Computer Code as Poetry?
A Sampling of Interactive Poetry

Context:

- Interactive poetry via executable code
  - The code and the execution thereof constructs the poem
- Perl and PerlMonks
  - Programming Language for parsing text and performing logical operations on text
  - A help site for the Perl programming language
    - Includes a poetry section
- Poem author (username): "ghernandez"
  - Wrote one additional poem on the same website
  - Poem posted on 9/11/2014, last post in 2015

```perl
print "Life and death are balanced on the edge of a razor.\n";

sub razorsEdge {
$life=shift;
$death=shift;

  if ($death == $life) {
    $life = int(rand($death+1)*2);
    $death = int(rand($life+1)*2);
  }

  $life++ if ($life < $death);
  $death-- if ($death > $life);

  $life-- if ($life > $death);
  $death++ if ($death < $life);

  razorsEdge($life, $death);
}

razorsEdge($life, $death);
```

Strict logical progression:

- "Life and death are balanced on the edge of a razor."
- If No. of deaths equals number of lives, randomize their values
- If there are less deaths than lives, add a life and remove a death
- If the opposite of the above, remove a life and add a death
- Rebalance ad infinitum
    - Running this program on an actual PC causes the program to consume all RAM and eventually get terminated by the operating system
    - The program can be stopped early by "killing" it

Themes of the Poem:

- Perfection and disruption of the balance
  - Coexistence is fragile
  - Is the balance useful?
- Population/Resource Dynamics
  - How many is too many?
- Deterministic judgment
  - Should a simple conditional statement decide life and death, pass or fail, etc.?
- Quantification
  - Value of life? Death?
- Fatalism
  - Should "we" even try to survive if the result is the same?
  - Should "you" end it all knowing the above?

Literary Elements and Devices:

- Rigid Syntax
  - Primarily for interactivity

- Logical language
  - Every line performs an equally important action by design

- Presentation
  - Reading vs. operation

- Allusion and irony of philosophical "razors"

- Possible allusion to Creative Destruction

Themes of the Genre:

- Readability vs. obfuscation

- Human vs. machine
  - Interpretation vs. parsing
  - Difference in meaning

- "A hammer as art"
  - A predominantly productive tool used towards an aesthetic purpose

Reasons for Inclusion:

- The poem challenges the definition of poetry
- Reduce the barrier between STEM students and language subjects
- Compact
- Recruitment

Questions?

(Links on next slide)

Links

- Poem itself
  - https://perlmonks.org/?node_id=1100243
- PerlMonks Poetry section
  - https://perlmonks.org/?node=Perl%20Poetry