and met 'nice men.'  
Then Norway called; he is a Nordmann.  
She struggles for income there— does her best,  
Inspired by nature's beauty and rest.

## Introduction

Limited analytical attention has been given to Vikram Seth's novel in verse, *The Golden Gate*, since its publication in 1986. In addition, comment has varied widely. Although most critical observers would agree that its moral points are worthy, some find the work panders to specific social and political issues and agendas, or is excessively didactic or trite. Seth's 'messages' in this modern morality novel include the value of friendship, the merit of nuclear disarmament, and the value of individual 'self-realization.' Little technical analysis has been done on precisely how Seth achieves his literary and poetic effects, analysis that elucidates the scope and variety of the work's meaning. The detailed analysis in this thesis ultimately suggests the greater significance of this work of poetic fiction.

The means Seth uses to achieve effects are found in the poetic text. The analysis of that text in previous scholarship fails to sufficiently explore both the wealth of referential material and Seth's technical skill with language. My focus is on illustrating a variety of ways in which Seth uses specific poetic tools to achieve meaning and effect in *The Golden Gate*. This should result in broader agreement as to the work's importance as modern poetic literature, as well as invite further explication and annotation. I therefore see this thesis as a beginning, the beginning of a redress of a dearth of technical analysis of this important modern sonnet sequence.

I provide an explication of a number of Seth's sonnets and sonnet sequences in the work by means of traditional 'close reading.' This involves holding a magnifying glass of analytical techniques to the work at the word, line, phrase, sonnet and sequence level. I include sonnets on a number of themes in order to illustrate the variety of effects Seth achieves in the work, and some of the ways in which they are intertwined in the work as a whole. I conclude by reviewing concerns of significance in evaluating the work from a literary perspective, and include the comments of some of those who have offered their critiques.

Meaning in a poetic work such as this, a novel in sonnets, is, of course, direct in the sense that it is referential of 'actual' characters, events and things, as well as sharing a basic narrative plot, moving the story forward. However, it is also intentionally multi-referential; it is communicating at various indirect and oblique angles, and by multiple techniques. I attempt to give Seth's use of language and literary effects in this work their names, and a level of detailed recognition they have not had heretofore.

Grounding Seth's work in the sonnet tradition is important, though historical analysis is not my focus. As Seth has stated, *The Golden Gate* grew out of his enthusiasm upon

reading *Eugene Onegin*, written by Alexander Pushkin, as translated into English by Charles Johnson.<sup>1</sup> Pushkin's 'comedy of manners,' published in 1833 in Russian, is considered one of the world's most well-loved long poems, a reflection of and embodiment of the early Romantic period in Russian literature. With its disjunctive relationship between a hero and a heroine, both seeking love, Pushkin explored "human archetypes" caught in the "attitudes" that governed "the towering fictional creations of nineteenth century Russia."<sup>2</sup>

Seth's work follows in the sonnet tradition of English poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Nineteenth century Victorian sonnet writers used the sonnet sequence for, among other purposes, "clothing autobiographical material in fictional dress."<sup>4</sup> The tradition of telling a narrative in a sonnet sequence continued into the 20th century in England and America where, as one scholar notes, we see the blurring of the role of the sonnet stanza, yet an increased appreciation for the sonnet's ability to provide "dynamic images" for a poet's development.<sup>5</sup> Today, we note that Seth's sonnet novel has paved the way for other sonnet writers, with renewed interest in the sonnet form and sonnet sequence as a vehicle for narrative poetry and literary development.<sup>6</sup>

Seth's work in *The Golden Gate* exhibits a traditional literary approach to storytelling, and traditional nods to the humanitarian values honored by earlier sonnet writers. From, for example, his use of a 'hero' seeking love in the world, having a series of related adventures, to the use of jokes and puns, high and low humor, quick shifts in action, and the use of gravity, surprise and social comment, Seth follows closely in the traditions of his literary forbears. At the same time, Seth modernizes his story's parts and themes appropriately.

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<sup>1</sup> Pushkin, Alexander. *Pushkin: Eugene Onegin and Other Poems*. Translated by Charles Johnson. Edited by Charles Johnson, *Everyman's Library Pocket Poets*. New York, London, Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at Intro.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, first published in sequels between 1819 and 1824, is the first full reflection of English Romantic ideals in a sonnet-related narrative sequence. Byron, Lord George Gordon, *Don Juan*. Edited by Christopher Ricks, T.G. Steffan, E. Steffan and W.W. Pratt, *Penguin English Poets*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Fuller, John. *The Sonnet*. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1972, 45. Fuller mentions several examples of semi-autobiographical sonnet sequences published in the 19th century, beginning with *Venetia* by Benjamin Disraeli. The form increased in popularity later in the century, with Elisabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850), George Meredith's *Modern Love* (1862), Thomas Hardy's *She, to Him* (1866) and George Eliot's *Brother and Sister* (1869).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 46. Wilfrid Blunt's *Esther* (1892) is noted by Fuller as a more modern sonnet sequence. Others he mentions include William Ellery Leonard's *Two Lives* (1926), and John Crowe Ransom's "Two Gentlemen in Bonds," from *Selected Poems* (1970).

<sup>6</sup> Here, I note Anthony Burgess's posthumous *Byrne* (1998), finished in 1993, and Brad Leithauser's *Darlington's Fall* (2003). Burgess, Anthony. *Byrne*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998. Leithauser, Brad. *Darlington's Fall: A Novel in Verse*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

Seth uses his platform as an author to share secrets with the reader about the characters and their history, to jab at cultural prejudices, and to explore the popular culture of 1980s California. *The Golden Gate* is set in the San Francisco Bay area. Topics of Seth's comment include, among others, the role played by the Roman Catholic church in social activism, the struggles of homosexuals and bisexuals, the struggle of unknown artists against the fecklessness and fickleness of art critics' reviews, the roles of workers in Silicon Valley, the defense industry's endangerment of local and global life, and the beauty of the Bay Area, the ocean and life's natural wonders. Various portions of Seth's 'novel in verse' both bless and question those who struggle in their lives to create a worthy contribution to the world as we know it, with their balance of work and play, intimacy, chastity, love and friendship. Further, the sadness of disconnection from others, both intentional and unintentional, is explored, as well as the personal and private alarm one can suffer over estrangements from those one has loved deeply, either as friend, family or wife.

I have selected sonnets from several different passages in *The Golden Gate* to more readily see the variety of specific poetic techniques and choices made by Seth. Through *close reading*, I examine aspects of theme and narrative purpose, as well as figurative and metaphorical techniques Seth uses to achieve effects.<sup>7</sup> I also note some of the broader strokes Seth uses to unite the ideologies with which his characters struggle.

To illustrate the variety of modes of creating expression in the sonnet form and sequences, I have chosen selections that suggest effective *links* between Seth's techniques and the breadth of his intentions for the work, as a novel. These include sonnets that cross between several themes. I examine scenes involving concerns of a personal nature: love, intimacy, friendship and sexual orientation. I also examine scenes involving broader issues of social life: the relative importance of doing ethical work, attending social functions by invitation, respecting traditional religions, viewing art and culture as enabling devices in our lives, and participating in peace-related social activism. Further, we look at sonnets that play a more authorial, descriptive, and contextual role: among these, sonnets devoted to nature, both as a lyric and literary ideal, and celebrating nature's visual spectacles. In this last group, Seth pursues a variety of ends, in some cases panning the landscape, almost filmically, sharing his own sense of wonder at California's natural beauty; in others, linking natural events to human interactions in narrative sequences; and, in others, addressing the reader

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<sup>7</sup> "Close reading" is a form of explication involving "the detailed analysis of the complex interrelationships and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work." Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 8 ed. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005.

directly, in a traditional role, on questions concerning life, death, time, and the meaning of existence. This last mode of reference finds greatest expression as the novel nears its conclusion, begging a strong link between Seth's sonnet story and broader ends he wishes to raise for the reader's consideration.

For those who have not read the work, I provide a synopsis, which will be found at Appendix A. This affords a useful reference for seeing the sonnets I analyze within the narrative structure of the work, and provides a level of context I shall not give within the more detailed analytical body of the thesis. Further research on this work would include a more comprehensive explication of the sonnets, as well as, I would hope, the eventual publication of an annotated version of the work.

### Analytical Tools

Discussing the analytical tools of poetry affords a greater appreciation for both the terminology and technique of my explication. The traditional tools of *close reading*, with its focus on poetic form and devices, are my first approach to the analysis, while I continue with discussion of what critics call the *context* of the sonnet or sequence when that is particularly pertinent to Seth's technical delivery. Thus, socio-economic, cultural and historical contexts are intrinsic to a complete analysis.

As we know, Seth's ends are two-fold: (1) to tell a story, and (2) to inform the poetic medium with metaphors that elucidate and build multiple levels of meaning and inquiry - its literary effects, the 'means' to Seth's 'ends.' Some of the criticism to date has failed precisely by finding the story, in and of itself, silly, without affording the sonnet medium an opportunity to deliver a multi-layered message across the text of the 'novel in verse.'

At the descriptive level, I use a full array of traditional analytical techniques, worth examining as a class.<sup>8</sup> First, let us consider the verse as a structural unit, **versification**. This concerns us with whether and where the sonnet is divided, and whether and where it is tabulated, as well as how sentence stops and other punctuation are used within it. In sonnets, there is the related aspect of a 'turn,' the **volta**, which was historically placed in the ninth line, and which, when not placed there, drew attention to the words and ideas around it. The

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<sup>8</sup> Bright, James Ilson, and Raymond Durbin Miller. *The Elements of English Versification*. Boston, London: Ginn and Company, 1910. Spiller, Michael. *Early Modern Sonneteers: From Wyatt to Milton*. Devon, U.K.: Northcote House Publishers, 2001. Eagleton, Terry. *How to Read a Poem*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. Ruffel, Burton. *How to Read a Poem*. New York & London: Meridian, Penguin Books, 1984. Turco, Lewis. *The New Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics*. Hanover & London: University Press of New England, 1986. Packard, William. *The Poet's Dictionary: A Handbook of Prosody and Poetic Devices*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.



sonnet 'turn' has evolved, moved within the sonnet, and changed over time, and is used variously by different sonnet writers, often to affect meaning.<sup>9</sup> In Seth's work, we see fanciful aspects of Byron's versification in *Don Juan*, as well as versification practices used by Alexander Pushkin in *Eugene Onegin*.

A second technical approach examines **enjambment**, the "continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line, couplet or stanza," used to create meaningful effects, and also used to move the narrative action forward in a prosaic manner.<sup>10</sup> Third, we consider **rhythm**, both the actual 'timed' rate of flow of the words or motion, and the precise depression level in the wave pattern created. As in song, downbeat is an element of this, as well as meter, usually treated separately. Conversational style in *The Golden Gate* is much informed by this aspect, varying for the different characters, as well as for the author's own remarks to the 'Reader.' Fourth, we consider **melody**: here, the musical effect of the sonnet, passage, or sequence is noted. Is it monotonous or not? hymn-like, psalm-like, prayer-like, a folk-song? What is the character of its musical effect? We see this of note, particularly, in the more culturally and religiously-based dialogues of Seth's *Golden Gate* characters, as well as in a broader dialogic sense, according to the theme of note. Fifth, we note the significance of **harmony**, the degree to which the verse elements are harmoniously constructed in their variations from and similarities to each other. This includes examining points at which they are intentionally rendered in a disharmonious manner, and why.

**Meter**, the mainstay of analysis, involves an explication of the number of feet, as well as the character of the feet, where the **stress** falls, and where the pause, or *caesura*, enters, with and without reference to the sonnet's punctuation. *The Golden Gate* is written in iambic tetrameter, in contrast to the more frequently used sonnet form, iambic pentameter. The tetrameter length is recognized as having the effect of foreshortening the active length of both the line and the thought, which helps to create the feeling that the reader is being pulled into and forward through the story action. The shorter line brings us further forward faster, through characters' thoughts and responses, and past their statements to ensuing reactions and actions, and affords, generally, a greater sense of reader surprise and responsive reaction.<sup>11</sup> The short line helps punctuates particular responses. It is precisely this brevity, and deviations from metric consistency, that lend special literary effect to the words Seth uses. Deviations from standard meter, we shall see, are a key to understanding how the work communicates itself to the reader.

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<sup>9</sup> Spiller, *Early Modern Sonneteers*, 5-6, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Oxford, ed. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> The shorter metric line is also used in Byron's *Don Juan* and Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Bibliographic citations at footnotes 3 and 1, respectively.

**Tone** and **tonal color** include several technical aspects. By tone, we are usually referring to the author's "attitude to his listener,"<sup>12</sup> while 'tone of voice' and 'voice' are also now considered part of this analytical point. Tonal color includes aspects of **rhyme** and rhyming schemes - overall rhyme patterns and interior schemes, although other aspects of sound quality are a part of this analytical concern, including **alliteration** (repeated consonants or initial vowels) and **assonance** (similar vowel sounds within dissimilar consonant combinations). These are classified as **phonological concerns**.

Generally, the explication involves **scansion**. Aspects of scansion, the actual reading of the verse, involve commenting upon the rhythmical stress, or *ictus*, based upon an analysis of word-accent and sentence emphasis. These include whether the **accent** is primary or secondary, involves prefixes or other types of grammatical stress combinations, or uses specifically relational words in specific positions in the line and verse.

The scansion exercise, critiquing the position of the rhythmical stress in the line and verse, takes us closer to discovering how the text creates effects. For instance, **trochaic substitution** is a specific type of inversion having the effect of giving special emphasis to the first foot of a metric set, while **caesural inversion** refers to a hovering of the stress in a line. Aspects of syllable analysis fall under scansion: Does the verse take a direct attack (**initial truncation**)? Does it add extra unstressed syllables at the beginning of the line (**anacrusis**) or elsewhere (**hyperbeats**)? Does it cut off the final unstressed syllables (**catalexis**)? How are the vowels treated: are they slurred (**contraction**)? or blended to omission (**elision**)? And how is **pause** used, specifically within the syllabic scheme? Today, linguists include syllable analysis under the category of **morphophonological concerns**. I elucidate these techniques when they are used by Seth, many of which are informed by scansion.

These traditional analytical techniques must marry broader contextual concerns in order to provide a complete portrait of textual effects.<sup>13</sup> First, **theme**, or motif, is used to create meaningful congregations of ideas in narrative action. I am referring to "a conspicuous element, such as a type of event, device, reference or formula," and a "recurrent poetic concept," or leitmotif.<sup>14</sup> One recurring theme of Seth's work in *The Golden Gate* combines the *carpe diem* and *tempus fugit* motifs,<sup>15</sup> while Seth has threaded a number of other themes

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<sup>12</sup> Abrams, *A Glossary*, 227-228. Abrams cites I.A. Richards as defining tone in this way in Richards' work, *Practical Criticism*, published in 1929. Abrams discusses briefly recent developments in the use of the term, 'tone,' in literary criticism.

<sup>13</sup> Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971. Spiller, *Early Modern Sonneteers*.

<sup>14</sup> Abrams, *A Glossary*, 177.

<sup>15</sup> *Carpe diem* means 'Seize the day.' *Tempus fugit*, 'Time is flying,' is from the Latin, an abbreviated quotation from the Roman poet, Virgil, *Georgics* Book III, line 284: "Fugit inreparabile tempus."

across the narrative action, inviting multiple linkages that add interest and enjoyment to the work.

Second, scholars have argued we must examine the author's **intention**. More broadly, we are interested in what is 'outside' the 'work,' per M.H. Abrams' analysis. For example, how is the poet's intention made evident, if it is; what world or 'universe' is seen or shown by Seth; and what audience is of interest to him in delivering this work? The work stands in relationship within a group of four concerns: itself, the author, the world and the reader.<sup>16</sup>

Third, **imagery** is both a literary effect and an organizing principle of separate note. This term encompasses both textual effects that elicit visual images, or "mental pictures," and, more broadly, "figurative language" used as "vehicles" for metaphors and similes.<sup>17</sup> Here, we are interested in whether the verse is intentionally designed to elicit, refer to, or explain visual images, as well as enhance other understandings of the text.<sup>18</sup> For example, *The Golden Gate* includes landscapes and nature's beauty, described with stylistic precision, an effect obtained by using specific familiar lyrical phrasings<sup>19</sup> with certain textual elements. In other examples, nature is a background for a scene linked to characters' thoughts and their personal development; while imagery which introduces us to artists' art sculptures, in particular, invites amusing interpretations, as artistic creations are 'seen' by an artist, her friends, and her critics, and then also by the reader through Seth's words.

Fourth, we examine the role of **wordplay**. Michael Spiller discusses this technique as one often seen in the work of sonnet writers, a critical component worthy of separate note, citing the traditional and long-standing 'board-game' quality of sonnets.<sup>20</sup> We see much wordplay in *The Golden Gate*, with Seth, an accomplished anagramist and Scrabble player, enjoying even arguably dreadful puns. In playing with words and meaning at this level, the sonnet writer is asking the sonnet reader to play out his or her part in a 'word-and-meaning game' of discovery and fun, as well as elucidating underlying symbolic sense and secretly-shared metaphors.

Fifth, **thematic play** is noted as a separate concern of sonnet analysis. How are thematic elements raised, revisited and revised within the sonnet and sequence? Within the sonnet, for example, how is the 'turn' in the sonnet's meaning accomplished thematically? In

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<sup>16</sup> Abrams, *The Mirror & the Lamp*.

<sup>17</sup> Abrams, *A Glossary*, 128-129.

<sup>18</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnets are examples of verbal image wedded to visual image, eliciting a mystical and artistic quality. Rossetti's work included sonnets based on actual paintings, designed to reference them and enhance their appreciation, both visually and in literature.

<sup>19</sup> By lyrical, I am referring to "that kind of verse most readily associated with the chanted or sung origins of poetry." Wainwright, Jeffrey. *Poetry: The Basics*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Spiller, *Early Modern Sonneteers*.

*The Golden Gate*, we find Seth dropping themes and re-arranging them, visiting them in private comments to the reader in mid-narrative, or returning to them long after they might have been raised, apologizing as he does so. We also see thematic strains running harmoniously over the entire work in interesting ways.

I note, here, another point of critical inquiry, that of **idea**. Here, the question asked is whether the poet has successfully managed and delivered an entire idea. There has been a traditional concern in sonnet criticism as to whether a full idea is communicated in each line of the sonnet, or a full concept in each sonnet. For example, when the idea is split, effect is sharpened, attention is drawn to the area, and the reader notes a heightened impact, contrast, or enhancement; while, when a short 'idea' appears complete in one line, its impact is emphasized, as a unit.

With the term, **rhetoric**, M.H. Abrams suggests we examine any purposeful relationship between the author and the audience,<sup>21</sup> while Terry Eagleton considers this term a departure point for analysis of *context* more broadly.<sup>22</sup> In the traditional sense, we mean a style of speaking or writing. In this work, we find, among others: self-reflection, oratory, conversational dialogue, persuasive argumentation, descriptive forays, and expository 'discussion' of characters' predicaments by the author with the reader.

We keep a separate focus on a broader area called **temperament**, or **mood**.<sup>23</sup> Sonnet writers have a long history of utilizing conceits to achieve specific effects. We ask what style or mood is being elicited. For example, is the style intentionally delicate, offended, stumbling, final, inquisitive?<sup>24</sup> We find all of these in Seth's work.

Studying the **psychological** effects of the sonnet has been a mainstay of sonnet criticism.<sup>25</sup> In this work, such analytical concerns are especially interesting to note in Seth's character work on homosexuality and bisexuality, where he comments both directly and obliquely on the psychological and psycho-social aspects of alternative sexual persuasions through narrative action, dialogue and authorial observation.

With the word, **presentation**, we refer to what Michael Spiller calls the sonnet writer's use of "image, fancy, sign and trace," beyond wordplay, and in the realm of delighting the senses with the effective and efficient use of what he calls 'twist,' and 'hide.'

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<sup>21</sup> Abrams, *A Glossary*.

<sup>22</sup> Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> Spiller, *Early Modern Sonneteers*.

<sup>25</sup> For example, the literary criticism of Shakespeare's sonnets includes hundreds, if not thousands, of studies of Shakespeare's psychological frameworks and intentions, yet only recently a detailed analysis of the homo-erotic nature of the works. Pequigney, Joseph. *Such Is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

This is related to aspects of thematic play. For example, Seth intentionally fancifies the presentation of specific narrative scenes, as well as the development of narrative themes and the organization of structural elements. One example of thematic play is his 'Table of Contents,' also a sonnet.<sup>26</sup>

I include a short note on **phenomenological aspects** of analysis. I am referring to the level of close reading that analyzes the *ways* in which we experience the meaning of the story. The Geneva school of critics, for example, saw each work as an embodiment of the author's own consciousness and voice. Seth's sonnet novel has this sense of being a "living reading,"<sup>27</sup> although we do not focus on this here. Additionally, what are the "atemporal and ahistorical" ways in which the meaning of the work is made concrete?<sup>28</sup> The sonnet, with its small shape and recognizable features, has always had a special and cozy relationship with the ahistorical and the atemporal, and our awareness of this is informative in a satisfying way, an awareness that both creates and enhances literary effect.

Finally, we recognize the **historical and cultural context** of the work. Here, as Abrams' model suggests, we are looking at the world from the vantage-point of the sonnet and seeing a relationship between the two that is interesting and worth commenting upon.<sup>29</sup> Here, too, as Stephen Greenblatt notes, we are seeing the work within a broader cultural anthropological setting – both its own, and that of our own creation – in a "circulation of social energy."<sup>30</sup>

The importance of contextual perspective, generally, cannot be over-estimated. As Terry Eagleton notes with dismay, most attend to poetry's analysis as "*language* but not as *discourse*," stating, "'Discourse', as we shall see, means attending to language in all of its material density."<sup>31</sup> By attending to poetic analysis as discourse, the intentionality of building effects is not overlooked, and a more rich and diverse level of discovery and appreciation is obtained.

A concern with context extends and reinforces meaning. This concern arose for Mikhail Bakhtin, who contributed to modern critical thought by elucidating "a fundamentally

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<sup>26</sup> An explication of the Table of Contents sonnet for *The Golden Gate* can be found at Jay Curlin's article. Curlin, Jay. "'The World Goes On': Narrative Structures and the Sonnet in Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*." *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association* 22, no. 2 (1996): 13-26.

<sup>27</sup> Abrams, *A Glossary*, 230. Abrams references the German critic, Johann Gottfried Herder, who called a 'living reading' a "divination into the soul of the author."

<sup>28</sup> Kuddon, J.A., ed. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Abrams, *The Mirror & the Lamp*.

<sup>30</sup> Greenblatt, Stephen. "The Circulation of Social Energy." In *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 495-511. Harlow, Essex, U.K.: Pearson Education Limited, Longman, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*, 2.

different approach to both language and literary discourse in their entirety," in part *via* his concept of *dialogics*.<sup>32</sup> The concept draws its strength from the observation that "the everyday is a sphere of constant activity, the source of all social change and individual creativity. The prosaic is the truly interesting and the ordinary is what is truly noteworthy."<sup>33</sup> Within the *context* of "the everyday"<sup>34</sup> in *The Golden Gate*, the narrative action is wedded to its broader significance as philosophical, moral or ethical acts, *and* as poetry, with "fields of force."<sup>35</sup>

A sense of the need for moral action teases the reader of this work: what is the role of ideology in literature? As David Birch writes, "literature" is not a term defined in isolation from ideology, since any 'positioning' is necessarily socio-political.<sup>36</sup> Nor can the concerns of the literary scholar be divorced from those of the linguist, as either omission would result in "equally flagrant anachronisms."<sup>37</sup> As Seamus Heaney has stated, poetry's reprise should "affirm that within our individual selves we can reconcile two orders of knowledge which we might call the practical and the poetic; to affirm also that each form of knowledge redresses the other and that the frontier between them is there for the crossing."<sup>38</sup>

Further research of a contextual nature might focus on the work's socio-cultural markers, as well as on a more strictly philosophical analysis. Before I begin my own analysis, I shall note the contributions of those who have analyzed and/or commented on the work to date.

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<sup>32</sup> Morson, Gary Saul, and Caryl Emerson. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990, 20.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 23.

<sup>34</sup> Gardiner, Michael E. "Bakhtin's Prosaic Imagination." In *Critiques of Everyday Life*, edited by Michael E. Gardiner. London: Routledge, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> My interior quote is to Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*, 90.

<sup>36</sup> Birch, David, ed. *Language, Literature and Critical Practice: Ways of Analyzing Text*. Edited by Ronald Carter, *The Interface Series*. London & New York: Routledge, 1993, 30-31. Here, Birch discusses the growth of interest in the relationship between ideology and meaning in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, once "considered totally inappropriate for 'literary' analysts." As Birch notes, "All knowledge is ideologically determined and we are politically irresponsible if we do not recognize this."

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at *xiii*. Ronald Carter, the series editor, is quoting the critic, Roman Jakobsen, in his discussion of the concerns of critical practice in literature.

<sup>38</sup> Heaney, Seamus. "Frontiers of Writing." In *The Redress of Poetry*, 186-203. London: Faber and Faber, 1995.

## Analysis and Comment to Date

I mention most of the major commentators and analysts on *The Golden Gate* to date, with summary remarks. This should give the reader a greater appreciation for the analysis I contribute in this thesis. When *The Golden Gate* was released, it was reviewed by several newspapers quite positively. John Gross of the *New York Times* called the work "only slightly allusive," concluding that "the inventiveness of the verse keeps the story going, and saves it from sentimentality," while also concluding, as a measure of Seth's success, that "the story keeps the verse going as well," with "verbal cameos and aerobatics."<sup>39</sup> Gross found unevenness in parts, but excused it, stating "the poem is a splendid achievement."<sup>40</sup> Raymond Mungo followed, also in the *New York Times*, with a review summarizing the plot in sonnet form. Mungo was very positive about the work's quality, and quoted Sonnet 13.10 as one of Seth's best: "Are the dead, too, defiled by sorrow."<sup>41</sup>

In literary journals, we find the 1986 assessments of Bruce Bawer, Marjorie Perloff, Carol Iannone, and Rowena Hill. Bawer asserts, "It isn't great poetry: it doesn't have (or attempt to have) the requisite depth or density: it isn't rich in metaphor or other poetic devices," as well as asserting that it is, despite this, "an extraordinarily accomplished work of narrative verse," "engaging, well-paced," and "technically mesmerizing."<sup>42</sup> Bawer concludes that the work appears "quite frequently, technically inept," yet that it has "sweetness, wit, imagination, facility and sheer joy of creation that shine out from every line."<sup>43</sup>

Marjorie Perloff, while claiming not to know what Bawer was saying, stated she was concerned with the extravagant praise the work was receiving. Perloff couches her analysis within a broader discussion of modern poetry, finding Seth's rhyme work lacking in its expression of "semantic transfer."<sup>44</sup> She cites portions of several sonnets, arguing that Seth's choices of words, including his use of "contemporary colloquialism," are examples of "cuteness," "filler," or are not appropriate choices.<sup>45</sup> She finds his characters stereotypical and poorly drawn, and the dialogue mundane, such as in Ed and Phil's departure from Liz's party, at Sonnet 4.29, a selection I include in this thesis. Perloff's remarks are based on representative selections, but appear to lift these out of context in ways that support her position. Perloff ends her discussion of modern poetry's directions by giving Seth credit for

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<sup>39</sup> Gross, John. "Book of the Times." *The New York Times*, April 14, 1986 1986, 16.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Mungo, Raymond. "Modern Love in Rhythm and Rhyme." *The New York Times Book Review*, May 11, 1986.

<sup>42</sup> Bawer, Bruce. "Pushkin by the Bay." *The New Criterion*, May (1986): 77-80, 77.

<sup>43</sup> *Id.* at 80.

<sup>44</sup> Perloff, Marjorie. "'Homeward Ho!': Silicon Valley Pushkin." *The American Poetry Review* 15: 6, Nov-Dec (1986): 37-46, 38.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.* at 39-40.

"renewed attention to the role of sound in poetry," while concluding that the next step must be to ""Try again. Fail again. Fail better.""<sup>46</sup>

Carol Iannone provides an interesting analysis of the "Yuppie" cultural aspects of the work, clever although brief.<sup>47</sup> To the debate over its overall merit, Iannone adds the general remark that, "in the hands of a lesser artist than Pushkin, versification of this sort actually seems to encourage flatness and superficiality of a kind that would be intolerable in prose."<sup>48</sup> However, technically, she finds that the work "sports a slick emotional veneer such as one associates less with serious fiction than with a Hollywood film . . ."<sup>49</sup> Iannone suggests those who praise the work may have been willing to "overlook its view of life" and focus on its technical virtuosity, while those who do not praise it do not wish to separate the two aspects.<sup>50</sup>

Rowena Hill takes a quick look at the work, with interesting comments on its themes and tonality.<sup>51</sup> She cites a number of lines, and discusses the characters briefly. She finds Seth's treatment of the characters full of "both irony and compassion," while noting that, as people, they "do not really participate in the grandeur and beauty of their natural surroundings," being "not mythological" because "too small, too human-centred."<sup>52</sup> While she assesses the work's themes as oversimplified, she appreciates Seth's use of language, stating, "it rises at intervals to high poetry."<sup>53</sup>

In 1987, Bruce King provided a discussion of Seth's work in the context of neo-Formalism, noting that its characters represent American subcultures, and complimenting the poetry highly.<sup>54</sup> Makarand R. Paranjape then provided an interesting thematic analysis of the work in 1989, arguing that the work is not "a celebration of Yuppiedom, but a severe critique and rejection of it."<sup>55</sup> Paranjape cites from several sonnets, and traces aspects of moral and ethical challenge faced by the characters, finding greater complexity in the work than previously suggested. Santosh Gupta followed in 1990, with an enlightening assessment of

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<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 46. Perloff ends with this, a quotation from Samuel Beckett's short play, *Worstward Ho*, 1983.

<sup>47</sup> Iannone, Carol. "Yuppies in Rhyme." *Commentary* 82, no. 3 (1986): 54-57.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 55.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at 57.

<sup>51</sup> Hill, Rowena. "Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*: A Quick Look." *The Literary Criterion* 21, no. 4 (1986): 87-90.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.* at 90.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at 89.

<sup>54</sup> King, Bruce. "Postmodernism and Neo-Formalist Poetry: Seth, Steele, and Strong Measures." *The Southern Review* 23, no. 1 (1987): 224-31.

<sup>55</sup> Paranjape, Makarand R. "*The Golden Gate* and the Quest for Self-Realization." *ACLALS Bulletin* 8, no. 1 (1989): 58-73.



the work's themes and characters.<sup>56</sup> Gupta traces the work's literary heritage briefly, and discusses the development of the characters within Seth's broader framework. He notes Perloff's criticism of the work, suggesting it "does not do full justice to its merits."<sup>57</sup> Gupta cites the sonnets briefly in his argument, concluding that Seth has succeeded in creating a disciplined "story in sonnets" that is "delightful and refreshing reading."<sup>58</sup>

The late 1990s produced four additional contributions to scholarship on the work. First, Roumiana Deltcheva's analysis compared *The Golden Gate* to Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.<sup>59</sup> She finds many similarities in the development of character, portrayals of society and how issues of personal conscience are handled. To Perloff's criticism that Seth was not Pushkin, Deltcheva suggests, "Seth's real homage to Pushkin is not realized intertextually," finding many of the elements in *Eugene Onegin* transposed "with the same kernel ideological content" - into a California world.<sup>60</sup> Deltcheva finds the work a "prominent contribution" to "human culture, specifically in its manifestation as individualism."<sup>61</sup>

Jay Curlin's 1996 analysis provides a positive portrait of the work in which he analyzes its narrative structure. Curlin finds the work's structure full of "ingenuity" and "intentional complexity."<sup>62</sup> Through an analysis of the work's timeframe and plot, Curlin charts the work's structural symmetry as an overarching sonnet. Curlin cites several sonnets briefly in his analysis. Barbara Benjamin, in her self-published analysis of 1997, argues that Seth's "underdevelopment of characters" is reasonable, commenting on criticism to date and on the work's themes.<sup>63</sup> She cites several sonnets, noting their satiric elements. While she finds specific weaknesses in the work, her overall conclusion is positive. Joanna Durczak wrote, in 1999, briefly, re-evaluating the characters within a post-AIDS and post-Yuppie era, to clever effect.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Gupta, Santosh. "The Golden Gate: The First Indian Novel in Verse." In *The New Indian Novel in English: A Study of the 1980s*, edited by Viney Kirpal, 91-100. Bombay & New Delhi: R.N. Sachdov, Allied Publishers Ltd., 1990.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* at 97.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.* at 99.

<sup>59</sup> Deltcheva, Roumiana, "Recycling the Genre: The Russian and American Novel in Verse: The Case for Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and Seth's *The Golden Gate*." *Almanach Kola Naukowego Rusycystow 2* (1995): 33-51.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.* at 47.

<sup>61</sup> *Id.* at 51.

<sup>62</sup> Curlin, Jay. "'The World Goes On': Narrative Structures and the Sonnet in Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*." *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association* 22, no. 2 (1996): 13-26.

<sup>63</sup> Benjamin, Barbara. "Critical Analysis of *The Golden Gate* by Vikram Seth." online article, 8 pages, July, 2008. [www.barbarascyberplace.com](http://www.barbarascyberplace.com), 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Durczak, Joanna. "A Prophecy That Came True: Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*." *American Studies - Warsaw* 18 (1999): 105-14.

Helen Khanzhina's 2000 article provides an interesting analysis of the narrative strategies in *The Golden Gate*, comparing *Eugene Onegin* and discussing examples of their voicing strategies.<sup>65</sup> Khanzhina offers high praise for Seth's achievement. Finally, Lars Ole Sauerberg's 2004 article discusses Seth's narrative further, contexting his discussion with other verse novels in an interesting and positive manner.<sup>66</sup>

I hope this information provides the reader with an historical context for viewing my contribution to the scholarship on this work. Let us begin the analysis.

## Analysis

### Beginnings: Sonnet 1.1

*The Golden Gate* includes three pre-story sonnets, entitled Dedication, Acknowledgments and Table of Contents. The narrative portion consists of 590 sonnets in 13 parts. Let us begin our analysis with the first sonnet, Sonnet 1.1:

To make a start more swift than weighty,  
Hail Muse. Dear Reader, once upon  
A time, say, circa 1980,  
There lived a man. His name was John.  
Successful in his field though only  
Twenty-six, respected, lonely,  
One evening as he walked across  
Golden Gate Park, the ill-judged toss  
Of a red frisbee almost brained him.  
He thought, "If I died, who'd be sad?  
Who'd weep? Who'd gloat? Who would be glad?  
Would anybody?" As it pained him,  
He turned from this dispiriting theme  
To ruminations less extreme. (1.1)

Seth begins his work with authorial nods to both the inspirational muse and to his reader, to both tradition and form, while already playing with the toy-box of sonnet-meaning tools, and his own intentions. A classic 'herald' to the muse is included but is given the least possible room, as Seth notes, "To make a start more swift than weighty, " in perfect iambic tetrameter. The reference, 'Hail, Muse,' is to Byron's *Don Juan*, where Byron writes,

Hail, Muse! et cetera. We left Juan sleeping,  
Pillowed upon a fair and happy breast,<sup>67</sup>

We are already signalled that respect for traditional literary paths is present. By choosing *Don Juan*, Seth informs us it is a playful confirmation. Romantic expectations for John are at the fore in this work with Seth's call to the muse to assist him in his storytelling task.

