

Possible topics for “Quitters, Inc.” and “The Parker Shotgun” papers – ENGL 1158.107 - Lennon

- We generally know Stephen King as a horror writer, and this is certainly a horror story. But it's also a crime story. What's the difference between these genres? How far can a story go in depicting disturbing acts or events before it loses our trust?

- One theme in the King story that we've seen before is that of responsibility to home and family. Think of “Ransom,” “The Terrapin,” or “The Comforts of Home”...and the motif of household violation that we have returned to again and again.

- A similar, if subtler, theme: the protagonist here is portrayed as henpecked, put-upon by his wife's silliness– her interminable garden shows which he is forced to “get through,” her helplessness and saccharine niceness. We've seen a few stories that lend themselves well to feminist interpretations, but what about the portrayal of men and their supposed burdens? Do you feel for this man, whom is always being portrayed as “Morrison”? Or does King seem like a chauvanistic whiner here?

- This isn't the first story we've read that explores the difficulty of self-control; although this is, on its face, a story about smoking, it's really about sin and temptation, and our chronic inability to resist our desires. Write an essay about this concept and how it's brought to bear upon several class readings.

- “Quitters, Inc.” features, among other things, a disabled child. We've seen several of these: a disturbed child (“Terrapin”), an endangered infant (“Icebox”), a man who is too much under his mother's influence (“Comforts”). Discuss the role of children and childishness in these works.

- Speaking of disabilities, in “The Parker Shotgun,” we have a disabled characters whose broken body serves as a metaphor for his damaged conscience. We've seen a lot of characters this semester who are damaged in some way– illness, madness, deformity. Do a study of them in an essay.

- “The Parker Shotgun” is in many ways reminiscent of Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, but Grafton is observing the criminal world from a decidedly feminine– though no less tough– perspective. Kinsey Millhone is attuned to the ways in which women are challenged by, or have control over, men. See if you can find examples of this theme running through other stories, too.

- The Grafton story, like some others we've read, centers upon a valuable, mysterious, or powerful object, which, though it isn't really the point of the story, serves to sharpen and focus the real concerns of the narrative. Consider the power of the object in this and other stories we've read.