**Abstract:** a concept considered apart from concrete existence; theoretical; seeming unpractical or not applied; difficult to understand; abstruse

“Sonnet 43” –Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight

For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

I love thee to the level of every day’s

Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise…

*Explanation:* The lofty and abstract ideas contained in this poem provide no image that makes the speaker’s love concrete or understandable. The abstract concepts of this poem establish the immensity of the speaker’s love, perhaps rendering it incomprehensible. The images of the sun and candle-light are the first of a concrete nature that the reader comes across; however, the line “by sun and candle-light” makes reference to both day and night, indirectly producing and abstract concept. Altogether, the poem leaves a large amount of room for individual interpretation.

**Absurd:**  having the ability to discredit the human life and experience giving it no value at all in a humorous manner; often making little to no sense

Waiting for Godot –Beckett

Passage One: Passage Two:

Estragon: [Anxoius.] And we?

Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.

Estragon: What?

Vladimir: Pull on your trousers.

Estragon: You want me to pull off my trousers?

Vladimir: Pull ON your trousers.

Estragon: [Realizing his trousers are down] True. [He pulls up his trousers.]

Vladimir: I beg your pardon?

Estragon: I said, And we?

Vladimir: I don’t understand.

Estragon: Where do we come in?

Vladimir: Come in?

Estragon: Take your time.

Vladimir: Come in? On our hands and knees.

Estragon: As bad as that?

*Explanation:* The first passage makes very little sense to the reader; the reader understands, however, the two men are discussing the time they “come in,” but when Vladimir says “On our hands and knees” the reader is thoroughly confused. Also, the act of entering on one’s hands and knees lowers the human to the level of a four-legged animal. The second passage is reminiscent of Abbott and Costello’s “Who’s on First?” routine with the amusement and confusion of the two men.

**Ambiguity:** employs the idea that language has the capacity for functioning on levels other than that of denotation. Ambiguity is writing in the state of having more than one meaning, with resultant uncertainty as to the intended significance of the statement.

“The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner” –Jarrell

From my mother’s sleep I fell into the State

And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.

Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,

I woke to black flack and the nightmare fighters.

When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

*Explanation:* Jarrell uses the word “State” ambiguously to include both the connotation of a state of warfare and a political state. Therefore, the rest of the poem can be interpreted as a speculation of warfare or of the governments that control wars.

**Baroque:**  a blending of the fantastic, the wild, the grotesque, or the eccentric with the more formal, ordered style of writers of the “high Renaissance” (1500-1600s) to produce a strong sensory effect

“The Flaming Heart Upon the Book and Picture of the Seraphical Saint Teresa, as She is Usually Expressed with a Seraphim Beside Her” –Richard Crashaw

O thou undaunted daughter of desires!

By all thy dow’r of lights and fires,

By all the eagle in thee, all the dove,

By all thy lives and deaths of love,

By thy large draughts of intellectual day,

And by thy thirsts of love more large than they,

By all they brim-fill’d bowls of fierce desire,

By thy last morning’s draught of liquid fire…

*Explanation***:** The imagery is extremely strong and vibrant, almost to excess: “liquid fire,” “large draughts of intellectual day,” “thirsts of love,” “fierce desire.” There is an abundance of lush diction as well (“undaunted,” “desires,” “draughts,” “thirsts”) that is combined with images of the eagle and the dove, more standard poetic symbols, producing a mixture of the startling with the more familiar. This combination is extended in the clash between the content and the structure; the content is, as discussed earlier, bizarre, sensuous, and excessive, while the structure is consistent and regular. The rhyme scheme, for example, is AABBCCDD etc. throughout the poem. The rhythm is also steady, frequently using commas to connect lines rather than periods to separate them. This produces a constant flow and structured sound that is characteristic of the more formal Renaissance poetry (such as the Petrarchan sonnet).

**Bizarre:** unusually strange or odd; strikingly out of the ordinary; often involving sensational contrasts or incongruities.

“Oysters” -Anne Sexton

Oysters we ate,

sweet blue babies,

twelve eyes looked up at me,

running with lemon and Tabasco.

I was afraid to eat this father-food

and Father laughed

and drank down his martini,

clear as tears.

It was a soft medicine

that came from the sea into my mouth,

moist and plump.

