

Riddles: Sherlockian, Joycean, Freudian “eye”

Tomoyuki TANAKA (Calif., USA) tanaka@cs.indiana.edu

“Why is a raven like a writing desk?” I love hard riddles. Even if a riddle was designed to have no solution, we can often think of good answers anyway (e.g., Poe wrote on both).

Working on an old, quaint riddle is interesting enough. And it’s just so surprising and special to find that I’ve actually solved an old, unsolved riddle. One such riddle I solved was a Sherlockian crux. In *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, Mrs. Watson says to a visitor, “Or should you rather that I sent James off to bed?” Why was Dr. John H. Watson called “James”? The “James” Watson puzzle had been a subject of much speculation, since first pointed out in 1911.

For my solution, see Tomoyuki Tanaka, “Holmes is Box; Watson is ‘James’ Cox.” *Sherlock Holmes Journal* (London: Sherlock Holmes Society, December 2007). Tomoyuki Tanaka, “Box and Cox, the Homeric Sherlock Holmes, and Joyce’s *Ulysses*” *Hypermedia Joyce Studies*, http://hjs.ff.cuni.cz/archives/v9_1/essays/tanaka.htm (Feb. 2008).

James Joyce’s stories and novels are full of hard and impossible riddles. A great introduction is Martin Gardner’s article “Puzzles in *Ulysses*” in his collection *The Night Is Large* (1997).

In Joyce’s *Dubliners*, Eveline remembers her mother repeating on her deathbed: “Derevaun Seraun! Derevaun Seraun!” (a dozen Irish-Gaelic readings have been proposed) Could it be bad French? *Devrons serons!* (We ought to be what we will be) Or mumbled English? (Dare advance, or run; The reverends are wrong;)

“In the morn when I rise, / I open my eyes, / Tho’ I ne’er sleep a wink all night”

--- I enjoyed the old riddle (from 1782, 1801, ...) reprinted in WW (Feb. 2010). I thought about several possibilities, including Mr. Eckler’s proposed answer of “fame in the short-lived sense of ‘notoriety’ ...”.

Many a stripe suggested a grooved rifle bullet (*You will be in danger*), and also a striped bee or wasp, which might lament: “I live a short time, I die in my prime”. (I see that this “Plan Bee” was anticipated by Jim Puder in WW, Feb. 2011.)

Then, I saw Ronnie B. Kon’s answer “the Stars and Stripes” (WW, Nov. 2010), and was ready to give up, when I thought of the stock market. (Back then, did they have the notion that *money* or the stock market never sleeps?)

(1) NYSE (The first central location of the Exchange was a room, rented in 1792 for \$200 a month, located at 40 Wall Street.) It burns many people (investors) ends “with a pipe” ??? (not today’s Closing Bell ?) loss, gain... lusty..... “my habit oft change in a day” --- fluctuating market trends

To which Mr. Eckler comments: “The riddle first appeared in the 1782 issue of The Ladies’ Diary or Women’s Almanac, [...] Furthermore, it is unlikely that Eliza Hurst, a British woman, would base a puzzle on an American institution.”

Ok, I have two responses: The stock exchange in London was thriving by the South Sea Bubble of 1720; and How about my second, related answer ...

(2) **Greed (for money)** (or the 1 dollar bill), which is similar to “stock market”, in that it burns many people (investors), loss, gain, lusty... habit(s) “change in a day” (Did British paper money have stripes? The grooves at coin edges look like stripes.)

---- The person may sleep, but his (or her) Greed doesn’t.

---- “And pay no regard to the light” ... shy of righteousness.

---- “punished with many a stripe” ... money crimes, leading to striped prison uniform

---- “I end with a pipe” ... Greed dies only when the person dies (bag-pipe at the funeral)

My “Greed” answer is awfully abstract. Most of the Seven Deadly Sins would work too. “Greed for fame” is another way to describe Mr. Eckler’s answer.

(((One aspect that especially interests me about this “Greed” answer is that the first person “I” of the poem is actually a part of the mind which it inhabits. The Greed inside this person is like a parasite living within his brain, and it’s speaking with the first person “I”. ---- I think this is a particularly Freudian concept, renewed by the split-brain studies by Gazzaniga, and *Society of Mind* theories by Minsky, etc.

As I read the poem in this way, the Freudian “I” reading is so fresh that I can not believe that this notion existed in such an old poem (from 1782 ...). Please let me know if you have a comment of this aspect, or know of another old poem or story with a Freudian sub-self’s narrative.)))

Then, I studied some Enigmas from the period and got some feel for these things. See the page (reproduced below) from *The Weekly Entertainer* (Oct. 6, 1783), in the 630-page Free Google-ebook noted by Faith W. Eckler (WW, Feb. 2011).

And it suddenly came to me. The answer is Fire. Expressions like “eye of the fire” or “stripes of the fire” were more common earlier. The 1897 short story “At The Article of Death” by John Buchan contains: “In a little he raised his eyes and saw that the place was filled with darkness, save where the red eye of the fire glowed hot and silent.”

Throughout 1700s and until the 1840s (when the huge, Victorian enclosed ranges became in wide use), the fireplace was commonly used for cooking (as in the 1847 play “Box and Cox.” --- Maybe fire *punished with stripes* refers to the grid-iron or the iron cage.) A wall fireplace “usually had a cupboard fitted with an iron door [...] for slow

cooking” and for baking cakes, biscuits, and pies. Housewives “hung their huge cooking pots on a hob within their fireplaces. The meat went into the boiling water, and any number of pudding cloths could be hung in the same pot.” (Kristine Hughes, *The writer’s guide to everyday life in Regency and Victorian England*, 1998, pp. 19-21)

For oven (stove) or fireplace, in some cases, the fires were not completely extinguished in the evening. By using slow-burning peat, “it was possible to keep the fire burning at all times, even when a cottage was empty, as it could be left to smolder safely for days at a time.” (Hughes, p. 14).

