**http://www.penguin.com/static/pdf/teachersguides/Frankenstein.pdf**

**About Vijay Seshadri**

Poet, essayist, and critic Vijay Seshadri was born in India and came to the United States at the age of five. He earned a BA from Oberlin College and an MFA from Columbia University.  
  
Seshadri is the author of Wild Kingdom (1996); The Long Meadow (2003), which won the James Laughlin Award; and 3 Sections (2013), which won the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry. The Pulitzer committee described the book as “a compelling collection of poems that examine human consciousness, from birth to dementia, in a voice that is by turns witty and grave, compassionate andremorseless.”  
  
Seshadri has received fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts, the NEA, and the Guggenheim Foundation. He has worked as an editor at the New Yorker and has taught at Bennington College and Sarah Lawrence College, where he currently directs the graduate non-fiction writing program.

Source of Information:

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/vijay-seshadri

**Imaginary Number**

The mountain that remains when the universe is destroyed

is not big and is not small.

Big and small are

comparative categories, and to what

could the mountain that remains when the universe is destroyed

be compared?

Consciousness observes and is appeased.

The soul scrambles across the screes.

The soul,

like the square root of minus 1,

is an impossibility that has its uses.

The review given below has excerpts from The American Reader, **Review: On Vijay Seshadri's "3 Sections" by Bhisham Bherwani. Full article can be accessed at the following website-** http://theamericanreader.com/review-on-vijay-seshadris-3-sections/

“Imaginary Number,” titled after a theoretical abstraction that extends mathematics to a “complex” realm (parallel to a “real” one) that accommodates impossible numbers (a realm replete, as any mathematician knows, with profoundly beautiful geometric patterns), “The soul scrambles across the scree”:

The soul,  
like the square root of minus 1,  
is an impossibility that has its uses.

Consciousness has caught up with the impossible soul on “the other shore,” the shore that permits, and legitimizes, the imagination, the vehicle of consciousness. Seshadri’s metaphor is doubly apt (if not multiply complex): improbable as it may seem, the imaginary number (*i* or √−1) regularly surfaces in science and engineering; it is present in the formalisms underlying modern technologies. Its “uses” include almost any contraption we take for granted in our daily lives—anything that uses electricity, for example—keeping us, paradoxically, rooted in the “real” world we inhabit, the real world to which, after our brief sojourns to the other, unreal one, we must predictably return.

Our evolving technologies define and redefine the modes by which we indulge our unyielding impulse for “the other shore,” which is always but never quite within reach, even as “consciousness leaks from the broken seals, / the busted drumcases, the cracks in the housings, the fissures” (“A School Day in October”). It “teems viscously across the surfaces of the world”— of *this* world, we might note—as “the soul scrambles across the scree” of *that* world. We might in this world just have to accept, in the face of the unfathomable, the limitations of our consciousness, to reconcile ourselves to a few chance flights to that world. “Consciousness observes and is appeased,” notes Seshadri in “Imaginary Number.”

**Three Persons**

*In the Oedipus myth*, the oracle at Delphi tells Oedipus’ father King Laius that he will be murdered by his son who will marry his mother. When Oedipus is born, his father following the practice of infanticide at that time, drills holes through Oedipus’ ankles, binds his feet together, and abandons him on a hill side. There he is found by a shepherd and taken to King Polybus who raises him and he is known as Oedipus (Greek for “swollen foot”). When Oedipus is grown he meets King Laius on the narrow road to Thebes, an argument ensues, and kills his father Laius.

**Freeway Meridian**: A group in Kansas was formed in 1911 to promote the concept of a direct north-south automobile route though the central United States. Unlike most auto trails, the Meridian Highway was envisioned as an international highway, running from Winnipeg to Mexico city.1

1Source: Wikipedia

That slow person you left behind when, finally,

you mastered the world, and scaled the heights you now command,

where is he while you

walk around the shaved lawn in your plus fours,

organizing with an electric clipboard

your big push to tomorrow?

Oh, I’ve come across him, yes I have, more than once,

coaxing his battered grocery cart down the freeway meridian.

Others see in you sundry mythic types distinguished

not just in themselves but by the stories

we put them in, with beginnings, ends, surprises:

the baby Oedipus on the hillside with his broken feet

or the dog whose barking saves the grandmother

flailing in the millpond beyond the weir,

dragged down by her woolen skirt.