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<sup>65</sup> Khanzhina, Helen P. "Narrative Strategies in *Eugene Onegin* and *The Golden Gate*." *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 191-99.

<sup>66</sup> Sauerberg, Lars Ole. "Repositioning Narrative: The Late Twentieth-Century Verse Novels of Vikram Seth, Derek Walcott, Craig Raine, Anthony Burgess and Bernadine Evaristo." *Orbis Litteratum: International Review of Literary Studies* 59, no. 6 (2004): 439-64.

<sup>67</sup> Byron, *Don Juan*, 157.

Seth is working in line 1 completely inside the box with meter, while line 2 signals special emphases with two spondees, double strong stresses. The proclamation to the muse is a call, a heralding, as is our own position with respect to the work, the next words, 'Dear Reader,' with the metric result: //, //-. "Once upon" completes line 2 with the requisite iambic, while leaving us hanging, awaiting the standard refrain's conclusion, "a time," causing us to rush ahead of the enjambment at the line end, ready to hear the entire and familiar introductory phrase, the phrase that signals that a children's story, fairy tale, or perhaps morality tale, is about to begin. We, the "Dear Reader," are addressed in a tone that informs us of our role, as courteous cooperator 'listening' to this story, and we are more 'dear' for the initial and continued truncation of that line, whose first four stresses encompass us. In fact, we keep company with the muse, a great honor, and as readers, we, too, are thus a suggested inspiration to Seth.

'Time,' it turns out, has two meanings, is not fully fairy-tale as the introductory "Once upon" suggests but, within the complete 'idea' of the third line, "a time, say, circa 1980." Here, we have "time" standing on its own in line 3 with the casual tossed-off, "say," to get us to the author's generously broad, "circa," followed by the year, which must be read 'aloud' to complete the correct stress and syllabic pattern. The storytelling context is enhanced by this. We find here 'trace,' as these different aspects of the concept of time are tossed together, as well as our introduction to the importance of time as a thematic element in the entire work. As well, mark the play of the author with high and low rhythm, in that "Hail, muse," which sounds at a proclamatory level, withers to, "say, circa 1980," bringing the reader down to a seemingly passed-off compromise of time period assignment, comical and reflecting on the author as storyteller. The 'circa' gives us a sense that the story is occurring at a general time, a tonality that reinforces the ahistorical and atemporal qualities of the story. How joyful, then, to know we are being transported to a particularly . . . general period by someone with high hopes of sharing a story, but who will not waste our time getting there, nor pretend to bother with the details of specificity, and drop the melody down to a casual chat when that suits.

With "There lived a man," we have the first line of the narrative story. This seemingly innocuous start appears, in closer view, to be an allusion to the opening words of Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, "The Birthmark," "There lived a man of science - an eminent proficient in every branch of natural philosophy."<sup>68</sup> In Hawthorne's story, similarly, a 'once-upon-a-time' sense is engendered, with "there lived" reinforcing the 'storyteller' aspect,

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<sup>68</sup> Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Birthmark and Other Stories*. 1 ed. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1968.

raising readers' expectations. Seth's "There lived" would be dismissable were it not for strong similarity in the two stories of the 'man' referred to, here, John. In Hawthorne's tale, a man of science falls in love with love, marries his love, and when his lover's small fault, a birthmark, is displayed, becomes, later, pre-occupied with the fault, obsessed, eventually causing the death of his so-beloved wife while attempting the removal of the mark. Here, John falls in love with love when he falls in love with Liz, then grinds their relationship into the ground with obsessive complaints about small things Liz does, cares about, and enjoys (e.g. Sonnets 6.13 - 6.32). If only John could talk some sense into Liz, their love would be perfect (e.g. Sonnets 9.4 - 9.5). John, a man of science, attempts, in *The Golden Gate*, to use his talents to reason out responses to these and other challenges, while the object of his affection declines his inferred marriage proposal and removes herself from the intensity of John's critical attentions, a more modern woman, luckily spared death by experiment.<sup>69</sup>

We now have 'John' in line 4, named after the romantic character of Romantic literature, the fun-filled recalcitrant playboy, Don Juan, and also the disciple closest to Jesus, surely a model for mutual moral challenge and modern ethical interplay. Indeed, John exhibits his playboy talents to strong effect in portions of the book when, following Liz's departure from his life, he engages in a series of one-night stands impressive for its bravura, if not its ethical depth (e.g. Sonnets 11.30, 11.34, 11.39 - 11.41). Who is John, in our first introduction, in the author's words? "Successful in his field though only / Twenty-six, respected, lonely," is a harmonious construction with enjambment meeting line end, at "only," with its unstressed extra syllable or *catalexis*, suggesting that the modification is to his "success" when, instead, it is to his age. This raises our interest in whether there are other compromises to his success not related to his youthful years, although the gentle reader is swept forward, again, as Seth continues, with the information that John is "successful, lonely," delivering the descriptors with the modern rhetorical twist of an author's list, while embracing the potential comforts of elision in the sadness of the end-rhymes, 'only' and 'lonely.' The end of the initial sestet is our first clue that we will not see the 8-6 versification model, nor perhaps other standard sonnet forms, but, in any case, more variation, making the presentation inviting.

Arriving at line 7, we are taken to our first scene, John's seemingly inconsequential walk in the park, with scansion informing on thematic play: "One evening, as he walked across / Golden Gate" would suggest he was going to walk 'across' the bridge. Here, we have

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<sup>69</sup> 'Trace borrowings' are common in the work of sonnet writers, and became a popular focus of literary research, generally, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Donow, Herbert S. *The Sonnet in England and America: A Bibliography of Criticism*. Westport, Conn., London, U.K.: Greenwood Press, 1982.

*The Golden Gate*, not *The Golden Gate Bridge*,<sup>70</sup> but we expect John to 'walk across' the bridge. The bridge, brought to mind by the phrase, "walk across," and the unstated notion that the 'bridge' is omitted as an object in the next line, may cause us to rush past the 'twist and hide,' yet find ourselves interested further in the discovery of what we do not expect, what will be new and of special interest in the activities to follow. With the line 8 enjambment leading to the "Park," we could be a bit forewarned. In fact, John never walks across 'the Bridge,' although other characters do so, some part-way, others driving across to take the Bay views, each to their own metaphorical ability. Just as Seth uses the bridge as a metaphor for reaching out to others and for making progress on issues of spiritual or relational connectedness, other metaphors later inform us on John's own progress towards peace and resolution.

We find John wandering in the park alone, a place for social connection but also for reflection, a good place for him to begin his quest, and we are then, quickly, transported to the action, an "ill-judged toss / Of a red frisbee almost brained him." We have here the *volta*, occurring in its traditional place in line 9, yet with a goof of a physical play, a bad toss, while the sonnet's core meaning is about to be focused. Thus it is a true "turn" in the meaning of this sonnet, while the "almost brained him," raises the rhythm, speed, and pitch of the turn. The frisbee is red, as well. Color is not mentioned often in this work, but red is repeated in the work later with respect to John's failure to see his own self-destructive behavior model, precisely at the point at which he suggests he and Liz should consider marrying soon, as they walk by the 'red river' (10.26). Indeed, John is about to be 'clobbered' by his own traditional romantic desires mixed with others' non-traditional romantic notions of love and wedded bliss, the frisbee here, a minute thematic image, a trope, an oblique metaphor intentionally dropped into our laps with a visual presentation that is modern, playful, and readily grasped, while even the romantic 'clobbering' John will receive later has little to do with Liz's own intentions, which are, like the red frisbee thrower's, simply poorly executed with regard to John, according to Seth's remarks to the reader (11.23).

John's awakened ruminations complete the first sonnet, with its sense of having no one who depends on him, wondering who would either celebrate or bemoan his death. Seth's choice is the repeated "Who'd," a pressing *anaphora* followed by short questions, twisting

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<sup>70</sup> As an aside, 'the Golden Gate' was the name given to a number of concrete bunkers situated in the hills surrounding the San Francisco Bay. These were called 'base-end stations' and were originally designed to protect the San Francisco Bay from potential enemy attacks from the sea. They were built around 1908 and abandoned after the development of air and radar defense systems, sometime in the 1920s. As archeological markers, they are no longer easy to see, although their photographed ruins remain in place. Sunde, Benedicte. "Bull.Miletic: Sighting Unseen." *Henie Onstad Kunstsenter* 2005, Sandvika, Norway, Spring (2005): 13-15.

into its reverse notion, with "Who would be glad?," emphasized both by being preceded by the *caesura*, the pause, as well as by its change in tonal color. In every sense, John is confronted with the modern Everyman's predictable question set. The use of the "If I died" form in line 10 references that sense found in literature encompassing wartime soldier's writings, parental concerns, and children's bedtime prayers.<sup>71</sup> On topic, John may not have done much to care for or assist anyone, while others may be jealous of his success. We want to care about John, and find, then, mid-line 12, an abrupt end to his desperate questions, with "Would anybody?" With its *caesural inversion* and hovering stress, mid-line, it is a decidedly non-iambic moment, with its continual inversion of meter in the same line to trochee, in "As it pained him." With a mid-line rush to the trochee form, found by Hawthorne in Finnish oral epics, and associated with epic poetry and the oral tradition of the storyteller, we have an intentional metric turn that puts the point nicely on John's philosophical dilemma.<sup>72</sup>

We have the end of the delivered idea, one we can share with John, that of our own significance in the broader scheme of life, as well as of attachment to others, with "As it pained him," in line 12. The enjambment of this sentence from line 12 to line 13 illustrates his apology for re-directing his attention, continuing to line 14, with, "He turned from this dispiriting theme / To ruminations less extreme."

The ending of the sonnet is notable, first, for its resolution of the discordant harmony introduced in the frisbee hit, while recognizing, thematically, that the value of one's individual life as well as the risk of physical accident are matters of occasional consternation. Given that our mortality is, ultimately, out of our complete control, and our deaths of questionable meaning in the broader social, cultural and natural scheme of the world, this narrowing of focus on our shared mortality opens the reader, ever so softly, to themes regarding the meaning of life on earth, the significance of attachment in both social and romantic networks with other humans, and the difficulty of coming to philosophical conclusions upon which to act. At the same time, it focuses on determining whether John will succeed in his quest. Just as John walks in the allegorical park-near-a-bridge, and 'turns' to 'ruminations less extreme,' so do we all, generally, when confronted with the frailty of our existence, turn away from the philosophical challenge, walk not 'across.' But now, we ask, what will, or would, that judgment day look like, the day John stands before St. Peter and the

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<sup>71</sup> The American children's bedtime prayer is, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, / If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." Traditional.

<sup>72</sup> The trochee was exploited by Longfellow in *The Song of Hiawatha* in order to accommodate an English language verse to a sense of earlier epic poetry, according to James Fenton. It was associated conceptually with the long story and an oral tradition requiring both a storyteller and a story listener. As Fenton notes, the metrical pattern is not arbitrary but selected for its purposes. Longfellow, Henry W. *The Song of Hiawatha*. Mt. Vernon, New York: Peter Pauper Press, 1942. Fenton, James. *An Introduction to English Poetry*. London: Penguin Books, 2003, 41.

'Golden Gate' at heaven's doors, surely the most immediate golden gate, whose metaphor finds expression in the title of the work.<sup>73</sup>

Further, the nagging suggestion has been released upon us, as well, that we are faced with potential damage by random accident; why do bad things happen to good people, another theme and question in this work, one which is developed at its fullest in the senseless death of Jan with friends in an auto accident en route to her own party (Sonnets 12.36, 13.1-13.2), a death that leads, ultimately, to a redemptive turning point in John's own isolation, honesty and self-awareness at the book's conclusion.

As readers, though only just setting out on our experience of the story with the author, we have been taken in Sonnet 1.1 from its beginning, a place where Seth links his own role to that of earlier authors through his 'trace borrowings,' to a world we can identify as a modern world, perhaps an urban oasis, one we recognize, where success may be fleeting or difficult to evaluate, intimacy and commitment difficult to sustain, and where John's interest in ruminations less extreme may be wise, but may also be an avoidance strategy. We know little about John, but are brought squarely, in lines 13 and 14, into relation with him in a way that, psychologically, bonds us to his struggle with the mortality we share. Additionally, we see the author as someone who can deliver a full thought within the sonnet's strong borders; are brought into confidence with the storyteller in a traditional way - to observe the tale as a traditional 'hearer;' and are, as well, informed of the sequence's temperament, a feeling of openness inviting variation and controversy, ease and a casual pace, which suggests to us that we will be permitted to judge both the work and John for ourselves. The skill with which this has been accomplished, in fourteen lines, puts Seth in the same league as the great sonnet writers who have preceded him.

### Dialogues

Much of *The Golden Gate's* narrative is pushed forward by dialogue. This includes dialogue between the characters, internal dialogue in characters' thoughts, and the shared dialogue of the author with the reader. Dialogue occurs by phone, on walks, in cafes, restaurants and bars, at parties and at home. An explication of some of these illustrates how meaning and direction are created in poetic conversation, how the narrative action is pushed

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<sup>73</sup> The gate(s) to heaven, known as the 'pearly gates,' have also been known as 'the golden gate.' The 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish ballad beginning, "St. Peter stood guard at the golden gate,/ With a solemn mien and an air sedate," is just one example of the image's historical popularity. National Library of Scotland. "Broadside Ballad Entitled 'St. Peter at the Gate'." In *The Word on the Street*, 2004, Edinburgh.

forward, and the ways that stylistic devices inform our understanding of the relationships and concerns of the characters. Let us look at some examples.

### Dialogues: Voicemail and Phone Chat

When John Brown phones Janet Hayakawa, his friend, to ask for her advice, we have already been introduced to Jan, their history, and his sad predicament, a lack of love. John promptly reaches her voicemail, a modern invention whose combination of immediacy and lack of intimacy has both thrilled and disappointed most of us. We hear Jan's reply phone call at Sonnet 1.19, beginning at line 7:

He hears the phone ring. "Hello, John?  
Are you OK? What's going on?  
I just got back. I thought I'd phone you  
Although it's late. You sounded bad  
On the machine, more tired and sad  
Than in the whole time that I've known you."  
"It's nothing." "Tell you what, let's meet  
For lunch tomorrow. 16th Street. (1.19)

The Shu Jing. One. It's well-frequented.  
Food's great." (1.20)

In line 7, the *caesura* at the end of the third beat, dividing the iamb and forcing a trochee in Jan's greeting, in addition to her regular use of contractions, wakes us up, is bright, and shifts the tone from John's "hearing the phone ring," with its monotonic melody. Jan's approach, in line 8 scansion, begins as consistently metric - iambic tetrameter, but becomes stressed and split by the pressure to vocally de-emphasize the 'what' in "What's going on?". The alternative is to read it as a trochaic substitution, forcing emphasis onto "what," ie: "What" *is* the problem? Jan's excusing herself immediately thereafter for calling late, and Seth's adding the extra unstressed "you" to line 9 throws extra emphasis on John. The 'you' is repeated, mid-line 10, creating insistency, with the short declarative - and informative clause, "You sounded bad". Jan is ready to apologize for caring, with her rush forward. We are alerted to this as much by the tempo of her words as by her noting the lateness of the call or her abbreviated communication style. Lines 9 and 10, divided, lend the short sentences extra weight, while the enjambment at, "You sounded bad / On the machine," has a twisting sense to it, reminding us that John 'sounds bad' literally, although a good friend might attribute that, through Seth's clever figurative contexting, to the medium, a voicemail tape. Add to this Jan's understanding of John, 'more tired and sad,' with its building melancholic tone. When the sentence continues, with 'the whole time that I've know you,' including a triple foot



*bacchius*,<sup>74</sup> we see a stress variation that emphasizes their long acquaintance, delivered in the strong form of a 1 ½ line thought with a line-end stop.

John's response at line 13, where we might hope for a couplet ending, is so short, "It's nothing," a three-word resolution, one contracted, in three small beats, a tonal mile below Jan's preceding speech line. In all, this smallest of responses is modern and curt, effective communication and telling brevity. The line's iamb, 'ing' is met by the swift reply of his friend with the bold trochee introduction, "Tell you what, let's meet," the upbeat and familiar American phrase, followed by the imperative plan, casual but directed. The 'let's meet' idea is enjambed to line 14, with more specifics, "For lunch tomorrow. 16th Street," suggesting Jan has just thought of it, a sign of dedication to sudden action, coupled with indecision and the need to plan a response.

The tools used in this short passage are primarily the morphophonological concerns of the analyst, well-handled by Seth in driving his action forward at the same time as he creates character and interest, while threading modern thematic elements into the scene, with its voicemail and phone-call tensions.

#### Dialogues: Context and Conversation at a Chinese Restaurant

In Sonnet 1.20, we move to the scene of the planned meeting between John and Jan, and are linked to the restaurant name and time for meeting by Jan's words on the phone, which complete the conversation begun in Sonnet 1.19 and seamlessly and deftly link the lunch proposal to the scene of the lunch and the developing action. We have the clever unspoken acceptance of Jan's suggestion, and a chance to examine analytical concerns with more thematic and cultural qualities. The scene is introduced in a way that tells us about both the culture and its participants.

The Shu Jing. One. It's well-frequented.  
Food's great." Next day, not quite at ease,  
John shows up early, cologne-scented,  
Hyper-immaculate, sits and sees  
Families, lovers, inter alia  
A circus clown in full regalia,  
But as the hope-hour strokes its sum  
He fidgets: Janet hasn't come.  
Deaf to the pap of Muzak sounding  
"O Little Town of Bethlehem"  
Anachronistically at them,  
The patrons dine with zest. Rebounding  
Off plastic chairs and grubby floor  
The notes merge with the squeaking door. (1.20)

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<sup>74</sup> Lennard, John. *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism*. 2 ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 3.

The sonnet begins with Jan's super-short sentences, which punch up the action like a cheerleader's calls at a game. The *Shu Jing*'s description as 'well-frequented' and 'food's great' seems to self-confirm Jan's positive, smart plan. The restaurant's name lends another kernel of context for the luncheon, referring to Chinese heritage in a way that suggests a meeting here would include not just a meal, but a moral assessment.<sup>75</sup>

We join John as he "shows up," the stuff guys do, after all, in line 3, and note that he is multi-syllabically blessed: "cologne-scented," with its feminine meter-ending, and "hyper-immaculate," a dangerous five-syllable item with a masculine end-note. He "sits and sees," with the 'low-and-steady' feel this suggests. What he sees is a virtual variety show of lifemate pattern choices: families, lovers, and a clown in full clown-dress, the only other solo visitor noted. John waits for the "hope-hour," an allusion to Thomas Hardy's poem, "A Broken Appointment," a literary allusion which carries with it a veiled understanding of John's relationship to this meeting with Jan precisely.<sup>76</sup> The playful 'bait' for the allusion, and thus the interpretation, is given in the previous sonnet, where John's recent readings were catalogued, including "Hardy." As continued in line 8, "He fidgets: Janet hasn't come," a mirror to the Hardy poem. The punctuation assists, lending the *caesura* in this strictly iambic tetrameter line its sense of fussy and hated delay.

We get a larger view of the room with the *volta* at line 9 and two sentences that swing us through and around the restaurant, from the insipid 'Muzak' to the 'plastic chairs' and 'grubby floor.' Here, America's love-affair with re-processed recorded background music is noted by its arguably annoying presence, and is combined with the traditional Christmas carol title, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," in an amusing clash of style and culture.<sup>77</sup> Those who

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<sup>75</sup> The *Shu Jing* is "the oldest complete work among what are known as the five Confucian classics." The *Shu Jing* included instructions to a would-be king on the "workings of the 'Mandate of Heaven.'" The Mandate of Heaven was used as a social and political explanation for the success and failure of leaders and nations across the centuries. The reason a dynasty or person would fail was, inevitably, because they "had lost the moral right to rule which is given by Heaven alone," not by a single God but by "a cosmic all-pervading power." In this way, virtuous behavior was encouraged and immoral and unethical behavior damned. Andrea, Alfred J., and James H. Overfield. *The Human Record: Sources of Global History*. Translated by James Legge. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994, Intro.

<sup>76</sup> Hardy's poem begins, "You did not come,/ And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb." It continues by, first, questioning the dedication of the absent friend, ending the first stanza, "Grieved I, when, as the hope-hour stroked its sum,/ You did not come." In the second stanza, the speaker wonders whether the lady he waits for loves him, agreeing that that was less important than that, "Once you, a woman, came/ To soothe a time-torn man . . ." "A Broken Appointment," Thomas Hardy. Abrams, M.H., ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Edited by M.H. Abrams. 3 ed. Vol. 2. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974, 1719. Relatedly, John's reading of Hardy's *Life's Little Ironies*, mentioned in Sonnet 1.19, refers to a book of short stories whose focus was on the loss of higher values in daily life, the failure of marriage as an institution, and the negative effects of ambition on family and community values.

<sup>77</sup> The carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," is a good choice for Seth's use here. It begins, "O little town of Bethlehem,/ How still we see thee lie!/ Above thy deep and dreamless sleep/ The silent stars go by." The second verse finds the angels keeping "their watch of wondering love" while "mortals sleep." It

are "Deaf to the pap . . . sounding /" with its line end incomplete and full of substitutions, will be named later, we imagine, as we are caught in the reversed rhythm leading to the carol's title, a soft, lilting and regularly-moderated line 10, certainly intended to calm. The sentence continues to line 11 with the suggestion that the music is played not 'for' the patrons, but 'at' them, and, as well, "anachronistically," that is, out of its proper context. Line 12 returns us to the objective, "The patrons dine with zest." Seth adds, "Rebounding," to this line, however, opening up a new sentence whose idea and modifier we cannot guess. The patrons would be the closest referent, with line 13 enjambed to "Off plastic chairs and grubby floor." The subject-object 'twist and hide' is enhanced by his punctuation choice, not adding a comma after "floor." This forces the reader forward to line 14, with its own complete, but disconnected image, "The notes merge with the squeaking door." Readers who trace back over at least part of Sonnet 1.20 discover that the diners are eating with gusto, that the supposedly calming Muzak is bouncing off all the surfaces in the locale and mixing with the entry door's squeak, that no one seems to notice, and that the storyteller finds these observations chaotically and ironically and, of course, culturally, mixed.

The Shu Jing, it turns out, is a place with its share of irony and allusion, humor and culture. Meanwhile, we wait, with John, for Jan. In this way, Seth contexts, from the first opportunity, the theme of Jan's own lateness, only one aspect of many configurations of the *carpe diem* motif found in the work. Jan's lateness reflects upon her on several occasions, raising inquiry about Jan's own relational commitment to friends and social intercourse, and is used to greatest effect when her friends wonder about her last lateness, caused by her impending death, in Part 12.

To open Sonnet 1.21, we have the pleasure of a mixed-mirror of the prior sonnet's scenic description, now from John's viewpoint, enriching the experience with his multifaceted perspective, and a mid-sonnet entrance by Jan. John's observations link the sonnet topically to the previous one and, as well, cause us to chuckle at his consternation:

John thinks, "It's not that I'm fastidious. . . .  
 I wish they'd turn that music down. . . .  
 It's gross. That calendar is hideous . . .  
 (He stares at the distasteful clown.)  
 . . . I've waited half an hour, blast her!"  
 Her hands encased in clay and plaster,  
 Janet arrives at twelve to two:  
 "So sorry, John, I had to do  
 This torso. Yes, I tried to hurry.  
 I'm glad you've got yourself a beer.  
 What's that? Tsingtao? Don't look severe.  
 I didn't mean for you to worry.

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was written by Phillips Brooks in 1868 and put to music by Lewis H. Redner in 1874. Preuss, Theo., ed. *Christmas in Song*. Edited by Theo. Preuss. Chicago: Rubank, Inc., 1957, 6.

You've ordered? No? This place is fun!  
What'll you have? It's family-run." (1.21)

Line 1's fastidious John makes an effort to tolerate a bit of extra dirt. His line 2 description of the Muzak as 'music' he wishes they would turn down gives it more credibility than the storyteller's own description afforded in 1.20, giving a referential chuckle, and the added aspect of a 'hideous calendar' suggests, in a cute twist, a standard Chinese calendar.<sup>78</sup> The use of ellipse punctuation enhances John's down-time, and the use of the parentheses enhances his lack of self-embarrassment at *not* liking the clown, creating a conceptual fancy. Line 5, which begins with further ellipse punctuation, pushes the delay, while the contraction, "I've," draws us forward more quickly through the line, with its *caesura*, imperative form and punctuated "blast her!" With these words, Jan appears. The structural irony, and volta, is enhanced to fun effect, and the tension caused by her tardiness thus becomes the prime subject for a resolution we await.

Janet's "hands encased in clay and plaster" is an allusive stroke of romantic and structural irony: Jan's hands were 'tied' by her sculpture project as she seeks the 'moral authority' to succeed at her art in the broader society. Contexting her appearance thus, Seth is interested in permitting the delay and creating a sense of forgiveness. This is enhanced at line 8-9: ("I had to do [ie: what?] / This torso. Yes, I tried to hurry." Jan's artistic muse's inattention to timeframes appears the price of being an artist, one of hundreds of time-shifting references that enhance the work. Metrically, Janet waltzes in, line 7: "Janet arrives [space] at twelve [we leave a space] to two," a complex substitution and melodic line with a waltz rhythm that is effortlessly accommodated, and which also works to isolate and focus attention on her appearance.

Janet's character is still being scripted. Once again, apologies come first, although her reasons inform of her determination to settle certain artistic and creative impulses, a prioritized and recurring motif throughout the work. In the next couplet, we 'see' the scene through Jan's words, the shifting viewpoint holding our attention and interest: "I'm glad you've got yourself a beer. / What's that? Tsingtao? Don't look severe." Seth uses both assonance and ironic twist here, rhyming 'a beer' and 'severe,' the first, an acclamation of acceptance, the second, a warning to hold his temper, which rings at the allegorical level as a lesson in good behavior. The closing couplet is its own small tour-de-force, with its double

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<sup>78</sup> The year, 1980, for example, was a 'Year of the Monkey' per the Chinese calendar, which shifts to a different animal in rotation every 12 years, and would include large poster paintings of the animal, with lucky coins and symbols for happiness and long life. It is comical to consider John, an American, finding a (possibly) Chinese calendar 'hideous,' as most Chinese consider it a special gift and possession. Artistically, it is considered 'poster art,' which has its own proud history in modern Chinese art.

*caesura* in line 13 providing information through questions shared, as well as utilizing the line 14 waitress Americanism, "What'll you have?," a trochaic substitution, followed by "It's family-run," a caesural inversion, both inviting, excusing, contexting and informing with its combination of friendly cheer, wit and talent.

Sonnet 1.22 finds them ordering and getting their food quickly, with the linkage resolutions for both tardiness and trumpy place ensconced in an ocean metaphor, a place they will visit later in the book, together, in their own reawakened intimate relationship, lines 4-9:

Enticing scents  
Swim over the noise, the greasy table.  
Two bottles each of beer enable  
Small talk and large, in cyclic waves,  
To wash their shores, and John behaves  
At last less stiffly if not sadly.

Following small talk, the sonnet ends with Jan's confrontational couplet,

But I came here to hear your song.  
Now sing!" "Jan, I don't know what's wrong. (1.22)

The metric regularity of Jan's enquiry in line 13 hardens the growing emphasis of her words, while, broken to line 14 and followed by, "Now sing!" with its spondee stresses, meets with our sense of verisimilitude. With its *caesura*, full stop and exclaiming punctuation, Jan's forthrightness puts the contrast on John's monotone response. With John's reference to Jan by name, we have a spondee substitution scheme at the second metric foot that permits the sad reply to fizzle naturally and rhythmically to an end.

John shares his trouble in Sonnet 1.23 in an unusually clear glimpse of himself: he knows he is lucky to be "young, employed, healthy, ambitious," (line 1), as well as the consonant solidity of 'Sound, solvent, self-made,' and 'self-possessed,' (line 2), but calls his 'symptoms' - in other words, of some illness – 'pernicious.' Seth's choice of this word is perfect as it means not only 'capable of causing great harm,' but derives from the archaic word for evil, a choice made more delicious by being both 'full rhyme' with 'ambitious' and alliterative with 'self-possessed' as well as with the other 's' and 'p' words we find in his list. John continues, using an extended set of clever metaphors to explain his predicament, lines 4-13, with Jan's reply begun as a clever mini-summation at line 14:

...  
The Dow-Jones of my heart's depressed.  
The sunflower of my youth is wilting.  
The tower of my dreams is tilting.  
The zoom lens of my zest is blurred.  
The drama of my life's absurd.  
What is the root of my neurosis?  
I jog, eat brewer's yeast each day,  
And yet I feel life slip away.  
I die! I faint! I fail! I sink!"  
"You need a lover, John, I think." (1.23)

John's confessions are self-mocking and have a deflating effect; they elicit a general bathos, caught between cynical self-reflection and mawkish sentimentality. His topical reference to the stock market's health, the flower of his youth, his tower of dreams, and his camera lens provide a set of understandings that we can appreciate, both as literary metaphors and as modern commercial reference points. We sympathize not only with John's misanthropy but, as well, note the personal limitations of his ability to describe it. John's lament, of ennui, is enhanced by literary allusions to Blake and Shelley. Blake's 'Sunflower' is "weary of time," found as a "Youth pined away with desire," and urged to follow where "my Sunflower wishes to go!" As well, Blake writes, "The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,/ My face turns green and pale."<sup>79</sup> These allusions illustrate Seth's use of figurative motifs to elucidate John's condition. He continues, in line 13, with allusions to Percy Bysshe Shelley's poems, *The Indian Girl's Song*, with "I die! I faint! I fail!," and *Epipsychidion*, with "I sink," which express a man's deep desperation and longing for sexual and romantic union with the women referenced and addressed in the poems.<sup>80</sup> Granted, John is being self-ironic, but the undertone is serious. Thus, Jan's response confirms our own suspicions: he 'needs a lover,' 'we think,' with a wink to the friend's modern, low-key and colloquial reply.

With this liberatingly modern diagnosis, Jan begins a thoroughgoing analysis of the possibilities for John to meet a mate, passing off any renewed romantic interest she might feel, while, being a drummer, sharing a drum-roll on the table, and using John's own metaphors, in Sonnet 1.24, to link and build upon our understanding of the required resolution, suggesting, among other things, line 5, "Trade in that zoom for a wide angle." Here, we have a simple parallel-use, but one which is more fun for its acute correctness to the purchasing patterns of young professional of the era.<sup>81</sup> Jan's advice is therefore both

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<sup>79</sup> The tension in Blake's poem can be said to concern whether the speaker simply yearns for romantic love or, instead or also, seeks to reach up to acknowledged spiritual heights. "Ah! Sunflower" and "Nurse's Song". Blake, William. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Edited by Richard Willmott. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 35 & 76.

<sup>80</sup> In Shelley's *The Indian Girl's Song*, a man calls for a woman he has seen when he awakes from dreaming, and closes, "O lift me from the grass! I die, I faint, I fail! Let thy love in kisses rain/ On my lips and eyelids pale./ My cheek is cold and white, alas! My heart beats loud and fast./ Oh press it close to thine again/ Where it will break at last." This passage mirrors John's later psychological state in *The Golden Gate*, after his renewed romantic relationship with Janet ends with her death, and feels like a secret mirror into the end of the book, hidden in this early meeting between them. Abrams, *Norton Anthology, Vol. 2*, 539-540. The *Epipsychidion* reference, "I fail," comes from an equally romantic poem by Shelley, addressed to 'Emily,' and carries forward a series of bird, water and mariner metaphors, concluding, "The winged words on which my soul would pierce/ Into the height of love's rare Universe./ Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.--/ I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!" Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Epipsychidion: 1821; Together with Shelley's Manuscript Draft* Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1970, 30.

<sup>81</sup> In fact, well-educated, cash-happy young professionals with an interest in developing their photography hobby were out purchasing wide-angle lenses in the early 1980s because the technology had only

metaphorical and acutely 'fashion-current.'

The closing couplet of Sonnet 1.24 sets up the *tempus fugit* motif, as Jan warns John about delaying action, thus:

" . . . Don't put things off till it's too late.  
You are the DJ of your fate." (1.24)

We rush past 'till,' with its pulling-away spelled sense of taking care of one's land, to Jan's line 14 metaphor analogizing John's needs to those of a disc jockey who presents popular music for an audience: John needs to engage himself in creating his own musical 'fate.'

Sonnet 1.25 repeats the motif, which follows Jan closely throughout the work. In it, Jan creates a dreaded portrait of the aging John, alone and unloved, with its initial dactyl substitution in line 1, lines 2 and 3 alliteration and wordplay, line 4 *caesura*, effective ellipses, initial rhythmic substitution, and John's increasingly-nervous short retorts:

Think of yourself a few years later,  
Possessing, as the years go on,  
Less prepossessing vital data:  
Love handles . . . ("Thanks a lot," says John.)  
. . . Receding . . . (John is getting nervous:

Jan's own sense of self-irony is evident at lines 10 and 11, while Seth relieves tension with a viewpoint shift:

Too much to drink last night . . . (And here  
Jan pauses for a sip of beer)

When we reach the colorful ending couplet, we find a metric substitution scheme of double dactyls, a slippery-slope to Jan's inescapable albeit rhetorical question. We have to agree:

Blubbering into your raisin bran.  
Why not do something while you can?" (1.25)

Jan and John's conversation continues, devoted to exploring his options, when the suggestion of a personal ad is made. The development of the personal newspaper ad as a means to find a lover or partner was exploding at this time, as baby boomers moved into adulthood, bringing with them expanded social and sexual norms, as well as emotional dislocation, multiple careers, and a changing family makeup. Let us look at the linkage set up by spanning Sonnet 1.31's bridge to Sonnet 1.32:

I've got it, John! The perfect answer!  
I should have thought of it. My friend—  
Your sufferings are at an end."  
"That sounds as terminal as cancer.  
Let's hear it." With a tame surmise  
He listens. Jan says: "Advertise." (1.31)

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recently become affordable for mass-producing size-to-weight ratios at prices attractive to the amateur shutter-bug.

