

Possible topics for “Hot Springs” papers – ENGL 1158.107 - Lennon

- Hmm. Okay, this one is a little porny, I admit. But you can't deny that we have yet another entry for your dangerous-female-sexuality paper. Though this story was written in 1996, it harkens back to the noir era, when powerless women in crime stories used their sexuality to get what they wanted. Sexist? Perhaps. In any event, throw it on the pile!

- That said, this story is another example of a theme we've explored rather less in this class, but which is still present in many of the stories: male impotence. I mean this as a metaphor– the incapacity for men to live up to the standards their societies set for them. Think of Thomas in the O'Connor story, or the father in “Ransom,” or Marlowe's pent-up anger. We also have some rather creepy images of sexual impotence here– Mona Sue's dream of her father's penis, and poor Benbow's hammer to the jewels. Maybe a mite too vivid for my taste, but powerful images nevertheless.

- Also: animals again! This is an extraordinarily visceral story, what with all the sex, the football, and the intimate violence– and it's set against a backdrop of farming, with threats to feed people to pigs, hookworms, and the like. Is Crumley trying to tell us something about the ways people are and aren't like animals? Compare to Poe, Conan Doyle, Cain, et al.

- This story has kind of an interesting temporal structure: there's a plot running in the “foreground,” at the resort in Hot Springs, and then a series of flashbacks, each making its way up to the present moment. Nobody's yet written an essay about how the different writers we've read have represented the passage of time– but they all do it slightly differently, and with different results. Give it a go.

- “Life,” this story tells us, “should have taught him not to plan.” Most of the criminals we've read about have had some kind of plan in mind before everything goes fascinatingly wrong: Parker's score, Daniel's country house full of misfits, Sheppard's genteelly concealed murder. In a way, these criminals are like fiction writers: inventing a story. The difference is that they expect real life to conform to it. Try writing an essay about the role of narrative itself in these crime narratives.

- This isn't the first story we've read with parents and children in it; the most obvious comparison would be to Cain's “The Baby In The Icebox,” but we could add the O'Connor, Highsmith, and Buck stories, too. Perhaps compare a few of these in an essay.

- There's a lot of weather in this book– snow and rain, heat and cold, and the like. Here, Crumley is employing the pathetic fallacy (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pathetic_fallacy), wherein inanimate objects or phenomena are assigned human feelings, for the purpose of enhancing the story's tone and character development. Comb through our readings to discover how various authors have employed this tool to make their stories more dramatic.

- Culpepper and Dark are sinister authoritarians– a coach and a boss in this case, but we could add them to a gallery of same that includes Thomas's dead father, Donatti in “Quitters, Inc.,” and the lawyer in the Oates story. An analysis of these powerful and frightening men could be interesting.