He doesn’t see you as a story, though.

He feels you as his atmosphere. When your sun shines,

he chortles. When your barometric pressure drops

and the thunderheads gather,

he huddles under the overpass and writes me long letters with

the stubby little pencils he steals from the public library.

He asks me to look out for you.

[**So take two poems by Vijay Seshadri…**](http://www.margaretsoltan.com/?p=43774)

… who has won the [poetry Pulitzer.](http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/04/15/303183547/book-news-a-q-a-with-pulitzer-prize-winner-vijay-seshadri) Take [“Bright Copper Kettles”](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/240830) and [“Three Persons.”](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/240834)They’re both halting little dances to the music of time, or, if you like, rivulets of consciousness from a poet afloat in the present and at the same time [darkly encroached upon, occasionally even flooded by, that old catastrophe.](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poem/2464)

His life will start to break apart eventually. Then he will die. He wouldn’t mind knowing something about that. He wouldn’t mind knowing more about his strange relationship to his condition of knowing something about that. So in the first poem, its title taken from the treacly Sound of Music song, his favorite thing is consort with the dead, since they know all and can enlighten him as to what awaits. They come to him in dreams, and

**I like it so much I sleep all the time.  
Moon by day and sun by night find me dispersed  
deep in the dreams where they appear.  
In fields of goldenrod, in the city of five pyramids,  
before the empress with the melting face, under  
the towering plane tree, they just show up.  
“It’s all right,” they seem to say. “It always was.”**

This is no night of living dead absurdity; they don’t menace him. Why would they?

**They’re dead, you understand, they don’t exist. And, besides,  
why would they care? They’re subatomic, horizontal. Think about it.  
One of them shyly offers me a pencil.  
The eyes under the eyelids dart faster and faster.  
Through the intercom of the house where for so long there was no music,  
the right Reverend Al Green is singing,  
“I could never see tomorrow.  
I was never told about the sorrow.”**

The right Reverend has no fore-knowledge of life’s breaking apart and then the end of life; no dead people ever told him about it. The poet however has puzzled out a path to the dead, and they have broken the silence of his mind with the knowledge the Reverend lacks. The poet’s rapid eye movement as he dreams registers his excitement about what he is about to understand.

Yet the poem ends not with sage words from the dead, but with one of the dead shyly (earlier the poet has called the dead in his dreams “diffident” and “polite”) offering the poet a pencil. How to interpret the gesture? Perhaps something like this. **Wake up! You’re horizontal all the time, just like us, because you’re so desperate to know what awaits. Death is … eh… I dunno… It’s another condition; like life. Both are all right – in the sense that both are, and there’s little point in acts of resistance. You, however, at the moment, write. You’re a poet. Allow me to be bold enough to suggest that you should just keep doing what you’ve been doing: Recording what it feels like to be a human being in the middle of your journey.**

The second poem also ends with a pencil. Here the speaker fixates not on the dead dead, but the alive dead. He contrasts himself, a vital successful sort of person, with losers, slow people, people you leave behind when you make it. While you stride about organizing with an electric clipboard / your big push to tomorrow, you can’t avoid thinking about those you’ve left in your dust, people “coaxing” their “battered grocery cart[s] down the freeway meridian.” You see yourself, others see you, as a mythic, storied figure striding life like a colossus; but the loser has a special insight into the truth of you (and here the poem begins to merge with the one we just looked at; this is a poet drawn to has-beens because he knows that having-been is the ineluctable human truth, however we delude ourselves about that):

**He doesn’t see you as a story, though.  
He feels you as his atmosphere. When your sun shines,  
he chortles. When your barometric pressure drops  
and the thunderheads gather,  
he huddles under the overpass and writes me long letters with  
the stubby little pencils he steals from the public library.  
He asks me to look out for you.**

The prince and the pauper; the poet and… the poet. The loser turns out to be wielding the same pencil the winner’s got in his hand. Here’s his special knowledge; here’s why he’s worried about the poet’s welfare: They are equally vulnerable to the gathering thunderheads.

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UD would say that these poems are variations on Lear’s

**Oh, I have ta’en  
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp.  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel…**

Encounters with the wretches, though, disclose something rather odd, and moving: He asks me to look out for you.