"What? Advertise? You must be joking!"  
 "I'm serious." "Jan, you're nuts." "I'm not." (1.32)

Here, we have the building of tension, with Janet's split line 9 volta and hyperbeat ending, as well as the anadiplosis sense of the repeated word, "advertise." The allusion to the American western snake-oil salesman's line, 'your sufferings are at an end,' reinforces John's need to get moving on this project in a comical and twisting way. We see the developing conceptual divide between the two friends on the topic of personal advertising in an artful way, with Seth suggesting Jan just thought of it, while working with the interior, funny rhyming set, 'answer' and 'cancer.' Additionally, we have Jan's precise suggestion repeated across the sonnet divide, after following the upbeat, exclamatory and imperative substitution rhythm of line 14. John's response in line 1 of the following sonnet is made more surprising by its short, bursting nature, three stops in one line. The words used have a sense of jarring consonance, the line ending with the equally exclamatory substitution trochee, 'joking.'<sup>82</sup>

Seth explores the polyphony of personal ad word usage to both high and low comic effect following Jan's suggestion, in rhymed meter at Sonnets 1.32 and 1.34. Ad texts are playfully discussed as their own arguments for and against their use – ie. both internally and externally. The return to seriousness occurs in the ad text Jan secretly writes and lists on John's behalf at Sonnet 2.3, which links earlier controversy and comedy to later intention and action.

We shall move away from this conversation to other examples between other characters, but not before watching Seth close the curtain on this one. Let us look at Sonnets 1.35 and 1.36, as well as the first lines of 1.37.

From John's teasing 'pers-ad' text on "hooking chicks," we move to Jan's response:

Janet picks up her fortune cookie,  
 Then puts it down, turns to her friend:  
 "Don't bank too much on youth. Your rookie  
 Season is drawing to an end.  
 John, things we would – when young – not think of,  
 Start to make sense when, on the brink of  
 Thirtydom, we pause to scan  
 What salves and salads cannot ban,  
 The earliest furrows on our faces,  
 The loneliness within our souls,  
 Our febrile clawing for mean goals,  
 Our programmed cockfights and rat races,  
 Our dreary dignity, false pride,  
 And hearts stored in formaldehyde. (1.35)

Time sidles by: on television  
 The soaps dissolve, the jingles change.  
 Defeat or pity or derision  
 Constricts our hearts. Our looks grow strange  
 Even to us. The grail, perfection,  
 Dims, and we come to view rejection  
 As an endurable result  
 Of hope and trial, and exult  
 When search or risk or effort chances  
 To grant us someone who will do  
 For love, and who may love us too--  
 While those who wait, as age advances,  
 Aloof for Ms. or Mr. Right  
 Weep to themselves in the still night. (1.36)

<sup>82</sup> From an anthropological perspective, while 'pers-ad' pairings have now become common, the practice was, at this time, controversial. Many found both friends and lovers through such cryptic ads, which reinforced their popularity as well as the chances of finding 'the right' person for a commitment.



It's sad to see you look so lonely,  
That's all, John." John does not confute  
Jan's passionate words. He thinks, "If only  
Things were that simple." Moved and mute,  
...

(1.37)

Let us look at the form and strength Seth creates in this scene. Sonnet 1.35 opens with a fortune cookie, a clever metaphorical trope and vehicle for pursuing possible futures. Jan shows her intensity and truth-telling behavior: John's first sporting season is over, and he should act. Her reference to 'salves and salads' is cross-topic, artistic, culturally referent, and subtle. Salves won't forestall aging or cure loneliness, nor will a diet of healthy salads. Jan shifts to include herself in the reflective tonal change at line 10's volta, 'the loneliness within ourselves.' The sadness and moral bankruptcy of feverish 'clawing for mean goals' is one of the moral motifs visited by Seth, with most of the characters in this work examining their work lives. Jan's reference to 'programmed cockfights' reinforces the notion that we stage our battles via computer, or live programmed lives, while the modern emptiness of the 'rat race,' with its trimmed-down work and personal lifestyles, is seen as reinforcing 'dreary dignity,' 'false pride' and dead 'hearts.' The contextual quality of striving for essential meaning in life is quietly established through a series of phrasal confessions and turns, moving from the prospect of an aging John to a shared and genuine lament.

One thing of interest in Sonnet 1.36, is its ability to stand alone, both as a sonnet and as a philosophical statement. Neither Jan's nor John's names appear in this sonnet, so the reader can be drawn into greater intimacy with the author. Seth steps forward without interrupting the flow, developing an elegiac tonality, less conversational, with a philosophical presentation. This sonnet has the multi-dimensional and multi-referent quality of 'high' voiced lyrical poetry, and is internally closed while being externally linked to the characters' conversation.

The time motif opens Sonnet 1.36 directly, and the first full line provides us with a single idea, as well as a contrast. By ignoring its mid-line pause punctuation, we see that, 'Time sidles by on television,' an oblique twist at the effect of foreshortened dramatic activity on television, as well as suggesting to us that persons who watch television waste their time while their lives pass them by, thematic play carefully contexted to permit the reader to tease out multiple interpretations. The figurative language continues in line 2: soap does dissolve, while soap operas seem to stage never-ending stories, dissolving into other similar stories; and advertising 'jingles change' – to other advertising jingles we watch, make, produce, and pay cultural homage to. Seth's second sentence-thought draws on the *tempus fugit* un-lived-life motif, as well as highlighting the twisted perceptual 'set' that television encourages. Line

3's ending, 'Our looks grow strange,' suggests a complete thought: to wit, yes, we age physically and change. This is enhanced by its enjambment to line 4, "Even to us." Seth's presentation reinforces the notion that we don't know ourselves well at a more basic level, John's own lack of self-awareness being part of his problem, only reinforcing the desire to struggle to find relational satisfaction and intimacy, another of the work's overarching motifs.

Seth suggests we are looking for 'the grail, perfection' using the simile for the Holy Grail of medieval galantry, later the communion cup of Christ.<sup>83</sup> Instead, do we find ourselves accepting 'endurable results' in our intimate relations with others, a suggestion that we've done neither the self-realization nor the moral homework to go to deeper levels of connection with others? The suggestion that the resulting experience is mixed in our satisfaction is pushed over the line 10 ending, resulting in our concluding that we've found 'someone who will do/ For love,' a split line thought full of structural irony that reminds us that when we settle for what we find fault with, we are ashamed to call it love, hesitate, and then do so anyway. Seth's dramatic ending, in Jan's words, that 'those who wait' and are 'aloof' as time passes, 'Weep to themselves in the still night' is rhythmic and lyrical, while extending the lonely one's fraudulent self-assurance with the damnation of their secret detachment.

With Sonnet 1.37, we are, again, back in conversational mode, where Jan's final words on the matter seem rather ordinary, are even put forth by her as if they are simply another way of saying what she has just said at 1.36, another clever contextualization that shifts us from the estrangement effect of 1.36 to the verisimilitude of visiting friends. Jan finds it sad to see him so lonely, ending with "That's all, John," and the 'That's all, John' works on a second level to bring to a close Jan's persuasive and philosophical thoughts on the matter, serving two purposes.

As can be seen, Seth's work with characters in conversation includes a rich interweaving of multiple techniques, which have multiple narrative and philosophical purposes. Let us move on to examine the technical ways in which he handles a variety of party scenes.

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<sup>83</sup> The Holy Grail was the goal of the knights of chivalry, first noted in the romances of the late 12th century, appearing in 1190 A.D. Within 20 years, the concept was found in popular stories with a variety of thematic motifs including romantic and religious notions of courtly love, enthusiasm for chivalry, interest in sport and tournament, and the spiritual teachings of the Cistercian order. Eventually, its debate became focused on creating a presence for Christ in the church's mass services. Barber, Richard. *Legends of King Arthur*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, U.K.: The Boydell Press, Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2001, 2-3.

## Party Contexts

Seth selects a variety of difficult scenes to craft in *The Golden Gate*, including several party scenes. Each of the party scenes has its own personality, and Seth works to create a sense of verisimilitude in each. The first party is a cocktail party given by Liz and John. The second is a repeating 'potluck' breakfast party hosted by Phil, with neighbors and friends in attendance. A third party is a Thanksgiving dinner, a family party held by the Dorati parents at their vineyard estate. The fourth party, also held in the vineyards area, is the wedding reception of Liz and Phil; and the fifth party is the party at Jan's apartment, at which John ends up playing host. In these, we see, again, how meaning and direction are created by Seth, with narrative action pushed forward, while stylistic devices are used to inform us of the relationships and concerns of the characters. Let us look at the entire sequence of the cocktail party, as well as view portions of the wedding party and the final party.

### Party Contexts: Cocktail Party Culture

In each party scene, Seth introduces both key and peripheral characters, each with his or her own agenda, context, and viewpoint. Their viewpoints enhance the reader's structuring of the scene, and provide understanding, both comic and tragic. In the first party, hosted by Liz and John, the drinks and music continue late into the evening, carrying the characters forward, beyond their inhibitions, towards a type of philosophical crescendo, an argument between tipsy friends, and an unexpected pairing. Seth works technically in these sonnets to mimic the misgivings and surprises found at such parties, and the strong and weak points in human nature.

Perspective shifts are one key to understanding Seth's delivery technique. Here, we have narrative pushed forward by the concerns of characters, in (1) the characters' words and thoughts, (2) the author's storytelling delivery, (3) the author's report of the author-as-character, and (4) the author's asides to the reader about the characters and scenes. Add to this the number of characters' viewpoints shared, and the fluctuation results in a narrative that shifts our attention often and at multiple levels, enhancing the 'party' effect. The mix of viewpoints becomes magnetic, combining both literary and cultural allusions with the overheating party scene on personal, social, and philosophical levels.

We begin with Sonnet 4.1. Liz, the attorney and career gal, hosts the 'housewarming' party with her new beau, John.<sup>84</sup> The section begins with Liz's mother leaving, outside,

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<sup>84</sup> The party is only referred to as a 'housewarming' once, by John when he invites Phil to attend, at Sonnet 3.33, line 4. The party, which is at Liz's place, is hosted by both John and Liz, but is not, technically, a 'housewarming party,' as that is a specific type of party hosted by persons in their new home. Therefore, it is a play on words, a pun, designed to play with the concept that having a party in the place will 'warm'

where we are shown the personal conflict Liz faces, the distinction between maintaining correct familial appearances in society and having a genuine desire for a family and children. After indicating she likes John, her mother's words at Sonnet 4.1, lines 3-8, are:

We hope that soon. . . ." Without completing  
Her exhortation to enjoy  
A copula more sacramental  
(Resulting in the incidental  
Production of grandchildren—three  
Seems best—to dandle on her knee),  
Mrs. Dorati hugs her daughter  
And drives off with rheumatic care. (4.1)

The oblique reference to intercourse, line 5, combined with the same-line reference to the traditional religious perspective of sacred union, is comical, but for the hard edges of the parenthetical but clear message. The sonnet ends thus,

Liz stands and breathes the sharp night air,  
While from the house keen squeals of slaughter  
And wrath attest that Liquid Sheep  
Have just commenced to rant and weep. (4.1)

As soon as her mother has left, we have the *volta*, in line 10, where Liz "stands and breathes the sharp night-air." Liz's visit with her mother's expectations is lightened by the sound of the band, Liquid Sheep, with Jan on drums, which commences to "keen squeals of slaughter," an eye-rhyme, replacing 'laughter,' made funnier as the author's comment on the nature of the music they play, linking in a general sense, to sharpness- as to a knife, in the sharp air that Liz breathes, the sharpness of her mother's unspoken request to 'marry and have children now.' 'Slaughter' is paired with another reaction, "wrath," an unexpected pairing, unless one is looking for assonance, or suggesting any or all of the following: the wrath of God, the 'dark side' of the party attendees' musical preferences, or Liz's repressed anger at her mother's words.

Sonnet 4.1 ends with a linkage from the squeals of the audience to the band's music, which is to "rant and weep." Seth uses sarcasm and low comedy in a clever mix to shift perspective from the confusion of deciding to remain childless, while suggesting that a modern rock band would sound as if it were both complaining and crying. Sonnet 4.2, line 1, begins with Liz's thought, "So much for the Vivaldi," linking it to the previous sonnet, while

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the 'house' - presumably with social activity and conversation. The reader wonders, since the reader does not know it is a pun at Sonnet 3.33, and the pun is never un-ravelled for the reader later in the text. Thus, when the reader 'gets to the party' at Sonnet 4.2, he/she is looking for the 'newly-acquired home' aspects, but finds, instead, everything else at the party. This reinforces the atemporal sense of going to a party without knowing what will happen, having certain expectations or understandings, and discovering, instead, other experiences. This pun therefore reinforces the aspect of verisimilitude present in the readers's perceptual experience of this party, an unknowable entity before it is experienced.

shifting her – and the reader's – attention.<sup>85</sup> So much, too, for her mother, for now, as Liz 'turns her back' on the prior sonnet scene.

The scene shift brings us indoors, to the party proper. Sonnet 4.2, with its professor clamoring for Liz's attention, reads, lines 3-14:

Liz turns back. "Ah, the hostess!" Drinking  
His seventh glass of gin and lime,  
Professor Pratt, fine-tuned historian  
(Renowned creator of *Victorian  
Architecture in Pittsburgh; How  
Pittsburgh Was Lost and Won*; and now,  
With plump grants from the Frosch Foundation  
—No less voluminous as he  
Hops up the academic tree—  
*Pittsburgh—The Savior of the Nation*),  
Roars in her ear as she goes by  
And holds her with his bulbous eye. (4.2)

Liz's posture, turning but implicitly not 'to' the professor, makes his call to her understandable but also potentially unwelcome, while his subject of special study seems selected by Seth to emphasize as much the anachronistic unimportance of some academic publishing as the ways in which academics build upon their earlier research and their reputations. Seth's contexting this as an aside to the reader invites the reader into the party. The titles selected for Pratt's works are cheerfully sarcastic, an example of stable irony developed creatively with contextual wordplay and an extended metaphor. Pratt receives 'plump' grants from the 'Frosch' Foundation,<sup>86</sup> while frogs are plump; he hops up the academic tree, while frogs hop and cling to trees; and while frogs do not 'roar,' this internal mis-match with the extended metaphor intentionally deflates the metaphor, and links his hollering at line 3 to his impaired condition, on his seventh drink, in a comical way, as well as to its incongruity with a frog's nature. Pratt's 'holding her with his bulbous eye,' utilizes the common expression for holding one's attention, and mixes it with the frog's eye image, 'eye' being a *rime riche*, identical rhyme, with 'I.' Thus, the professor 'holds' her with his 'ego.' Beyond the authorial tomfoolery, Pratt's effort to stop Liz for conversation raises our interest in whether she will grant him his demanded audience. Despite the fact that they don't

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<sup>85</sup> 'Vivaldi' could be an anagram, enclosing the Italian, 'viva,' used as 'let live.' It could also be a reference to music she personally enjoys listening to usually, ie: not Liquid Sheep.

<sup>86</sup> The name of the foundation, the Frosch Foundation, besides being a wordplay, may be an allusion used to comment on an actual foundation funding academic research efforts at Stanford University at the time; and/or a reference to a person, such as Robert Frosch, an economist, now considered the 'father of industrial ecology,' whose big splash occurred in the 1980s. Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. "Robert Frosch, "Father of Industrial Ecology," Receives Prestigious Society Prize from International Society for Industrial Ecology.", 2005 Jun 19.

chat long, we're relieved when Liz replies with the musical and harmonious line 1 of the following sonnet, "Professor Pratt, how good to meet you . . . ."

Each of the sonnets in this party sequence evidences multiple levels for reading. I shall point out a few additional examples. Liz is called from her conversation with the professor to John, who has discovered her cat has pissed on his tuxedo leg at Sonnet 4.3, lines 10-14, and line 1 of Sonnet 4.4. Line 10's mid-line split helps shift the scene more quickly, as Liz deftly greets a new party predicament by the line's end:

Excuse me. . . ." Liz goes over. "Hi!"  
Something wrong, dear?" "Yes! Just as I  
Was hoping things had gotten stable,  
As if to prove that all is flux,  
Your squalid cat pissed on my tux." (4.3)

"Poor Charlemagne. He's agitated. (4.4)

Line 11 begins with a trochee substitution, which has a comical effect, with its mid-line question, and John's only-begun reply, his 'I' cut off. By line 12, we are revisiting his already quiet fear that the cat is causing relationship trouble with Liz. His statement, 'all is flux,' is an allusion to the philosophy of Heraclitus, whose theory of the universe suggested that change was natural, and that mankind failed to recognize the universal principles of relatedness to nature and constant change.<sup>87</sup> John wants change to stop, forever in love with Liz, yet has now called her cat 'squalid.' Liz's maternal instincts kick in with her amusing reply which first empathizes with and then excuses the cat, not John.

Sonnet 4.4 continues with playful references concerning John and Liz's cat. We hear him think how much he hates it, line 12, "I hate the beast, and I can't fake it . . . .," a modern self-confession with an allusional quality.<sup>88</sup> John's thoughts are paired with the cat's howling 'doom' while the band's next musical number, at Sonnet 4.5, is 'new,' entitled 'Love Dispriz'd,' in which the band goes 'corybantic,' a Scrabble-lovers dream word meaning frantic. The band continues in 'spasms of uncontrollable orgasms' to Jan's drumming, making playful oblique thematic fun of the unspoken pleasures of orgasmic sex. Line 12's 'But there can be no second coming' echoes upon the unresolved John-cat spat from Sonnet 4.4, while leading to line 13's 'For Liquid Sheep,' the band having taken a break, dropping the tone, and

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<sup>87</sup> The reference is translated as, 'all is flux,' and is attributed to Heraclitus in Plato's writings. Plato's *Cratylus*, *Lives of the Philosophers*, Book IX, Section 8. Encyclopædia, Britannica. "Heraclitus," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ed. Editorial Board. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 2001.

<sup>88</sup> In *Flowers for Algernon*, Charlie, a retarded boy, has a brain operation, becomes a genius and experiences many aspects of life on his quick rise in intelligence. He finds himself confused when confronted with a sexual relationship and its possibility for continued intimacy. To the woman, he says, "Let's just say I'm not ready yet. And I can't fake it or cheat or pretend it's all right when it's not." Keyes, Daniel. *Flowers for Algernon*. New York: Bantam Books, 1975. This was a very popular book, film and play.

dissolving the tension with a comical twist to an ordinary band pause.

Seth is having allegorical fun - at John's expense. Yes, love is disdained and undervalued by John, as well as being scorned by the cat and the cat's namesake, Charlemagne.<sup>89</sup> The sex may be good, but the relationship may disappear, and he may not get a second chance. Seth's structural 'twist and hide' is classical while being modern in nature, and is a clever foreshadowing of Liz's loss of affection for John and his own struggle for emotional stability when combined with love and intimacy.

We move on to an example of Seth's use of surprise, to elucidate Phil's character, followed quickly by shifting viewpoints, maintaining the party pace. John and Phil are old friends, and John is trying to find someone for Phil at the party since Phil has fallen into separation solitude. John drops Phil off with Rose, an English diplomat's daughter who gets high on cocaine, is blowing her nose, and disgusts Phil, in Sonnet 4.6, "wilting from chic gibberish / Into a bruised Americish. . . ."<sup>90</sup> Phil's response tells us something about both his internal emotional strength and his potential for bravura, at Sonnet 4.7, lines 1-5:

Phil frowns, and sets down his manhattan.  
He dips one arm of his thick specs  
—Daubing its tortoiseshell ground pattern  
With bold green guacamole flecks—  
Into a nearby bowl, and licks it,

The first quatrain compresses Phil's strong and decided personal temperament. The implication is planted that he will take risks. The trochee substitutions in lines 3 and 5 assist that sense of directed action, while the sonnet winds down, psychologically, with desperation to be rid of her company, and to welcome solitude, lines 8-11:

He thinks, "If this won't do the trick,  
I'm stuck." But Rose by now is fleeing  
And Phil's left blessedly alone,  
Content in an inviolate zone." (4.7)

Scansion informs us that Seth has used the line 8 break to add to the natural emphasis in the common expression, 'do the trick,' before the feared line 9 conclusion, "I'm stuck," a problem raising anticipation and hope of resolution. Thus, Line 10's calming effect, utilizing the three-syllable, 'blessedly,' seems even more of a blessing, its perception by Phil saved for line 11, contentment, and a recognition of his 'inviolable zone,' a choice suggesting his strength of self-awareness and inner calm. Lines 12 through 14 find Phil 'chuckling,' however, just in

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<sup>89</sup> Charlemagne, or Charles the Great, became king of the Franks in 768 A.D. and reigned until his death. He expanded the Frank empire to include much of central and western Europe by force of war, and his ability to govern relied primarily upon force - to maintain control over a progressively more culturally diverse population. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The selection of this name for Liz's cat, who considers John an intruder in Liz's home and takes progressively desperate measures to remove outsiders from her life, is an example of Seth's use of high-tone comic allusion.

<sup>90</sup> The name of this character, Rose, is an ironic allusion to the common expression for a lovely young lady, 'an English rose,' a picture of blushing innocence, as demure as she is sweet.

time to be plucked up by Liz, assumedly against his will, who 'steers' him to another potential mate, her sister, Sue, and Jan, a friend of his former wife.

In this last scene, we experience ten character/author shifts within two sonnets.<sup>91</sup> These shifts enhance the verisimilitude of the party, since we recognize the shifting focal point as part of a party's dynamic combination of public and private moments, both observing others and being observed.

The resolution of character-driven ambiguities helps to unite the narrative action while maintaining reader interest in the party and prospects for later story development. For example, we find Professor Pratt revisited already, in Sonnet 4.12, talking to Liz, "His fugitive," explaining the basis for his conclusion that a historical moment in the politics of Pittsburgh's development 'saved the nation,' teasing real meaning out of his earlier, seemingly-silly suggestion, and thus deflating Seth's earlier satire. Meanwhile, we see Seth playing with the motif of 'saving the nation' that is visited first in earnest with Phil's discussion of the real dangers of nuclear arms development, towards the party's conclusion, at Sonnet 4.19.

Another example of viewpoint variety occurs with the married couple, the Van Camp's, apparently the only married couple in attendance, who chat acrimoniously but with chilled courtesy, in Sonnet 4.12, one to the other, about whether the other has had too much to drink.

We also revisit Rose, in Sonnet 4.12, being leered at by Bjorn, a Swedish runner. Rose is now not as eager to meet just anyone as she seemed earlier with Phil, 'shuddering' and 'adjusting an earring.' This particular shift in viewpoint gives Seth the opportunity to establish the veracity for Bjorn later discovering John is hanging out at a singles bar, news that precipitates Jan's renewed outreach to her old friend through their shared grapevine, his girlfriend being a member of Jan's band.

Links such as these give the visited characters broader dimensionality and bring them into more specific relationship with each other while maintaining an amusing party temperament. This temperament is pushed up, in tempo and vivacity, by the rhetorical visit of the author in Sonnet 4.12, a seemingly innocuous yet effective inclusion:

While, bowed down with the gray futility  
Of his dank thesis, Kim Tarvesh  
Ogles convexities of flesh  
And maximizes his utility  
By drowning in his chilled Chablis  
His economics Ph.D. (4.12)

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<sup>91</sup> Since I note their total, these shifts in viewpoint include: from John to Phil, John and Phil to Rose, Rose to Phil, Phil to Rose, the author to the reader regarding Phil, Phil to himself, the author as storyteller to the reader, and Liz to Phil - en route to Jan and Sue.



Kim Tarvesh, an acronym for Vikram Seth, appears, weighted with a thesis project whose usefulness he sadly questions. Within this context, he 'ogles convexities'<sup>92</sup> in a comical reference to sexual attractiveness, and 'maximizes his utility' at the party by following the referenced law of economics, which encourages maximizing the usefulness of any product by developing it for a variety of practical purposes: thus, Seth makes maximum use of his capacities by 'drowning' – ie: his sorrows, a common phrase, in his white wine, while checking out the party-goers. The twist is that he is, structurally, drowning his academic degree in wine, a funny visual joke. The juicy irony is that he has painted himself as a wooden character, in contrast to the characters in the book, a rather dull, socially inept attendee, lending his characters, by comparison, a sense of greater verisimilitude, depth and vivacity. Between author and reader, it gives the reader a chance to chuckle at the author's humble and dissembling description of himself and his problem-ridden Ph.D. - while the poet operates on multiple levels for multiple effects.

Let us look at Seth's use of specific visual imagery at the party in a way that links it to an earlier reference, and also to themes he develops later in the work. The sunflower, a literary allusion used by John to describe his sad and lonely state, becomes a lietmotif for Phil finding the 'meaning of life,' and then shifts to become a symbol for consideration of the larger moral and ethical questions about the survival of life on earth. Phil, tipsy by this point in the party, studies the flower in this shifting solitary scene, Sonnet 4.14, lines 10-14, and Sonnet 4.15, lines 1-2:

A sunflower in a frame of chrome  
Reminds him of his childhood home,  
And in an access of swift feeling  
He sees, with vision like a knife,  
Into the very heart of life. (4.14)

He thinks of Paul. He thinks . . . John hails him  
Across the clouds of smoke-filled air, (4.15)

The sunflower, reminding Phil of his own childhood, brings memories that cut deeply, making it an emotional symbol for him. His vision, 'like a knife,' introduces a metaphor with strong effect, cutting 'into the very heart,' a searing image whose result may both pain him and bring him greater understanding. 'Knives' and 'hearts' focus and concentrate the moment's impact for the reader, while avoiding mention of Phil's own broken heart. In terms of scansion, we fly over the sonnet division and find that his son is that 'very heart of life.'

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<sup>92</sup> Literally, 'ogling convexities' is staring at convex surfaces - curves bulging outward. This oblique reference to the author's apparent viewing of the sexual endowments of those at a party reduces this common perceptual party activity to a secret joke, while utilizing both literary hyperbole and 'macaronics' to comic effect.

The tempo of Sonnet 4.14's ending is a rush toward a natural rhythmic confirmation with its regular iambs. The metaphor suggests a desire to find the deeper meaning of his own life, and the effect of the enjambment to the next sonnet is to startle us with his conclusion, 'Paul.' The assonance of Sonnet 4.14, with its 'swift-vision,' 'feeling-sees,' 'an-into,' and 'knife-life,' is met at Sonnet 4.15's mid-line 1 stop with 'Paul.' The unique place his son holds in his existence is enhanced by use of the sonnet sequence and alliteration, as there is no sound like 'Paul' anywhere near 'Paul.' In fact, no rhyme for Paul, or 'all,' its most obvious assonant, is found within any of the nearby sonnets. The consolation Phil takes from his thoughts of Paul are short-lived at the party, as Seth shifts viewpoint again.

The sunflower image is examined again at the party scene. In the discussion that follows, the sunflower appears in Phil's reply to John. John has asked Phil how he could quit his job in the defense industry, and Phil has indicated, "to save the world." Let us examine Seth's use of imagery and poetic technique in this scene, at Sonnets 4.19 - 4.20:

Speech strained and clarified by passion  
 —His S's remain S's still—  
 In unantagonistic fashion,  
 Eschewing escalation, Phil  
 Resumes: "John, take a look around us.  
 Imagine that the first bombs found us  
 Just as we are—as here we stand,  
 A glass of liquor in our hand.  
 There by the door is Van Gogh's painting  
 Of sunflowers. Here are all our friends.  
 And suddenly our small world ends,  
 And our vile dust is swept up, tainting  
 The hills, the vineyards, and the seas  
 With irremediable disease. (4.19)

So tell me, how much will it please us  
 That mankind with its crazy ways  
 —Bach, Rembrandt, Socrates, and Jesus—  
 Will burn to ash and swiveling haze?  
 Will it console us to be knowing  
 In the swift instant of our going  
 That Red Square, like our children's crèche,  
 Will soon be charred or ulcerous flesh?  
 And then, when the soft radiation  
 Descends on what's not been destroyed  
 —Trees, whales, birds, wolves—the birthless void—  
 Think how the crown of earth's creation  
 Will murder that which gave him birth,  
 Ripping out the slow womb of earth. (4.20)

We note the low and steady tonality of 4.19, lines 1-4, and the melodically consistent tenor, as Phil stands collecting his thoughts to speak. The enjambment, to the mid-line interruption at line 5, with its direct address of John in the imperative sentence, 'take a look around us,' awakens our interest while indicating Phil is a confident speaker; Phil will hold not only John's attention, but partiers and reader as well, in the quick shift from John's caring exasperation to Phil, while moving toward broader themes of concern to all. The 'imagine' reference continues the imperative, while also being sentimental and inviting: we agree to shift - to 'standing with a drink' in the present moment of the party, but then shift again to revisit Phil's past reflection on the sunflowers, now identified as Van Gogh's painting, a symbol of the heart of life, and now our present reality, as well as, obliquely, the beauty and importance of human-made art. This deepens the emotional tonal shift when Phil turns the scene into an imagined cataclysm at line 11, with 'world ends,' chilling in its present perfect tense.

Phil's justification for quitting his job begins with a grounded desire to prevent the destruction of life, suggested by the art of Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers,' while the construction of line 10 suggests the flowers are also symbols of their many friends, with its line-thought idea and *caesura*, 'Of sunflowers. Here are all our friends.' The beauty of the substitution rhythm in this line invites sentiment, while the tonality turns nearly sermon-like. Seth continues in a consistent motion and sentence format, from 'take a look around us' and the 'imagine' construct, to their unique San Francisco geography, inviting John to consider the horror of the contamination of their own hills, vineyards and seas. The reference to 'our vile dust' is a literary allusion involving patriotism, the man who is without feelings of love for his homeland being damned 'to the vile dust.'<sup>93</sup> This allusion makes it, also, a twist on the nationalism Phil derides as an invalid reason to engage in nuclear war, in Sonnet 4.20. The use of the figurative allusion is only squared thus: a love for one's country should, instead, cause one to wish to save it at all cost, rendering nuclear arms indefensible.

Seth continues Phil's building argument by consistent use of the strong rhetorical imperative in Sonnet 4.20, with 'So tell me,' 'Will it console us,' and 'Think how,' all used to extend our attention and concern in a methodical and readily-grasped manner. In the first quatrain, he includes a Juvenalian satire, referring to mankind's 'crazy ways' as including great composers, philosophers and Christ. This introduces a corrective argument against the human folly that continues the path of nuclear arms, as if we care less what should become of the arts and human culture. The second quatrain shifts the focus from the disappearance of art and culture to the disappearance of children's cribs, with 'creche' a word choice used almost exclusively in English for Christ's manger bed. A quick shift takes us to the disappearance of all forms of life on earth.

The imagined scene is rendered in language and pace that enunciate the sudden and unceasing horror of such a scenario, with its 'ash and swiveling haze,' a 'swift instant' resulting in 'charred or ulcerous flesh,' as well as naming the names of some of the animals affected by the wider catastrophe, an effect of personalizing their prospective disappearance. This sonnet, whose rhythmical strengths are consistent with its iambic nature, develops Phil's

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<sup>93</sup> Sir Walter Scott's poem, "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," is considered a "metrical romance verse," and was "modeled on medieval narrative forms." Abrams, M. H. "Sir Walter Scott," *Norton Anthology, Vol. 2*, 719-720. The 16-line verse, entitled *Patriotism*, is: "Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,/ Who never to himself hath said, / This is my own, my native land!/ Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,/ As home his footsteps he hath turned,/ From wandering on a foreign strand!/ If such there breathe, go, mark him well;/ For him no Minstrel raptures swell;/ High though his titles, proud his name,/ Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;/ Despite those titles, power, and pelf,/ The wretch, concentrated all in self,/ Living, shall forfeit fair renown,/ And, doubly dying, shall go down/ To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,/ Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung." Scott, Sir Walter. "The Lay of the Last Minstrel." *The Oxford Anthology of Great English Poetry*, ed. John Wain. Chatham, Kent: Oxford University Press, 1999.

argument on the dangerous consequences of unchecked patriotism, puncturing the argument that atomic bombs would help us defend ourselves. Each of Phil's sentences, despite being rhetorical, invites response, and builds toward his use of the figurative symbol of earth's own offspring, 'murdered,' 'ripped from the womb.' Phil's argument ends at its strongest moral point, utilizing the metaphor of human pregnancy to suggest intentional crimes against prospective and unrealized life. The shuddering psychological horror and prospectively tragic truth have been created by Phil's innocently-begun reply, turned into a compressed and metaphorically grounded argument.

Seth ends Phil's reply with a study in technical phrasing and emphasis, Sonnet 4.21, lines 5-7:

We *must* stop— . . . (Caught by sudden sadness  
He fumbles) . . . —if we *can*—this madness,  
We common people of good will. . . ." (4.21)

In line 5, we have Phil's first and only affirmative sentence of this sequence, and the reader can feel the tension of over-emphasizing the already-accented iamb, 'must,' while 'stop' thus falls to a lower-than-expected tonal depression, which suggests Phil's doubts of being able to accomplish a 'stop.' Seth's use of ellipses and the parenthetical report of his fumbling both calm the scene and legitimize the humbleness of Phil's argument, while raising doubt: 'Could this be stopped?' Here, we see deflation of the speaker concurrently with his own association of himself with the masses. The effect is an example of what Robert Nye calls "personal rhythm" cutting across "impersonal form."<sup>94</sup>

The party's conclusion is lightened by discussion between Ed and Phil about his pet iguana, continuing the motif of caring for animals raised in Phil's speech. Ed, mesmerized by the speech, jumps happily into discussion of his pet iguana, including how, when and why he got the pet, and how its diet should be changed. Phil's knowledge of unusual pets is a comical twist that gives the two shared experience, and lends veracity to their conversation and growing friendship. The introduction of characters sharing their own stories and knowledge, at this point, also shifts the tone and temperament, lending the loving good-byes and embraces a feeling of resolution and modulating the concerns Phil's remarks have raised. The party tempo thus drops as motif is revised and rhythmic variations are reduced, ending with concerns many cocktail party-goers have shared: who is too drunk to drive, and who will sleep where. Ed and Phil make their arrangements and leave, with the presence of the hostess implied through their dialogue, at Sonnet 4.29, lines 9-14:

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<sup>94</sup> Nye, Robert, ed. *The Faber Book of Sonnets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1976, 31.

I'll drive you home. Come back tomorrow  
 To fetch—"I live near Stanford, Ed."  
 "Oh . . . well, in that case, share my bed—  
 Just don't try driving! — You can borrow  
 My toothbrush too. Come on, let's go—  
 Good night, Liz— Bye, John—Homeward ho!" (4.29)

These brief words of exchange, in short phrases with frequent *caesura*, shift the tonality of the party toward the practicalities involved in getting home with verisimilitude, while emphasizing Ed's platonic generosity. When line 11's end, 'share my bed,' meets a dash, with the playful line 12 beginning, 'Just don't try,' we think to finish the statement, ie: 'any sexual advances,' while the unspoken allusion shifts quickly and comically to 'driving.'

The shared good-byes become a rounding up of social visit-ending courtesies, enjambed lines 13-14, ending with the positive exclamation of the driver, Ed, 'Homeward ho!' This phrase, with its culturally-charged sense of patriotic love and determination of the pioneers for the American west, includes a touch of nostalgia for the Hollywood western film within its broader anthropological context, as well as repeating the subtle reference to love of one's home and homeland, just used by Seth in the 'vile dust' allusion found in Phil's speech.<sup>95</sup>

Seth not only has captured universal elements of human nature in this party scene, but has brought the focus of it onto one of our greatest modern predicaments, survival in the face of nuclear arms. On an historical level, he has also captured some of the ways in which this striving party-culture - of creative, artistic, intellectual and professional people in the Bay area – existed in the 1980s, bringing it alive while making the dreams, foibles and follies of its characters atemporal and ahistorical and wedding their cares to the reader's own.

