1. One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest

We made him stand and hitch up his black shorts like they were horsehide chaps, and push back his cap with one finger like it was a ten-gallon Stetson, slow, mechanical gestures — and when he walked across the floor you could hear the iron in his bare heels ring sparks out of the tile.

Only at the last — after he’d smashed through that glass door, her face swinging around, with terror forever ruining any other look she might ever try to use again, screaming when he grabbed for her and ripped her uniform all the way down the front, screaming again when the two nipple circles started from her chest and swelled out and out, bigger than anybody had ever even imagined, warm and pink in the light — only at the last, after the officials realized that the three black boys weren’t going to do anything but stand and watch and they would have to beat him off without their help, doctors and supervisors and nurses prying those heavy red fingers out of the white flesh of her throat as if they were her neck bones, jerking him backward off of her with a loud heave of breath, only then did he show any sign that he might be anything other than a sane, wilful, dogged man performing a hard duty that finally just had to be done, like it or not.

He gave a cry. At the last, falling backward, his face appearing to us for a second upside down before he was smothered on the floor by a pile of white uniforms, he let himself cry out:

A sound of a cornered-animal fear and hate and surrender and defiance, that if you ever trailed coon or cougar or lynx is like the last sound the treed and shot and falling
animal makes as the dogs get him, when he finally doesn’t care any more about anything but himself and his dying.

Discuss the implications of this passage, referring particularly to the representation of gender and the relationships between the characters.

2) Sula

But they had been down on all fours naked, not touching except their lips right down there on the floor where the tie is pointing to, on all fours like (uh huh, go on, say it) like dogs. Nibbling at each other, just their lips, and when I opened the door they didn’t even look for a minute and I thought the reason they are not looking up is because they are not doing that. So it’s all right. I am just standing here. They are not doing that. I am just standing here and seeing it, but they are not really doing it. But then they did look up. Or you did. You did, Jude. […] I just stood there seeing it and smiling because maybe there was some explanation, something important that I did not know about that would make it all right. I waited for Sula to look up at me any minute and say one of those lovely college words like aesthetic or rapport, which I never understood but which I loved because they sounded so comfortable and firm.

Analyse the effects achieved in this passage, and explain how they contribute to your reaction to the characters and your overall impression of the novel.

3) The Rocky Horror Picture Show

Why, in your opinion, has The Rocky Horror Picture Show endured as a cult film for so long?

4) A Private Life

The novel is stylistically diverse, even to the point of fragmentation. Most chapters open with long impressionistic epigraphs, which are included in full in the book’s list of chapters. The book is narrated primarily in the first person, with the notable exception of the description of Ni Niuniu’s first experience of heterosexual intercourse, which is narrated in the third person. The book also makes an almost poetic use of anthropomorphism, turning inanimate objects – Ni Niuniu’s bathtub, the shrubs on her balcony, her mother’s clothes – into “characters” capable of conversing with the
protagonist. This device succeeds as a form of character description by conveying both a charming intimacy and a compelling loneliness, a sense of being on the outside looking in. It employs the discourse of medical diagnosis, framed by diary entries, to foreground themes of madness and recovery that tend to invite socially critical analysis. Chen seems less interested in using this format to convey an explicit social critique or “authenticate” the text, than in deepening our picture of Ni Niuniu’s complex psyche and her connection to the past; the social critique is left implicit. As the narrator herself remarks, “My attention to the accurate depiction of the fragmented memories of past events is not motivated by a passion for personal reminiscing, nor am I fanatically nostalgic. The reason my focus persistently returns to the bits and pieces of the past is that they are not dead pages from history; they are living links that connect me to my ever-unfolding present.” Or as Ni Niuniu states more succinctly elsewhere: “I am a fragment in a fragmented age.”

Larissa N. Heinrich

Carefully analyse the ways in which the style of the novel contributes to your overall impressions of the character Ni Niuniu, and the novel as a whole.

5) *Shallow Grave*

Ronan Bennett describes *Shallow Grave* as harbouring “a freezing and cruel emptiness,” combined with the sort of predictable plotting standard to the thriller genre. Discuss.

6) *Specimen Days*

As feminist critics have pointed out, in the wake of a national trauma, there is a mobilisation of traditional, hegemonic values relating to nationalism, gender and sexuality, as well as notions of the family and other social structures. Anne Cvetkovich, writing on the construction of cultural memory around September 11, argues for the usefulness of considering what queer perspectives on sexuality may teach us about de-pathologising the non-normative, to: “acknowledge and embrace the queer or non-normative dimensions of our emotional responses and to see them as a resource for public cultures of feeling that can challenge violent retribution and narrow or exclusionary patriotisms” (2002, 472). Such violent retribution is something that we see being played out as well as radically resisted in *Specimen Days*. Queer models of kinship variously represented by the “inter-species” relationship of Simon, an android and Carateen, a non-human immigrant from another planet, the “siblings” that make up the children crusaders.
and the non-conventional mother-son relationship of Cat and her informally adopted son Luke, open up alternative ways of relating to the other.

Olu Jenzen

Engage creatively with the above quotation.

7) Transamerica

Shortly after the “penis incident,” Bree and Toby are rescued by a kind Native American named Calvin after Bree’s car has been stolen. His chivalric attitude and obvious romantic interest in Bree fluster as well as flatter her, but the film leaves no doubt that she wishes to respond to his flirtation when she asks, “Is there a Mrs Many Goats?” Bree’s inability to establish interpersonal relationships is a key part of her character. However, it does not seem credible that the two would not have even one tentative touch after so many intimate conversations, particularly when they part with enthusiastic assurances to meet again. Where’s a goodbye handshake? A pat on the arm? Even a chaste kiss on the cheek? Such an omission is glaring when compared with the only scene when Bree is touched erotically – by Toby. He sneaks into her bed in an apparent reconciliatory gesture with full knowledge of Bree’s genitalia, but without knowledge of Bree’s paternity. While this scene functions well as the plot device that drives a reluctant Bree to admit the truth, it does not resolve the trans/romance dilemma since the audience is fully aware of Toby’s past life as a gay hustler and current ambition to become a gay film star. The only other sex scene in the film occurs between Toby and a male customer he picks up in a restaurant restroom while Bree and Calvin chastely flirt at the counter. Tucker reaffirms the primacy of Bree’s genitalia by suggesting Toby initiates the erotic encounter because Bree has a penis, not despite it.

Traci B. Abbott

Use the quotation as a starting point for a discussion of the depiction of romantic relationships in the context of transgender in the film.
8) *The Virgin of Flames*

*The Virgin of Flames* investigates the tensions between the desires of the body, its self-destructive urges, and the spirit as mediated by ritual, sex, and art.

Ahmad Saidullah

Discuss the above quotation, making particular reference to Black’s relationship with Sweet Girl and his last mural, that of Fatima, “a being both Virgin and not and closer to the profane than the sacred yet holding the two.”

9) *District 9*

Consider the use of dirt, both literal and metaphoric, in *District 9.*

10) *Zoo City*

Analyse Lauren Beukes’s category of “muti noir” as a suitable lens through which to view the novel.