*Explanation*: The description of common oysters is irregular. The similarity that the persona has placed on the oysters makes the reader uncomfortable. The “sweet blue babies” and her father’s martini that was “clear as tears” also shows the persona strange connection of real to other items that show incongruity in the persona’s thought patterns. The surreal mood and flocculation from her memories to her imagination also add to the bizarre way in which she recalls her childhood.

**Bland:** characterized by a moderate, undisturbing, or tranquil quality, especially pleasant in manner; not irritating or stimulating; soothing

“Most Satisfied by Snow” -Diana Chang

Against my windows,

fog knows

what to do, too

Space pervade

us, as well

But occupied by snow,

I see

Matter

matters

I, too,

flowering

*Explanation:* The contemplative nature of the poem enhances its bland and tranquil quality. The fog is personified in that it is given knowledge and in turn presents the idea that everything, including even the abstract fog, has a place and purpose. The poem’s bland nature is depicted through the peacefulness of the poem and the undisturbed comfort it bestows on the reader. The speaker’s appreciation for the snow is seen through her feeling fulfilled by it, and the last line “flowering” indicates promise. Perhaps the snowflakes remind her of the pattern of flowers and allow her to feel content with her present state in the process of growing and living.

**Breezy**: having a quick paced rhythm (perhaps even fresh and lively), but often lacking deep insight into the motives and emotions of the speaker

“I Write Poetry” (from the 2002 edition of *A Near Miss*) –Alfred Clowny

The flow just comes to me naturally

Like babies and pee-pee

Or thuggin records out like Mobb Deep

It just comes to me like dead people and sleep

Or a tom peeper trying to peep I can’t go to sleep

I’m so impressed by my rhyme style its so unique MAN!

I knock myself on my feet.

*Explanation:*  First, the reader must see past the images of the poem and focus only on its style. The poem reads as if it is stream-of-consciousness style. The rhythm is quickly paced; the reader automatically goes to the next line with out hesitation. Although the speaker does comment on his “flow,” he does not focus on any one idea longer than the others.

**Colloquial:** characteristic or ordinary and informal conversation which is marked by local or regional dialect and expressions.

“We Real Cool” - Gwendolyn Brooks

We real cool

We skip school

We jazz june

We die soon.

*Explanation*: The slang and terms used in We Real Cool help to convey the colloquial tone of the young rebellious type of person that uses special “lingo” to talk to other people. The phrase “We jazz june” gives a hint to the secret term that only a member of the persona’s group would understand. The flow of the poem suggests the young person’s nonchalant attitude toward being in school and having moral values.

**Contemptuous:**  feeling or expressing strong dislike or a complete lack of respect for someone or something.

“Some Blind Alleys: A Letter” -E.M. Cioran

I had always supposed, dear friend, that loving your province as you do, you were resolved upon the practice, there of detachment, scorn, silence. Imagine, then, my surprise on hearing you say you were preparing a book about it! Instantaneously, I saw looming up within you a future monster; the author you will become. “Another one lost,” I thought. Modestly, you refrained from asking the reasons for my disappointment; and I should have been incapable of giving them *viva voce.* “Another one lost, another one ruined *by his talent*,” I kept murmuring to myself.

*Explanation***:** The author of this passage refers to the recipient of his letter as “a monster” and as one “lost” to his talent. This shows the absence of respect and presence of scorn that are intrinsic to contempt. Rather than offer support for the attempt at writing a book, the author simply belittles it, making it into a symbol of the recipient’s imminent ruin. Talent is turned into a trivial vanity that is totally overvalued, and most likely not even genuine, as signified by the italics of “*by his talent*.” The author is looking down upon his correspondent, and making no attempt to temper it with anything positive.

**Convoluted** – complicated, involved, intricate, with more detail than needed

“No Swan So Fine” --Marianne Moore

“No water so still as the

dead fountians of Versailles.” No swan,

with swart blind look askance

and gondoliering legs, so fine

as the chintz china one with fawn-

brown eyes and toothed gold

collar on to show whose bird it was.

*Explanation:* The poem “No Swan So Fine,” by Marianne Moore suggests a convoluted tone because of the intricate detail involved in describing a swan. The phrases “swart blind look askance,” “gondoliering legs,” and “chintz china one with fawn-brown eyes and toothed gold collar,” have very complicated, “high” words as well as a complicated sentence structure. There is also extreme detail in the beginning of the poem, “No water so still as the dead fountains of Versailles.” The exact fountains are completely detailed it seems that if one wanted, one could go to Versailles expecting to find the exact swan swimming in the “dead fountains.”

