

H. V. Cramond & Robin Morrissey

Part I: Prose Poem Dungeon

Directions: The audience chooses poems through use of an 8-sided die.

- 1 Once. Once there were woods and a house. There was a place with people in it and something changed and we were all transformed, especially the Decepticons. They went home again. It was a place. There were still people in it but they were different people. We were all happy because after this there would be no more sleeping, which everyone knows is dying. No more pennies for Charon; no more cats. This was the first day.
- 2 The wager was whether or not someone could bring her back to the tree. She could consent or it could be a trick, but it had to be done by nightfall and documents must be notarized. There must be an order to things. We thought she could be a Foolish Wife maybe or a Stepmother but she kept slipping and on the worst days, we couldn't decide if she was good or evil. She would sing to herself, I wish I never wore those shoes. She swore herself I would never sing. The contest ended when she bested herself.
- 3 The opposite of destiny is not loss but boredom, a kind of sleeping. Listening is kind not remembering. No, tell it again so we know how it happened. When I was four, I had pneumonia and almost died. That couldn't have happened to anyone. To hear my mother tell it, pausing to turn the page. Here you are saying what you like and what you always wished for. Remember?
- 4 A girl goes into the woods. A girl goes into the woods. A girl words woods and goes. As in, along for the ride. As in along for, they hope, something that hasn't been before. Like, for example, a girl in the woods being described. A girl walks, enters, a girl is surrounded by shadows and trees. Strobe lights. A girl about to hit up a place where things happen, and for sure are gonna happen to her. Might. Potentially. There is that hope. Other women have ridden: fast car right, front seat, back seat in an ocean forest in the back of a pickup watching the mangrove, palm, the bramble of night tangle and untangle itself from moonlit clouds of dust. Or looking up, with a friend hands on the machetes women learned to carry. Women like Diane, Artemis, Ephemera, Treat, and we hope later Bea and Slip.
- 5 A stranger comes to town to teach us something not too big and not too small. We decide to hang him.
- 6 Something clever with language that isn't about anything. Something about clever isn't anything about language. Language is a clever choosing from a list. Options are a person. Personality is cleverly optional. Anything is a language without a starving, mostly mad street dog. List something, cleverly: hands, face, experience with graphic design and html. Design mostly mad language.

- 7 I once had to choose a person. There were a lot of options, each option had a different set of very compelling traits, hair, eyes, musical talent, good figure, negotiation skills, competitive, kind, innovative in appraising rising and falling market values as well as with a list of ingredients. Some had many, none had all. Eventually, I had to get rid of them all. I could not choose on the basis of any tangible trait for that position. Instead, I wrote the position in sand. The first one who stepped onto the sand-clumped title, was the one the title chose. The palace's papal office now run by a starving, mangy, and mostly mad street dog.
- 8 I once had to be chosen by a person. I made sure to be very gendered and very accomplished but not too much or too little. I had just the right amount of hair and teeth and such big eyes. When the briars grew in, and then the thorns and then the roses. Some lesson was learned, brewing at the fire, spinning at the fire with no scissors to be found. Rust everywhere and feeding the secret song of mice.

Part II: Story as Board Game

Directions: Eight volunteers from the audience choose characters using a paper “fortune teller” (sometimes known as a “salt cellar” or “cootie catcher,” most often used by little girls to decide who they will marry). Three designated areas are marked out by colored spike tape on the floor: The Palace, The Woods, Town.

Each volunteer can do any of the actions or say any of the things assigned to his or her character, in any order, any number of times, but is limited to that list.

Characters

1. James: Hard of hearing, hard of seeing, loves fountains, scales, symmetry and record stores; asexual, but occasionally found talking to young women in museums, or I suppose Palaces & Woods. Gender not identified. Physically: medium height, lean, hair so coiffed it could kill, model good looks that turn grotesque when he smiles.
 - James checks locks on doors, lights in rooms, stoves, and girls’ pony tails.
 - Leans in to another character and smells him or her.
 - Says, “I see your potential.”
 - Compliments someone and asks if what he just complimented is vintage.
 - Says “What was that?” and squints
 - Says, “What are you doing after the reading? I know this great place. We can really get to know each other.”
2. Slip: Woman-child; curved, tall, once a cheerleader now a traveling saleswoman, she sells rings. Dreams while waking, fabricates when talking, she is beautiful, unreliable, has a melodic voice that sounds like water against wood.
 - Says, “I might have just what you need. But it will cost you. Just a little.”
 - Says, “Let me tell you a story.”
 - Says, “The card of death is a sure sign that danger is up ahead. Sometimes it means that you’ll overcome something that’s been holding you back. In either case, pay attention.”
 - Says, “I love how solid you are. You know exactly who you are and where you’re going, don’t you?”
 - Chooses an object from the room. Approaches another character and put the object in the person’s hand. Says “before you go to bed, brew this as a tea and you’ll have your wish. I promise you.
 - Says “If it is fated for you to recover from this illness, then you will recover whether you call a doctor or not./ Likewise, if you are fated not to recover, you will not do so whether you call a doctor or not./ But either it is fated that you will recover from this illness, or it is fated that you will not recover./Therefore it is futile to consult a doctor.”

3. Ephemera: Refugee from a country no one knows; small, large eyes, smart, powerfully powerfully smart. She writes, organizes creatures into communities, and makes love similar to the way hermaphrodites reproduce. It is a way of covering, enveloping those who are capable of getting close; changing them into something new. Ephemera writes the following on the windows (with dry erase markers):

- “This above all: to thine ownself be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.”
- “I would prefer not to,”
- “How can you tell a woman artist from a man artist? Check to see who cleans up after the opening”,
- “If I post that I’m being political on Facebook, even though I only posted to see how people will react, what does that make me?”
- “Is there Facebook in China? And what does Facebook look like in a Communist country? What if it looks the same? What does that mean for the way me and my friends use it? Would that mean we’re Communists, too?”
- “I am the bad wolf. I create myself. I take the words, I scatter them in time and space. A message to lead myself here.”

