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Only Dull Readers Escape: Navigating Contextual Frames in Stephen Crane's *The Black Riders*

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Oral Presentation O5.1

**ONLY DULL READERS ESCAPE: NAVIGATING CONTEXTUAL FRAMES IN
STEPHEN CRANE'S *THE BLACK RIDERS***

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The Black Riders and other lines, Stephen Crane's first book of poems, has suffered from marginalization and underestimation at the hands of critics whose interests in Crane's fiction and in Crane himself have overshadowed any attempts at understanding the poems as the text they comprise. In this essay, I attempt to redress this pattern with an approach that accounts for our experience of *The Black Riders* as readers: first, by recognizing the humor in these poems that previous scholars have overlooked; and then by exploring the way the text—when treated as a structurally coherent, unified work—pulls our laughter into the contextual frames of our interpretations. Ultimately, this project seeks to reorient scholarship towards understanding the text's affective purpose, beyond and before its ubiquitously assumed philosophical or autobiographical meanings.