### Party Contexts: The Wedding Party

Let us look at some of the ways Seth uses poetic technique in a portion of a later party scene, a wedding reception. Phil has just wed Liz, and her brother, Ed, stands, about to greet his sister and his own former lover, the groom. Those assembled have a champagne toast. Three sonnets will be examined, Sonnets 11.7, 11.8 and 11.9:

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<sup>95</sup> Ed's exclamation, "Homeward, ho!" may be a reference to the poem by that title, by T'ao Yüan-ming. This Zen poet wrote of wine-drinking and the three paths of a recluse scholar's garden. Ed is first seen at the party by Liz, opening wine: "Her brother Ed decants Bordeaux/ On the white woolen rug below." (Sonnet 4.11, lines 13-14) Ed also has a courtyard where he spends time with his iguana, is interested in Zen, as evidenced by his book collection, fights shyness and is interested in religious and spiritual philosophy. Hori, Victor Sōgen, ed. *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Koan Practice*, Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003. Since Ed is also compared by Seth, in appearance, to Felix Paravicino, a Spanish Jesuit priest and poet of the early 17th century, the 'wine-drinking scholar' image seems to fit his character.

Ed kisses Liz; with gallant lightness  
 He wishes her all happiness.  
 He goes to greet Phil, but a tightness  
 Within his chest acts to compress  
 His breath, and to subvert all action:  
 The crowded room— the old attraction—  
 Phil drunk— inspirited— merge to move  
 Ed's heart toward his former love.  
 He stands there wordless, cold, and trembling.  
 "What should I do?" he thinks. "Will he  
 Embrace me? Shake hands? Speak? All three?"  
 Phil turns and sees him; and, dissembling,  
 Ed makes a feeble joke about  
 Phil's wearing black; and wanders out. (11.7)

Free of the smoke, his eyes still smarting,  
 He breathes the winter vineyard air.  
 Meanwhile, inside, the toasts are starting.  
 Now someone laughs— and from somewhere  
 The clink of glasses, next the quiet  
 Moments of drinking, then a riot  
 Of simultaneous speech, the loud  
 Sound cycles pulse out from the crowd.  
 Here Mrs. Craven shakes her stogie;  
 And there, supported by twin sticks,  
 Old Mr. Cobb, now eighty-six,  
 Stands, talking to an older foggy  
 About the happier days of yore:  
 Of slump, depression, and the war. (11.8)

Ed thinks, "I'm acting like a martyr.  
 Bad form on Liz's wedding day!"  
 He walks back in. The menacing garter,  
 The flinging of the white bouquet,  
 The canapés, the reminiscing,  
 The crush, the chaos, and the kissing,  
 The twirling pairs, the tilting cake,  
 The thirties tunes "for old times' sake,"  
 The vast permuted introductions  
 With older couples who appear  
 To be at ease with no one here,  
 The contradictory instructions  
 Fed to the caterers and the band  
 Lure Ed back to a brighter land. (11.9)

Generally, here, Seth's use of tonality and perspective to 'watch' the action assists the reader in feeling the joy and beauty of marriage as well as the transitory nature of life. Note the shifts in voice between each of the sonnets in this sequence. We have Ed, in Sonnet 11.7, engaged in an internal struggle for emotional control and grace, gallant with his sister, but stumbling when faced with Phil. Sonnet 11.7, line 2, where, stressed, Ed 'wishes her all happiness,' presses itself out of its normal melody to read as iambic, creating a too-low-tone 'all,' and too high 'ness.' Yes, the stress of Liz's marriage is enveloping him at the very moment he wishes her well. The enjambment of the next thought idea, which carries the reader from lines 3 to 8, shows us Ed's internal turmoil, as he perceives the scene. His internalized reactions are enhanced by the short phrases. The 'crowded room' is his first excuse for seizing up, then the 'old attraction.' Ed sees Phil 'inspirited,' a wonderful word precisely describing Phil's taking strength and courage from his new union while also drinking the champagne 'spirits.' Ed's standing 'wordless, cold' in line 9 shows the volta with a mid-line stop. Lines 10 and 11, with their short questions, push the pace up while indicating Ed's fear of a physical or direct contact from Phil. When Phil turns towards him in line 12, the line break has aided the shift in tonality. The *caesura* and enjambment to lines 13 and 14

provide Seth the opportunity to insert a moment of low-comedy with a two-line lead-in, with the line 14 joke breaking the tension built up by Ed's fear. Ed's 'feeble joke' deflates the tension altogether.<sup>96</sup> When Ed 'wanders out' at the end of line 14, he wanders out of the tone of that sonnet, also, into a new tonality, outdoors. We find him recovering from smoke and sensitivity in the next sonnet's beginning with 'smarting' eyes, a clever wordplay, as his joke was perhaps not so smart.

Sonnet 11.8, lines 1 and 2, resolve Ed's tightened chest with the 'wintry air,' linking it to line 4 of the previous sonnet. Lines 3-8 continue with a masterpiece of aural description as Ed stands outside the small country church, hearing rounds of toasts begin indoors. Line 4's 'Now someone laughs' has a clever, distancing quality. The line ends with an enjambment of 'somewhere' with no comma, causing a wondering feeling to arise. Line 5's 'The clink of glasses' is a quicker 'clink' as we'd have expected the line 4 ending comma. This example utilizes not only scansion and syllabic technique to heighten the development of the toast, but an onomatopoeic quality in the 'clinks.' A shift to short phrases of aural note, and line 5's enjambment to line 6 heighten the quietness of the 'quiet/ Moments of drinking' while line 6's ending, with another enjambment, 'riot / Of simultaneous speech' lends the scene a classic quality: of wedding solemnity followed by lively vivaciousness, happiness and colorful community.

Seth then creates an interesting contrast to Ed's youthful fears and concerns by turning our attention to two elderly attendees: one, Phil's landlady who is smoking a cigar; the other, an elderly man in conversation about good old days – of want and war, a comic twist on the tendency to increasingly sentimentalize ever-older personal memories of stress and conflict. Here, we have a woman who cares for all, Mrs. Cravens, and a man who cares for the old days, despite their hardships, widening our perspective and obliquely deflating Ed's personal concerns of the day. Sonnet 11.8 ends with the elderly man's sentimental stance, creating a strong division between Ed's earlier self-analysis and his re-entry to the fest in Sonnet 11.9, a good example of utilizing the sonnet's natural length and divisions to create new directions while utilizing interceding material to – obliquely – 'resolve' Ed's internal conflict.

Sonnet 11.9 begins with Ed's conclusion that he is 'acting like a martyr,' a common phrase, but with a twist here on whether Ed is 'acting' or not, ending with the hyperbeat, added unstressed syllable, which lengthens and deepens the tonality of his self-appraisal. The choice is also clever due to its religious overtones and Ed's religiosity. Line 2's truncated 'Bad form' again plays with the space between acting and 'being there,' while concluding he

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<sup>96</sup> Ed's joke about the groom wearing black references an old joke about the bride wearing white for her happiest day, and then asking why the groom wore black. Since one would wear black to a funeral, and Ed and Phil were lovers, it comments in a comical and oblique way on Phil's decision to marry Liz.

must participate. Ed's is not the only crisis of this nature in *The Golden Gate*, as Seth repeatedly works the thematic motif of achieving one's salvation by participating in social community with others, despite one's fears and misgivings.

Ed's re-entry provides the reader with fresh eyes on the party – and a fresh and ironic twist on wedding rituals, as his 'walk back in' in line 3 confronts him with 'the menacing garter,' the bride's stocking-holder which is traditionally flung into the air, and is to be caught by the next man to be wed. Seth's clever figurative choice confronts Ed with his homosexuality in an oblique and comic twist. 'The flinging of the white bouquet,' the unwed ladies' hopeful catch, swings its celebratory rhythm over the scene with perfect iambic tetrameter, emphasizing the natural harmony of the ritual with language more modulated in comparison to the short phrases, pauses and breaks with which the action has been described in its near vicinity. These are followed by another series of short phrases, all introduced by 'the' and enhanced by alliteration in 'crush,' 'chaos,' 'tilting cake,' 'twirling pairs,' 'thirties tunes,' all measuring out aspects of such a party's atemporal and ahistorical glee with the intent of increasing the reader's sentimental joy and positive response. Thematic repetition shows us other elderly in this sequence, and we now observe with an ironic twist that some 'appear/ To be at ease with no one here,' reminding us without saying so directly that we feast and socialize with gaiety in our youth, forgetting our mortality and the forgetfulness of aging, both, as we age. Here, Seth inserts order changes in the introductions made - 'permutations,' as well as changes in the caterer's and band's orders, playing with the ways in which the concept of 'order' changes meaning, and 'order' dissembles and changes during such parties. As well, instructions are 'fed' to the caterers and band, a fun pun.

Seth has shown us a wedding reception which has many of the cherished qualities of American wedding parties, while playing with motif and character development, and honoring the rituals of the celebration. To suggest that the fun and frivolity, with its foolishness and senses of connection and dis-connectedness 'lure Ed back to a brighter land,' line 14, is to tell us, obliquely, that Ed will cement his commitment to be a part of the larger human spirit's celebratory nature, albeit tinged with naturally human folly and misdirection, as well as honor the solemn yet festive and transitory cultural rituals of wedded intimacy, supportive, albeit as an observer. The subtle summations, among others, are encompassed in the compressed poetry of just three sonnets in the sequence.

#### Party Contexts: The Last Party

Let us look briefly at the final party in the work. I include reference to it, in part, to emphasize its focus on the characters involved, and on the brilliant use of language and



phrasing that elucidate their swiftly changing moods and responses. Gone are the literary allusions, and we are confronted with the actions and responses of the characters in such a way as to share the intensity of their feelings with a subtlety and finesse that is matched and worked by the technical phrasings and choices Seth has made.

In this scene, Jan, in her renewed lover relationship with John, has made plans for Phil and Liz, now married, to make a mid-evening appearance at her party, after she has had time to enjoy it with her friends, in John's company, hoping that John, Liz and Phil will agree to 'bury the hatchet' and renew their friendship. Instead, Jan is stranded south of town, and is to get a ride from a family who are friends of Phil's, arriving late. John is faced with Liz and Phil at Jan's door, and has, as well, to face his own enmity with some measure of social grace. Sonnet 12.32 ends with the couplet, "His ponderings abruptly freeze/ As, turning to the door, he sees". This sonnet, with its unfinished sentence, emphasizes and deepens John's shock, in the opening of Sonnet 12.33, which begins, "—O God! How could Jan do this to him?" with its natural rhythm pushing against the iambic meter, speeding delivery and understanding, as well as fear. Lines 2-5 extend his internal reactions, "To leave him no excuse for flight/ Or subterfuge, to superglue him/ To the host's chair, then to invite—/ Liz and Phil here?" The clever way in which he cannot flee as in 'flight,' nor fight, the unspoken association, as well as the consonance of line 3's syllabic choices, 'subterfuge' and 'superglue,' enhance the comic and sympathetic interest in what John will do. John is described, lines 6-8, as 'pale as paper' and "As if he'd just inhaled the vapor/ Of Love Canal, face white with strain,"<sup>97</sup> Lines 8-14 deftly shift from his interior to an exterior view of his hosting gesture:

John pours two glasses of champagne,  
Then, walking to the door and handing  
Them to the guests— a gesture planned  
So as not to have to take their hand—  
Mutters, "In here—or on the landing—  
Enjoy yourselves. As you can see,  
I've got my work cut out for me." (12.33)

I note the phrasing and punctuation used by Seth to ease a natural and acutely mimetic experience from John's acts and words. The line 8 full-idea, of two glasses of champagne poured, is the only complete-line thought in this section, met with an enjambment explaining his plot not to shake hands or touch them, lasting through lines 9-10, at which point he mutters, without using full-sentence courtesies, his 'invitation' as to where they can go, 'in here,' 'or on the landing,' ending this sentence on a new line, with the standard courtesy,

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<sup>97</sup> Love Canal was the site of a modern community built atop an area previously used as a chemical industry waste dumping ground. Toxic chemical wastes leaked into homes and housing lots, causing death and disease among the residents. The dangers were 'discovered' in 1978 after decades of official ignorance and neglect. Clean-up, lawsuits and restitution proceeded into the 1990s.

'Enjoy yourselves,' a clever breaking and effect enhancer that cuts off the contact with an abrupt mid-line stop. His stated excuse, that he 'has his work cut out for him' is both lame (ie: he is hosting) and a twisting point on the psychological work that John *does* have 'cut out' for himself: in fact, he should try to make amends with these old friends, who have tried to explain and renew social ties already.

In the next sonnet, Phil and Liz become alarmed that Jan is not there, as they would have expected her by now, given that she got a ride. Let us examine Sonnet 12.34, lines 8-14, with its lead-in at line 7, as Phil speaks to Liz:

Or  
Didn't she get a ride? I'm sure  
Matt hadn't left yet when I told her  
To call him." He goes up to John  
And asks him, "John, where's Janet gone?"  
"Not here yet." John's eyes flash and smolder.  
"Well, may I use the phone?" "Feel free,"  
John says with tight civility. (12.34)

It is interesting that each of Phil's thought ideas enjambs, crossing a line-break, truncating the effective completion or resolution, as well as elucidating Phil's confusion. Phil's questions result in his direct question to John, made to appear more direct for its directness, in 'John, where's Janet,' while foreshadowing the ultimate answer in 'gone,' with its sense of 'loss' and 'lost person.' John's short reply, 'Not here yet,' continues his non-sentence replies to his former friends, reminding us of both his anger at having to speak to them and his intimidation by the circumstances he cannot control. Seth introduces stop punctuation mid-line 12, an unnecessary choice, but one which makes John's physical reaction stand out, when 'John's eyes flash and smolder.' This short sentence's power comes from its alliterative and onomatopoeic quality, John's emotional power and individual flare barely held in check. Phil's humble (he 'goes up to' John) request to use the phone highlights the contrast with John's mood, with line 10's monotonic melody. John's choice of reply, 'Feel free,' evidences an extra twist; after all, Phil 'felt free' to wed John's girlfriend and roommate, Liz. Line 14's summing, 'John says with tight civility,' focuses on John's interaction issues. The effect is enhanced by opening with four one-syllable words, followed by the condensed tightness and assonance of the four-syllable 'civility.' Additionally, John is maintaining his iambic calm, despite the stress, while the regular stress presses against the topical content.

The final sonnet in this party sequence, Sonnet 12.36, brings us to the resolution of Jan's non-appearance, while opening with views and shifts in perspective that help the reader to experience the shock, dismay and surprise of that moment in a verisimilitudinous way, and drop the curtain on the party without further ado:

Jan's absent, but her party's swinging.  
 Funny that no one seems to care,  
 John muses (now the phone is ringing)  
 Whether or not the host is there.  
 He squeezes through the reveling fever  
 Toward the phone, lifts the receiver:  
 "Yes . . . Hayakawa . . . What? Police? . . ."  
 All sounds around him swiftly cease.  
 Phil looks at John: eyes closed, and gasping  
 As if for life and breath, he stands,  
 The Mickey Mouse phone in his hands,  
 Reiterating without grasping  
 Three words that gradually sink in  
 As he repeats them: "Next of kin?" (12.36)

The reader only realizes we are reading John's thoughts in lines 1-4 at line 3, as he observes the others 'not missing' Jan at her own party. Line 1's beginning, with two strong stresses, 'Jan's absent', hits a high melodic tone, a wake-up call to inquire further. We note John's addled and lonely state without her, while his musings push against the natural stress scheme and rhythm, interiorizing the text. While caught in his thoughts, the phone rings parenthetically. Seth's structuring of this sentence has its own clever twist, as he uses John's interior thought as the focal plane, then follows it with the presence of the 'phone is ringing' in parentheses, enjambed to the divided thought, 'Whether or not the host is there.' Yes, phones ring, even for people who have died – for practical reasons, mixing practicalities with the absurd feeling that the world should stop -or know- when a loved one dies. The shift from 'squeezing through' a 'reveling fever' to answer it, enhances the party's rhythmic pulse and John's solitude. John responds in the second quatrain, his single-word responses to the caller raising the tempo and tone of the scene, as well as curiosity for its unknown resolution. With the one word, 'Police?', a line end enhances the shift of viewpoint, as the partygoers pause. Line 8's consonance of 's' sounds signals the softness of the stop and change in tonality, as 'sounds' 'swiftly' 'cease.' Seeing John through Phil's eyes in line 9 reminds us of their long friendship, while seeing the scene through one who cares for him personally. John is observed, with 'eyes closed' and 'gasping,' the enjambment of 'gasping' to the next line helping to replicate a sense of the effective strain in a delay to catch one's breath. Thus, for Seth to use the words, 'as if for life and breath' in line 10 enhances the effort to catch one's breath, while combining it with what would, under such circumstances, be a more difficult physical challenge, to stand up. The fact that John is noted for standing cues the reader: John will have to 'stand up' to this news to survive, although it will work to crush him emotionally.

The introduction of the Micky Mouse phone in line 11 reminds the reader in a sentimental touch of Jan's love for kitsch household objects, and of Jan and John's recent

wanderings together, in love again with each other, but not speaking the words. The acute sentimentalism acts as a trope and novel unifier. Lines 12-14 continue the final scene, John 'reiterating' words 'without grasping' their meaning at the same time as their meaning 'sinks in,' and he repeats them, 'Next of kin?' The 'gasp,' 'grasp,' and 'sink' words all carry associational qualities that illustrate their enhancement effect here, a man about to drown.

The phrase, 'next of kin,' meanwhile, a term of law and asked by police in cases of death, is also acutely perfect, referring to the names of the person(s) closest in blood or marriage to one who has died. Besides being an oblique way to signal that Jan has died, however, it adds a sad twist in that Jan is survived only by her parents, having had no children of her own, and has died unwed, while her immigrant grandparents had come to the U.S. to create a better life for their family. This also builds on Sonnet 1.1, in which John mused, "If I died, who'd be sad?/ Who'd weep?" A second twist is that Jan has, in fact, not died yet, but is expected to die, which builds up additional surprise and emotional response when that is later revealed in Part 13, a literary twist that mimics the experiences of many.<sup>98</sup>

The party closure, with its unreported conclusion and lack of formal good-byes, differs markedly from prior party reports: its dead-stop information ends the festing, in an appropriate compression. Thematically, to lose the love he found with Jan seems to work an unfairness on John, and Seth resolves this tension in the last sonnets of the work, which we also examine.

### Nature: Characters in Nature

Seth utilizes nature to complement the feelings and narrative directions of his characters, as well as to share the beauty of the San Francisco Bay area. Let us examine two examples in the work that illustrate how he uses poetic technique to marry the beauty of nature to his characters, enhancing both meaning and narrative development. The first occurs with Jan, who is in a car travelling toward her own party when an accident occurs on the highway. When we last see Jan, she is looking up toward the starry sky, in Sonnet 12.31. The sonnet opens with the commotion of the LaMont family in their car, travelling north, full of staccato pauses and familial jokes, lines 1-8. The volta begins at line 9:

Slowly,  
Dusk turns to dark, and from the car  
Jan sees how, star by star by star,  
The sky, now constellated wholly,  
Domes over the fluid freeway, bright  
With red and silver lanes of light. (12.31)

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<sup>98</sup> This is revealed in Sonnet 13.11.

The fast-paced conversation of the earlier quatrains provides an appropriate contrast to the contemplation of Jan's gazing. The assonance of 'star' with 'car,' and the 'stars' repetition slow the gaze, and concentrate it on the sky overhead, filled 'wholly' with the constellations and stars, a beautiful and lyrical image. This is enhanced and shifted in perspective by Seth's word choices, and his reference to the 'dome' of the night, as it rests 'over' the top of the 'fluid' freeway. Seth's use of 'fluid' lends the highway scene a synergistic and life-like quality of its own. The 'bright' we find at line 13's end, which should first have described line 12's sky and, presumably, the stars, instead points us to its reference in the final line, the 'red' and silver lanes of light,' ie: below, on the earth. This shift in reference swings the reader from the sky's heights down to the sweeping highway, and at an angle as if seen from a plane. Jan, whose artistic perspective has informed not only her sculptures but her perception of the visual world, is observed in this scene as one who sees the sculptural quality of the city highway, lying, it seems to her, a plain of streaming light below a domed sky of design-triggering, 'constellated' stars.

This scene is one we revisit when we learn later of the accident, if only to assure ourselves of the meditative moment of her departure. The visual idea that she is looking toward heaven at the time of her death is an acutely lyrical and classical conceit that also seems a bit corny for being so contrived, yet also modern. Within the broader work, we find ourselves, too, figuratively riding between heaven and earth, acutely aware of the broader questions of our existence.

Let us turn to another example of Seth's use of nature to elucidate character. We turn to Phil and Ed, whose off-again, on-again homosexual relationship challenges them both: Phil, to dampen his sexuality at Ed's request for 'no sex;' and Ed, to resolve his internal struggle between his own physical desires and his decision to give chastity a higher value, for religious reasons. We join their discussion as they walk outdoors, at Sonnet 5.36, lines 9-12, as Phil teases Ed for confessing that he doesn't care for women sexually:

Phil laughs. "You're like a starving pigeon  
 Who just can't bring himself to eat  
 Barley or rice, yet thinks the wheat  
 He likes is poisoned. Your religion  
 Doesn't square too well with your lust.  
 I wonder which first bites the dust!"

(5.36)

Phil's use of the 'starving pigeon' simile to describe Ed's sexual preferences is reinforced by knowledge of the bird: pigeons don't like wheat. Phil asks Ed to 'square' his lust with his sexual preferences; ie: to enjoy his homosexual nature. The tempo here has a smugness suggested by the natural iambic nature of the chat meeting the emphatic metaphor,

followed by Phil's challenge. The bird metaphor is developed further in the sonnets that follow, Sonnets 5.37 and 5.38:

"You find that funny?" "No, not really."  
 "Why did you say what you just said?"  
 "I didn't mean to mock. I merely  
 Enjoyed the contradiction, Ed.  
 Things puzzling, contrary, or ironic  
 Revivify me like a tonic—  
 And inexplicabilities  
 Accost us even from the trees.  
 Look—there's my favorite 'conference maple,'  
 Of all the many hundreds, one  
 Where at the setting of the sun  
 Birds congregate—as if by papal  
 Fiat a chattering conclave  
 Of cardinals crammed a narrow nave." (5.37)

Despite himself, Ed grins. "You're pretty  
 Free with your similes today.  
 Because your sacrilege is witty  
 This time, I'll let you get away.  
 Watch out, though, if your wit gets grosser—"  
 But now, as they're approaching closer,  
 The hubbub's risen to a pitch  
 That makes their pelted eardrums twitch  
 And pulverizes conversation.  
 The birds are screaming, and the pair,  
 Awed by their ardor, stand and stare.  
 Incomprehensible elation  
 Floods through their spirits, as the light  
 Dies with the sound, and it is night. (5.38)

The *caesuras* in lines 1 and 3 of Sonnet 5.37 tease up the light argument between Ed and Phil with regular iambic rhythm, while line 2's full-length, straightforward question gives Ed's question direct emphasis, with its initial trochaic substitution adding interest. We are lead quickly and flexibly to the explication in Phil's argument, which turns back on logic - 'things puzzling, contrary, ironic' energize him 'like a tonic.' The shift in Phil's tone lessens the confrontation with Ed, while Phil – and Seth – deftly shift focus to the birds who congregate at a particular tree at sunset, mellowing the argument, and extending our sense of inquiry in a pleasant shift of tenor. Seth's extension of the bird motif shifts to a metaphor for the nature of these particular birds, in a neat vision of cardinals congregating – that is, both as red birds chattering in the trees, and as the Roman Catholic church's prelates chattering in a 'conclave,'<sup>99</sup> crammed into a 'nave,' a church's central section, and also the hub of a wheel. The hubbub in birdsong in Sonnet 5.37, line 14, plays, further, with a literary allusion, as well.<sup>100</sup>

Sonnet 5.38 opens with Ed appreciating Phil's extended simile on a Catholic theme, deflecting the larger argument for the present in the first quatrain, while line 1 is a playful compliment to Phil, itself: 'you're pretty.' Ed's warning to Phil not to push him with 'grosser' wit is a warning effectively washed away in the second quatrain with the developing sound of the birds' common scream, falling away in split lines. The onomatopoeically-charged

<sup>99</sup> A conclave is defined as the private meeting of Roman Catholic cardinals held to elect a new pope. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. ed. Board of the American Heritage Dictionary. 4 ed. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006.

<sup>100</sup> William Wordsworth's sonnet, "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room," is an allusional stroke found at Sonnet 5.37, line 14. Hutchinson, Thomas, and Ernest de Selincourt, eds. *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*. 1989 ed. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 199. The 'bird in a nave' was also a subject of Wordsworth's poetry, in another poem, one based on a visit he made to Furness Abbey, discussed by William Pritchard in his recent article. Pritchard, William H. "Possibilities for Wordsworth." *The Hudson Review* LIX, no. 2 (Summer 2006).

consonance develops, with 'pitch,' 'pelted' and 'pulverizes,' their 'twitch' a clever rhyme choice. Line 10's shift to scene description contains both the birds' screaming and 'the pair' – not pair of birds, but inviting cross-analogizing and effective pause. Line 11 suggests that the the pair are 'awed by ardor,' which makes us wish Phil and Ed would be engaged in a bit more ardor, or passion. That they, instead, 'stand and stare,' reinforces a sense of reverence and mystery for nature's ways, also suggesting an impasse in Phil and Ed's own quandary, and reinforcing the naturalness of the birds' shared scream.

The birds' screams, meanwhile, are clearly an act of impulse, embraced freely by them in nature. Within the context of Phil and Ed's stand-off on the expression of homosexual love, a natural impulse they both share, their line 12 'incomprehensible elation' soothes, while line 13 'floods' their consternation with natural beauty and 'light,' the light that is the sun setting in line 14, resulting in the birds' shift to quietness as night falls. The enjambment of the final shift, 'as the light / Dies,' proportions its impact in a visual and exciting way, with the final phrase, 'it is night,' a quiet low melodic calm, tonally neutral. These shifts create successful hypotiposis, or descriptive trope, which acts, as well, in Seth's capable hands, as a metaphor for nature's answer to the young mens' argument.

Other examples of this sort in *The Golden Gate* include: Phil's hike with his son in the hills overlooking Stanford, Phil's and John's brief walk near John and Liz's place, Ed's visit to the Golden Gate bridge, Phil's and Liz's visit and walk on the bridge, and John's and Jan's whale-watching and beach-walking outings. Each one contains descriptive *tropes* – of hypotiposis, topographia, chronographia and pragmatographia.<sup>101</sup> In each case, Seth works deftly with the balance between the characters' development - their acts and their choices, and elements of nature that compliment, extend, or comment obliquely upon key aspects of their character within a broader contextualized world.

### Nature: Seth Characterizing Nature

Let us elucidate some examples in which Seth characterizes nature more directly. First, we segue to the sonnet following the 'conference maple' sunset, discussed above. In Sonnet 5.39, Seth characterizes night, then reintroduces Phil and Ed as they walk back to Phil's home in Sonnet 5.40:

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<sup>101</sup> The broader definition of a trope is a figure of speech containing a "certain language construction that presents figures to the eye, to the ear, to the other senses" which appeal to the inner "sense" of the emotions. Hypotiposis is a descriptive trope concerning real things. Topographia is a descriptive trope concerning real places. Chronographia is a descriptive trope concerning the seasons. Pragmatographia is a descriptive trope concerning actions. Turco, *The New Book of Forms*, 47-60.

Dark night and silent, calm, and lovely,  
 That stills the efforts of our lives,  
 Rare, excellent-kind, and behovely . . .  
 No matter how the poet strives  
 To weave with epithets and clauses  
 Your soundless web, he falters, pauses,  
 And your enchantment slips between  
 His hands, as if it's never been.  
 Of all times most imbued with beauty,  
 You lend us by your spell relief  
 From ineradicable grief  
 (If for a spell), and pain, and duty.  
 We sleep, and nightly are made whole  
 In all our fretted mind and soul.

(5.39)

They walk, not daring to do violence  
 To the still night by force of speech.  
 What do friends need to say that silence  
 Will not say better? As they reach  
 The house, they hear Paul's high-pitched piping.  
 He sits at Phil's typewriter typing  
*Jackdaws love my big sphinx of quartz,*  
 While Schwarz, who's feeling out of sorts,  
 Yawns redly. . . .

(5.40)

The poet's direct address makes Sonnet 5.39 an example of *apostrophe*, the literary manner of addressing an inanimate object, idea, or person, in this case, an epithet used to discuss Night's powers and effect. Seth's formal address of 'Night' follows that of other poets whose characterizations range from restful to evil.<sup>102</sup> In line 1, night is addressed as 'Dark night' and 'silent,' as in 'Silent Night,' soothing and calm, triggering reader-recall of the popular Christmas carol.<sup>103</sup> The lyrical word choices, 'calm and lovely,' lend to night the softness to gently 'still' our 'lives' efforts,' the opening couplet in perfect iambic tetrameter, with its varied noted elements. The 'still' of night, its usual noun context, is twisted to its verb form, 'to still,' contributing to further pause.

Seth continues, exclaiming in exasperation that the universal poet 'falters' and 'pauses' to 'weave' - not a cloth of night, but a 'soundless web.' With the introduction of the figurative spider's web, we might expect to shift to darker extensions but, instead, are met with Seth's own shift to attributing to it 'enchantment,' extending the apostrophe, while elucidating it, figuratively, as something that 'slips between/ His hands,' and that it does so 'as if it's never been.' In this way, Seth captures the sense that night permits enchantments to occur that cannot be fully explained in the light of day, nor be re-captured. As Phil and Ed walk into their own future, Seth marries a romantic motif to 'night' that rings true.

<sup>102</sup> Other examples of apostrophe include Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem, "To Night," and Joseph Blanco White's sonnet, "To Night," while Shakespeare personifies night in his Sonnets 28 and 73. Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "To Night." In *Posthumous Poems of Shelley*, edited by Irving Massey. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1969. White, Joseph Blanco. "To Night." In *Poetry of the Seasons*, edited by Mary Isabella Lovejoy. Salem, N.H.: Ayer Publishing, 1969. Burrow, Colin, ed. *The Oxford Shakespeare: Complete Sonnets and Poems, Oxford World Classics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>103</sup> "Dark night" comes from the fourth stanza of "Little Town of Bethlehem." "Silent night" comes from the carol by that title. *Christmas in Song*.



Seth begins his second sentence of the sonnet with his thesis, that night is 'most imbued with beauty,' and 'lends' us relief – that relief characterized as a loan, not a gift. Night does this by placing a 'spell,' suggesting enthrallment as if by magic, which has the power to relieve our 'ineradicable grief,' sounding its sense of mankind's struggles in an exaggerated and Romantic manner. Seth's switch to note, 'if for a spell,' plays out the plurisignation of the word, 'spell,' lifting the reader off the content of the sonnet and into its linguistic context, a clever and somewhat comical relief, at once both intrinsic - with the text - and fully removed from it. To 'grief,' Seth adds 'pain' and 'duty' in that order, a list which moves from perhaps the worst to the more bearable 'agonies' of life. The closure of the metaphor in the sonnet's 12th line respects a traditional sonnet ending couplet pattern, dropping the metaphor but mirroring it in the reality that we 'sleep' and 'are made whole.' The line 14 reference to 'our fretted mind and soul' is both allusional and figurative imagery: a 'soul frets' in the shadow of . . . language,<sup>104</sup> in James Joyce's usage, just as Seth has described in this sonnet the difficulty of finding language sufficient to describe Night's enchantments. Seth's allusion becomes, itself, a conceit, since a fretted string is one under stress, playing a dependent tune, just as we do in our fretful lives, which reminds us of Phil and Ed's fretful relationship, to which we return in thought.

Sonnet 5.40 begins afresh, as Phil and Ed walk back to Phil's home. They respect the beauty of night's 'stillness' by not speaking, Seth venturing the platitude that friends say more with silence, its own twisting point. This implies that a resolution of Phil and Ed's sexual relationship may be coming, while teasing with the idea of language and its laudatory limitations also raised in the previous sonnet.

Line 4's mid-line *caesura* brings us to the end of the shift in tonality, from the poet's elaboration on night to Phil and Ed as they reach Phil's home. The first sound is a pleasurable contrast, from Paul, described as 'piping,' to which we think of the pied piper attracting others to him, raising our curiosity. The noise turns out to be a nonsensical typewriter-practice sentence, also a pangram,<sup>105</sup> which alleviates the gravity of the previous sonnet's

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<sup>104</sup> Combining 'soul' with 'fret' suggests an oblique and appropriate allusion to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In this work, the narrator is referring to the words of another, thinking, "The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language." Joyce's protagonist struggles with religious and sexual issues, as does Ed. Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: The Viking Press, 1964, 189.

<sup>105</sup> A pangram is a sentence that contains all the letters of the alphabet. Challenging pangrams are often short and repeat as few alphabet letters as possible. The sentence Paul types has 31 letters, all 26 letters of the English alphabet with only 5 repeated letters. Such sentences are good typing practice for finger-reach and assignment. *American Heritage Dictionary*.

metaphorical intensity. The absurdity of the sentence typed adds high comic relief. The reference to the iguana, 'Schwarz' as 'feeling out of sorts' and 'yawning redly' comically and ironically deflates the sexuality tussle, an epithet for Ed's iguana-as-pet, a clever, appropriate and oblique reference to the expiring struggle concerning both Phil's and Ed's sexual natures, at least for this 'night.'<sup>106</sup> Seth is twisting oblique comment out of the scene while its contrast to the prior sonnet simultaneously enhances that sonnet's lyrical beauty and the mystery to which it refers.

Let us move to two other sonnets in which Seth describes night, the first, a night one month after Jan's death. Sonnet 13.1 immediately follows the call from the police in the party sonnet discussed above. The second discussed is Sonnet 13.3.

