

## Question Sheet, Class #6

### Beatrice's questions for Countee Cullen's "Yet Do I Marvel," pg. 207

1. What is the tone of the poem? What words, phrases, or lines stand out in conveying this tone?
2. What do the allusions to Tantalus and Sisyphus add to the poem?
3. How do you interpret the final couplet? How does it "turn" the poem?
4. Two years after writing this poem, Cullen commented that his "chief problem has been that of reconciling a Christian upbringing with a pagan inclination." How does the poem reflect Cullen's religious struggles, his "god-wrestling," and what (if any) resolution does it imply?

### Beatrice's questions for Claude McKay's "If We Must Die," pg. 181

1. What particular words and images stand out? Why?
2. The poem has been called an "anthem of resistance" in relation to the racist violence and killings of Red Summer 1919. (We'll talk more about that in class.) How does the poem read to you now, in light of the events and movements of today?
3. How does the poem -- in its focus, perspective, purpose, and tone -- compare to "Yet Do I Marvel"?

**About both poems:** Why might these poets have chosen to work within the conventional, European sonnet form (when many writers of the Harlem Renaissance moved away from such forms)? What's the impact of this? How do the poems fit, challenge, or expand our notions of the sonnet?

### Barbara's questions for Gwendolyn Brook's "Gay Chaps at the Bar" pg. 227

1. How do off-rhyme and off-meter and enjambment throughout the poem, as well as stop-end lines in the octave but not in the sestet contribute to the pace and different moods in the poem. Some critics have said, "Brooks writes a kind of prose poetry?" Do you agree?
2. Compression is important in the sonnet. Consider several meanings for the following: bar, order, tropics, islands, green, brass, holler, or others.
3. The We are the soldiers in the poem, but the narrator makes her presence known. Where?
4. Food, heat, and instruction run through the poem. How do they help to describe the action?

### Barbara's questions for Gwendolyn Brook's "Piano After War" pg. 228

1. Shall in the first line sets the timing of the poem. When is it?
2. What in this poem connects to "Gay Chaps..."? How is it different?
3. What sonnet, although in a very different context, used piano playing as an important image?
4. Does Line 6 "That sometimes after sunset warms the west" sound like the Gwendolyn Brooks you have come to know?

### Barry's questions about Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays" and "Frederick Douglass" pg. 219

1. Read each poem out loud. Notice any change in tone or voice as you read. Also notice if the poem encourages changes in emphasis, volume or speed.
2. Try to read/view each of Hayden's sonnets through the lens/filter of what we have learned about the traditional and evolving sonnet form. Consider such things as the:
  - 1) historical forms,
  - 2) the number of lines,
  - 3) the typographical arrangement on the page,
  - 4) the rhyme scheme,
  - 5) the rhythm,
  - 6) rhetorical, poetic devices,
  - 7) syntax and word choice
  - 8) thematic development,
  - 9) the placement of the volta,
  - 10) the structure of an argument (plot or events unfolding line by line/stanza by stanza).How has Robert Hayden adhered to the sonnet form and how has he modified it?
3. What emotions are expressed/evoked in each poem? How does Hayden convey those emotions? Is there tension or conflict in the poems? Are the tensions evident/obvious or hidden/implicit?