

Study Questions for selected poems from chris wind's *UnMythed*

Daedalus

I thought you would've learned—
all of you at Los Alamos,
and the rest of you
all over the world.

why was my story saved?
why is it told and retold
if not for that?

do you see in it
just a lesson in ingenuity?

were you as blind to the deaths
of those 14 Athenians
year after year
as you were to the 140,000 Japanese
years
after year—

of course I tried to destroy it
but I couldn't get close enough!
they had taken away my security clearance
and it was too well-guarded!

then I tried to amend
(to amend— how could i?)
I saved Theseus and the others
one year
(one year!)

DOES IT MEAN NOTHING TO YOU?
the same government I helped, then—
I was of no further use, then—
I was a threat then—

so when they come to you
with money, for research and a lab
with anthems
with arguments, about the lesser of two evils
with threats
please—
say to them
no
it cannot be done.

•

Daedalus was a great inventor, asked by King Minos to build a labyrinth in which the Minotaur would live—and in which seven young men and seven young women from Athens would be left to die each year, unable to find their way out. One year Daedalus helped the youths escape; for this he was punished by the King, who left him and his son in the labyrinth of his own making. They escaped, using wings Daedalus created, but Icarus (his son) flew too near the sun, the wax of the wings melted, and he fell to his death.

The reference to the Japanese is a reference to Hiroshima: it is estimated that initially 70,000 were killed and 70,000 injured; subsequently (and consequently) another 140,000 have died.

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The story of Daedalus and Icarus is usually understood to be making what point? What point does Chris Wind's poem take away from the myth instead?

Clytie

I can see you sitting there
looking up to your love
watching his every move
through the sky

like the girl who waited
every day at the corner
so to follow him to school
I knew his timetable
where he sat for lunch
and which afterschools he had practice

gradually your life changes
from human to plant
till you are finally immobilized
by your adulation
and unrequited love

if only you'd known
he wasn't a god at all
but just some bunch of hot air

•

Clytie was a young woman in love with the Sun god. She would sit outside all day and watch him. Eventually she turned into a sunflower.

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Explain the double meaning of “some bunch of hot air”.

## The Danaids

there are so many of them  
in the kitchen doing the dishes  
in the bathroom cleaning the toilet  
in the laundryroom washing his clothes  
in the livingroom dusting the furniture  
in the kitchen preparing his dinner  
in the bathroom scouring the tub  
in the laundryroom ironing his shirts  
in the livingroom vacuuming the rug  
in the kitchen doing the dishes  
in the bathroom cleaning the toilet  
in the laundryroom washing his  
who did not want  
to marry  
to become a wife

•

*The Danaids were fifty sisters who were to be married to their fifty cousins. The women opposed the marriages but were forced into them. On their wedding night, each of them (except one) killed her husband, for which they were doomed in Hades to fetch water from a river using sieves—an endless (and impossible) task.*

~ ~ ~

What device does the poet use to convey tedium?

## Galatea

you don't know me by name,  
though you've heard of my husband, of course—Pygmalion.  
the myth ends with our marriage.  
then the real story begins.  
(no, the real story begins a year later,  
with our divorce.)

it shouldn't surprise you—  
I mean, look at the courtship:  
it really didn't involve me:  
he spent months romancing his own private image  
of the perfect woman,  
not me.  
(that happens a lot.)

then, as you know, he visited Venus,  
she was impressed with his passion,  
and made his sculpture  
(his archetype of the life-sized inflatable doll)  
come alive:  
he proposed immediately,  
and, I accepted.  
(why, you might wonder.  
well, it's not uncommon for a disproportionate attachment  
to develop toward the agent of,  
no, the first encounter after,  
one's sexual awakening.  
in my case, since the awakening included  
my entire physicality,  
I think my initial infatuation, and hence, consent  
is understandable.)

however, over the next little while,  
I found out what everyone knew:  
that he had spent years creating  
this beautiful statue,  
that when it was done he started dressing it,  
talking to it, bringing it gifts.  
that he caressed it, kissed it—

(I also found out what few people knew:  
that he had left a hollow space in the right spot,  
and lined it with moss  
—he was fucking it too.)

so let's face it, the man has problems:  
womb envy  
delusions of grandeur  
displaced narcissism  
misogyny

stone fetishism  
inability to cope with reality

so when he brought home this huge block of marble one day

I left.

•

*Pygmalion was a sculptor who detested 'the faults beyond measure which nature had given to women' and therefore resolved never to marry. In spite of, or because of, his attitude, he sculpted a statue of 'the perfect woman'. He grew to love it and began to kiss and caress it, dress it, bring it gifts, and put it to bed at night. Impressed with the strength of his love, Venus made the beautiful statue come alive; he named it Galatea.*

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What is the main point of “Galatea”? What is the main point of Shaw’s novel *Pygmalion* (which is based on the myth) and/or “My Fair Lady” (the musical by Lerner and Lowe which is based on the novel)?

Bellerophon

it's frightening
I mean, it's just her word against mine—
and quite apart from the problem of simply lying
for revenge or reputation,
there can be real misunderstanding—

I mean it's not like we sit there and I say
do you want to have sex with me
and she says yes or no—
of course not—it's all body language
and you know how unclear that can be—

and a lot of women *do* mean yes when they say no
because they can't say yes
it's like they've been taught, told to say no—
if a woman *wants* sex,
let alone *admits* it,
says it out loud *to a man*,
well she's a slut, a whore—

so you can't even talk about consenting adults
as long as one of them
isn't really allowed to consent—

well *both* of them actually—
I mean, if she says yes, she's a whore
but if I say no, I'm gay—

so the way it's set up,
I'm supposed to say yes
and she's supposed to say no
—and that's rape.

and that's frightening.

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*Bellerophon was unjustly accused of rape by Anetia, whose husband, Proteus, sent him
on a journey sure to end in his death.*

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What problem does Bellerophon describe? What's a solution?

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