**Crepuscular**: having to do with twilight or shadowy areas (as in the darker and more hidden parts of human experience).

“The Pharmaceutical Journal” -J. Neville Bond

And now the tide of life creeps on

Into the shadows, where the memories echo;

Coming from all the proud, past, years.

The fire burns sadly on the lonely shore,

And never boat puts in to warm its crewmen at the flames.

And we who romped in strength and joy

When years were young,

And laughed at obstacles, and slept so free,

Are now but wandering shadows on the shore

Gathering driftwood damp to feed the flames,

And seeing far the ocean’s endless passing ships

Each on its own appointed mission sailing.

*Explanation:* The poem written by Bond creates a crepuscular tone by the use of “the tide of life creeps on”, “the shadows on the shore”, and “to feed the flames.” The shadowy imagery and descriptive words add to the twilight feel of the poem. There is also a hint that the men on the ships live in this world of darkness and never “warm at the flames.” They live and sail on to their “own appointed missions.” The poem shows the darkness of the sailors’ human experiences.

**Cynical:** a tone suggesting a sneering disbelief, often containing irony, also obvious distrust in the nature of mankind’s motives

“Land of the Free” –Richard Macwilliam

It’s War! shouted the papers –

It’s War! bellowed the T.V.

Yes! screamed the people.

Excuse me, said one little voice, I think –

No! they all shouted back.

Excuse me, said another little voice – maybe –

No! they all shrieked, sounding ferocious.

It’s war! hurrahed the radio.

Excuse me, said another little voice –

Shut up! They yelled. We don’t want to hear!

And they made him – and her – and him again – apologise

for daring to question their world view, in the (apparently)

the Land of The Free.

*Explanation:* The poem “Land of the Free,” by Richard Macwilliam contains several obvious jabs at the so-called “land of the free” but implied “land of the sheep.” The poem suggests through the statements about the press declaring to the masses that “It’s War!” and the people’s response of “Yes!” that nearly all people in the “land of the free” support whatever they are told. The people who are the exceptions are forced to “apologise for daring to question their world view.” The irony in the title and the biting sarcasm in the “(apparently)” proves the poem’s cynical take on the position of the people and the treatment of those who disagree with what they are told.

**Depressing:** Sad, gloomy (without any redeeming qualities; of true tragedy) effect that results in a reduction of concentration and quality of life.

“Preludes” - T.S. Elliot

The Winter evening settles down

With smell of steaks in passageways.

Six o’clock.

The burnt-out ends of smoky days.

And now a gusty shower wraps

The grimy scraps

Of withered leaves about your feet

And newspapers from vacant lots;

The showers beat

On broken blinds and chimney-pots,

And at the corner of the street

A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.

And then the lighting of the lamps.

The morning comes to consciousness

Of faint stale smells of beer

From the sawdust-trampled street

With all its muddy feet that press

To early coffee-stands.

With the other masquerades

That time resumes,

One thinks of all the hands

That are raising dingy shades

In a thousand furnished rooms.

*Explanation:* Although this is only an excerpt from T.S. Eliot’s poem, there is a real feel of the depressing nature of the poem. The diction gives it away with “withered leaves”, broken blinds”, and “the sawdust-trampled street.” The persona of the poem has a distorted and pessimistic view of the world and notices all that is wrong. The lowered quality of life and disjointed flow of the poem help the reader to better understand the persona depressed attitude about life.

**Droll:** a strange passage (in terms of images, ideas, style) that captivates the attention of the

reader so that the reader wants to continue reading (similar to suspense, but a lesser degree); a droll passage is often “ludicrous from oddity” (dictonary.com) and causes some thoughtful laughter from the reader

“Oatmeal” –Galway Kinnell

I eat oatmeal for breakfast.

I make it on the hot plate and put skimmed milk on it.

I eat it alone.

I am aware that it is not good to eat oatmeal alone.

Its consistency is such that it is better for your mental health if somebody eats it with you.

That is why I often think up an imaginary companion to have breakfast with.

Possibly it is even worse to eat oatmeal with an imaginary companion.

Nevertheless, yesterday morning, I ate my oatmeal – porridge, as he called it – with John Keats.

Keats said I was absolutely right to invite him: due to its glutinous texture, gluey lumpishness, hint of slime, and unusual willingness to disintegrate, oatmeal must never be eaten alone.