A month has passed. The moon is rising.  
 A balmy night in late July  
 Rests on the city, exorcising  
 The summer fog. Around the sky  
 The great imputed constellations,  
 Differently seen by different nations,  
 And that great current over all  
 That Janet's grandmother would call  
 The Silver River, faintly glowing,  
 Counter the city's glittering grid.  
 The Transamerica Pyramid  
 Spears up in light. A breeze is flowing  
 (Quiet as love that's left unsaid)  
 Through the straight streets. And Jan is dead.                   (13.1)

The effect of Seth's sharing a scene from a 'balmy night,' with us after the shock of Jan's death on the phone is a contextual 'balm' to anguish. The night also 'rests on the city' as one rests one's head on a friend's shoulder, a comforting personification. The 'exorcised fog' could, as well, be the clouded consciousness or painful loss felt by friends. In the third sentence, which carries us from lines 4 to 7, Seth revisits the starry sky and highway grid of the city last noted while Jan watched them from the car, creating a recall of that scene. The constellations Jan saw as individual stars are noted by Seth for being seen differently by different nations, literally. The trope meets the name given the Milky Way by the Japanese: the 'great current,' as of a river, is a portmanteau word, used by Seth to refer to the 'Silver River,' carrying also associations with the 'river' of life.<sup>107</sup> 'Current' is a clever choice, as it also describes the cause of the lively electric lights streaming on the 'glittering grid.' Between the faint glow of the Milky Way, and the city's night lights, Seth notes the spear of light from

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<sup>106</sup> Ed's pet, an iguana whom he named Arnold Schwarzenegger, appears in various figurative roles, most keenly as an epithet for Ed's sexuality, playing comically with his struggle between a more open sexual nature- which, as it is homosexual in preference, is completely hidden by him from society, and his attraction to the chastity of religious celibacy and its safe harbor from intimacy - what could be called the 'inner-directed dialogue' of the iguana when it is confronted with human social company.

<sup>107</sup> Hesse, Herman. *Siddhartha*. New York: New Directions Publishing, Bantam Books, 1971.

the Transamerica Building, with its special shape, a 'Pyramid' recalling ancient civilizations and human accomplishments. The effect of the alliterative choices, 'great,' 'grandmother,' 'glittering;' and 'summer,' sky,' 'silver,' and 'spears' leads us quickly through and 'around' the larger dome of sky and land. Thus the last image, which leads us to a 'breeze blowing' shifts the tenor of the sonnet, as well as the narrative direction. Line 13's simile, 'Quiet as love that's left unsaid,' in parentheses, places a hush of reverence, grief and guilt on the scene that portends John's personal anguish, and brings him to the reader's mind, while line 14's 'Through the straight streets,' carries us on the breeze that would bless a clear and balmy July night in the city, while using 'straight' to twist at John's failure to be 'straight' with Jan, not letting on that he had, in fact, fallen deeply in love with her by the time she died. This context is reinforced subliminally by the last sentence, 'And Jan is dead,' with its brevity in contrast to the central descriptive portions of this sonnet. The finality of the last sentence is enhanced by its shortness. The indifference of the Milky Way and streaming city lend the tonality of the sonnet its sense of life moving onward mixed with personal ennui, romantic pause and pathos.

Seth shifts the tone at this point to inform us as narrator of certain consequences. We are given a quick summary of death details in Sonnet 13.2, the author creating a sense of mimetic trust. Chuck has moved in with Liz and Phil, as have Janet's cats, Cuff and Link,<sup>108</sup> who are 'playing/ With Charlemagne,' a suggestion the reader finds mixes tragedy and amusement.

Sonnet 13.3 ends with the following sestet, which ends the scene begun in Sonnet 13.1:

Again tonight the moon advances,  
 A casual crescent, fine and high,  
 A sort of innocent passerby  
 Across the city of Saint Francis,  
 Across the freeway, red and white,  
 With last month's curvature and light. (13.3)

Here, regular iambs are observed throughout, creating a smooth melody. The repeating motif reminds us of the cyclical view of nature in the moon's appearance and its steadfast regularity. The ironic twist is preserved; the dignity of human life meets the indifference with which life goes on after a loved one's death. Seth's repetition of the freeway lights lends

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<sup>108</sup> Cuff and Link are the names of Rocky Balboa's turtles in the film, *Rocky*. Rocky meets the woman he begins to date, the shy Adrian, at the local pet shop while buying food for the turtles. Seth's character, Jan, is another unsung 'hero,' striving nearly alone in her sculptural art, unknown and unsung, while focusing on a life of humility, led with love and respect for others, yet wanting her own artistic recognition and moment in the limelight. Avildsen, John G. "Rocky." U.S.: United Artists, 1976.

serenity without becoming redundant. The moon vehicle becomes a passer-by, 'innocent' of the crime, raising inquiry about who was, in fact, guilty, as of a crime, information shared later.

### Activism and Acts: Speech and Social Activism

A central portion of *The Golden Gate* is devoted to a speech by a Catholic priest, Father O'Hare, at a local anti-nuclear arms demonstration, held outside a company named Lungless Labs.<sup>109</sup> Phil has been one of the primary organizers. Father O'Hare's speech and appearance involve most of twenty sonnets, with the speech delivered as oratory to the assembled demonstrators. Despite its poetic context, it strives to deliver a straightforward message *via* rhetorical contexting: how can we permit this danger to dwell among us? Father O'Hare also asks the employees of the company how they can ignore the terrible potential consequences of creating nuclear bombs, and warns of both practical and patriotic dangers in the development and maintenance of nuclear arms. This political and social issue captured the attention of many in the 1980s.

Father O'Hare's delivery of his speech mixes secular and religious roles, adding interest and variety to his words. He is the priest, delivering a sermon in the traditional manner of that specialized oratory; and he is also the caring person whose humble personal style includes fumbling for words and notes. These induce the sympathetic attention of the crowd and the reader. We hear not only the moderate voice of a person who is present at the scene, but get regular cues to the presence of his listeners. The speech is also given the sense that it is 'coming together' as he speaks, a sense of re-assemblage creating verisimilitude, as well as acute attention to its themes and empathy for its speaker.

Let us look not at the entire sequence, but at highlights in Seth's usage of poetic and literary techniques to elucidate its anti-nuclear theme. First, we note the priest's name is an anagram for 'O Hear,' and that he is 'chubby,' 'nervous,' has a 'scuffy cassock' and is 'tubby,' words which emphasize his humanity. In Sonnet 7.14, he 'bends down' on 'one knee,' not to pray, the expected physical staging, but, as Seth twists from the delay in the narrator's report, 'Gathers the notes his jittery hands/ Dropped on the ground.'" The disarming physical presence of an ordinary priest lends strength to his humility, and grace to his 'fumbling.'

The beginning of the priest's speech includes other contrasts that make his small effort feel important. The speech opens at Sonnet 7.16, mid-line 2, "Friends,/ Sisters and brothers,

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<sup>109</sup> The name, Lungless Labs, puts the point on the suggestion that only a company with no lungs could afford to make something as dangerous as nuclear arms. Interestingly, some of the only living beings on Earth considered "lungless" are salamander varieties that live in this geographic region.

sons and daughters./ The little time each of us spends . . . / Can everyone at the back hear me?/ Yes? Excellent—and all those near me—/ Not too loud? . . . Well, these few short years/ We spend pursuing our careers/ . . . " Seth carefully treads into the moral and philosophical territory the topic demands, with frequent pauses and kind questions. Not only are we informed that the priest cares whether the assembled can hear him, but that he cares about them. The nearness of those to whom he is 'near' is not only physical, but feels larger: he is a priest, he is near to all, he cares for all. As well, he strikes the proper volume which, as read, translates into the proper tenor for a speech, reinforcing the appearance of the form's oratorical and stylistic devices.

I will mention several passages in the priest's speech and develop each briefly. The priest remarks on the varied goals of men during their lives, including those who 'gathered manifold possessions,' a fitting reference and tribute to Robert Browning's poem, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.<sup>110</sup> The priest indicates his perspective and the choice he sees, with an apology for its simplicity, in Sonnet 7.17, lines 8, to Sonnet 7.18, line 2:

. . . "one attribute may claim  
 To cut across all our partitions  
 Of wealth and vigor, fame and wit:  
 Did they serve life? Of injure it?  
 These are more naked oppositions  
 Than can sieve truth in every case,  
 But we may use them when we face (7.17)

Choices such as, today, we're facing.  
 What is our will in life?" . . . (7.18)

The collation of the human distinctions - wealth, health, fame and intelligence, as well as the priest's reference to nakedness, albeit with respect to 'oppositions,' help to give his context a palpable sensitivity to human action, while 'more naked oppositions' plays with the political phrase, 'mere naked propositions,' in a politically acute way: it is more important to ask the line 11 questions that beg for a 'yes' or 'no' answer. The question of whether one had 'served life,' provides its own context: that life is for service. The use of 'life,' alone, gives it the atemporal universal quality that pushes it forward as a philosophical evaluation.

Recognizing that the question doesn't serve to square all choices, he calls it the correct

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<sup>110</sup> In Browning's poem, the Rabbi discusses his philosophy, that life has purpose and can be lived with an assumption that a god exists, as well reviewing his life as he reaches old age. The text section reads, "For pleasant is this flesh;/ Our soul, in its rose-mesh/ Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest:/ Would we some prize might hold/ To match those manifold/ Possessions of the brute, — gain most, as we did best!" Doing what is best is at the core of the priest's speech. Browning's poem is consistent with the work of the historical rabbi on which it was based. Browning, Robert. "Rabbi Ben Ezra." In *Poems of Robert Browning*, edited by University of Illinois Donald Smalley. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956, 281-287, 283.

perspective for this issue, while extending and shifting tonality from the more-philosophical perspective to the more ordinary idea of our will 'in life.' The weaving of these clever technical strokes ensconces the argument as a rhetorical and meaningful message.

The priest uses Biblical metaphors to elucidate his argument. Sonnet 7.18 ends with a reference to the demonstration scene, bringing the prospective futility of their efforts into sharp and humble focus, while creating a transition memorializing Christ's words.<sup>111</sup>

Beginning at line 12, and continuing into the following sonnet:

<p>... Indeed, with our incarceration In those yellow school buses, we May find ourselves compelled to be</p>	<p>(7.18)</p>	<p>As little children. Let's inquire With the same childishness as they, Should we not try to douse a fire That threatens to consume away Not just our home but the whole city?</p>	<p>... (7.19)</p>
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To be 'as little children' is, in the priest's usage, first, a reference to their need to cooperate if they are requested to board the buses. The reference bridges the gap between Sonnets 7.18 and 7.19, cleverly lending a sermon's parable its sense of extending control across a divide, a point at which some will 'find themselves' 'compelled to be' ie: arrested, while the organizers hope all will behave 'as little children' and follow a planned process, part of their non-violent assembly and peaceful design. The language used shifts the priest's metaphor further, however, into a request to have a sense of inquisitiveness about what the production of nuclear arms really portends, not just for the world, but for them, personally, and not just for their 'home' but for their beloved 'city.' The sense of personalization carries with it the tenor of a sermon, while breaking the risk of over-sentimentalizing the subject by creating seamless transitions between the rational and forthright points of his discourse, each with its softly stoic tonality. Thus, when the priest reaches his rallying cry and proclamation of their united position at the rally, it rings with astounding clarity and height, at the end of Sonnet 7.19:

<p>Well, we have gathered here this morning In disparate but harmonious voice To show that we have made our choice; That we have hearkened to the warning That hate and fear kill; and are here Confronting death and hate and fear.</p>	<p>(7.19)</p>
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Seth splits these lines with regularity, each containing its own full portion of thought, and each beginning with a word used to shift forward: 'in,' 'to,' 'that,' and 'that.' These provide

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<sup>111</sup> The reference is to Matthew 18:3, "Except ye become as little children, ye will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*. U.S.A.: A.J. Holmen Company, 1962.

their own sense of orderly progression to a conclusion. Line 14's beginning, 'confronting' is not confrontational in the usual sense, but emphatic in line position, front and active, punched up in melody and boldly carving up its allegorical devils, 'death and hate and fear.' The odd spelling of 'hearkened' in line 12 reminds one of the internalized eye rhymes with fear in lines 13 and 14. The cliché effect of the pronouncement is reduced by its contextualization in the speech, and by the tentativeness of the priest's introductory, 'Well,' which humanizes it.

Seth includes two epic similes in the priest's speech, one on 'hate,' and one on 'evil.' Let us examine his skillful development of these. Sonnet 7.20's first quatrain follows:

Hate is a subtle weed; vagaries  
Of soil and time give it new growth.  
Only the food of hatred varies;  
England and Germany were both (7.20)

Seth uses the vehicle, a weed, to discuss the tenor, hatred – specifically, the objects of America's national hatred as they have changed over time. The remainder of Sonnet 7.20 elucidates the metaphor, tracing the 20th century history of America's shifting list of enemies, ending with Germany and Russia in a final coup of a couplet:

Even before we'd reached Berlin,  
Moscow was our new sump of sin. (7.20)

The trochaic substitution opening each line, as well as the contraction in line 13, press the reader forcefully onward and invite a meritorious evaluation of the conclusion. The use of the alliterative 'sump' and 'sin' compliment the conclusion, while 'sump' is a word choice with both a figurative and visual 'low' meaning, consistent with the figurative 'weed,' a place where 'subtle' weeds will thrive without check.<sup>112</sup>

Seth's opening in Sonnet 7.20, 'Hate is,' shifts in Sonnet 7.21 to 'Hate shifts,' linking them structurally to the progressing argument, with the first couplet:

Hate shifts with diplomatic fashion.  
To love is to be resolute. (7.21)

In these two clear line-thoughts, the shift acts as both a linkage, and a transition, to the priest's reference to the example of Christ's love in this sonnet, which ends with the priest's call to the marchers, returning us to the scene of the demonstration and concluding the development of the conceit:

Without hate, without hesitation,  
Taking our freedom in our hand,  
Let us pledge that here we stand. (7.21)

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<sup>112</sup> A sump is a low-lying pit, may also be a cesspool, and is considered a stagnant place, one that is rank, with only an occasional opportunity for drainage. *American Heritage Dictionary*. To extend the analogy, our hatred of the Russians is a rank hatred that we take only an occasional opportunity to shift, ie: away from them to some new target for our national hatred, a hatred we don't want to look at or 'clean up.'

The priest's call to 'pledge' that 'here we stand' has its roots in American history and culture, from its 'stand' against English oppression to Martin Luther King's speeches and the civil rights movement's request to 'stand' in peaceful protest - against hatred and for freedom. The words and phrasing make the priest's use of the phrase, 'taking our freedom in our hand,' more poignant, and recall a cultural heritage of pledging resistance to what is, from a human perspective, morally and ethically wrong behavior, even if they are the acts of states and nations.<sup>113</sup>

Seth's use of 'stand' is repeated in Sonnet 7.22, as the priest looks, now, forward, stating, from lines 6-8:

. . . we will stand together,  
As now; and with our common breath  
Cry out against our common death. (7.22)

The scansion of this sentence supports the 'rallying cry' phrasing of its conclusive rhymes, 'breath' and 'death,' accented by consonance, repetition and effective line-break phrasings.

Sonnet 7.22 includes further effective phrasings of special note. The priest states, lines 12-14: "We are all here; no one is alien/ Now radiation's common laws/ Impel us into common cause." This portion emphasizes, generally, the eulogistic quality of the priest's address, as well as focusing on his inclusiveness of all persons, reminding readers that they, too, are not 'alien,' regardless of their persuasions. 'We are all here' reinforces the larger sense of our shared humanity, while 'no one is alien' expresses a forgiving quality and a full line-thought. The lack of a comma after 'alien' makes it, also, the reason we must stand together, ie: now that radiation's laws of physics are known to us. The call to 'common cause' is consistent with his earlier metaphorical attack of global hatreds.

The argument moves on to a discussion of how apathy and avoidance play their own role in permitting genocide and war to continue, as the priest develops his justification for his church's involvement in assisting the local demonstrators in small ways on this day. Sonnet 7.23 makes the effective introduction with a question,

It was once asked on Belsen's ashes,  
'Where were you then? Where was the Church?' (7.23)

Seth's use of the priest's rhetorical technique raises the reader's interest in an historical moment not described further in the text. The reference is to the Bergen-Belsen

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<sup>113</sup> Thomas Paine's use of 'stand' with 'freedom' is an especially appropriate example. From Paine's *Common Sense*: "O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia, and Africa, have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind." Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense*. Edited by Diane Gabaldon. New York: Bantam Dell, 2004. Orig. pub. 1776.



concentration camp, the first liberated by the Allies at the close of World War II, whose atrocities begged the question how anyone, including the Church, could have suspected that such conditions existed and not have done something to stop them.<sup>114</sup> The metric substitutions accentuate the question, while the context recalls the horrors of the prisoners there, whose recall whispers silently of a genocide much kinder than that a nuclear bomb would wreak on human life.

The priest then directs the same rhetorical inquiry at those who work at the plant, Lungless Labs, addressing them directly in Sonnet 7.28, line 1: "Workers of Lungless Labs—when dying/ Will you be proud you were midwife/ . . ." This introduces a metaphor for the gruesome birth of a machinery of death. This sonnet ends with Seth's simile on the personification of evil, lines 9-14:

Indeed, it's said that the banality  
Of evil is its greatest shock.  
It jokes, it punches its time clock,  
Plays with its kids. The triviality  
Of slaughtering millions can't impinge  
Upon its peace, or make it cringe. (7.28)

Evil is characterized as a 'regular guy,' someone who 'jokes,' keeps precise work hours, and 'plays with his kids,' an extended hyperbole designed to remind us of what we identify as the signs of a model citizen. The reference, that 'slaughtering millions' is a triviality, works as an example of unstable irony, not only satirizing the notion that a good employee will not be disturbed generally, but, too, will not care that his work creates an abomination. It plays with the notion that a good employee maintains the status quo as well as wanting their own 'peace,' ie: personal freedom from responsibility for their own acts. Seth deftly weaves the ordinary day-to-day references of a working man's pride into the message, creating an estrangement effect that elicits a re-examination of conventional behavior.

Seth then turns these 'figurations' of hate and evil on their heads, at least as a literary device, with the opening quatrain of Sonnet 7.29:

Killing is dying. This equation  
Carries no mystical import.  
It is the literal truth. Our nation  
Has long believed war was a sport. (7.29)

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<sup>114</sup> Bergen-Belsen concentration camp was originally a prisoner-of-war camp designed for trading Jews for Germans, but became overrun with prisoners transferred to it from other camps as the war wound towards its conclusion. It had no gas chambers, but also little food or shelter. It was designed for 10,000 persons, and was made to hold over 60,000, 35,000 of whom died before liberation. Another 14,000 could not be saved and died after their liberation. Among the more ironic notes, the Allies tried to feed them meat, which their systems could no longer digest and which caused many to experience increased illness resulting in death. *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

With these words, the exemplum analogy of the previous sonnet, with its intrepid if self-righteous nuclear industry employee, is turned toward the truth: killing is dying; it is not a metaphor for something else. This truth is combined with the priest's perception that America considers war a sport, an analogy reflecting a lack of sufficient value placed on the preservation of human life. The development of this theme also introduces the notion that we use a language of analytical equivalency to decide that war, or killing, is defensible. The priest's speech includes a number of allusions. For example, Sonnet 7.32 opens,

*Quo warranto?* By what authority,  
I ask you in the wounds of Christ,  
Does strength confer superiority  
Over God's earth? (7.32)

Seth emphasizes 'Quo warranto' by its repetition in English, in a macaronics turn, 'by what authority,' while its use has a multi-dimensional aspect: it also stands for a common law writ permitting the people judicial 'standing' to sue public officials for violations of the Constitution.<sup>115</sup> The argument's continuation flows, logically, in Sonnet 7.32, asking how they, "with our puny sling," can "stand/ Against this latter-day Goliath," to which the priest replies, line 6, ". . . let me ask, 'How dieth/ The wise man? As the fool.'" This quotation from the Bible suits the context of the priest's speech precisely, again, with a multi-dimensional quality, mixing his discussion of their lack of power to effect change with the vision of a future in which 'all shall be forgotten,' a future in which all persons would be equalized, regardless of their talents, wisdom, size, strength or foolishness.<sup>116</sup>

The priest concludes in Sonnet 7.34, which opens on a hopeful note:

From history we may learn two lessons:  
How slowly – and how fast – things change.

In this way, Seth utilizes the Time motif to give hope that a larger change can occur, prefaced by using the example of the freeing of the slaves, which is referenced in Sonnet 7.33. The priest ends with another Bible reference, lines 10-14:

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<sup>115</sup> In the U.S., this right is guaranteed under the Ninth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. *The Constitution of the United States, Amendment 9*. However, judicial standing for the private prosecution of public officials and agents has been substantially conscripted as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court case, *Frothington v. Mellon*, 262 U.S. 447 (1923). From that case, at 488: "The party who invokes the power must be able to show, not only that the statute is invalid, but that he has sustained or is immediately in danger of sustaining some direct injury as the result of its enforcement, and not merely that he suffers in some indefinite way in common with people generally. If a case for preventive relief be presented, the court enjoins, in effect, not the execution of the statute, but the acts of the official, the statute notwithstanding. Here the parties plaintiff have no such case."

<sup>116</sup> The Bible verse, in its context, is "The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool." *The Holy Bible*, Ecclesiastes 2: 14-16.

Let me close  
 With Deuteronomy's plain prose.  
 Here it is: 'I have set before you  
 Life and death . . . therefore choose life.'  
 Or, as that sign says, 'Strive with strife.'" (7.34)

This reference reinforces the priest's original contexting of his message, to 'choose life,' a theme that goes beyond seeking a halt to nuclear arms proliferation and moves toward a broader objective, assuring the protection of all life in all its forms, while giving organizational continuity and closure to the speech.<sup>117</sup> The clever shift to equating a protester's sign with his message signals a sense of kindness: the message can be said in many ways. The low note of finding the same meaning in a sign that says 'Strive with strife' brings a sense of comic relief to the ending of the speech, filled as it has been with dire import, as well as raising a question that interests us: 'does this mean that?' Line 14's language also returns us to the scene of the crowd, the 'sign' playing with language by playing with a rhymed imperative with end-stopped full rhyme assonance. The placard is, we realize, both staccato and a mouthful, just as the speech, and just as the task of stopping the arms race.

Activism and Acts: Acts of Prayer and Salvation: Prayer to St. Francis

To end our look at examples of poetic technique in Seth's *The Golden Gate*, let us turn our attention to two scenes. First, I discuss the prayer the author includes, directed to Saint Francis, patron saint of the City of San Francisco. Sonnet 13.4 appears in the narrative following the deaths of Jan and the LaMont parents. Second, I discuss the end of the work, in which we have an intimate view of John alone in his home. Sonnet 13.4 follows:

Patron of your beloved city,  
 O San Francisco, saint of love,  
 Co-sufferer in searing pity  
 Of all our griefs, whom from above  
 Birds would alight on, singing, feeding  
 Within your hands—hands pierced and bleeding  
 With Christ's own signs—who, stigmatized  
 As dupe and clown, apostrophized  
 The sun in its white blistering starkness  
 As brother, and the blistered moon  
 As sister, and who, blind at noon,  
 Opened your heart and sang in darkness—  
 And where it was, sowed light, look down.  
 Solace the sorrows of your town. (13.4)

The prayer's formulation utilizes traditional prayer form. Line 1 begins with a traditional invocation in a dactylic substitution for the first foot, or / - -, which enhances the

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<sup>117</sup> The Bible verse is "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." *The Holy Bible*, Deuteronomy 30: 19.

directedness of the address of the saint, whose name should be called, to begin the prayer. This same substitution rhythm is found opening lines 5, 12 and 14, giving it a regularizing and 'mantra' effect. As to scansion, the first two lines express whole clauses of a thought, which is then extended in line 3, the next thought requiring 1 ½ lines, taking us to line 4, where the next portion takes 2 lines, breaking in mid-line 6. The effect is to smooth the transition between short clauses while building lengthier dependent descriptors of the saint's notable life achievements and lessons. Seth utilizes only the last part of line 13, and line 14 to express his petition.

Seth has included key aspects of the saint's life in the adoration portion of the prayer, including the special remark made of his pity, the report of him preaching to the birds and animals, his experience of receiving stigmata - wounds as of Christ's from the cross, his humility in the face of ridicule, and his blindness in later life. Seth adds the wordplay of line 7, 'stigmatized,' a word obviously related to stigmata, but serving, here, to introduce the saint's goal-directed work, which succeeded in establishing a new religious order, despite his being shamed by some for that work.<sup>118</sup> His description, perceived as a clown, awakens the clown memory from the earlier restaurant scene, changing the way we see that, as well as humanizing the saint.

Seth follows notes on St. Francis's life with some of St. Francis's thoughts, utilizing 'apostrophized' in both its possible senses, an *equivoque*: not only did Francis converse, or chatter with nature, but he also addressed inanimate objects in nature as animate, calling all creatures his 'brothers' and 'sisters,' the Sun his brother and the Moon his sister. These lines remind the attentive reader, as well, of the animal motif, and bird and pet references, in the work, while utilizing the references to lead to the prayer's petition.

Notable morphophonological features of this sonnet include line 3's ending, drawing trochaic pressure out of 'searing pity,' which emphasizes this aspect of the saint's gifts to mankind in an unexpected adjectival twist. The alliteration of line 9's 'sun' in 'its' 'blistering starkness' effectively conveys our sense of the sun's strength, while reference to the moon's 'blistered' appearance mixes both the comical sense of it being scorched by the sun, which it is not, and the sense that it has a blistered appearance due to its crater-pocked geography. Line 12's 'sing in darkness' has an especially lyrical quality to it, pulled out of the standard iambic rhythm with a line-ending with the extra feminine syllable, for 'ness,' which has about

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<sup>118</sup> Saint Francis began the Order of the Franciscans, obtaining later approval from the Roman Catholic Church's popes. The order was developed based on a simple set of rules for living. It grew quickly to include thousands, and included monks as well as an order for women. Francis administered the growth of the order for most of his adult life, extending his teachings and philosophy and travelling to spread the order. *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

it a sense of a soft drop in the press and tonality of the prayer. Line 14's dactyl beginning, with 'Solace the,' is resolved to a strong trochee, 'sorrows,' in an effective continuation of the rhythm switch that presses the desperateness of the prayer out of the sonnet and into a realm of special signifying, an embellished emotional appeal. Thus, the stop, at 'your town,' already a double-stress spondee, creates a catalexis, a stop before what should be the final unstressed syllable of the substitution rhythm. This explication most clearly explains how certain technical features of the language are used by Seth to obtain effect in this sonnet. Additionally, not only is this sonnet able to stand alone, but its referential quality, backward and forward, give it a highly unifying effect in the larger work.

Activism and Acts: Acts of Prayer and Salvation: Endings

*The Golden Gate* ends with an unexpectedly subtle yet penetrating denouement. Leading to the scene, Liz has given birth to a baby, and her mother, who wanted to have grandchildren, enjoys seeing the baby before her death of cancer. Liz's father is harvesting the vineyards alone. Descriptive tropes in the surrounding sonnets include the harvesting of crops, a time of death, and a time of birth. Meanwhile, John lives in a state of continuous grieving, deep emotional sadness and shock, cut off from his former friends. As Sonnet 13.50 ends, lines 11-14,

In John's yard, each untended bed  
Grows thick with weeds. Inside, dust settles  
Through his disordered rooms. He holds  
A note he stares at, then unfolds. (13.50)

The 'untended bed' reference is no longer a bed for rest or love, recalling sadly his joy with Jan, but is now John's untended garden, a metaphor for his neglected emotional recovery, while the weeds we last saw as 'Hate' are, here, a sign John continues to avoid social reparations with his former friends. The 'inside' description of his home is carried over in the line 12-13 enjambment, 'dust settles,' extending its significance with the substitution rhythm of 'Through his.' 'Disordered rooms' continues the push out of iambic regularity, with its reminder of John's disordered life. Line 13's enjambment finds him 'holding' something, the pause leading to line 14's 'a note' which he stares at through most of line 14, finally 'unfolding' it in the last two syllables. Seth uses timing to special effect here. Additionally, the extent of John's own disconnectedness from his social life is emphasized by his reticence to appreciate even a simple written correspondence - in itself, extreme, and a good example of the use of literary exaggeration.

We look now at the final two sonnets of the work, Sonnets 13.51 and 13.52.

He hesitates a minute, eyeing  
 The script; then reads on. When he's done,  
 His chest is tight, and he is crying.  
 It says, *Dear John, We have a son.*  
*We hope that you'll be his godfather.*  
*We've called him John. We would far rather*  
*Have you than any other friend.*  
*Please speak to us, John. In the end,*  
*We'll all be old or dead or dying.*  
*My mother died two weeks ago.*  
*We thought perhaps you might not know.*  
*Phil and I send our love. Liz. Sighing*  
 A harsh, prolonged, exhausted breath,  
 John feels his heart revisit death.

(13.51)

Depleted by his pain, he slowly  
 Walks to Jan's desk. What did not last  
 In life has now possessed him wholly.  
 Nothing can mitigate the past.  
 He gently touches Jan's sand dollar.  
 It soothes him in the ache, the squalor  
 That is his life, and she seems near  
 Him once again, and he can hear  
 Her voice, can almost hear her saying,  
 "I'm with you, John. You're not alone.  
 Trust me, my friends; there is the phone.  
 It isn't me you are obeying.  
 Pay what are your own heart's arrears.  
 Now clear your throat; and dry these tears."

(13.52)

Sonnet 13.51 opens with the reader in a posture of pathos elicited by the previous sonnets. It also has a number of extra beats, hyperbeats, which lends it some of its special feeling. It opens with John's reticence to read the letter, in lines 1 and 2, obliquely suggesting that he recognizes the script and considers tossing it. Line 2's pull toward trochees, 'when he's done,' lowers the already low tone of the scene further. This is followed by a regular full and complete line in which he is 'crying,' with its extra feminine syllable highlighting the line end in a lingering way. The reader then confronts the note which is in italics, causing raised anticipation. The letter itself is notable for its aspects of distinct tone. The repetitive construction using 'we' solidifies Liz and Phil's agreement, while working to relax our anticipation, with its *anaphora*, repetition. The use of the short sentences in lines 4 – 6 presses us quickly through the key thoughts – their son and their request that John agree to be the 'godfather,' a triple-foot word which brings with it both surprise and substitution stress for which we excitedly accommodate an extra stressed foot. This *antibacchius*, // -, for 'godfather' in line 5 is repeated in the line 6 ending, in the pressure to pronounce that ending similarly - would 'far rather,' a rhythmic consolidation. The continuation to line 7's beginning, 'have you' is direct, creating special emphasis on their seeking him, with its spondee stress. Line 8's 'speak to us, John,' is a substitution that reaches out, again, and begs the reader to permit the rhythm, as well reaching out and tugging John's heartstrings. Due to the phrasing and punctuation at this point, it has the feeling of the quadruple foot, *choriamb*, / - - /, giving it a more rare effect.

The tenor of Liz's argument in the letter is self-reflective, and elicits the same from John, albeit it with difficulty. Sonnet 13.51's ending, with 'harsh, prolonged, exhausted,' pulls the melody down, over John, engulfing him in what is described as his heart 'visiting death.'

The risk of caring necessarily includes the ability to feel new pain due to loss at some point in the future, the oblique and twisting point of this sonnet's closure.

Sonnet 13.52 opens with the results of his exhaustion described: he is 'depleted by his pain,' with its sense of progression toward a new future. The monotonic quality of line 1 is relieved only by the slight upbeat in 'slowly,' which illustrates both a linguistic and narrative marriage of usage. Line 2's combination of walking to Jan's desk, which is at his home, while thinking of things that 'don't last' puts a special twist on the actual sentence structure, which is enjambed to line 3, in which we have the sense that he realizes he is possessed by her absence. Line 4's message, his thought that 'Nothing can mitigate the past,' is a substitution metric that is highly dactyl and distinct. It is also an oblique reference to the guilt with which he has saddled himself for not having told Jan that he loved her when, in fact, he did. The first quatrain elicits a delicate and intimate temperament, blessed by consonance (pain-possessed-past, last-life, walks-wholly).

John's reaching for the sand dollar in line 5 elicits the reader's memory of their shared time together and their walk along the beach, when Jan found it, exclaiming, "Intact!"<sup>119</sup> Recalling Jan's thrill of appreciation for the perfect beauty of nature lends depth of meaning to this figurative visual image, now reappearing. The rhythmic substitution at the end of line 5, 'Jan's sand dollar,' again matches that used in the previous sonnet in the 'godfather' line, a technical aspect the reader is surely unaware of at a conscious level, but one which deepens the continuity of the conclusion. Lines 6 and 7 explain how touching it soothes John's sorrows, with a mid-line 7 comma at 'That is his life, and she seems near,' a line thought in itself, and a summary of how John has appeared since her death, its own twisting point. Here, we are lead forward into the long sentence that ends at the end of line 10, with the suggestion that John hears her voice. The reader has been told this before, so the sense of surprise is not new, but is, because it is not 'new,' thus sharpened and deepened.

When we hear, in line 10, Jan's voice as a quote, knowing that Jan is dead, it creates for the reader a phantasmagorical quality. The allegorical device of hearing Jan's voice already lends it agency – the ability to create action, which is contrived by Seth to create additional significance by signification. The context enhances this sense, with John's

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<sup>119</sup> The event occurred at Sonnet 11.52, when Jan stands looking at the sand dollar in her hand, "Defectless emblem of delight/ And seal of oceanic power." Her thoughts drift off to her grandmother, who came from Japan to the U.S. When she hands the sand dollar to John, she says, "For the Atlantic!" 'Atlantic' is an anagram of 'Intact,' the word Jan has exclaimed when she finds it. This suggests she celebrates in it the perfection of nature. To turn it into an anagrammed 'toast' is to honor that perfection, although a toast is usually to a person or special event. Thus, it also turns the giving of it to John into a special event. John turns the occasion into a joke about monetary 'change' by mentioning it is worth four sand quarters or ten sand dimes. "For the Atlantic" includes other anagrams, some being: artefact, creation, attraction, interact, elation and relation.

weakened immunity to sensation of any kind still seeking that sound of Jan's voice. The sense of extending believability is aided by the rhythmic construction and introduction of the voice, with progressive and repetitive enjambments at line 7 ("and she seems near/ Him once again"), line 8 ("and he can hear/ Her voice"), and, the crowning enjambment, at line 9 ("can almost hear her saying,/ "I'm with you, John."). The directness of the perceived message's beginning has, thus, a chilling and also thrilling quality.

We move into the text of what Jan tells John. Line 10's division into two whole thoughts, the second being, 'You're not alone,' soothes and calms, the tonality moderatingly low, ending the line with a stop, a full thought and comforting closure. Line 11's imperative opening, with a trochee, 'Trust me,' is thrusting and a forceful order pushing against John's ennui, while the line's ending, with 'there is the phone,' is an oblique twist that urges him to call his old friends without telling him so. The telephone's appearance is a unifying trope, recalling our modern communication methods as well as other calls in the larger work between John and Jan. Line 12's apology, or argument, is direct enough - as it says, 'it isn't me you are obeying,' although it reminds us of what it would feel like to, literally, hear the voice of a loved one who had died, its otherworldly quality, perhaps scary. It also reminds us, in a multidimensional manner, of how stubborn John can be, how independent he is, and how Jan worked with these aspects of his character with wit and tenderness. The element of suspenseful resolution is delayed at line 12, enhancing anticipation due to the digression.