4. Treat: a person of good intentions who hides her emotions until she’s acted on them. Needs to convince others to like her, even if it means being manipulative. Eyes appear to be laughing, silky voice, cold skin that melts when touched. Her parents kidnapped her from a rival when she was a baby. Believes power and control are a means to happiness.

- Treat claps when approached, then stops. Says: “Are you okay? Are you sure? I have something I think you’re going to like.”
- After another character speaks, says “I agree completely. Of course it’s for the best. I don’t know why everyone else seems to be against you.”
- Says, “It is easy to see why each man kills the things he loves. To know a living thing is to kill it... to try to know a living being to try to suck the life out of that being.”
- Says, “I’m sure he was only kidding. Don’t be so sensitive.”
- Says, “You’re not like everyone else. How they make everything into a big deal. You’re cool.”
- Says, “Men should be either treated generously or destroyed, because they take revenge for slight injuries - for heavy ones they cannot.”

5. Taylor: a fatalist and an insurgent. Quick with a needle, close-lipped. Mouse brown, fades into walls, soft shoes, thin. Whistles brightly. Exemplary herb garden. Gender unknown.

- Taylor hides behind whoever just spoke and appears to have heard something. If anyone notices her, says “It’s nothing.”
- Taylor sings Patti Smith songs but only to the tune of “Happy Birthday”.
- Laughs at something that’s not funny, stops when noticed. Moves to a different location.
- If another character sits on a chair, she asks if she can see it for a second and puts it back into the audience and yells “Death of the Author!”
- Convinces another character to break the rules.
- Blind hate against the enemy creates a forceful impulse that cracks the boundaries of natural human limitations, transforming the soldier in an effective, selective and cold killing machine. A people without hate cannot triumph against the adversary.”

6. Bea: Female, works as a very successful matchmaker; links people based on electrical charge. Desk full of candy, plump. Lives in a co-op where she is in charge of composting and building maintenance. Efficient, pleasant, hums while she works. Asexual. Reacts to even well-intentioned physical touch with violence; it burns her skin.

- Says, “Sir, I don’t even know you.”
- Hums while moving two other characters together. In order to not touch the other characters, she has to improvise. Says “I have this feeling” while tilting her head approvingly.
- Rearranges the chairs in the three spaces into a straight line.
- Love is not love/ Which alters when it alteration finds/ Or bends with the remover to remove/O no! it is an ever-fixed mark/That looks on tempests and is never shaken”
- While walking in a circle, says “Now put take away one hand. This will require some sensitivity. The walker will have to be receptive to your touch, to be open to a more subtle way of being directed. Leaders, you have to take care of your walker, adapt to what they can absorb. If they are handling it, try to trick them, take them off their guard. Mind the walls.”
- Says, “My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but *love* it.”
- Says, “Do not cede to the bitterness and pessimism that the devil offers us every day. Instead, we must find new ways to spread the word of God to every corner of the world. Don’t you agree?”

7. Stephen: A collector of maps and paper. Loves detective novels, crossword puzzles and dust. Very white, very soft, male. Polymorphus light eruption (sunlight allergy) & ABCC11 gene (no armpit odor). Frequently disoriented after dark.

- Says, “You look a little lost. More lost than me I mean. What was it that I was after?”
- Says, “It’s no surprise that seed spilled upon the earth fails to propagate. Perpetual intention protects denigration, accidental varietals. But it is not this way. It’s not the incest, it’s the miscegenation. That’s Faulkner. One eighth part equals both less than one and all fractions round to whether high yellow or paper bag and what is wheatish complexion? When pushed face-first into the density of the earth. Mud-covered, we unbind each others’ lotus hands.”
- Says, “As infants we are just a jumble of diverse biological processes over which we have no authority, and our first task in life is to develop a coherent personality which ‘pulls together’ this fragmented confusion,”
- says “I read that somewhere.”
- Says, “concrete behavioral traits that patently depend on content provided by the home or culture—which language one speaks, which religion one practices, which political party one supports—are not heritable at all. But traits that reflect the underlying talents and temperaments—how proficient with language a person is, how religious, how liberal or conservative—are partially heritable.”
- Says, “I have made my peace with these events and, as far as I am concerned, the case is closed.”
- Says, “women are naturally helpless to exercise political positions. The natural order and the facts show us that man is the being for politics by excellence; the Scriptures show us that the woman is always the support of the thoughtful man and and doer, but nothing more than that.”

8. Machina: muscular and conventionally attractive. Becomes clumsy when anxious. Appears just after tragedy strikes. Genetically engineered, generally put-upon.

- Says, “You know, I would have done it differently. If you had planned a little better, this wouldn’t have happened.”
- Says, “I saw her again today. She looked good. I didn’t say anything, but I know that she’s changed. I don’t know. I think I’m going to call her. What do you think?”
- Says, “I’ll die a warrior’s death. Stories will be told of this day.”
- Says, “Where did you come from? We were made from the same stuff all of us and you insist on being broken and outraged, laying your strangeness upon us.”
- Says, “You always do that. I was trying to tell you something and you make it into a story about you. I have a life too, you know. “
- Says, “Manifold are thy shapings, Providence!/ Many a hopeless matter gods arrange./ What we expected never came to pass,/ What we did not expect the gods brought to bear; So have things gone, this whole experience through!”