He said that in his opinion, however, it is perfectly OK to eat it with an imaginary companion,

And he himself had enjoyed memorable porridges with Edmund Spencer and John Milton.

Even if eating oatmeal with an imaginary companion is not as wholesome as Keats claims, still, you can learn something from it.

Yesterday morning, for instance, Keats told me about writing the “Ode to a Nightingale.”

*Explanation:* The opening line of the poem is very straightforward; the reader strangely anticipates knowing what makes eating oatmeal alone so strange and special to the speaker. The “I + verb” combinations seem to indicate a didactic tone, but as the poem progresses the oddity of the whole oatmeal situation is revealed: the speaker eats breakfast with John Keats and Keats tells him why he wrote his poems. But Keats is very dead and therefore the speaker only imagines eating with Keats.

**Earthy** – an earthy tone is characterized by realistic attitudes ranging from matter-of-fact (practical) to the gross and low (unrefined)

from *Sunflower Sutra*

- Allen Ginsburg

The grime was no man's grime but death and human locomotives, all that dress of dust, that veil of darkened railroad skin, that smog of cheek, that eyelid of black mis'ry, that sooty hand or phallus or protuberance of artificial worse-than-dirt--industrial-- modern--all that civilization spotting your crazy golden crown-- and those blear thoughts of death and dusty loveless eyes and ends and withered roots below, in the home-pile of sand and sawdust, rubber dollar bills, skin of machinery, the guts and innards of the weeping coughing car, the empty lonely tincans with their rusty tongues alack, what more could I name, the smoked ashes of some cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the milky breasts of cars, wornout asses out of chairs & sphincters of dynamos--all these entangled in your mummied roots--and you standing before me in the sunset, all your glory in your form!

*Explanation*: Ginsburg exemplifies the earthy tone through his realistic description of the sunflower as he sees it dirtied by “civilization.” He basically describes himself as he sees himself influenced by material objects (the “artificial worse-than-dirt –industrial—modern”) that have no real value to cover up the beauty of nature, his natural self, the “sunflower.” The fact that Ginsburg uses nature as the example adds to the earthy tone as well.

**Elegiac:** a style that involves lamenting or commemorating the dead; it consists of a line of hexameter followed by one of pentameter. Elegiac as an adjective describes poetry expressing sorrow or lamentation.

“Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” -Keats

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth

A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown.

Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,

And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,

Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:

He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,

He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,

Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,

(There they alike in trembling hope repose)

The bosom of his Father and his God.

*Explanation:* This section of “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” is the last three stanzas and is labeled the Epitaph. Looking at just the title “Elegy,” the reader is clued into the elegiac tone. The poem is dedicated to commemorating the life and soul of a man.

**Erudite:** showing great knowledge gained from study; scholarly

“Of Books” -Michel de Montaigne

This same consideration draws me on further. I observe that the good ancient poets avoided the affectation and the quest, not only of the fantastic Spanish and Petrarchian flights, but also even of the milder and more restrained conceits that are the adornment of all the poetic works of the succeeding centuries. Yet there is no good judge who misses them in those ancients, and who does not admire incomparably more the even polish and that perpetual sweetness and flowering beauty of Catullus’ epigrams than all the stings with which Martial sharpens the tails of his. This is for the same reason that I was stating just now, as Martial says of himself: *he has less need for the labor of wit, since his subject matter took the place of wit.*

*Explanation***:** The basis for the passage is observations and comparisons between various ancient poets and writers, whom the reader must be familiar with in order to fully understand Montaigne’s claims. The numerous allusions to Spanish and Petrarchian writers, and to specific authors such as Catullus and Martial, require a thorough knowledge of ancient and classical literature, as do the conclusions he draws from his observations of their writing. The ability to quote Martial, as Montaigne does in the final line, is also indicative of a great deal of study and learning.

**Facetious** – characterized by sometimes witty, but often crude jesting, written to evoke laughter at the “bathroom humor”

*from “Don’t Mean a Thing if it Ain’t Got That Swing”*

* Dave Barry (humor columnist for Miami Herald)

The thong appears to be a major weapon in the swinger’s fashion arsenal. This is not necessarily a good thing. Your taut-bodied individual may be able to pull it off (Har!), but when you see a portly middle-aged man who has more body hair than a musk ox AND (I swear) a tattoo of Elvis on his right butt cheek stroll past wearing essentially a No. 8 rubber band, you begin to think that maybe it’s time Congress enacted strict Federal Thong Control.