The final couplet, thus, acts as an emphatic resolution of the larger problem, as well as a suggested course of action. Line 13 includes the order to 'pay his heart's arrears.' With its imperative contextualization in a sense of karma, it is suggested that John owes a personal duty to reconcile his estrangement from his former friends with a future of happiness and life lived with others. The unspoken joy of sharing in the new life of their son, by accepting their invitation to be a member of their official extended family, adds blessing to the pain of reconciling his isolation and dilutes the earlier focus on his prevailing disaffection for their marriage. Line 14 includes two imperatives which extend and complement those that have just passed, line 11's 'Trust me' and line 13's 'Pay what are,' with 'Now clear your throat; and dry these tears.' In these trochee-pulling substitutions, we hear the well-worn words of common maternal love and caring, while they are telling us, obliquely, that John should prepare to talk on the phone and is crying, respectively.

With this ending, we see the 'Mother Hen' in Jan, the name of one of her sculptures, reaching out. The closing imagery, with its modern phone touch, permits us to see obliquely the resolution of the work. We are rather sure he will pick up the phone and make that call. Thematically, it is reasonable comfort, in the knowledge that John will have a future of social



interaction with persons who love him deeply as a friend and wish to maintain close ties with him throughout their lives. Some of the themes this scene seems to resolve involve self-realization and redemption, as well as concluding the motif concerning time: All things do change, but our acts and actions do make a difference, in our lives and in the lives of others, a difference that matters.

## Conclusion

I have examined a number of sonnets and sonnet passages from *The Golden Gate*. Here, I discuss several evaluative considerations. I note the comments of some on the work, and extend my evaluation to some thematic linkages I noted in the analysis. My argument, generally, is that the work merits continued attention, and greater agreement as to its poetic and narrative quality.

First, let us look at what I have done – and not done. Jonathan Culler states that poetics "starts with attested meanings or effects and asks how they are achieved," while hermeneutics "starts with texts and asks what they mean, seeking to discover new and better interpretations."<sup>120</sup> I have taken the first path, "trying to understand how works achieve the effects they do," while, as Culler observes, "the modern tradition of criticism has overwhelmingly taken the second, making the interpretation of individual works the payoff of literary study."<sup>121</sup>

I note, briefly, two fallacies of critical interpretation. The first is the intentional fallacy.<sup>122</sup> I have avoided this by not concerning myself with what the author has sought to accomplish in the work, instead, basing my analysis on an examination of the work itself. The second fallacy is the affective fallacy,<sup>123</sup> the argument that, should one study emotional effects of the work on the reader, the work itself disappears in criticism tending towards "impressionism and relativism."<sup>124</sup> The proper response to this danger is to focus directly on the "technical features, devices and form" of the work.<sup>125</sup> David Birch argues that when we are analyzing text, we should be providing an "explanation of language and not simply a neutral description of it," and, further, that we should be "involved in the articulation of our

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<sup>120</sup> Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 61.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* I am using Culler's quoted words in this context.

<sup>122</sup> The intentional fallacy is "the error of interpreting and evaluating a literary work by reference to evidence, outside the text itself, for the intention—the design and purposes—of its author." Abrams, *A Glossary*, 134.

<sup>123</sup> The affective fallacy is the "error of evaluating a poem by its effect—especially its emotional effects—upon the reader." *Id.* at 5.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

meanings of text, not reconstructing . . . other people's meanings."<sup>126</sup> This has been my approach. While this does not erase the possibility of discovering ambiguity, as Terry Eagleton notes, "ambiguity is built into the nature of poetry."<sup>127</sup>

Let us now examine some evaluative considerations. We have noted that Seth's work follows his English literary forbears.<sup>128</sup> We also see the poetic form of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. We have found Seth's focus on real world narrative consistent with the Romantic tradition in literature. Terry Eagleton notes, "part of the point of Romantic and post-Romantic poetry . . . is to restore a sense of specificity in an increasingly abstract society."<sup>129</sup> Although Seth has stated he did not much care for the "knotted language" some authors expect their readers to wrestle with, he admired certain 19th century novelists he called "*great, clear, fine writers*."<sup>130</sup> We have noted this clarity in *The Golden Gate*, a directness which gives the lives of his characters and their everyday choices potentiality. We also found this to be a feature of Seth's linguistic and technical choices.

Seth's poetic novel recalls A.D. Hope's 1965 remark, in which he bemoaned the losses inherent in the dearth of new narrative poems:

The poetry of the great commonplaces, the plain poetry of description and statement, the great narrative or the great dramatic poem embodying for its age a restatement of some acknowledged truth, all these things draw part of their delight from the sense in both reader and writer, that they are making an act of celebration—and this is always an act of joy, even when what is asserted is itself a tragic or a terrifying truth. It is this function of asserting what is the case as a conscious and satisfying celebration of the nature of things that modern poetry has largely lost. In losing this it has lost one of its main reasons for existence.<sup>131</sup>

*The Golden Gate* is a narrative poem of this stature, an act of celebration, as a consequence of Seth's technical and linguistic choices.

If we look closer at the work as sonnet and sonnet sequence, we see the form's easy propensity for making such semblances manifest. Seth's novel in verse combines a sense of conscious choices with self-consciousness. As noted by Phillis Levin, the sonnet as a form has always had a self-conscious intensity, with its introspective mode and sense of the

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<sup>126</sup> Birch, *Language, Literature and Critical Practice*, 29.

<sup>127</sup> Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*, 124.

<sup>128</sup> Santosh Gupta notes evidence of the "satiric comic element" of Byron; the "imaginary psychological and introspective elements" of Wordsworth and Coleridge; and the use of imagery, metaphor, and symbol as seen in Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. Seth's work also builds upon the works of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf in that they made the "novel poetic in the prose they wrote while the construction of their novels is governed by metaphor, rhythm and symbols." Gupta, 93.

<sup>129</sup> Eagleton, 36-37.

<sup>130</sup> Gupta, 92.

<sup>131</sup> Hope, A.D. *The Cave and the Spring: Essays on Poetry*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965, 15.

"crystallization of thought."<sup>132</sup> A single sonnet often looked forward and backward, part of the form's historical development. It was known for its "vast range of reference," its platform for discourse and address, and an "assymetry essential to its nature."<sup>133</sup> As one writer noted, "the self-consciousness of the form and language itself is what gives this book its quality."<sup>134</sup> Our analysis supports this conclusion.

Levin's description of the sonnet's strengths, in her introduction to Penguin's 500-year compilation, suggests precisely the effect of Seth's sonnets in *The Golden Gate*. The sonnet, she writes, gives the poet the ability to meld the intensity of reason with the intensity of emotion:

The need to survive and transcend consuming emotion, the need to succumb to the sway of feeling, the need to order life meaningfully . . . all these urges occupy us still. The sonnet changes whoever stands upon "its scanty plot of ground." It thrives because it offers a haven for complex emotions and memories, an innate holding pattern and stopping point, a guarantee that however dangerous or overwhelming the subject, the duration of the encounter will be brief. Because the temporal frame is set in advance, the material, however, difficult, is free to surface—an image whose meaning begins to unfold as time draws to a close.<sup>135</sup>

We have seen the intensity of surfacing emotional triggers in Seth's language choices, as well as clever game-playing aspects, enticing the reader with a wide variety of metaphors and allusions, references, quips and puns. Under the surface, we noted, also, that the stopping point is there for complex holding patterns, the surfacing of personal memories and the development of questions about our own struggle to 'order life meaningfully.'

John Fuller notes that the "modern period of the sonnet sequence has been found suitable for more meditative or speculative treatment of public themes."<sup>136</sup> Seth's work fits this characterization, with its reverberating sexual, artistic and political tensions in focus.

From a technical standpoint, in an extended sonnet sequence, Levin notes, "we see how poets respond to the pressure of repetition."<sup>137</sup> We therefore see the need to balance harmonious thematic development while avoiding redundancy. Within the twin minefields of harmonious repetition and redundancy, the skill of effectively modulating the musicality and harmony of the work is set. A.D. Hope noted that this skill is "not only an art which is in danger of being lost, but one which readers and critics often fail to recognize and

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<sup>132</sup> Levin, Phillis, ed. *The Penguin Book of the Sonnet: 500 Years of a Classic Tradition in English*. New York: Penguin Group, 2001, lxiv.

<sup>133</sup> *Id.* at lxvi, lxviii.

<sup>134</sup> Hill, 89.

<sup>135</sup> Levin, *The Penguin Book*, lxxiv. Levin's internal reference is to Wordsworth's sonnet, "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room," line 11.

<sup>136</sup> Among his examples, Fuller includes Coleridge's *Sonnets on Eminent Characters*, Wordsworth's 132 *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, and Auden's *Sonnets from China*. Fuller, *The Sonnet*, 47.

<sup>137</sup> Levin, *The Penguin Book*, lv.

appreciate."<sup>138</sup> He states, "A long poem of any kind cannot be sustained indefinitely at the highest level and a poet's problem is to learn to maintain the tone of the poem as a whole, while modulating skilfully from one level to another."<sup>139</sup> In our analysis, we identified some of the ways that overall harmonies are obtained by Seth at a detailed level, including by the consistent and effective use of tone, tempo and musicality. We examined some of Seth's responses to the problems of repetition and redundancy. We find him not only working with but playing with these tensions to increase the pleasure of the work as literature.

Part of the beauty of a good sonnet is in how it visits the various angles of a motif. As Jeffrey Wainwright writes, the sonnet sequence continues to be popular precisely because it "enables fresh angles, different tones from the intimate and meditative to the comic and polemical," its attraction being, in part, the pressure of "the flux that can be contained – sometimes only just – within the single sonnet's walls."<sup>140</sup> We have observed Seth using this tension to intense effect. We have, as well, found angular and varying tonalities modulated in ways that illustrate the development of several motifs into a harmonious whole, a kaleidoscope of technical systems being used with several voices and voicings.

"Narrative poems recount an event," states Jonathan Culler, and the first criteria of a story is to "give pleasure – pleasure, Aristotle tells us, through their imitation of life and their rhythm."<sup>141</sup> We have a sense of the *mimesis* of modern life in Seth's rhythmical work, and have identified many examples of its ability to produce pleasure. Part of this has been accomplished by Seth's storyteller contextualizations, structural choices and asides to the reader. As Culler notes, "Narrative patterning that produces a tryst . . . gives pleasure in itself."<sup>142</sup>

Lars Ole Sauerberg discusses narrative verse forms, noting that the verse novel of the 20th century recaptures narrative art in an appealing way, in part, because it "appeals directly to an audience not necessarily familiar with literary history. . . but . . . highly aware of contemporary media forms."<sup>143</sup> We have seen Seth using narrative approaches in traditional and modern ways, resulting in an interesting and dynamic narrative, referential while having modern thrust and presence, and utilizing modern vernacular and media motifs.

Successful character development is key to a novel's merit. Seth enhances the work's

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<sup>138</sup> Hope, *The Cave and the Spring*, 129.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Wainwright, *Poetry*, 142.

<sup>141</sup> Culler, *Literary Theory*, 91.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Sauerberg, Lars Ole. "Repositioning Narrative: The Late Twentieth-Century Verse Novels of Vikram Seth, Derek Walcott, Craig Raine, Anthony Burgess and Bernadine Evaristo." *Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies* 59, no. 6 (2004): 439-64, 461.

varied voices through his characters. Rowena Hill remarks, "As a novel, the book is successful. It is carefully structured and balanced in its episodes. All the characters are clearly identified and followed through according to their importance. The pace is rapid without loss of depth. All the detail is credible and vivid."<sup>144</sup> Seth's characters, despite their 'stock' quality, become, to some extent, reflections of what they see and hear; confronted by the world around them, they attempt to make meaningful decisions based on their perceptions. They retain the quality of being open to development and supplementation, also, by the reader, in a commonly-experienced fictional manner. Seth's work in blending character and story was also evidenced in our analysis. As Jay Curlin writes, "the narrative is structured far more on the patterns of relationships," while characterizing Seth's work as showing us "how the narrative genre of the novel can achieve the complex structure and beauty of a lyric poem."<sup>145</sup>

What should we conclude about Seth's use of figurative language? The 'figurative' in poetry has commonly referred to "an expression that lends colour or force."<sup>146</sup> However, Jeffrey Wainwright - and others - suggest we move toward a broader sense of figurative language in literary criticism. As Wainwright notes, "while the evolution and use of language has obviously been functional . . . , its sounds and shapings, both spoken and written, are also inevitably gestural . . . poetry is not really a peculiar, demarcated zone . . . language is inevitably gestural and intrinsically 'poetic' in the qualities I'm calling gestural."<sup>147</sup> My analysis has included study of both figurative and non-figurative language. David Birch calls this "language-aware analysis," suggesting we "engage" with the text in its choices of meanings, which arise from our linguistic and literary competencies: "Such engagement requires a skill with understanding grammatical structures, a skill with words, a skill with literary effects, a skill with meanings, and a skill with language analysis."<sup>148</sup> According to Birch, while these skills do not account for the 'total' meaning in a text, they "go a long way towards explaining why a reader reacts in a particular way to a text."<sup>149</sup>

'Gestural' language, or 'figurations' using language, have been illustrated by placing "a greater emphasis on the language of the text," resulting in a broader understanding and appreciation of it, as well as what Birch has called "a more detailed and formally rigorous argument about the 'special' character of literary/poetic language, because language within

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<sup>144</sup> Hill, 87.

<sup>145</sup> Curlin, 19, 24.

<sup>146</sup> Wainwright, *Poetry*, 188.

<sup>147</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>148</sup> Birch, *Language, Literature and Critical Practice*, 88.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

literature is considered to 'draw attention to itself.'"<sup>150</sup> We have studied examples of the 'figurative' language of the work, and have noted its special character.

The breadth of a work's figurative language's *effects* is, more often, the critics' subject. I correct for that imbalance with detailed technical analysis at the word, phrase and sentence level. Figurative language enhances the pleasure the work produces, with its variety, clever choices, extensions of meaning, and flexibility. This flexibility of tone is noted favorably by several critics. The sonnets are, as one writer described, "slack and colloquial in the dialogues, terse and biting in rage against critics, full of compressed insights. . . , mellow in descriptions . . . , using echoes of older authors. . . , inventing absurd rhymes. . . and enjoying sound effects."<sup>151</sup>

How does figurative language create effects? As Terry Eagleton states, "it is the very essence of words to point beyond themselves, so that to grasp them as precious in themselves is also to move more deeply into the world they refer to."<sup>152</sup> Within that world, "it is characteristic of poetic language that it gives us not simply the denotation of a word. . . but a whole cluster of connotations or associated meanings."<sup>153</sup> As Eagleton notes, "it is as though poetry grants us the actual experience of seeing meaning take shape as a practice, rather than handling it simply as a finished object."<sup>154</sup> "What looks incarnational is really associational. We associate one kind of materiality with another kind of materiality," he states, noting "we have come to forge magical associations between words and things."<sup>155</sup> Our analysis confirms that, in this work, the figurative use of language evidences intentionally selected, highly interesting technical turns and choices that are associational in acutely appropriate ways. It is both direct and gestural, forging both expected and unexpected associations.

At a rhetorical level, the 'figurative' includes specialized languages. In Seth's work, these include the language of personal ads, art critic reviews, the defense industry, peace protesters, religious sermons, academic publishers, family recipes, prayer, book-readers, book lovers, and music appreciators. We see Seth using these to achieve effects, making it possible to put a face on specialized societies and experiences, and permitting him to comment obliquely on them and through them. We understand, also, that we know something about the world described by Seth in the familiar tonalities of its words and turns, finding multiple layers of meaning and enhanced intensity in that meaning.

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<sup>150</sup> *Id.* at 115.

<sup>151</sup> Hill, 89.

<sup>152</sup> Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*, 69.

<sup>153</sup> *Id.* at 110.

<sup>154</sup> *Id.* at 68.

<sup>155</sup> *Id.* at 61-62.

How do we assess the value of specific metaphor in such a work? With metaphor, we are asked to consider two or more meanings for a given context, both a natural meaning and a nonliteral or metaphorical meaning. Burton Raffel states, "The measure of a metaphor, which is nonliteral language, is in its working and associational aspects. A good metaphor is associationally appropriate, lending enhanced meaning or direction to its context. It is expressing a number of things all at the same time, while being, linguistically, "tightly worked out."<sup>156</sup> Additionally, he notes, "what is literal and what is nonliteral can shift, depending on context."<sup>157</sup> My analysis has sought to contextualize Seth's technical choices. Doing so enhances an appreciation for those choices. As Derrida wrote, "Metaphor is never innocent. It orients research and fixes results. When the spatial model is hit upon, when it functions, critical reflection rests within it. In fact, and even if criticism does not admit this to be so."<sup>158</sup> As my analysis demonstrates, Seth's use of metaphor is both confident and varied, intentional in the sense Derrida refers to, and shifting in the sense referred to by Raffel.

An evaluative discussion of Seth's use of imagery is a related concern. As one writer noted, "When one backs away from the story, . . . when one views the whole of Seth's world through, to use . . . his . . . metaphor, a "wide-angle lens," one sees that Seth has actually brought to his comprehensive vision of life in the San Francisco area the type of order and precision that Dante gave to his far more encyclopedic *Commedia*."<sup>159</sup> Raffel has noted, "in our everyday language, as in poetry, the literal and the use of nonliteral are frequently so mixed together that no one either could or would want to separate them. . . . To understand the inevitable interweaving of these different contexts, these different approaches to reality, is to take the first and perhaps the largest step toward understanding poetry."<sup>160</sup> As Jay Curlin notes, "Seth deliberately immerses one in a sea of images that reflect not only the comprehensiveness of his scope but the disconnectedness of a society very much in need of cohesion."<sup>161</sup> Helen Khanzhina remarks that the reader is occasionally 'defamiliarized' from the story by the language of the sonnets.<sup>162</sup> This aspect is part of the push and pull by which we recognize the sonnet's conventions. We have found shifting planes of wordplay and meaning, both literal and nonliteral, with imagery which is tightly worked, providing highly appropriate contexts for understanding the choices Seth's characters have. Seth's imagery

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<sup>156</sup> Raffel, *How to Read a Poem*, 51.

<sup>157</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>158</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, 17.

<sup>159</sup> Curlin, 14.

<sup>160</sup> Raffel, *How to Read a Poem*, 4-5.

<sup>161</sup> Curlin, 14.

<sup>162</sup> Khanzhina, 197.

continually compliments the multiple levels of meaning in the 'story.'

Let us consider, separately, the tone of the work. Gupta writes, "The flexibility of tone makes the reading delightful. The metre and rhythm lend themselves to the mood, and help in creating a verbal structure that is supple, resonant and suggestive."<sup>163</sup> Tone and tonality are a function of Seth's use of syllabic metrics which "contribute to its musicality and rhythm."<sup>164</sup> We identified Seth's poetic rhythmicity, which involves frequent substitution schemes that enliven meaning. We saw that flexibility of tone utilized to unite and to shift forward and backward in the narrative action. In each case, we saw tone used for specific literary purposes in an effective way, ultimately unifying the work.

Let us remind ourselves where we have been as we examine some aspects of theme, or motif, in the work. In our first example, we found Seth raising reader anticipation with a brainy frisbee toss. Seth's use of figurative language helps us to share the contextual development of John's quandary, as well as the other characters Seth places in his focal plane. We are lead into the heartfelt, comical and quirky friendships between the characters, all caught in a modern world, with its American culture, 'placeness' and work-life dichotomies. The struggles for intimacy among both heterosexual and homosexual partners and the tensions of family life are examined with lyrical and sensitive linguistic techniques, while the whole is enlivened with high and low comedic touches.

Seth plays confidently with language and literary references, cultural commentary and character development, creating a tonality that is both as staccato as a questioned direction ("Advertise?") and as culturally ensconced as "What'll you have?" Dialogue moves the narrative forward while providing us significant glimpses of the unspoken positive and negative attributes of the characters. We see the broader themes of human nature – love, happiness, family, society - being threaded, pieced together, unravelled, and re-constituted throughout the course of the plot.

Seth's development of the *carpe diem* and *tempus fugit* motifs is consistent throughout the work, starting at Sonnet 1.1 with John's decision to think of things 'less extreme,' and ending at Sonnet 13.52, with Jan's voiced "Now clear your throat . . ."; in other words, we move to the 'Now:' we should not wait. The time motif is used variously for the different characters, making it more interesting, while contributing to the work's sense of allegorical significance, the practice of 'allegory' being, itself, an exercise in watching the tension

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<sup>163</sup> Gupta, 91.

<sup>164</sup> I use Raffel's discussion of syllabic metrics to context this assessment. Raffel, *How to Read a Poem*, 243.



between literal and metaphorical meaning.<sup>165</sup> Additionally, as Barbara Benjamin notes, amusingly, "the modern reader is so thoroughly indoctrinated into a lifestyle of hemorrhaging time that recognition of the many devices Seth uses to call our attention to living life at the bleeding edge probably eludes most of our notice."<sup>166</sup>

We also noted the value of social activism explored as a theme through development of the anti-nuclear issue, an industrial source of Bay area work and a weapon of global destruction. Seth plays with the tensions of the topic not only through the acts, or choices, of the characters, but also by examining their stated reactions to thinking and talking about it. The figurations involved include a wide range of rhetorical and linguistic touches. This theme is combined with the time motif in an interesting way. Seth's characters are asked to focus on making the most of their time on Earth, while working to preserve all forms of life. The frenetic pace of modern life and work life inform the tension within this theme at a higher level.

These and other motifs are informed by clearly delivered and appropriate linguistic turns and viewpoints. Some critics have found Seth's messages didactic. Carol Iannone, for example, is skeptical of Seth's treatment of "that summa of causes, peace," stating she dislikes his 'moral beatitudes.'<sup>167</sup> One answer to this concern is to recognize the asymmetry of thematic treatment in literature, generally. As Sauerberg notes, the prose novel has been characterized by "the moral possibilities of holding up a mirror, compassionate, satirical, etc. to the mundane lives and habits of readers" since Cervantes.<sup>168</sup> As Burton Raffel states, "Balance is not a substantive issue, but a technical one. The only sort of balance one can find, in matters substantive, would be even-handedness of treatment, equal time to differing points of view."<sup>169</sup> As he notes, this makes "no sense in art, which is not inherently symmetrical."<sup>170</sup>

Paranjape discusses the overarching theme of "self-realization" in detail, finding the book "ultimately 'spiritual'"<sup>171</sup> while Gupta notes that the theme of "passion" is complemented by themes of "affection, mutual consideration and compatibility."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> As Quilligan notes, allegorists work with language at a level that "makes the final focus of their narratives not merely the social function of language, but, in particular, the slippery tensions between literalness and metaphor. They scrutinize language's own problematic polysemy." Quilligan, Maureen. *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1979, 64.

<sup>166</sup> Benjamin, B., 7.

<sup>167</sup> Iannone, 55.

<sup>168</sup> Sauerberg, 449.

<sup>169</sup> Raffel, *How to Read a Poem*, 108.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Paranjape, 58.

<sup>172</sup> Gupta, 95.

When we examined Seth's characters, we found that the social 'acts' of the characters bring them into relationship with one another in ways that test the values of their lives. The allegorical quality of their personal interactions 'happens' in culturally modern ways, fraught with the tensions of work and home life, while exuding the special significance of long friendship, captured time for reading, art-making, sharing and intimacy. Seth's narrative verse propels the characters towards their personal goals and challenges, their social and sexual lives and their tolerances for change and intimacy in technically effective literary ways.

We identified a variety of patterns used by Seth in dialogue and viewpoint. In the party scenes, the use of shifts in viewpoint, as well as changing perceptions of the characters, both with respect to each other and in the eyes of the reader, enhance the pleasure of that sonnet sequence. Clever use of phrasing, timed interruptions, breaks and pauses assists in that enhancement. The variety of viewpoint shifts also assists, varying from passers-by in seemingly trite conversation to the innermost thoughts of a tipsy pal, from asking how one's work is going to questioning the merit in one's life. Seth moves deliberately and seamlessly from pathos, pun and anagram to elegiac and lyrical tonalities, bringing his characters into and out of the world of nature and mankind in a way that preserves its verisimilitude to 'lived life,' with its highs and lows on any given day.

Seth's treatment of animals and pets is an especially acute figurative stroke. As Benjamin – and others – have observed, Seth "uses the pets as foils to their human owners in several ways."<sup>173</sup> They lend comic and serious effects, creating allegorical personas as *tropes* that permit Seth to comment obliquely within his diverse themes: among these, the nature of fate, the danger of over-confidence in love, the comfort of caring for pets at home, and the nature of repressed sexuality. Seth's literary treatment of the animals adds multi-dimensionality to the work through systematic and regular applications that create intensification, commentary, comfort and relief.

Finally, the author is found within the work itself, as a pastiche, a miscellany bag. Seth, as poet, creates anticipation, amuses, delights, causes the reader to engage, feel they share joy and sadness, pathos and empathy. He is "the storyteller,"<sup>174</sup> the reader's confidant, 'scooping' the characters' backgrounds and special problems. He is also making an appearance at the characters' parties, the low comic note to the high-tones thus made higher in his characters' interactions, while confessing his boorishness, his albatross of a Ph.D. and

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<sup>173</sup> Benjamin, B., 5.

<sup>174</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." In *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, 11-29. Essex, U.K.: Pearson Education Ltd., 1998.

lack of social skills. He is the bearer of a sad story, and its sympathetic Over-soul, the Paramatman of his tale, gazing at the universe while praying for the city after the deaths of Jan and the LaMont's on the highway.<sup>175</sup> These shifts in his persona maintain our interest in him and create direct relationships between the author, the work, the world and the reader that enhance the work's overall strength and impact.

*The Golden Gate* reveals elements of intentional disorganization, surprise, 'apology,' twist, and orderliness. It encompasses life, death, entrances and exits. It has scene-stealing babies, nuclear weapons, starry skies and sparkling highways in the night. It has a maladjusted cat, an iguana on a leash, an all-night bookstore, and unpicked olives on Campus Drive. It has a censored sex scene, art sculptures with riddle-ridden names, lovemaking and oratory. The reader watches whales as they seasonally go by, walks a beach in the rain and visits a very special bridge. We have found that it includes a kaleidoscope of technical effects, handled with virtuosity and *virve*. It also has pet peeves and moral messages.

Based on my analysis, we can conclude that Seth's contextualization of his thematic, narrative and linguistic choices enhances the work, resulting in a fine combination of variety and consistency, as well as a quality of special geographic 'placeness' and cultural amends. In Seth's conclusion to the work, we identified technical elements that enhance its complexity, with excitement and compression, all subtly worked out. This analysis supports Paranjape's conclusion, that "The ending is far from facile or fairy-tale like."<sup>176</sup>

My analysis has included representative selections within the work, and has taken a consistent and detailed approach to examining their technical and contextual poetic features. My analysis, albeit limited, supports the conclusion that *The Golden Gate* is a more significant contribution to modern narrative verse than has been agreed upon to date. This work, therefore, merits renewed literary notice, continued scholarship, and further annotation.

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<sup>175</sup> "The Over-soul" is the title of an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson, from *Essays: First Series* (1841). The concept is seen developed in the East, in Hindu, as the Paramatman, or 'Supreme Soul.'

<sup>176</sup> Paranjape, 104.

## APPENDIX A

## APPENDIX A

### *The Golden Gate: A Synopsis*

*The Golden Gate, A Novel in Verse* is comprised of thirteen sections of sonnet-story text. It is prefaced by three sonnets: the Acknowledgements, a Dedication, and a Table of Contents. The general metric form is iambic tetrameter, and the thirteen parts have varying numbers of sonnets. The total number of sonnets, including the introductory sonnets, is 593. The rhyme scheme of each is: a,b,a,b, c,c,d,d, e,f,f,e, g,g.

Seth attributes his motivation to explore the iambic tetrameter sonnet form to reading Alexander Pushkin's extended poem, *Eugene Onegin*, as translated into English by Charles Johnson.

The story of *The Golden Gate* proceeds from a point in the early 1980s, "circa 1980" (1.1), in San Francisco. Seth follows his characters, a group of people in their 20s and 30s, into their personal lives. They are brother, sister, friend or acquaintance. We see the main characters go to and from their work, homes, families and social activities. In some cases, we meet their parents, hear of their ancestors, or meet the landlady. Some are suffering from modern career 'battle fatigue,' while others yearn for artistic or career success, regret loves past, yearn for lovers for the present and future, and, perhaps most importantly, attempt to fulfill their goals of establishing happy lives for themselves, both at home and at work. In the center of the work, we follow some of the characters to an anti-nuclear weapons demonstration outside a factory where some related parts are manufactured.

I hope this synopsis will give those who have not read this work a framework on which to better understand my analysis. It is intended as a broad and general reflection of the plot's harmonies and tensions, points and counterpoints; I do not treat all the subjects raised in each sonnet. Several subjects may be found in one sonnet, and some subjects are woven throughout several sonnets, with aspects reflecting and refracting at different points in the sonnet sequence. My description of the sonnet, assigned to its individual sonnet number in the work, paints with the broadest strokes that sonnet's subject and substance.

### Acknowledgements

Seth acknowledges, first, his debt to Stanford University, noting that his Ph.D. there is still incomplete. Second, Seth thanks his friends for their advice and praise; then, John and Susan Hughes; and, last, to those prospective readers who have bought the book: "backed your brashness with your purse."

### Dedication

Seth acknowledges that he has worked on this for 13 months, is exhausted but, at the same time, can hardly put it down. He asks that the hands of Steele should read its pages, apologizes if anything in it bothers the reader, attributing those passages to its newborn status, and claims that if anything is found to be engaging, Seth must credit Tim.

## Table of Contents

The Table of Contents reads like a group of unrelated sentences, each seemingly about a separate type of event or occurrence. Below, each part is introduced with its line from the Table of Contents sonnet.

### Part One

Part One is described in Vikram Seth's Table of Contents as, "The world's discussed while friends are eating." In this section, we are introduced to two of the most important of the small handful of characters we will meet in the novel. After Seth 'hails' his muse, and informs of the date, "circa 1980," we meet our first key character, John, 26, whose solitude and career success have led him to become disillusioned with life: John wonders who would miss him if he died (1.1). Seth then discusses John's efforts to put sentimental concerns aside, but, we learn, he continues to be dissatisfied with the ability of computer science to ease human loneliness (1.2). John's appearance and wide-ranging interests are described (1.3), and his demeanor is defined as charming, flaring, before his "chaste ambitious phase" (1.4), all leading, in late September, to a mid-life personal crisis and real darkness (1.5). John's parental family is noted for its absence from his life, and his penchant for complaining against numerous bothersome systems and bureaucracies affecting daily life is remarked upon (1.6). His detachment, he must confess, described by Seth as "A linkless node – no spouse or sibling,/ No children -..." is bothering him (1.7). Seth shows us John, arriving home after walking in Golden Gate Park. He is browsing through old record albums, finding soothing moralistic platitudes in an eclectic mix of Beatles, Herb Alpert and Pink Floyd songs (1.8).

John reminisces about his college days and college friends, in particular Phil, while we gather that John now works for a Silicon Valley company. Seth slips in a subtle lecture on the Silicon Valley's amorality. In sum, "John kneels bareheaded and unshod / Before the Chip, a jealous God" (1.9). John reflects on his friend, Phil's, move from the Department of Defense to peace work (1.10). They have taken different paths, but he determines to call him anyway, with no answer.

John then considers calling his friend, Janet Hayakawa, a former lover, an artist and musician he now calls a friend (1.11). Janet is described for the reader as a daytime artist and nighttime drummer in a band (1.12), and we hear of her desire for serious critical acceptance of her artwork (1.13). A sample of art critic insensitivity and dubious credibility is then placed on the table for our review, as seen through Janet's eyes (1.14), followed by a closer look at her home, "an eagle's nest,/ A great loft studio, light and airy," and her pets, two Siamese cats, Cuff and Link (1.15, 1.16). Janet's family history is referenced by viewing her apartment interior, with its old desk and calligraphy scroll, "Internment," a reference to the internment of Japanese in the U.S. during World War II, painted by her grandfather (1.17).

John decides to tell Janet of his depression and concerns, calls her and gets her voicemail (1.18). We then hear what John is reading, a clever list of double-entendre book titles. John and Janet make a lunch date (1.19). At the Chinese restaurant, Christmas muzak greets John, who has arrived on time, while Janet is late (1.20), and they settle into place and converse over lunch (1.21, 1.22). John makes his melancholy confession to Janet

(1.23), after which she advises him on socializing, nutrition, attitude and re-evaluation (1.24). She continues with her advice in the 'seize life' motif (1.25). As Janet reminds him that time passes, John responds with gruff disaffection for how to "hook chicks," resulting in a properly feminist tirade from Janet to his "venial linguistic tumor" (1.26, 1.27). John apologizes, while Janet begins exploring 'venues,' places where John might find someone nice to date, perhaps the office, perhaps female or male, to which homosexual suggestion John responds, simply, "can it" (1.28). John reflects on Janet's drinking, while Janet continues her inquiry, suggesting he'll find someone savvy at a museum (1.29).

We learn of John's workaholic weekends (1.30) and his depths of despair. Janet then suggests a personal advertisement approach (1.31). John rejects the idea out of hand (1.32) while Janet, now convinced, argues he should not be prejudiced (1.33). John mocks her notion, creating a cynical ad-text (1.34) while Janet reminds him, in reply, that they are both getting older, a classical exhortation to the end of youth's banal concerns and the move towards aging with grace (1.35). As Janet continues, ("Time sidles by: on television / ..."), she outlines their changing goals and pitiful woes (1.36). John doesn't disagree with her, but thinks she simplifies too much, thanks her for her concern as a "true friend," but declines the pers-ad approach (1.37).

We begin to move away from the subject of intimacy, as John asks how Janet's latest art project is proceeding, as well as her rock group, Liquid Sheep. She is looking for album cover art, recalling an air balloon poster as a reference (1.38, 1.39). They then open their fortune cookies (1.40), and Janet shares her advice, to set a goal of meeting someone special for himself. They part happily with a brief kiss, yet with Janet frowning with feminist discomfort as John holds the door open for her (1.41).

## Part Two

Part 2, entitled, "A cache of billet-doux arrive," begins with Janet returning home late from a rock-band performance gig, inspired by the stars and solitude to write (2.1, 2.2). The morning finds her reviewing her draft personal ad on John's behalf over breakfast with her cats (2.3). Responses begin to filter back to her, through the *Bay Guardian* newspaper, which Janet reviews, trying to decide which to forward to John (2.4, 2.5).

When John receives a package from her of selected responses, he is naturally furious (2.6), although Janet defends her decision and encourages John to reply (2.7). John, in a fit of anger, speeds off in his Peugeot (2.8) and gets a speeding ticket (2.9), then rushes to work, where his defense of a fired colleague gets him nowhere, followed by the rush hour traffic home, noted with various car-radio references (2.10). The visible California freeway landscape's mixture of weird and soulless brands, signs, symbols and signals is then cleverly elucidated by Seth (2.11, 2.12).

John reflects on his new feelings of alienation (2.13) before turning a critical eye on his own work-life (2.14). Stewing on his way home, he stops at a bar and feels better after a couple drinks (2.15). It is then time to go home and face the 'pers ad' replies he has received, providing a clever look at the myriad ways we seek and filter proposals for intimacy. John selects three for follow-up (2.16, 2.17, 2.18, 2.19).