So the fire *never sleeps a wink all night*. If the eye of the fire *wakes up too soon*, it is to *lie still till noon* (when a maid prepares fire for lunch), and the fire *pays no regard to the light* (can’t compete with sunlight), as in the old Jp expression *Mahiru no andon* (Mid-day’s oil-lamp) (He is as useful as a lamp in broad daylight). Or the glow-worm’s pale fire in the morning light (*Hamlet*, I.v)

“And my evenings I end with a pipe” ... The fire vicariously enjoys an evening smoke with Holmes, Watson, and other pipe-lovers. “And ne’er miss my road, Unless I am met by a stranger” ... The fire goes where it wants, and is never off-course, unless there’s an obstacle.

“I am chaste” ... I still like my earlier answers (money, stock market, greed), but the Freudian reading is too fantastic and I had trouble with the adjective “chaste.” It fits fire ... Fire is pure, and never stained. You can’t tarnish fire any more than you can stain or see the wind. *Frail, fantastic* ... all the other adjectives and descriptions fit too.

Ronnie Kon noted: “The answer [...] is an Oven. I kid you not.” (WW, Aug. 2011). (Maybe “Oven” meant *fire in the oven* back then?) My “Fire” answer is, of course, also related to the “Hot Air Balloon” answer by Faith W. Eckler (WW, Feb. 2011).

An annotation (& appreciation) of the poem.

I’ve looked in vain for other poems by Eliza Hurst. Was this the only poem she published? Of the several variants of this Enigma, I like best the version reproduced below. Note the “*long S*” in “I have lofs” or “all who poffefs me.”

Stanzas 1 and 2 cover *morn*, *noon*, and *evening* --- perhaps a homage to the most famous of all riddles: Sphinx asking Oedipus, “What in the morning goes on four legs, at mid-day on two, and in the evening on three?”

Jesus was “scourged” (Matt. 27:26) with many a stripe (wound from a rod, lash, or whip). These stanzas mention *eye*, *burn*, (*wound*), and *stripe* --- “Eye for eye, ... Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” (Exodus 21:24-5).

“I burn friend and foe” --- [foe] with o-umlaut designates the pronunciation of *feu* (fire in French).

Stanza 3 *Abroad* means *a-broad* (at large; widely), not *ab-road* (off-road). *Travel* and *mean* are *second-cognates*, because *travel* & *travail* come from O.Fr. *travail* (toil, torture) and *mean* & *moan* come from the Indo-European root MEI-NO- (opinion, intention > complaint). Using this, the first two lines of the stanza can be transformed into “*Abroad* means-not *off-road*.”

The stanza to me is Biblical. In paraphrasing the lines, I wrote, “The fire goes where it wants, and is never off-course.” That is, I ended up invoking: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth” (John 3:8) I think she had this verse in mind.

Stranger -- e.g., “I have been a stranger in a strange land.” (Exodus 2:22)

“You will always be subject to danger.”

Danger -- “shall be in danger of hell fire.” (Matt. 5:22), hinting at the answer *Fire*.

Stanza 4 Shakespeare’s Sonnet 153 is about lusty fire in a lover’s eyes. “I am strong and lusty” (*As You Like It*, II, iii)

I’ve been wondering why I like the combination *Lusty-Fire* so much, and thought about the *Lusty-Luster* sounds. Then I realized that I’m amused by the Chiasmus (or Conceptual Spoonerism) --- instead of the usual, hackneyed *burning desire* or *Fiery Lust*, the poem is hinting at *Lusty Fire*.

Describing court’s ladies and beaus as *frail* and *fantastic* is perhaps an indirect allusion to “gilded butterflies” in this stanza about changing “ebb and flow by th’ moon” (Act V, scene iii).

King Lear : No, no, no, no! Come, let’s away to prison:
 We two alone will sing like birds i’ the cage: [...]
 so we’ll live, / And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues / Talk of court news;

Stanza 5

‘F’s are everywhere in the poem, especially because of the Long-S’s that look like ‘F’s. Following *Frail* and *Fantastic* in the fourth stanza,

“If I add any more, To what’s faid before, I fear you will easily guefs me.”

note the final *before* and *fear* ... as if the poem is itching to reveal its secret: the answer *Fire*.

(Printed before the Enigma) A QUESTION, by J. Quant, of Hinton St. George.
THERE is a meadow near Hinton in form of a plain rectangle triangle, one side whereof is equal to 1000 yards, and the sum of both the sides, when squared and added together, is equal to 17056 yards. It is required to find two angles, and the content, and to shew the investigation of the same. (You can email me for help -- a small hint, or a big hint.)

After you’ve solved it, please answer: Why is this Question like a Joycean riddle?

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A N E N I G M A.

IN the morn, when I rise,
I open my eyes,
Though I sleep not a wink in the night:
Though I wake e'er so soon,
I still lie till noon,
And pay no regard to the light.

I have loss, I have gain,
I have pleasure and pain,
And am punish'd with many a stripe;
To diminish my woe,
I burn friend and foe,
And the evening close with a pipe.

I travel abroad,
And ne'er miss my road,
Unless I am met by a stranger;
If you come in my way,
As you very well may,
You will always be subject to danger.

I am chaste, I am young,
I am lusty and strong,
And my habit oft change in a day:
To court I ne'er go,
Am no lady nor beau,
Yet as frail and fantastic as they.

I live but short time,
And die in my prime,
Lamented by all who possess me.
If I add any more
To what's said before,
I fear you will easily guess me.