*Explanation:* Just the fact that the passage is written about thongs is almost enough to characterize it as facetious. The example Barry gives of the “portly middle-aged man,” and the “tattoo of Elvis,” is an obvious add to the crude jesting about thongs and the people wearing them. Barry also adds in more “bathroom humor” when giving the example of the type of people who “may be able to pull it off.” Just to make sure people pick up on his joke, he even adds a “Har!”

**Farcical:**  ridiculous, silly, and confused to an extreme degree

The Importance of Being Earnest (the scene is between a young dandy, Algernon, and his butler, Lane) –Oscar Wilde

Algernon: Why is it that at a bachelor’s establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

Lane: I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

Algernon: Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralizing as that?

Lane: I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

Algernon: [languidly]. I don’t know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

Lane: No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

Algernon: Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

Lane: Thank you, sir.

*Explanation***:** Both characters are caricatures: Algernon, of the young, rich irresponsible bachelor, and Lane of the dry, unemotional butler. This allows each to say ridiculous, extreme things, such as being married “in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person,” that would never work in serious writing, but that are humorous in the more silly genre of farce. Since they are both stereotypes, the statements they make can echo that quality, needing just the slightest basis in reality to maintain some credibility. The conversation is trivial, shallow, and unbelievable, and the characters providing it are obviously just as ridiculous.

**Fatalistic:**  the belief that “things” happen because they (the people who decide these kind of things) decided “things” were going to be a certain way and humans are powerless to change them, whether they want to or not.

An excerpt from Romeo and Juliet -Shakespeare

Two households, both alike in dignity,

In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,

From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,

Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes

A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;

Whose misadventured piteous overthrows

Do with their death bury their parents' strife.

The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,

And the continuance of their parents' rage,

Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,

Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;

The which if you with patient ears attend,

What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

*Explanation*: The excerpt comes from the prologue of the drama, alluding to the fate of the two lovers. Shakespeare uses phrases like “star-cross’d” and “death-marke’d” to describe Romeo and Juliet’s love to the reader (or the audience). Because of this, the reader knows that the play will end in tragedy. Also, the prologue establishes the “ancient grudge” between the feuding families that only their love can end.

**Flamboyant**: Characterized by bold and elaborate descriptions including exaggeration

“How Do I Love Thee?” –Elizabeth Barrett Browning

I love thee to the level of every day’s

Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise;

I love thee with the passion put to use

In my old griefs, and with my childhood’s faith

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose

With my lost saints—I love thee with the breath,

Smiles, tears of all my life!

*Explanation*: The speaker describes the love for the subject in a very direct way. She says she loves the speaker with her “childhood faith” and the “passions” of her “old griefs,” as if she has given her whole heart to the nameless “thee.” The speaker also says she loves the speaker with her “breath, smiles, [and] tears” referring to the basic human action (breathing) and two basic human emotions (happiness and sadness).

**Impressionistic:**  a highly personal manner of writing in which the author presents materials as they appear to an individual temperament at a precise moment rather than they are supposed to be in reality

“The Death of the Moth” –Virginia Woolf

Yet, because he [the moth] was so small, and so simple a form of the energy that was rolling in at the open window and driving its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my own brain and in those of other human beings, there was something marvelous as well as pathetic about him. It was as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking it as lightly as possible with down and feathers, had set it dancing and zig-zagging to show us the true nature of life.

*Explanation***:** Woolf presents the moth as an embodiment of life itself, giving it a significance particular to her perception of the moth and its actions. The passage is a description of a single event—the death of a moth—that spurs personal thoughts and musings on things such as life and death that, despite their universality, take on a different meaning and form for every person. This impressionistic quality is characteristic of much of Woolf’s writing; she also pioneered the writing style of stream-of-consciousness.

**Mournful:** a sad longing for something lost; expression of grief

“On Another's Sorrow” -William Blake

Can I see another's woe,

And not be in sorrow too?

Can I see another's grief,

And not seek for kind relief?

Can I see a falling tear,

And not feel my sorrow's share?

Can a father see his child

Weep, nor be with sorrow filled?

Can a mother sit and hear

An infant groan, an infant fear?

No, no! never can it be!

Never, never can it be!