John's date with the first, "Wasp Bluestocking," to a play and dinner, is described with amusement and "a glad adieu" (2.20); with the second, "Belinda Beale," candor and

flight (2.21). John's third choice, "Anne," turns out to be Janet, writing to him in disguise. After John responds twice, she "arranged her creature's discontinuation" (2.22, 2.23, 2.24). Feeling guilty, Janet forwards seven additional responses she had culled from the group (2.25), the seventh of which strikes a chord with John (2.26, 2.27). Here, not only the text is examined, but also the physical significance of receiving a letter (2.28).

We now meet Liz Dorati, who has replied to the personal ad with a letter of interest to John. She is an attorney with a "staid law firm" (2.29). We hear of her school days, home and family (2.29, 2.30), her mother's wish for grandchildren (2.31), and her siblings, Sue and Ed (2.32). Liz is lonely, living with her cat, Charlemagne (2.33). Her hopes as she writes her personal ad response are described (2.34). John meets Elisabeth, or Liz, at the Café Trieste on a Sunday morning for breakfast (2.35). Their first impressions are noted, and then both speak at once (2.36). They admit they are glad to have met (2.37), and enjoy a wide-ranging discussion (2.38). Jan happens in, sees them appearing so happy (2.39), and ducks out, headed home to her cats, feeling low-spirited, while Liz mentions her cat, Charlemagne, to John, who toasts his namesake (2.40).

John asks Liz out again, and they plan dinner at the Tree of Heaven restaurant, with a movie afterwards (2.41). That following Thursday, they meet for their date with high expectations and anticipation (2.42), and her subtle and seductive appearance to John is described (2.43). The waiter finds them "moonstruck" when he arrives to get their order (2.44). Liz begins with small talk, but John reaches deep to express his desperation for her company (2.45). Liz replies they might just be glad (2.46), assuring him not to fear her, at which John opens up, wishing to discuss the bigger issues of life, referred to in a striking ending quatrain (2.47). They eat, drink wine, relaxing and talking on various subjects (2.48), when the author gives the film director's cue, "Cut to dessert." (2.49). They walk and talk, take a drive and view the city and sea-lights panorama below them, hold each other and kiss (2.49, 2.50). Another cut-to brings us to John in Liz's bed the next morning, a cat at his feet and Liz bringing in coffee (2.51).

John is late for work and befuddled by the boss's questions (2.52), while Liz arrives promptly at the law firm, and races through stacks of work, the staff guessing the reasons she is so efficient today (2.53). That evening, they head for the movie theater they skipped the night before, Fassbinder's *Veronica Voss*, only to find it incomprehensible. They leave, go back to Liz's place and make love again (2.54).

Here, at the end of the second section, the author steps in, in three final sonnets. First, he wishes to discuss with the "Gentle Reader" their love predicament, and also to "sigh" over his own life's "mess" and his own "loverless" status (2.55). Next, he asks what love is, proffering several strains of its romantic understanding (2.56), and then, comically summarizing their romantic devolution, hinting at trouble, but not yet sharing the details (2.57).

### Part Three

Part 3 is entitled, "A concert generates a meeting." The concert referred to is Brahms's *Quartet in A Minor for Strings*, his first published string quartet. Present are: John and Liz; Liz's sister, the cello player, Sue; John's old college friend, Phil, and Phil's son, Paul. In sum, John and Liz run into Phil at the concert at which Sue is playing, and Phil is invited to Liz's place for a party the following week.



Seth opens the chapter with a filmic and novelistic landscape panning movement, inviting the "Dear Reader" to move south one hour from the city of San Francisco, describing the San Andreas Fault (3.1). Here, Phil, on a hike, sits on a rock with his son, Paul, lost in thought (3.2).

Phil feels time is passing and he muses on aging (3.3). His spirit lifts as he views nature's Fall splendor around him, hears his son, Paul, singing to himself, and a mockingbird cry (3.4). A jay bird flashes by. Phil sees cattle browsing in the gullies, and joggers go panting by (3.5). Phil's work situation is described, that he left a job that wanted his soul, a job involving "the space and missile race" (3.6). Phil tells Paul a story about a cat who liked to drink ink (3.7) and became silver-haired (3.8), at which Paul asks for more. Phil continues with the story of a bear who finds three apple tarts (3.9, 3.10) when he realizes Paul has "gone exploring." Phil finds Paul watching a spider (3.11), and Paul requests a spider pet, to which Phil suggests rabbits. Interestingly, here, Paul spies Stanford University, Seth's longtime alma mater, and the surrounding area, asking his Dad what it is, to which Phil replies "A school," and what appears a "field," actually a "lake when it rains." Paul responds, challenging the way Phil speaks about Paul's mother, Claire, "You talk like Mom is dead." (3.12). Phil replies he will get Paul a spider, and Paul writhes in tears and emotional pain, not knowing or understanding the reason he is without his mother (3.13). Phil comforts Paul, while wondering, privately, why she's not been in touch more (3.14).

We now get some background on what occurred to Phil and Paul, as a family. It seems that Claire was "wooded" away by a charming Easterner after they had been married 6 years. Her family's disapproval of their marriage is noted, as well as Phil's Jewish heritage and their Protestant ancestry (3.16). Claire's family reactions to Phil are noted, as well as their young age at marriage: Phil was 21. Paul is now 6. (3.17). Phil reminisces on their love of playing music together, a fire in the fireplace, and feels his emotional good will was taken from him by Claire (3.18). Finally, Phil tells Paul that his mother has just gone away; he doesn't know for how long, and he will never leave Paul alone, suggesting Paul will leave Phil first (3.19). Phil scrambles Paul down the hill on his shoulders to his traded-down car (3.20).

Phil and Paul's simple dinner is described, and the landlady brings them a pie as she feels they are starving (3.21). Phil thanks her and offers her a brandy, at which she reminds him that her daughter, Rowena, likes him (3.22). Rowena is described, is involved in the peace movement and has told her mother she likes Phil for leaving his job, while her mother asks her to choose someone else so as not to hurt him (3.23). The evening is brought to a close with a father-and-son ritual and the singing of a lullaby (3.24).

Here, Seth addresses the reader again, to "adjust a portrait too one-sided." Claire's family, he states, found Phil crude and a rogue, a social mis-fit (3.25). As Phil's vigor exhausted Claire, she withdrew, finally leaving him, which her mother found to be Phil's own fault (3.26). Claire thought it would be better if she did not flit in and out of Paul's life, and so has stayed away, bringing Phil closer to his son (3.27).

A few months later, Liz gets tickets to a concert at Stanford at which her sister will be playing, asking John, who has mixed feelings about the planned music program (3.28). John complains of Schönberg. They attend the Ionian Quartet concert, at which Sue plays cello. They enjoy the Mozart, described at 3.29 and 3.30. Liz reflects on her mother's illness which has prevented her mother from attending, while John complains further on

Schönberg (3.31). John sees that Phil and his son are in attendance, and introduces Liz to Phil and Paul Weiss at the intermission (3.32). John invites Phil to a housewarming party at Liz's, and Phil accepts, making arrangements for Paul's babysitting with the Lamont's (3.33). Phil admires the music performance, speaking to Liz about Sue, and Liz mentions Sue will be at the party (3.34).

John attempts to re-establish a buddy relationship with Phil and asks about old times. Phil declines to chat, observing that John's complaints on Schönberg being boring indicates he hasn't "changed a bit." (3.35) John persists, asking why Phil left his job, while Phil changes the subject, admiring John's friend, Liz (3.36). The concert continues with Brahms's *String Quartet in A-Minor*. Seth characterizes the music, as Paul recalls his mother humming Brahms. Part 3 ends with Paul reminiscing on being in the arms of his mother, presently gone from his life (3.37).

#### Part Four

Part 4 is entitled, "A house is warmed. Sheep come alive." This is a reference to the party at Liz's apartment at which Janet's band, Liquid Sheep, are playing. The senses of frenzy, connection and disconnection experienced at such a house-party are deliciously captured by Seth in the combination of meetings and partings between the party attendees. In the end, Liz's brother, Ed, finds himself attracted to Phil, and the two end up spending the night together.

The coverage opens with Liz's mother leaving the party after meeting some of Liz's friends, including John, of whom she approves (4.1). Liz turns and re-enters the party. A professor, an expert on Pittsburgh, tries to bend Liz's ear with talk of his architecture studies (4.2). Liz graciously deflects him, while spying John, who claims her cat pissed on his tuxedo trousers (4.3). Liz defends her cat while John exclaims he hates the pet (4.4). Janet's band is now playing loudly, and Seth captures the frantic vigor, after which the band takes a break (4.5).

John tries to connect Phil romantically with someone at the party, Rose, although we learn she is high on cocaine and a diplomat's daughter, who self-implodes on the topic of parties with pithy aphorisms (4.6). Phil decides to be rid of her, and so dips his glasses in avocado dip and begins licking them, at which Rose flees. At this point, hostess, Liz, takes Phil to meet Jan and Sue, Liz's sister (4.7). We find Jan and Sue chatting about music when they arrive (4.8), at which Jan freezes, as she is an old friend of Claire's, Phil's ex-wife, and believes he ruined that relationship (4.9). Sue asks Phil why Janet has scooted on and he claims not to know. Phil compliments Sue on her playing at the concert he attended. Meanwhile, John, with Liz, see Sue talking with Phil. John thinks Sue may be falling for him (4.10). Liz is less sure. John wants to find someone for Phil, while Liz observes her party scene. Its rag-bag group of dissimilar friends and attendees is described, as she sees her brother, Ed, opening a bottle of wine and spilling on her carpet (4.11).

We next see Bjorn, a Swedish runner, leering at Rose; the Van Camps, a couple bickering; as well as someone named Kim Tarvesh. An anagram for Vikram Seth, Kim is described as sadly weighted down with his economics Ph.D. (4.12).

The party scene continues in detail: The professor has, again, captured Liz to talk to, discussing his latest Pittsburgh publication (4.13). Phil is drinking too much and begins

to turn inward in a philosophical moment, thinking deeply of 'the heart' of life and his son (4.14). John interrupts Phil's reverie, asking why he left his job, to which Phil replies, "to save the world," at which John teases him (4.15). The author appears, here, to address the reader by noting the background on John's and Phil's debate (4.16). Phil teases John back, and John challenges Phil again, when Phil responds eloquently on the dangers of John's work, and the need to do something to stop the world's nuclear annihilation (4.17). John challenges him, asking what action that might be, as Phil rejoins that picketing companies, challenging and suing, could possibly help (4.18). Phil continues, painting a scene of annihilation that is poetic and filmic (4.19), while arguing that all peoples of all nations cringe in fear of nuclear destruction, which would literally destroy all living things on earth (4.20). Phil asks, shouldn't we stop this possibility, and ends his argument (4.21).

Ed Dorati, who is Liz's and Sue's brother, has been listening, rapt, to Phil, and is now introduced to him. We learn a bit about Ed's trigger topics, "One's Uranium;/ The other, God." (4.22). Ed is described further as energetic but deeply anxious and drawn to issues of religion and spirituality (4.23). Liz introduces Ed to Phil, who is, at first, uncomfortable, then slips into chatting with him at length, and learns of Ed's pet iguana (4.24). Ed explains how he came to buy an iguana. He named him Arnold Schwarzenegger (hereafter 'AS'), and discusses his pet's diet (4.25, 4.26), on which Phil provides advice. Phil tells Ed of his son, Paul, and then, drunkenly suggests 'women are for the birds.' Overheard by Jan, she arrives, exploding on their scene (4.27). Jan chastises Phil for being a man, exclaiming that Claire was right to leave him (4.28). Phil asks what he has done, and Ed realizes Phil cannot drive home.

Ed offers Phil a ride, to his place, to sleep overnight there (4.29). Ed drives Phil to his place, where Phil observes Ed's apartment and belongings, an interesting assemblage (4.30). Ed prepares for bed, discussing his place and pet iguana further (4.31). Ed prays, which Phil sees, and then comes to bed (4.32). Ed touches Phil's face, apologizes, and then Phil reaches for Ed (4.33). Ed and Phil make love, at which the author complains he has been censored in this entry, a sonnet with several clever, homo-erotic and linguistic twists (4.34).

The next day, Ed gets up, cares for the iguana, who is getting too cold, and promises it can sleep under his bed that coming night (4.35). Ed feeds 'AS' in a carefully timed duet (4.36), and they go out for a walk, leaving a note for Phil, who is still sleeping. Two girls are afraid of 'AS,' but Ed reassures them and shows them how to pet an iguana (4.37-4.39). When he returns, Phil is awake and friendly, not sad or morose over their prior evening's sexual activity together (4.39). He recalls his babysitting arrangements for his son, Paul, and calls the friends with whom Paul is staying, the Lamont's, arranging that Paul can stay with his friend, Chuck, and their family for the rest of the weekend, leaving Phil free to accept Ed's invitation to continue their visit (4.40, 4.41). Ed and Phil have a lot of fun, eat out champagne breakfast, swim in the pool, and walk the iguana. Phil teases Ed playfully, and the author notes that Ed needs someone like Phil, a role model (4.42, 4.43).

That next night, the iguana gets to sleep under the bed or it may begin hibernation – it must stay warmer; this puts a halt to any ideas of further intimacy between Phil and Ed for the night (4.44). Ed goes to confession the following day, confused, and tries to share his concerns with Phil (4.45). Phil calms him: Phil admires Ed, and he later thanks him for their time together (4.46). Here, the author asks the reader, "What does Phil see in Ed?"

We get a short history of Phil's occasional attractions to men, and a warning not to over-analyze "matters of the heart" (4.47, 4.48). Monday arrives, Ed prays bedside, and

Phil prepares to leave. They eat out breakfast near Ed's job, where Ed informs Phil he has decided that what they are doing is wrong. Phil claims Ed shouldn't live by such rules, and they jibe on the issues of conflict between homosexuality, desire and religious doctrine, when, suddenly, Phil realizes Ed is decided on the matter, and Phil falters (4.49-4.53). They part ways, Phil sadly, as Ed asks to visit Phil's place sometime and they agree to stay in touch (4.54).

## Part Five

Part 5, entitled, "Olives are plucked in prime condition," opens with an authorial address. Here, Seth takes us to the time when he was writing Part 4, noting that when he was asked at a party what type of book he was working on, and he said a novel in sonnets, his inquirer, an editor, dropped all interest in him (5.1). He laments: he feels no support in society for his aspiring work, and finds poetry is considered an economic disaster. He tells us he has asked several friends to help him examine his goals for this book (5.2). He then puts forth his justification for continuing in the enterprise (5.3), and answers those who challenge his metrical choice, tetrameter (5.4). In the following sonnet, he suggests his readers read *Eugene Onegin* in the Johnson translation, "that original spring of pleasure" for his work (5.5).

We then get back to the story: Ed is sad at the day's end, and thinks, privately and painfully, that he will not hear from Phil again after cutting him off that morning (5.6). Ed takes a drive across the Golden Gate bridge, parks and looks out "past the strait" (5.7). Ed thinks there can be no more lovely city in the world, and the author interjects and agrees. Ed decides to write to Phil, goes home, and begins a draft we can read, then decides against sending it (5.8, 5.9). The author discusses Ed with us, indirectly: Ed, he states, is surprisingly sad at work and won't discuss why, is confused and wants to see Phil, but fears getting too close to a bi-sexual (5.10). Seth tell us that Ed thinks Phil may be his mate, but thinks he, Ed, may want a non-sexual relationship, ie. of chastity (5.11).

Ed proceeds with his life alone, thinking of Phil (5.12). Ed decides to visit his sister, Sue, who lives near Phil, and, while visiting, ends up asking her for directions to his place (5.13). Phil and Paul are making dinner when Ed arrives with his iguana for an un-announced visit (5.14). Their arrival is a happy surprise for both Phil and Paul, who instantly likes Ed and the pet (5.15). Ed agrees to stay for dinner and quickly begins teaching Paul chess (5.16). Paul is later put to bed, and Ed tries to explain his prior chilling of the relationship to Phil (5.17). Ed then tries to ask if Phil still likes women, but can't seem to get it out . . . then, Phil second-guesses him wrongly, and tells Ed he likes Ed's body. Phil asks him to stay overnight. Ed declines as he is planning to stay at his sister's. Phil is gracious, asking him over for breakfast the next morning (5.18, 5.19).

The next morning, Phil's huge breakfast party is described, from the pot-luck foods to the party scene and its attendees (5.20, 5.21). Phil chats with Ed about the repeating party, asks about his sister, Sue, and is told Jan and other friends are coming to stay with Sue for two days (5.22). Ed thinks the party seems excessive, but Phil calls it networking, and warns him when Rowena, the landlady's daughter, approaches him (5.23). Rowena is introduced to Ed by Phil, and asks both to come olive-picking with them (5.24). They decline, but she insists, running down the list of others who are coming, and then they agree to join in (5.25). Phil and Ed get 'AS' out of the car, where he has become upset by being cooped up during the party, and glowers at the guests (5.26). The guests leave to do

various things, noted by Seth, including plan a "Lungless Labs campaign," a reference to a planned anti-nuclear demonstration against a local company in the defense industry (5.27).

When the breakfast party guests have departed, the olive-picking group go to Campus Drive to pick olives from the old olive trees alongside the highway (5.28). Here, we have a chance to meet Matt and Joan Lamont, the parents of Paul's friend, Chuck, interesting people with careers, hard-working, with love and time for family and friends (5.29, 5.30). Paul and Chuck play with the iguana, which was basking in one of the trees, when Rowena decides 'AS' would be a good mascot for their peace movement (5.31, 5.32). Paul and Chuck get into a brief fight and are calmed by Matt (5.34). Rowena tries hard to flirt with Ed, then with Phil, without response, and then it is time to go home (5.34).

The landlady, Mrs. Cravens, is characterized more fully, here, as she is the organizer and chef of the olive pickling, and her views on her daughter Rowena's peace movement interest are noted in a nod to the differences in viewpoint between the generations (5.35).

Phil and Ed walk and talk until nightfall, making their way back to Phil's place. Phil challenges Ed's seeming inability to reconcile his self-embraced religiosity and his homosexuality, comparing him to a starving bird. Ed asks Phil not to mock him. Phil directs their attention to the birds in a tree as they begin screaming in the sunset. The two friends watch and listen to them in awe until the light fades (5.36-5.38). Seth, here, writes an evocative and beautiful sonnet to 'night' (5.39). Phil and Ed walk back to Phil's place quietly, where Paul is involved in typing practice. Paul enjoys seeing Ed again and they play chess, after which Ed accepts Phil's invitation and stays overnight (5.40). Ed feels conflicted the following morning, and takes himself to church and confession before returning to Phil's, where the olives are soaking in the tub, seeming to stain it (5.41).

Mrs. Cravens then instructs them on the treatment for the olives, and the ingredients needed. The process is described until the olives are jarred, sealed and labeled (5.42, 5.43). The jars are then divided among the eight persons that helped, and Ed accepts Phil's invitation to stay over Sunday night, then leaves with 'AS' early the next morning for the city and his job (5.44).

## Part Six

Part 6 is entitled, "A cat reacts to competition." It opens with Seth writing a comical allusion to the classical platitude on the beauty of awakening with one's lover, with the soft light at one's side, as John looks dreamily at Liz in the morning light (6.1). John and Liz, we are told, have been working hard and staying together regularly for a couple of months (6.2). Liz invites John for dinner one night, and their post-romantic chat indicates that each has aspects that grate on the other: John can be too harsh and critical, while Liz has developed a fascination with a gestalt therapy group, while battling an addiction to sugar (6.3-6.5). John, meanwhile, is teasing her about her interest in fad psychology (6.6).

In February, John and Liz find an apartment they like in a big old Victorian house, take it, and begin stripping paint from the entire interior and re-doing it properly. They then have a housewarming party, whose details are intentionally skipped (6.7-6.10). The morning after the party, Liz sleeps in and John gets up, reads the paper, and feels blessed not to be alone any longer (6.11, 6.12). John considers what a man really needs, the last

entry being, "someone to love" (6.13). Seth intercedes here, warning John not to take Liz's affections for granted, warning that her cat will ruin their happiness (6.14), then characterizes the cat's perspective on itself and on John (6.15).

Liz's cat, Charlemagne, has now begun by ruining John's trousers, the phone cord, and an important defense missile report (6.16). A run-down of the cat's "psychic genealogy" adds a funny touch (6.17). We hear how the cat has been angered by loss of place in Liz's affections (6.18), was an orphan whom Liz took in and spoiled (6.19), and has been a comfort to Liz for many years (6.20). Thus, it seems unfair that the cat is pawing at her bedroom door again (6.21). Liz ends up letting the cat into the bedroom, despite John's complaints (6.22), then stays up working late at home, when the cat pisses near John's head, on the bed (6.23). Livid, John explodes, while Liz calms him, changes the sheets, and reminds him the cat is old (6.24). The cat is now locked out of the bedroom during the night, and takes the opportunity to poop inside John's open briefcase (6.25).

John is furious the next morning, but also fearful what the cat will do next, urging it be de-clawed (6.26). Liz does not want the cat de-clawed, but John demands the subject be addressed. They decide to let Jan come and be the judge (6.27). Jan arrives with her cats, Cuff and Link, who ramble around the yard with Charlemagne (6.28). Jan hears the case and determines the problems do not require such a drastic solution, de-clawing (6.29), although the cat might benefit from cat counseling (6.30). John decides Jan is crazy, but threatens to gut the cat if Liz does not agree to the counseling option (6.31). Liz, under pressure, agrees, and the subject briefly turns to Jan and her band's new music CD (6.32).

Liz has bought Jan's band's CD, and they discuss her signing it, what to say, and she signs it. They also discuss the status of her sculpture work, and Jan leaves (6.33). Fall arrives, the cat is in counseling, and Jan sits alone at the Café Trieste, feeling that her life is falling apart (6.34). She recalls her grandmother's advice, to have hope, but is coldly critical of her faults: her art, her music, her drinking. She decides to ask John for a friend's advice (6.35). She calls him and tries to set up a meeting for the next day, but John has too many conflicts, being booked with friends for work off-time throughout the next week. He promises to call her back soon. Jan sits alone at home, "thinking" and then crying, comforted by her cats (6.36, 6.37).

The next day, Phil drops by John and Liz's place to ask Liz a legal question about the planned march on Lungless Labs, set for later that week (6.38). John teases Phil, wanting to know about his sex life, which Phil says he'll discuss later, and then also about his visiting intentions. Phil then asks Liz a hypothetical question: if he goes limp when the police arrive, can this be considered 'resisting arrest' (6.39). Liz, who is considering participating in the march, considers it a good question, stating that attitude is important, and encourages Phil to simply cooperate instead, at which point John interrupts with his opinion, that their planned activity is not only pointless but also ill-advised (6.40). Phil reminds John they spoke about it already, to which John retorts with a deflating version of Phil's drunk state at the earlier party (6.41), teasing him about following his speech with a discussion of iguanas with Ed.

Phil decides to let John speak, and John reminds Phil of the under-appreciated values of freedom of speech, not found in Russia, and the fact that being unemployed, needing assistance, and then complaining about American companies, makes a land lacking freedom, such as Russia, stronger by wasting our own energies (6.43). Phil responds that he is not supporting Russia, although the sorry state of U.S. social support and extravagant

medical fees are freedoms hard to enjoy here at home (6.44). Phil adds that Marxism is the Russians' narcotic and that their government and society is full of corruption. He notes that we may be free, but what we show others is that we have no support for each other, and thus, our society's entire way of being supports Russia's autocratic style (6.45). Phil continues, that all humans and nations are in this together; all would be affected by a nuclear blast. He realizes this makes him sound "lyrical," but adds, don't pay my unemployment as he still knows what he is doing (6.46).

Phil leaves John a brochure and some essays on the anti-nuclear theme, some of which are noted by name. They then relax and visit briefly over a short marijuana smoke (6.47). John gives Phil a shell to give to Paul as a gift, and Phil leaves, just as Ed arrives in a suit, from church, excusing his attire with talk of working overtime (6.48). He visits with John and Liz, then leaves, leaving Liz wondering if Phil and Ed were together, but not saying so (6.49).

## Part Seven

Part 7 is entitled, "Arrests occur. A speech is made." This part is devoted entirely to the demonstration against Lungless Labs. In opening, Seth addresses us, about ourselves: when we fear the growth of hatred, and think of all that is ours, we try to laugh, or we become apathetic, and concede power to those who would destroy the earth with war; we "Live day to day," hopeless and powerless, pretending to be happy until the nuclear warheads destroy all life (7.1, 7-2). What is our creation, Seth asks, posing a cynical answer: stupidity and nothingness, something that would never be missed in the universe if dead and destroyed (7.3). Seth notes that some disagree with that opinion and wish to save our earth, and they are gathering outside the gates of Lungless Labs on the Fall Equinox, just as dawn breaks (7.4). As a red dawn arrives, others arrive from the nearby park. The many types of participants present are noted (7.5).

The attitude of employees of the company is discussed, as they do not consider themselves planners of death; they have a short-cut name for a new bomb, the "cookie cutter," which only destroys living cells, not buildings or machines, for example, and consider that a creative solution - a creation Seth suggests is based on blindness and hatred (7.6). Seth describes how the employees rationalize their work activity to continue guilt-free at the prospect of creating a "living dead" (7.7). They excuse their role because they will not be the ones sending the bombs, to which Seth retorts that those young who would fire them, perhaps in error, use military terms to cover these planned crimes (7.8).

The marchers are then described more fully, along with their signs and numbers; approximately 2,000 persons are present, with police and empty school buses nearby (7.9). Phil is discussing the plan for the day with TV reporters and handing out pamphlets, assuring they will not resist arrest. A company spokesman speaks to the reporters, noting that the demonstration is costing taxpayers dearly and has little effect. Also, he says, since their company serves the nation, the demonstrators are un-American, and their company work is, after all, for the best (7.10-7.11).

Phil is one of the monitors and surveys the many people who have now arrived at the gates, from children playing to elders giving flowers to the policemen (7.12). Phil spies Liz arriving with her cat in a baby carriage. They hug and when Liz smiles, the cat screams and scratches her badly (7.13). Liz and Phil parlay, Phil asking about John when Liz asks

about "Eddy." Their conversation is cut short as the priest scheduled to speak, Father O'Hare, is ready to begin (7.14).

The priest's appearance is described, and he seems nervous and dowdy, yet, we are told, his speech holds the audience's attention (7.15). The priest's speech is a series of nineteen sonnets which are extremely evocative and lyrical, with elements both personal and public, local and global, a clarion call and a proclamation (7.16 – 7.34).

Father O'Hare's speech is summarized here, according to its main points and directions: Our lives' goals are as various as they can be (7.16). Some master science or excel in sport, but the one key question for all should be, "Did they serve life? Or injure it?" (7.17). We face choices in life, just as today. We need to serve life and confront the danger of an efficient nuclear capability. We must celebrate life (7.18). If they are jailed they might ask a child-like question, wasn't it more important to try to stop the danger of annihilation than shrug and let the world be destroyed. He states, we confront death, hate and fear (7.19).

The priest continues. He characterizes hate across U.S. history as something we always find an object for, from England and Germany, to Spain, Japan, later China, and then Russia (7.20), and contrasts it with love which is resolute and rejects justifications for weapons that would assure the destruction of all creation (7.21). He proclaims they will cry out against a "common death" across all religions, in one common cause (7.22). He refers to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, asking who knew and what they did to stop it, including the church, praying they will reject apathy and avoidance, noting that the local archdiocese helped pay for transportation of people to this location today (7.23). He responds to arguments that the church should stay out of the business of moralizing on nuclear arms, stating that the State cannot have free moral license (7.24).

To the argument that this issue belongs to government, he says those concerned with moral behavior have both a right and an obligation to speak out (7.25). He notes that we don't get disinterested judgment on these matters from government leaders, and should follow moral leaders and moral guidance, even if it involves resistance against the laws, just as we did when our nation was born (7.26).

Time is short, he states, and we must act in every way to reduce, ban and undo work on nuclear warheads, which would destroy their own creators, including this town(7.27). The priest addresses employees, asking if they will be proud when all are dying, warning that evil is banal, just as at Auschwitz, and can be made into an ordinary activity that trivializes its utter destruction of life (7.28).

The priest states, "killing means dying." We cannot appreciate, for example, Russia's losses of life in WWII, and yet we face them, talking, in military language, about nuclear capabilities (7.29). No one, he reminds them, would have a victory, and all would be destroyed. All leaders have no solution, and if the Russians cannot speak out about it, we should speak for them (7.30). The threat of total cultural and life destruction is treated as a talent, while comparatively small crimes of terrorism are treated as abhorrent, suggesting it is hard to understand how considering destroying every living being in another country, such as Russia, should be considered, unless as posturing, vanity or futile self-protection (7.31).



Why, he asks, are the strong in control of the earth, and why should patriotism have the chance to destroy all life? He notes that we came close to using the bomb against Russia during the Cuban crisis (7.32). To the argument that they are small in numbers, he replies, all would die the same death, that others should join us, and that small ideas can grow to conquer what is wrong, just as slavery in America was eventually ended (7.33). History teaches us, he notes, to strive for right, but we must *choose* right. Act for life. (7.34).

When the priest sits down, Liz asks Phil if he liked it, as Phil is Jewish. Phil says yes, but reminds her that he was married to a gentile, and his son, Paul, is both (7.35). Phil asks Liz why she's not at work, and she admits John disapproves completely of her attendance (7.36). She tells Phil she plans to treat John to dinner 'out' that evening, and has to go. Phil plans to stay for the blocking of the road/gate area, but Liz fears arrest (7.37). Liz tells him she is afraid she would lose her job or experience strong disapproval, and asks if she can help Phil in some way, perhaps with Paul (7.38). Phil realizes he may need help with Paul if he is arrested, and asks her to visit him.

The monitors then prepare and block the road briefly. Some demonstrators are arrested, while some employee cars get through the gate, employees upset that they were delayed (7.39). Some demonstrators now lie down in the road and are arrested, walking or being dragged away to the buses. They are driven away in high spirits, singing *Give Peace a Chance* (7.40). Some participants have more theatrical approaches, including: a stilt-walker with a dove, who is hard to arrest (7.41), twelve friends carrying a coffin, a human pine-tree, and young people in skeleton suits. An elderly lady shows a police officer a photo of her grandson and is taken to the bus for arrest (7.42).

On the side, a television talk show is being filmed, including reporters talking to the priest and to a doctor, followed by any others who wish to speak (7.43). Suddenly, a microphone is passed to Liz and she is told she will be the next person interviewed. Phil is there, and she tells him she is afraid to speak out (7.44). Phil invites her to say anything at all. Liz then speaks, stating that we might deserve to destroy ourselves for using such a bomb, but what about all the other forms of life – they would be blinded and die, starving slowly, dying slow deaths because of what we did (7.46). Liz continues, explaining that even if we only explode one-half of the bombs we have, it would eat up one-half of our ozone layer, which would result in blindness, starvation and death for all living things, ourselves irradiated and all things dying (7.47). Liz stops. Her speech ended, she reminds Phil she may have used jargon - just not legal jargon, and takes her cat to the car to leave (7.48)

## Part Eight

Part 8, entitled, "Coffee is drunk, and Scrabble played," opens in mid-conversation between Phil and Ed. Phil is asking Ed why he is not active on the anti-nuclear issue, teasing him about praying. Ed responds that it seems to breed polarity to march against a company, and seems somehow self-righteous (8.1). Phil asks him how he would propose to get rid of the problem, then, to which Ed suggests, obliquely, that they stop hogging natural resources. Phil responds they'll all be dead at the rate that would take. (8.2).

Phil mentions the priest's speech and tells Ed he thinks Ed would like it. Ed admits he has read about it. Phil suggests he meet the priest (8.3). Ed asks Phil how prison was, at

which point we learn that Phil and the others were held for ten days in circus tents, since the Lungless County jail was too small (8.4). They were offered a sentence they rejected, which was later reduced to an offer of two years' probation. Their right to free speech was left intact, and they were permitted to go based on their time served and a small fine each, only a result of their holding out (8.5). Some were scheduled for trials, including Phil, whose trial is in one month, to which they plan to use the defense of necessity, a defense used when a "present public hazard" exists (8.6).

Phil continues talking, radiant in his intensity, while Ed listens, letting himself be more and more open now with Phil, drawn to him, admiring and loving him (8.7). Yet Ed is worried about how long their love can last, and why Phil never speaks about his past with Claire (8.8). Ed asks Phil why he doesn't speak of Claire, what she looks like, why he does not even have a photo of her around, for Paul's sake, and how she spells her name (8.9). Phil lists the details on her eye and hair color, and name-spelling, warning Ed to stop asking about her, comparing Ed's inquiry to battling the walls of Jericho, while noting his own sense of "tragic burden" (8.10).

Ed and Phil fall into silence. Paul is visiting at his friend's home as the clock ticks and the fridge hums. Ed and Phil visit over popcorn (8.11). Ed asks Phil if he likes cooking and gets a lengthy, humorous and sarcastic reply about the violence of cooking methods (8.12). Ed compares Phil's sarcasm to John's, but Phil rejects the analogy. They decide to go out for coffee, to Printer's Inc, and Ed is starving and can get dessert there (8.13). Seth then takes time to describe Printer's Inc, a bookstore attached to a coffee-shop serving coffees and desserts, where he, the author, has spent much time and money (8.14). Ed finds a book to give to Paul, *Charlotte's Web* (8.15), while Phil browses in a book on watercress, and notes that his father is a trivia nut (8.16). They return to Phil's, where they play Scrabble. Phil boasts long words, but Ed wins with many short words (8.17).

Ed checks the Scrabble score after the game and sees old game scores, which Phil explains as Rowena visiting and losing regularly. Phil notes Rowena's love of single men, to which Ed reacts quietly: so, Phil thinks of himself as single. Phil responds that he is either single or divorced but not sure which (8.18). Phil suggests they turn in for the night, and Ed mentions he doesn't want to have sex, suggesting they keep their love chaste and asks why conversation is not considered the true test of closeness (8.19, 8.20). Phil is miffed, which makes Ed feel bad. Phil replies that Ed can do whatever he pleases to 'boost' his 'godly score' (8.21). Ed asks Phil not to talk meanly, but Phil continues with cutting religious and personal remarks (8.22), until Ed punches Phil, who returns the bruising until they collapse on the floor, near tears (8.23). Ed's jaw is bruised, as is Phil's eye. Phil apologizes for his general insensitivity, asking what he can do, to which Ed replies, "don't treat me with disgust" (8.24).

Phil notes that he can't help feeling frustrated with Ed's perspectives, considering that Ed is surely thinking negatively about them, even as they make love (8.25). Phil asks Ed why he has let the church dictate his perspectives (8.26), arguing, why would God make such a gift as same-sex attraction and love something *not* to be shared (8.27). Phil continues, that the church is surely playing a hateful trick on people, and questions the entire notion of asking for forgiveness of sins (8.28). Phil continues, couldn't Ed's attraction to the church's teachings be an excuse to stay un-involved while making Ed feel calmer, focusing on himself (8.29). Ed hears Phil, who now sounds as over-wrought as Ed. Phil confesses Ed seems "stuck in catechism class," a cut Ed takes wryly (8.30). Phil

continues, that Ed seems to be living in the middle ages, saying Ed's swings on and off with Phil are exasperating (8.31).

