

# Contrappasso

Special Issue: Writers at the Movies

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## Poetry by R. ZAMORA LINMARK

### Twelve Short Takes on Montgomery Clift

#### Take 1

Acting is an accumulation of  
subtleties—like shaking the ash  
from a cigarette while you  
are supposed to be completely  
absorbed in a conversation

#### Take 2

How does it feel to be dead?  
Start with the face.  
Left side paralyzed.  
Teeth knocked out.  
Jaws wired shut.  
And he was not even drunk or high  
when he slammed right  
into the mountain.

Take 3

Counterclockwise.

Begin with: "Absolutely not."

Monty's last words  
recorded at one in the morning—  
a response to his Negro caregiver  
who asked if he cared  
to catch himself on the tube  
controlling his temper  
inside a phone booth  
in the middle of the desert,  
his half-drowned words blaming  
his mother's second marriage  
for robbing him of his ranch inheritance  
then shrugging at the word "home"  
and the mention of scars healing on his face.

Take 4

"Please don't wake me when I'm smoking."

Take 5

Clockwise. End with  
the making of *The Misfits*,  
when Monty, born fifteen hours  
behind his twin sister Esther,  
is asking the same question  
as forty years ago:  
"Did I begin like her?"



This left him with a busted gland  
and a scar on his neck, unlike the ones  
children get from the throat of *Printemps*.

From a window  
above 125 Rue St. Michel, he studied  
culture and other nuances. By nineteen,  
he'd had enough of Proust's madeleines  
and Thomas Mann's *Death in Deutsch*.

#### Take 9

Observe death in Latin.  
Avoid pills and blackouts.  
Extend sleep until four in the morning.  
Lie between a kiss and a killer's confession.  
Spend two days saying, "Who's that?" to a prostitute.  
Portray life as if it were your last sorrow.

#### Take 10

After one take, a last meal: Goose liver sandwich.

#### Take 11

Marilyn and Monty: Revelation scene:  
A saloon outside Dayton, Nevada.  
Everywhere flies swarming amidst black tarps.  
Day for night.  
Marilyn holding water in a paper cup.

Monty sipping vodka-spiked juice.  
Between takes: they compared paranoia and pill list,  
shared strategies for combating insomnia,  
the location of their loneliness.  
According to Monty, it was in Marilyn's smile.  
According to Marilyn, it was in Monty's laugh.

## Epilogue

"That goddamn fag," Gable,  
standing on a dry lake, said,  
"just stole the scene from me  
by lighting that cigarette."

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