And can He who smiles on all

Hear the wren with sorrows small,

Hear the small bird's grief and care,

Hear the woes that infants bear --

And not sit beside the next,

Pouring pity in their breast,

And not sit the cradle near,

Weeping tear on infant's tear?

And not sit both night and day,

Wiping all our tears away?

Oh no! never can it be!

Never, never can it be!

He doth give his joy to all:

He becomes an infant small,

He becomes a man of woe,

He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,

And thy Maker is not by:

Think not thou canst weep a tear,

And thy Maker is not near.

Oh He gives to us his joy,

That our grief He may destroy:

Till our grief is fled an gone

He doth sit by us and moan.

*Explanation:* The tone of this poem is clearly mournful as seen through the author’s use of such words and phrases as “wiping all our tears away,” “man of woe,” “feel the sorrow,” and “pouring pity in their breast.” The speaker is expressing the grief and a longing for something he has lost.

**Nostalgic:** longing for things, persons, or situations of the past; sentimental

“The Tropics in New York” -Claude McKay

Bananas ripe and green, and ginger-root,

Coca in pods and alligator pears,

And tangerines and mangoes and grape fruit,

Fit for the highest prize at parish fairs,

Set in the window, bringing memories

Of fruit-trees laden by low-singing rills,

And dewy dawns, and mystical blue skies

In benediction over nun-like hills.

My eyes grew dim, and I could no more gaze;

A wave of longing through my body swept,

And, hungry for the old, familiar ways,

I turned aside and bowed my head and wept.

*Explanation:* The nostalgic tone of the poem is apparent in lines 9-12 where the speaker tells of the longing he feels toward his homeland. He feels helpless alienated in his new surroundings, unable to live where he feels at home - found in phrases such as “wave of longing,” “hungry,” and “familiar ways.” The speaker’s “hunger” (line 11) ties the end of the poem back to the description of the luscious fruits at the beginning of the poem.

**Ominous** – causing anxiety or fear, seems menacing or threatening, implies a future misfortune or potentially disasterous event

from *The Hill Wife*

* Robert Frost

IV. THE OFT-REPEATED DREAM

She had no saing dark enough

For the dark pine that kept

Forever trying the window-latch

Of the room where they slept.

The tireless but ineffectual hands

That with every futile pass

Made the great tree seem as a little bird

Before the mystery of glass!

It never had been inside the room,

And only one of the two

Was afraid in an oft-repeated dream

Of what the tree might do.

*Explanation:* Frost’s “The Hill Wife,” has several examples of the ominous tone. The title of the fourth section of the poem is somewhat threatening and implies that the dream is not a good one. The lines “She had no saying dark enough / for the dark pine that kept / forever trying the window-latch,” imply the woman’s terror of the tree and of darkness. The point made in the third stanza that “only one of the two / was afraid in an oft-repeated dream,” suggests that she might be afraid of her husband and the tree symbolizes the near harming of herself by her husband, and the implication that something was happening often enough for it to be an “oft-repeating dream.”

**Parody:** writing that imitated another, usually serious, piece. It is designed to ridicule a work or make fun of some familiar style, typically by keeping the style more or less constant while markedly lowering or debasing the subject.

Hecht’s “Dover Bitch” is an existentialist parody of Arnold’s “Dover Beach”

“Dover Bitch” -Hecht

So there stood Matthew Arnold and this girl

With the cliffs of England crumbling away behind them,

And he said to her, "Try to be true to me,

And I'll do the same for you, for things are bad

All over, etc., etc."

Well now, I knew this girl. It's true she had read

Sophocles in a fairly good translation

And caught that bitter allusion to the sea.

“Dover Beach” -Arnold

The sea is calm to-night.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits;--on the French coast the light

Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,

Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!

Only, from the long line of spray

Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar.

*Explanation:* For a composition to be a parody, there must be enough similarities for the reader to make the connection to the original writing being parodied. In Hecht’s poem, there is an instant reference to the author or “Dover Beach” in the last line with, “So there stood Matthew Arnold and this girl.” “With the cliffs of England crumbling away behind them,” parallels the style in which, “the cliffs of England stand,” is written. The remainder of the Arnold’s first stanza describe the majestic beach in great detail while Hecht simply remarks on “that bitter allusion to the sea,” and then continues to describe in detail his personal, negative observations about the “Dover Bitch.” Hecht is thus mocking Arnold by taking Arnold’s impressionistic view of the world and making it negative and pessimistic.