Ed confesses that Phil's certainty in life, generally, unnerves him, while Phil asks why they can't have a "clean affair," to which Ed confesses that he simply feels platonic love is clean, and that he has debased himself (8.32). Ed argues for reining in the emotions, citing an ancient source, which Phil rejects, arguing he should follow his heart (8.33). Phil admits he cannot live on conversation, and won't divide his life, denying desire, nor take counsel from the noted ancient advisor (8.34). Phil proclaims, "Love's whole/ Or else it's nothing." Phil reaches for Ed's hand, but the touch is too intense for Ed and he withdraws, shaking (8.35).

Phil and Ed go to bed, lying apart. Phil won't reach again across to the shivering Ed for many reasons, including his efforts to re-unite them sexually, his own need, his pride, and their previous discussions hoping to break through Ed's arguments. Phil is awake most of the night, while Ed finally sleeps, leaving early, encouraging Phil that he will "discover easygoing/ Refreshment soon," to which Phil says, "close the subject" (8.36, 8.37).

## Part Nine

Part 9 is entitled, "A quarrel is initiated," and refers to John's falling out with his friend, Phil, as well as, to some extent, Liz. The author informs us that Liz's cat does, in truth, hate John. John continues to complain about it, threatening to leave if she does not get rid of it (9.1). Liz claims the cat was fine until John arrived (9.2). John responds that cat lovers care more for their cats than for human disasters. Liz prepares to go to the grocery, and John tells her to take her cat along, so she does (9.3).

John reflects on his life, how romantic and lovely it all was, and now, how Liz's small habits grate on him (9.4). He is now convinced, also, that she is not very rational, especially for never admitting her cat is at fault (9.5). He feels frustrated and decides to take a walk when Phil comes by to visit (9.6). They walk together, John expressing his frustrations (9.7). Phil says he realizes that Liz had the cat before John arrived (9.8), to which John frowns. The beauty of their surroundings, on a clear crisp October day, are described, including the trees and birds (9.9). John says he still hopes it will work out with Liz, but also feels stymied by not enjoying more TV sports, junk food and having to attend cultural activities with Liz instead of reading a book (9.10). John feels they are well-matched, but that Liz's opinions are idiotic, referencing her anti-nuclear speech (9.11). Apparently, the cat scratched the press photographer. Phil avoids inviting a conflict on the demonstration references, giving John chummy encouragement.

John asks what happened to Phil's left eye (9.12). Through guessing, John learns it was relationship-related (9.13). Phil admits it was caused by Ed, which surprises John, who recoils in obvious disgust at the thought that Phil and Ed have had a sexual affair. Phil feels both angry and insulted by John's reaction (9.14). John can't help being astonished and tries to divine Phil's motivations, while Phil suggests John's attitude is sick, and to stop presuming to know what is alright and how Phil feels about his ex-wife (9.15). They return to the house quietly. John notes Ed was his college roommate, making a smarmy remark that makes Phil consider that John is not just a fool, but a cruel fool, and with no compassion (9.16).

When they arrive at the house, Liz waves them in for muffins, then notes the chill between them. Liz insists they tell her what this is about, and Phil obliges (9.18). John then explodes, that Ed is "sick or mad," and that they should both see a shrink, perhaps Liz also (9.19). Phil walks out. Liz feels Phil has been offended, but John won't budge. She runs out after Phil, hoping to make amends (9.20). Liz apologizes, then gets into Phil's car to chat. She admits she guessed that Phil and Ed were seeing each other when they arrived on a Sunday, apart, but each wearing the same mis-matched socks (9.21). Phil is surprised, as he thought no one knew. The last flowers of autumn are lovingly described. Liz suggests they drive to the bay and take a walk (9.22).

Phil and Liz catch up on their drive and walk. He thanks her for visiting Paul when he was arrested. Liz mentions Rowena was asking for him, and Phil says he has seen her (9.23). Phil worries that he is not getting Paul to obey him always, to which Liz replies that Paul will "grow up fine." Phil thanks her for giving Paul two *Tintin* books. They realize they have both read these as children and loved them, trying to share references, but both forgetting their specific sources (9.25, 9.26). Phil asks why Liz came to the march. She admits she read the pamphlets he had left at their place, and asks him how prison was, to which Phil gives a general account of their daily activities, claiming they created a verb, *to consense* (9.27). They park near the Marina.

The beauty of the San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate bridge are described (9.28). They walk, then, to Fort Point. Liz mentions her demonstration participation with her cat was not supported at home or work, and that her bosses told her to stop. She promised to resign, but claimed she attended for professional reasons and would be representing some of those who were scheduled for trial. She is the only woman at the firm, and her bosses acceded (9.29, 9.30). Liz states if Phil seeks publicity, he may get harsher sentencing, and suggests a good verdict may come with less flamboyance before the judge, who may otherwise throw out his defense (9.31).

The scene at Old Fort Point is described, with its surfers, skateboarders, fishermen, natural beauty and the bridge (9.32). Phil and Liz start across the bridge. Liz hopes Phil and Ed are compatible, while Phil says he doubts it now (9.33). Phil notes he loves Ed, but Ed is too inaccessible, to which Liz suggests he give Ed time to mature (9.34). Phil admits he is terrifically lonely and is sure it is over (9.35). Liz sighs, referring obliquely to John and their life together, which includes good sex, but no common opinions (9.36). Phil excuses John's rigidity, as they are old friends, noting John lacked love as a child (9.37). Liz agrees that John is "not vicious" but exploits their differences and her faults, sometimes seeming blind (9.38). Liz backs off her criticisms. Phil admits he is less interested in passion and love than "company and warmth and kindness" (9.39). Liz feels pained, as if she is almost betraying both her lover, John, and her brother, Ed, and asks to walk back. They have "the seaward view" as the sun sets beyond Point Lobos and they walk and chat (9.40).

## Part Ten

Part 10 is entitled, "Vines rest in early winter light," a reference to the end of the grape harvest season and the making of new wines. The section opens as people come out of a white wooden church on a gray cold day, having just attended the Thanksgiving service, thanking God for the weather that permitted a good grape harvest (10.1).

It is Thanksgiving Day, and the Dorati family, area vineyard owners, and friends are there, as the wines newly harvested and bottled rest in their cellars (10.2). Mike Dorati, the father, is described. He greets the Levasseur's, and chats with Peter Levasseur about last year's rains (10.3). Peter lost a lot of topsoil, and Mike insists he plant fescue to prevent more run-off in the future (10.4). Mike heads off to Peter's, despite the fact that it is Thanksgiving Day, and Sue complains that Dad has not stayed to visit with them. Ed shrugs it off, as they both note their father is enjoying himself, ie: consulting (10.5). Ed teases Sue, his sister, about her boyfriend, Art, whom he finds especially boring and weak-spirited (10.6).

The Dorati's vineyard is characterized, as Mrs. Dorati walks slowly to their winery building (10.7). Meanwhile, John and Art are assisting in the kitchen, preparing food, and sharing notes on how many grandchildren each must have to satisfy Mrs. Dorati's wishes (10.8). Mrs. Dorati begins asking Ed what girls he likes, to which Ed responds he doesn't have time for girls, and finds an excuse to go check on the turkey (10.9).

We next see those assembled after a huge Thanksgiving dinner, stuffed, sharing family memories and, later, some football on TV (10.10). Liz's cat is present and happy, and seeks out his 'Winery Cat' buddy, a mouser that helps keep the area clean (10.11). Ed brought 'AS,' who is cold and lethargic. John shrinks when Ed tries to visit with him. Sue tells her mother that her scholarship to Paris means she and Art have decided to put off marrying, to Mrs. Dorati's expressed dismay (10.12). Mrs. Dorati feels her arthritis has compromised her enjoyment of her life and estate, in this tender verse. Sue promises her mother she will marry in 1-2 years (10.13).

John feels a bit withdrawn, watching TV, reading, catching bits and pieces of family conversation, including Liz sharing a cleaning tip with her mother, a suggestion from her friend, Phil. John reflects he wants Phil out of his life now, completely (10.14). John is worried, generally, as he has heard that Phil and Ed have broken up, and Liz will be assisting Phil's legal defense (10.15). Night falls on the beautiful area. Sue brings out her cello and plays Bach, which her mother loves. Her mother feels grief, trying to hide her pain and sadness (10.16). Mrs. Dorati reminisces of her own childhood, wondering also when all the children will be able to gather again (10.17). At midnight, each guest is in their own room: Art (Sue's guest), and John (Liz's guest).

Over breakfast on Friday, Mike Dorati chats with John about interesting trivia (10.18). John begins to enjoy the fatherly chat over coffee. Mike asks John, along with his wife, Marie, to walk outside (10.19), where he begins pruning some zinfandel, and discusses grape husbandry strategy (10.20). Mrs. Dorati, Marie, watches as John learns to prune. In the winery, bottles are being opened for company to taste-test the red wines (10.21).

At dusk, the 'rounds' are completed, and the location and activities of several couples are noted: two cats are ranging, Ed and 'AS' are snoozing, and Sue and Art are exploring in the attic (10.22). Art and Sue find some antique wine bills and Asian sculptures. Sue mentions she asked Jan to come by, but that Jan was non-committal (10.23).

Mr. Dorati makes a fire in the fireplace, and he and his wife grab the books they are reading, from which they share tidbits as they read along. He is reading *Tom Jones*, and she, *Jack the Lady-Killer* (10.24).

The beautiful red dusk is reflected in the nearby river, and we are told a precious memory of Liz's childhood, when she saw a doe breastfeeding its young fawn there (10.25). Liz and John are walking along the river, John feeling content with his physical work of the day. He suggests they consider marriage, although he doesn't ask precisely (10.26). Liz says she wants more time and, as they walk back to the house, John is puzzled and worried while Liz feels completely confused (10.27).

The next day, Saturday, Mrs. Dorati tries to talk to Liz about grandchildren. Liz sees the subject looming, with no escape, as everyone is busy or out. Liz feels trapped and hates it (10.28). Her mother begins by complimenting her on John in several ways. She recalls her happy days of having children and wishes these joys for her children. When she mentions John again, Liz walks out (10.29). Mike Dorati, who has been dozing on the sofa, has heard this, comforts his weeping wife, and goes out after Liz to talk (10.30). He reminds Liz that she is their oldest, and hasn't visited much this past year (10.31). Her father urges Liz to ease her mother's distress, noting "she's not got long," something he hadn't planned to share. Liz, shocked and saddened, inquires, and her father tells her they've known for a few weeks (10.32).

Meanwhile, John has been relaxing and feeling confident, thinking that Liz will come around to his suggestion of marriage, while he enjoys being lazy, admiring the sunny day and sky at the Dorati's (10.33). John observes the sky, birds, vineyard, and natural beauty around him, unable temporarily to move, then decides to spend an hour with a work file (10.34). En route into the house, he stops and peruses the mail pile, finding an interesting magazine, as well as a thick letter addressed to Liz (10.35). Immediately curious, he becomes jealous when he thinks he recognizes Phil's script of the address, and stops Liz accusingly as she passes him on her way in to talk to her mother (10.36). Liz has not seen the letter, so John is stuck, jealously wondering what it contains and accusing Liz (10.37). Liz suggests it may concern Phil's trial, and John guffaws in disbelief, resulting in her threatening to have an affair with him if John doesn't stop his angry emotional abuse. Liz, weeping, goes to the door as John tries to take her hand (10.38).

Liz's mother arrives in the hall, given the commotion, and Liz holds her tightly, sobbing an apology as they share the mother's condition – liver cancer, and time left – unknown (10.39). John disappears upstairs, saved by the interruption, but still remarkably upset. He packs his bags and quickly leaves, driving away as Ed calls for him to wait. John glares at Ed hatefully as he drives away, as Seth notes, "self-damned, self-banished" (10.40).

## Part Eleven

Part 11 is entitled, "The Winking Owl fills up by night," a reference to a popular singles bar which could also be described as a 'meat market.' But have we begun the correct section? It opens with the Dorati's white church and steeple, which we saw opening Part Ten, but now it is colder and the crowd is waiting to congratulate a bride and groom, who turn out to be Liz and Phil (11.1).

Mr. Dorati extends greetings to all, and they go inside for cake and champagne (11.2). Mrs. Dorati and others have been weeping. Charlemagne is present, eyeing the wedding cake for destruction, but is stymied by those cutting it up (11.3). Phil's mother has

flown in from Florida, and rudely compares Liz to Claire with unflattering directness (11.4). Phil is drinking champagne, and telling Joan Lamont with wonder about his trial. He spills a bit, then tries to hug his mother, who warns him she'll come back if Paul complains about Liz (11.6), to which onlookers note she must be drunk (11.6). Ed kisses Liz, and then goes to greet Phil, but is confused and makes a silly joke about Phil's wearing black, then goes outside (11.7).

From here, Ed hears the party and snippets of conversation across the generations (11.8). He decides he is being a martyr and re-joins the guests, visiting and enjoying the chaotic mix (11.9). Here, Seth brings himself back into the story, as "a joyless guest" who is thinking about his thesis full-time, inviting the reader to feel sorry for his lack of social skills (11.10). Sue Dorati and Art had a bet on whether Jan would attend, and Art has lost, as Jan has not shown up. They realize Liz's decision was quick, but note she appears to look happy (11.11). Liz's father pulls her aside to ask her if she loves Phil, and she denies it, saying she *is* happy, as he is a gentle man to her, to which her father seems perplexed and pleased, both (11.12). Liz goes to Phil and is glad she's with Phil. She likes Paul, and knows Phil is a good man who makes her laugh (11.13).

The author interrupts and apologizes, here, for having sketched the future without filling in the wedding back-story, claiming there is no excuse; his "bard card should be burned," referencing the lyrical , 'Nae man can tether time or tide" (11.14). Yet, we do just that, turning back time, here:

After John drove off, Liz read the legal brief included in the package from Phil. Ed then sat down with her and they both talked, realizing both of their relationships were over, Ed's with Phil, and Liz's with John (11.15). That next week, Liz defended Phil before a jury. The judge denied the 'necessity defense,' but Liz obtained a split jury (11.16). A portion of her spoken argument before the jury is included: Liz urged them not to accept the notion that no one can criticize Lungless Labs, a key aspect of what is truly American (11.17). Her delivery is emotional, but honorable, tinged with pathos and empathy (11.18).

Afterwards, Liz takes Phil to lunch to celebrate their success. She admits she has figured out that she can not marry John, to which Phil replies, "try me instead" (11.19). Liz bursts into laughter, asking if that is such a 'wise' idea, to which Phil responds that it is: romantic love can't forecast happiness, and he believes they would last together (11.20). Phil says he really feels they would be happy, and wants Paul to have her as a mother figure also. Liz is amazed, almost miffed, but then laughs and agrees (11.21). Phil tells her not to joke, but Liz says she is serious also: she likes him, too. She sees that he is a good father, and doesn't want to trust passion any longer. She also notes that she wants to marry soon, as her mother is quite ill (11.22). Within two weeks, Liz and Phil are married, but Liz did not handle John that well regarding the abrupt change (11.23).

When John got the invitation to their wedding, he immediately destroyed it, and is in utter disbelief at her quick changed of partners (11.24). John writes her a letter, requesting she arrange to get her things when he is not there, and to call his attorney for any business matters (11.25). John mails the petty letter, but continues growing in disgust for what he now sees as her falsified love and his gullible trust (11.26). John doesn't see the part he played in this, and when Phil sends him a note, John does not read it, as he gets more cynical and bitter (11.27).

John won't cry, either, although he awakens from dreaming, crying. He then cleans up, and goes out looking like a rock once again (11.28). John's work helps insulate him from the emotional pain of what he sees as treachery, but he is growing more cold and also lecherous (11.29). He begins an un-ending series of one-night stands, hanging out at singles bars each evening, and finding another gal the next (11.30). John feels he has no one to help him either, as both Liz and Phil were involved, and he hasn't called Janet for months and is ashamed of that fact. He also is probably not ready to take a close look at his own reactive and bitter behavior (11.31).

Liz is feeling progressively quite sad about John's distancing himself from his friends. When Liz and Phil send John an alabaster dove present for Christmas, he returns it to them without comment (11.32). Liz writes once more – a short card that happens to arrive on Valentine's day, John thinking, incredulously, that they are mocking his grief (11.33). John is going out often to the singles bars, including the Winking Owl. One night, Bjorn, the Swede who was at Liz's earlier party, spies John. Bjorn's own history of relationships with women is discussed. (11.34). Bjorn spots John in a corner with a sweet-looking girl, and stops to chat (11.35).

By short grapevine the next day, Jan is informed of John's single mingling, through Bjorn's regular girlfriend. Jan calls Sue Dorati, her friend, to ask if she knows what John is up to. Sue confesses they've fallen out of touch completely. At first, Jan thinks it best to leave John alone and not try to help him (11.36). After all, she is busy with work, an upcoming art show, sculptures, band dates and drinking, rushing constantly just to pay her rent; even her cats are complaining (11.37). She does, however, really feel bad for John, decides again not to contact him, and then decides to have a possible run-in, taking herself to the Winking Owl the next night (11.38).

John does show up, sees Jan, and stops to visit, beginning a patter about the girls on display. Jan orders a beer (11.39). John continues evaluating the women, asking if Jan likes particular guys (11.40). He claims it was Jan who first told him to "seize the day." At this point, Jan grabs him and drags him to the Café Trieste for tea (11.41).

Jan is looking at John, wondering why she likes him so much, recalling that when they broke up, she thought she couldn't live without him. She realizes she is more mature now, and is glad for that (11.42). Jan mentions their past and laughs, but doesn't mention Liz. John begins to relax, and apologizes if he was rude earlier. She realizes she did love him then – because he loved her (11.43). Now she smiles, inviting John to take a drive on Sunday along the coast, where the whales are passing as they migrate. John answers cynically about his new nightly love life (11.44). Jan is persistent, cutting through his facetiousness, and saying a weekend RSVP will suit. Sure enough, on Sunday, they head off in John's car with a packed picnic basket, towards Muir Beach (11.45).

The Bay area's geography, flora and fauna are lovingly noted (11.47), where the whales' migration path hugs the coastline seasonally. John thinks he sees a mother with her calf, although Jan is unsure. John asks to meet her again the next Sunday (11.47). They then have a superb picnic meal, and Jan makes a drawing of the precipice and sand. John had brought work, but has relaxed and can't bring himself to open the file (11.48).

The next Sunday arrives with quite bad weather, so they take the streetcars to the ocean and walk along the mucky beach area (11.49). Both agree the day is horrid and depressing, but John urges them on, through the drizzle, fog and dark day, teasing Jan that



they will go to the bitter end, then die (11.50). The beach stroll is described, with its scenes of activity, graffiti, birds, dogs, parents and children (11.51). Suddenly, Jan spies a perfectly formed sand dollar, shouting "Intact!" She stares at it, amazed at its beauty, as she is unknowingly soaked by ocean mist (11.52). She is thinking of her grandmother's hardships, moving in mid-life as the wife of a "pauper" to California, and, when her husband died, continuing 30 more years without ever complaining or crying (11.53). Jan gives John the simple treasure as they keep walking, near Cliff House.

All seems dark, bland and bleak until they reach the Musée Mécanique. There, they enjoy the museum, laughing, when Jan notes she must go – to do some work, make some money. John asks her out for the next weekend and kisses her on the cheek (11.55).

## Part Twelve

Part 12 is entitled, "An old affair is renovated," and we have the satisfaction of finding John and Jan exploring their relationship further. They can only see each other on weekends, due to Jan's work schedule, but have great times. John simply cannot think of his old friends without sliding into hatred and veiled grief, and leaves no room for reconciling (12.1). Janet thinks that it is a waste and a pity they cannot visit their old friends, wondering if, somehow, they could meet in a "neutral cafe," find a way to make amends. She feels "That life is short and that time flies," and does not think their differences should divide them, but, when she mentions this, John flies into a rage, so she avoids the subject, for now (12.2). The author interjects a comment here: A love triangle such as he has described has been "five-star tragedy material" for the greatest of authors. Meanwhile, Janet dreams of "universal love." Is she naive? Her art is not. Jan sees John's response as rigid, but sees his reasons, also (12.3).

Winter for Californians is characterized – cold, but no snow, and Spring is arriving, as all head outdoors into the warm breezes (12.4). The author heralds the unfolding beauty of Spring (12.5). John's garden is over-grown, and he decides to ask Jan to help him with it. However, when she arrives, they instead drive down the coast again, Jan talking about their own past together (12.6). They laugh as if they were other people then, but it becomes clear that John won't open up just yet, for serious love again (12.7). John is still visiting bars, having a few one-night stands, but fewer than before, and feels safer with Jan on their daytime visits (12.8).

A gig for Jan's band is cancelled, opening up an evening for her, and she invites John over for sushi dinner, feeding her cats first. When he rings the doorbell, she is surprised; it seems few have visited her there lately (12.9). She bounds down to the door, asking him to come back in an hour, as she is working on her latest sculpture, *Mother Hen*. John is not surprised, recognizing the creative Jan he has always known. Later, they chat over dinner, as John's longing for Jan re-awakens and she says, simply, "Yes" (12.10). John sleeps with Jan, waking peaceful and free, unlike the hiding of his emotions involved with his one-night stand forays (12.11). Their lovemaking is tender, but John doesn't speak about the depths of his feelings, and Jan won't reference this, as she feels herself, again, opening up to sharing all of John's "pain/ And gladness" (12.12).

The next Saturday is breezy on the bay, and John rents a boat they take out to watch the whales migrating, now, north. They get groceries afterwards, discussing food, and eat at Jan's (12.13). The next day, they lie in bed all morning, while Jan's cats nuzzle John and

her sculptures. Then, they eat an Asian breakfast, ramin with raw egg (12.14). They visit regularly now, attending a Hitchcock movie, or shopping for kitsch items, which Jan likes (12.15). Jan's routine is picking up, though, as she works hard to finish sculpture pieces for a show, then collapses with four glasses of port wine (12.16).

John begins to have moral and ethical concerns about the product of his work: whether the bombs stay sitting, or are launched, he is having trouble squaring the "assuring axiom" that more bombs reduce the chance of war (12.17). Ah, well, John excuses his small part, while complaining to Jan that peace protesters "have no respect for law," to which she notes that "law" interned her grandfather, whom her mother watched die before he was released, the Japanese interned in 1943 in the U.S. (12.18).

Jan's art exhibition opens on June 10th, and an art critic from *The Clarion* visits opening night, writing that the works are "feeble," and daring other stupid critics not to find them worthy of note (12.19). The critic continues, calling her works "bland and themeless," among other things. On cue, other critics follow in step, as Seth gets a blast at the art critic establishment, noting they loved "soup cans and bat dung" (12.20). Jan cries in frustration, but feels lucky and not defeated. Still, the reviews take their toll, and John can only reassure her, also telling her that her "time will come" (12.21). Jan latches onto John's pithy consolation, cheering herself by repeating it to sympathizers, but the judgment of the establishment has exhausted her. She is sure John is right, inviting him up for supper with her and the cats (12.22).

The next day, Jan is at the gallery when Liz and Phil stop by. Liz is six months pregnant, and Jan invites them to her place for a party on Friday night (12.23). Jan's plan is to have John there at 7 p.m., when the party starts, and soften him up before Liz and Phil arrive at 8, then moderate as they let down their defenses and pledge renewed friendship, or so she hopes. Her mind has wandered and her old pick-up is half off the road (12.24). Her truck is old and rusty, "on its last legs," and she is delivering some of her grandmother's furniture, including her desk, precious to her, to John's place, so it is out of her apartment during her planned party (12.25). Friday arrives, the party date, and Jan drives the old truck down to Stanford, to Sue's, to say goodbye, as Sue leaves for France the next day and cannot attend. She helps her pack and they express their goodbyes.

When Jan prepares to leave, her truck won't start (12.26). She realizes she may be late to her own party, checks public transit schedules, and decides to call Liz to come a bit later that evening to her party, unsure about John's response if she is not there (12.27). Phil answers the phone and suggests Jan get a ride with the Lamont's, who are leaving for a two-week vacation in Oregon that day, headed north (12.28). Jan checks with them, then walks over to their place, where they show off their rock garden and cacti, then scramble to load up, with Chuck, their son, and leave (12.29). They leave rather late, and Jan fears she is going to be too late to stop an unexpected confrontation at her place. Matt is chattering in the car about how the legislature has ruined bird sanctuaries in the Bay area (12.31). Joan tells Jan not to let Matt bore her, but he is getting intensely involved in the subject, a compliment to Jan. Jan observes the starry starry night, beautiful to behold, as the car snakes along the highway (12.31).

Back at Jan's place, John is playing host to Jan's art and music invitees, persons he feels he has little in common with, but is doing his hosting duty, while he worries, generally, about Jan's lateness (12.32). As he turns from filling glasses, he sees Liz and Phil arriving, takes glasses in his hands so he will not have to shake theirs. John feels

trapped, an unwitting subject of Jan's plan (12.33). Liz and Phil look around and, not seeing Jan, ask for her. Seeing she's not there, Phil asks to use the phone and calls the Lamont's. John is civil but extremely tense (12.34). Phil informs John about Jan catching a ride with the Lamont's who are on their way to Oregon. John thinks he isn't sure Jan is not going along with them, leaving him, and is fearful and tense, but smiles (12.35).

They expect to wait another hour, and the party continues, beginning to really swing. John looks around and notices that no one else is missing Jan. He is worried about her, hears the phone and answers it. He repeats, "Police?," and everyone becomes silent. John, his eyes closed and gasping, stands, with Jan's Mickey Mouse phone, as he repeats their question, "Next of kin?" (12.36).

### Part Thirteen

Part 13 is entitled, "Friends meditate on friends who've gone." This is the concluding section of the work.

Seth tells us that one month has passed, informing of us of what has transpired. It is late July, a balmy night in San Francisco. The starry sky shows signs of the Milky Way, what Jan's grandmother called the Silver River. The city's highways sparkle, and Jan is dead (13.1). Matt and Joan Lamont also died in the accident, but Chuck survived when his mother threw herself across him. The other driver walked away, a drunk high-school teen. Apologizing, he got a one-year driver's license suspension (13.2). Chuck's arm was broken, and he is living with Liz, Phil, and Paul, along with Jan's cats, Cuff and Link, who joined Charlemagne (13.3). Here, Seth calls on St. Francis, the patron saint of the city of San Francisco, referring to the saint's special story, and asking him to "look down./ Solace the sorrows of your town" (13.4).

Phil is more distressed than he lets on. Chuck plays with Paul but is struggling to cope with his own grief, begging to see his former house, and having nightmares. Phil takes Chuck to the Lamont's old place, now unkempt, but with bright red flowers blooming outside Chuck's window (13.5). Chuck picks a petal, sees the door, goes in, and begins screaming, running, calling out for his parents, madly sad (13.6). Chuck falls and hurts his one good arm, so Phil takes him by to see Phil's former landlady nearby, Mrs. Cravens. She invites Chuck to go flying with her, as she has just gotten her pilot's license (13.7). Phil agrees. They discuss Rowena, who has been elected to City Council and has left her male-seeking behaviors behind (13.8). Up in the small plane, Mrs. Cravens flies over their neighborhood, and Chuck is able to see his old house and the bright flowers, which cheers him. She invites him to visit when he's sad, and he confesses that may be next week (13.9).

Seth asks, here, do the dead feel sorrow or remorse? Meanwhile, we the living clutch at 'myths' to still our grief, while too few create memoirs: the young don't care, and the old are silent (13.10). The night of the accident, John drove to the hospital, where Jan was in a coma. Since he wasn't related, they wouldn't let him see her. He begged, and when they finally reconsidered, Jan had just died (13.11).

John was completely numbed that entire weekend, even beginning to think to prepare for their planned picnic date. When he realized the depths of his own love for Jan, left unsaid, the question became: would he ever recover (13.12). For days, John felt both "guilt and panic." He began to think crazy thoughts, that he deserved to miss her death, and

sank into recalling every single moment of their time together (13.13). He then starts to feel that she is around him often, it seems, both at work and at home (13.14). He begins to feel he can't let go of her image in his thoughts for even a moment or life will be too painful and he'll lose his sanity (13.15). His employer is sympathetic, but curt. Yet, as John becomes more and more apathetic about his work, albeit unemotional, it seems more fraudulent to him, and seems to increase his grief (13.16). He almost prays sometimes, looking for a pattern to satisfy the seeming illogic of Jan's untimely death. Yet, what reason could there be. Just as the sky is there, so do accidents occur (13.17).

Another month passes, and John is walking at night in Golden Gate Park, where he overhears a couple talking about how rings may trigger pressuring thoughts of the loved one. John's reality was so different: Jan is now always in everything he sees and thinks. John has even heard her voice – precisely hers, calling his name, at work, in the daytime, clear as a bell. He then has to walk outside (13.19). And, at night, he hears her also, and re-lives their lovemaking, craving her, his nights full of strange dreams (13.20).

One night, he dreams he sees an older woman mourning over a grave. He can't see the face. She is old, with knotted fingers. Then, he is sleeping in a dark room. Jan is present with her old hands in his gray hair (13.21). He wakes up, gasping and crying. He begins to feel something like terror, almost ready to die himself. He is sure he sees her around town, but when the person turns, it is never her and his tears continue (13.22). He is especially torn by the fact that he never told her he loved her. Well, she didn't say it, either. He was being careful to act casual. The fact that she died alone also bothers him greatly: if only he could have said a word of love to her, he feels she would have heard it (13.23).

John is looking for signs of her among her things (some of which were at his place due to the party plan). When he finds an old personal ad letter he sent to an 'Anne T. Friese,' he realizes she had posed as this particular personal ad contact, whom he had invited to a play, but had not heard back from (13.24). This, to him, says: she did love you, and she kept everything you were able to give her. She acted distant or self-protective by deriding love, but she knew she loved you (13.25), and "You gave her nothing." John derides himself, and continues to claw his way back into their common past – until he is finding meanings where there were none (13.26).

Then, surprise, the press smell a great story - a great artist, killed in her prime, and they rush to re-evaluate their artistic judgment accordingly, also contacting Jan's grieving parents. Suddenly, all her works at the show are bought up (13.27). *The Clarion* even issues a new review, which notes her maturity in style (13.28) and form, forecasting that she may even eventually join the modern sculptural art greats (13.29). Seth's sword is in his pen in these sonnets, brandished broadly against the world of art critics. But would it have pleased Jan to know about this change, or would she reject it as too fickle (13.30).

It is late summer now and we are catching up with more changes. The band, Liquid Sheep, has a new drummer, and Cuff and Link are surviving playtime with the boys, now with their initials shaved into their backs to tell them apart (13.31). Their household scene is described, so different, as Phil notes, with his very pregnant wife, Liz, and the children and pets co-existing in chaos. Phil hopes the baby is a girl (13.32). Phil's plate is full now, but he thinks of Claire for a moment, although he tries not to. He thinks of his and Liz's plan to move soon to larger lodgings, noting Liz's cat has settled down since the other cats arrived (13.33). Phil is considering Chuck: it has been helping him to visit Mrs. Cravens regularly.

Matt and Joan had left a will, asking if Phil could take Chuck if need be, and leaving a trust for him (13.34). Phil thinks Liz is too worried about her mother, realizes she acted quickly in marrying him, but hopes their happiness lasts, and also that his own mother will come to visit and help them care for the new baby (13.35).

"So little time," thinks Phil, pressed by many details for all concerned, and unable to continue the talking, marching and philosophizing of his previous peace work and anti-nuclear activity. It seems to him that Charlemagne has retired and he wishes he could also (13.36).

And then, "So little time . . . ." says the author. Liz's mother nears death, the family members visit every week, and the boys play outdoors there (13.37). Liz's mother is worsening, and only 55 years old. Mike Dorati talks to Liz about their earlier hopes to grow old together, but is also very busy with the tending of the vineyard at this time. Liz simply hopes her mother lives to see the new baby (13.38).

Paul and Chuck are playing near the winery with the Winery Cat when Ed arrives with 'AS,' whom he ties to a tree (13.39). The iguana is hissing, as Ed, teary, goes to and talks to his mother, at her bedside. It is late summer and Seth describes the soft and natural scene, by Marie, the air, a mockingbird singing. Ed tells her he'll find someone next year, to which she replies he should stop looking so sad (13.40). Ed suggests writing Sue to come home, but Mrs. Dorati insists they not do so: leave her scholarship, and what would Sue do then - hang around to wait until she died? No way (13.41). They eat dinner, a bit strained. Mike Dorati asks Ed to come work at the vineyards the next year and he declines. Mr. Dorati then mentions that he saw John wandering aimlessly, unkempt, in town. (13.42) Mike waved, but John slunk away. Liz asks Phil if they shouldn't try to help him, perhaps write his father. Phil rejects the idea of helping John now, imagining he is too isolated, pained and bitter (13.43). After dinner, Ed plays chess with the boys, who try to guess what the baby's sex will be (13.44).

Liz has a baby boy in September, and passes cigars around the law firm before taking a maternity leave. The baby is pudgy and Liz is busy trying to get back into her previous wardrobe (13.45). Here, the author expounds on babies for two sonnets. Phil's mother comes to visit and is even nice to Liz. Yet babies don't seem to deserve their reputation, with all of their bad behaviors (13.46). And they're ugly, too. Their behavior is atrocious, and if you like them, you can have them, and "Good luck to you;/ No doubt you used to be one too." (13.47)

Marie Dorati is thrilled by the first grandchild, who she swears has her own father's nose. She asks what name they've chosen, and Liz replies 'John.' The baby cries, is calmed, then sleeps, while Marie "Leans on her pillows painfully" (13.48). She lives one more week and is now out of pain, her ashes in the vineyard. It is grape-crushing time, with much work, and Mike Dorati cannot take time to grieve (13.49).

The whales migrate south as winter approaches. Things are undone: Matt and Joan Lamont's cacti garden is now the scene of snail trails, Campus Drive is full of unpicked olives, John's yard is all weeds, and his home is all dust and disorder. He is holding a note he unfolds (13.51). It is a note from Liz, telling him they've had a baby and named it John, asking him to be the godfather as no other friend will do. She mentions her mother's death, and sends their love, asking if they can't speak before they're all "old, dead or dying" (13.51). John walks to Jan's desk, touches the sand dollar she gave him, and hears her

voice, telling him that she is with him, that he is not alone, to trust her, directing him to the phone – not in order to obey her, but to "Pay what are your own heart's arrears./ Now clear your throat; and dry these tears." (13.52)

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Seth's Table of Contents sonnet includes a fourteenth line, but is un-numbered, unlike lines 1-13, since it is not a chapter or section in the book. It reads, "The months go by; the world goes on."

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