**Pompous:** Displaying one’s importance in an exaggerated way. Sometimes this quality is found in comic characters.

I, who have made literature my profession…think myself, nevertheless, bound in duty to caution every young man who applies as an aspirant to me for encouragement and advice against taking so perilous a course.

-Robert Southey to Charlotte Bronte

*Explanation:* Southey’s tone is pompous first by implying a condescending attitude with duty to caution,” as if he, as a great writer has the not only the right, but the *duty* to help aspiring writers. His “advice” becomes even more degrading when he only refers to assisting “every young *man*” when the author he is addressing is a woman. Later in the passage Southey even goes so far as to conclude that “Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be.” So, not only does Southey consider himself a rare gift from God to all authors, but he also assumes as very chauvinist attitude towards Bronte and other women authors.

**Puritanical:** marked by stern morality; strong in religious observance

A Selection from “Absalom and Achitophel” by John Dryden

In pious times, ere priest-craft did begin,

Before polygamy was made a sin;

When man, on many, multipli'd his kind,

Ere one to one was cursedly confin'd:

When Nature prompted, and no Law deni'd

Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;

Then, Israel's monarch, after Heaven's own heart,

His vigorous warmth did variously impart

To wives and slaves: and, wide as his command,

Scatter'd his Maker's image through the land…

*Explanation:* This poem is found to possess a puritanical tone through the direct statements of morality and religious adherence. Such phrases as “pious times,” “made a sin,” “cursedly confin’d,” and “his Maker’s image,” all relate to the moral codes and religious observance found to be a large part of the lives of the Puritans themselves from which the word is derived.

**Romantic:**  emphasizing sensibility and the free expression of feelings often in relation

to nature or the exotic; the Romantic movement began in the nineteenth century in England with poets such as Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth, and spread to America in the later years in the nineteenth century, with authors such as Thoreau, Emerson, and Bryant.

“Walking” -Henry David Thoreau

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil,—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school-committee, and every one of you will take care of that.

*Explanation***:** The emphasis on nature is immediately identifiable, being especially noticeable in the capitalization of the word; this presents Nature as a personified force, which is very characteristic of the Romantic era. Thoreau draws his contrast between the natural world and that of civilization, which, significantly,is *not* capitalized, placing it under Nature in the order of strength, or reality. Man is looked at as “a part and parcel of Nature,” a state in which he is able to fully express his feelings and longings, being as free and as wild as he wishes. Again, this is contrasted with being a “member of society,” and this parallelism emphasizes the desirability of the natural world as opposed to the implied constriction of the civilized one. Finally, “the minister and the school-committee” act as symbols of the restriction and conformity of society, of which Nature has no part.

**Sensuous:** appealing to or gratifying the senses; involved in aesthetic enjoyment; derived from the senses

“In the Gold Room” -Oscar Wilde

A harmony.

Her ivory hands on the ivory keys

Strayed in a fitful fantasy,

Like the silver gleam when the poplar trees

Rustle their pale leaves listlessly,

Or the drifting foam of a restless sea

When the waves show their teeth in the flying breeze.

Her gold hair fell on the wall of gold

Like the delicate gossamer tangles spun

On the burnished disk of the marigold,

Or the sun-flower turning to meet the sun

When the gloom of the jealous night is done,

And the spear of the lily is aureoled.

And her sweet red lips on these lips of mine

Burned like the ruby fire set

In the swinging lamp of a crimson shrine,

Or the bleeding wounds of the pomegranate,

Or the heart of the lotus drenched and wet

With the spilt-out blood of the rose-red wine.

*Explanation:* The sensuous nature of the poem is accentuated through such phrases as “ivory hands on ivory keys,” “wall of gold,” “gloom of the jealous night,” “sweet red lips…like ruby fire,” and “the bleeding wounds of the pomegranate.” The poem is found to have and effect on at least six of the seven senses, and thereby creates a sensual tone in the poem.

**Stark:** plain, harsh. Simple or bare, when applied to style, sometimes even bleak or grim.

Steppenwolf -Hermann Hesse

The day had gone by just as days go by. I had killed it in accordance with my primitive and retiring way of life. I had worked for an hour or two and perused the pages of old books. I had had pains for two hours, as elderly people do…Three times the mail had come with undesired letters and circulars to look through.

*Explanation:* The tone of the passage is stark because it reveals no emotion in the speaker and provokes no emotion in the reader. The sentence structure is that is short, simple sentences with minimal sensory imagery. A grim feeling is illustrated with the casual mentioning of pain and boredom.

**Surrealistic:** having an oddly dreamlike or unreal quality; possessing a distortion of ordinary ideas

A selection from “Dulce et Decorum Est” by Wilfred Owen

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,

Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,

Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs

And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots

But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;

Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots

Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys - An ecstasy of fumbling,

Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;

But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,

And flound’ring like a man in fire or lime…

Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,

As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,

He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning…

*Explanation:* The images described in the poem enhance its surrealistic tone, creating a picture of a miserable one the must trudge through without complete awareness of their surroundings. The actions of the soldiers all seem dream-like or taking place in slow motion at first. As the soldiers fight for their lives, a surreal ecstasy may have been felt as associated with a near-death experience. The speaker sees the man as if through an underwater mask, enhancing the surreal atmosphere of the poem thus far.

**Whimsical:** inclined to be playful, humorous, and fanciful. Whimsical writing is that inspired by a fantastic or fanciful mood.

On Running After One’s Hat -G. K. Chesterton

Now a man could, if he felt rightly in the matter, run after his hat with the manliest ardor and the most sacred joy. He might regard himself as a jolly huntsman pursuing a wild animal, for certainly no animal could be wilder. In fact, I am inclined to believe that hat-hunting on windy days will be the sport of the upper classes in the future.

*Explanation*: Firstly, the juxtaposition of a man running to the “manliest ardor” and “most sacred joy,” seems exaggerated and, therefore, fanciful. The image induced by an upper classman becoming a “jolly huntsman pursuing a wild animal,” is both humorous and playful. The image borders on the absurd, but is not mocking since the speaker is only speculating on what fantastic things are possible with an alteration of viewpoint.

These are some more tone words that may be utilized. Familiarize yourself with these to have more apt analyses.

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| 1. **accusatory:** charging of wrongdoing 2. **apathetic:** indifferent due to lack of energy or concern 3. **awe:** solemn wonder 4. **bitter:** exhibiting strong animosity as a result of pain or grief 5. **callous:** unfeeling, insensitive to feelings of others 6. **caustic:** intense use of sarcasm 7. **condescension: a** feeling of superiority 8. **contemplative:** studying, thinking, reflecting on an issue 9. **critical:** finding fault 10. **choleric:** hot-tempered, easily angered 11. **contemptuous:** showing or feeling that something is worthless or lacks respect 12. **conventional:** lacking spontaneity, originality, and individuality 13. **cynical:** questions the basic sincerity and goodness of people 14. **derisive:** ridiculing, mocking 15. **didactic:** author attempts to educate or instruct the reader 16. **disdainful:** scornful 17. **earnest:** intense, a sincere state of mind 18. **erudite:** learned, polished, scholarly 19. **fanciful:** using the imagination 20. **forthright:** directly frank without hesitation 21. **haughty:** proud and vain to the point of arrogance 22. **indignant:** marked by anger aroused by injustice 23. **intimate:** very familiar 24. **jovial:** happy | 1. **judgmental:** authoritative and often having critical opinions 2. **malicious:** purposely hurtful 3. **melancholic:** darkness, sadness, rejection 4. **mocking:** treating with contempt or ridicule 5. **morose:** gloomy, sullen, surly, despondent 6. **objective:** an unbiased view-able to leave personal judgments aside 7. **obsequious:** polite and obedient in order to gain something 8. **optimistic:** hopeful, cheerful 9. **patronizing:** air of condescension 10. **pessimistic:** seeing the worst side of things; no hope 11. **quizzical:** odd, eccentric, amusing 12. **reflective:** illustrating innermost thoughts and emotions 13. **reverent:** treating a subject with honor and respect 14. **ribald:** offensive in speech or gesture 15. **ridiculing:** slightly contemptuous banter; making fun of 16. **sanguineous:** optimistic, cheerful 17. **sarcastic:** sneering, caustic 18. **sardonic:** scornfully and bitterly sarcastic 19. **satiric:** ridiculing to show weakness in order to make a point, teach 20. **sincere:** without deceit or pretense; genuine 21. **solemn:** deeply earnest, tending toward sad reflection 22. **whimsical:** odd, strange, fantastic; fun |