

- e. Anaphora in Rukeyser's "Looking at Each Other," Harjo's "Remember, Kenyon's "Let Evening Come," Oliver's "Showing the Birds," or Warren's "Clay and Flame."
- f. A comparison of contrasts and paradoxes in Queen Elizabeth's "On Monsieur's Departure" and Wyatt's "I Find No Peace."
- g. Similes in King's "Sic Vita" or Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," personification in the poems by Wordsworth, Keats, or Agueres, metonymy in Keats's "To Autumn."

### Creative Writing Assignment

1. Write a poem in which you create a governing metaphor or simile. Examples: "My girlfriend/boyfriend is like (a) an opening flower, (b) a difficult book, (c) an insoluble mathematical problem, (d) a bill that cannot be paid, (e) a slow-moving chess game." "Teaching a person how to do a particular job is like (a) shoveling heavy snow, (b) climbing a mountain during a landslide, (c) having someone force you underwater when you're gasping for breath." When you finish, describe the relationship between your comparison and the development and structure of your poem.

### Library Assignment

1. In your library's reference section, find the third edition of J. A. Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1991) or some other dictionary of literary terms that you find under "list of literary terms" on Google. Study the entries for *metaphysical* and *conceit*, and write a brief report on these sections. You might attempt to answer questions like these: What is meant by the word *conceit*? What are some of the kinds of conceit the reference work discusses? What is a metaphysical conceit? Who are some of the writers considered metaphysical? In the "metaphysical" entry, of what importance is John Donne?

## Chapter 16

### Tone: The Creation of Attitude in Poetry

**T**one, a concept derived from the phrase *tone of voice*, describes the shaping of attitudes in poetry (see also Chapter 6, on tone and style in fiction). Each poet's choice of words governs the reader's responses, as do the participants and situations in the poem. In addition, the poet shapes responses through denotation and connotation, seriousness or humor, irony, metaphors, similes, understatement, overstatement, and other figures of speech (see Chapter 15). Of major importance is the poet's speaker. How much self-awareness does the speaker show? What is his or her background? What relationship does the speaker establish with listeners and readers? What does the speaker assume about the readers and about their knowledge? How do these assumptions affect the ideas and the diction?

To compare poetic tone with artistic tone, see the reproduction of Fernand Léger's painting *The City* (p. 1-8). A viewer's response to the painting depends on the relationships of the various shapes to Léger's arrangement and color. The signs, poles, and human figures in the painting are all common in modern cities. By cutting them up or leaving them partially hidden, Léger creates an atmosphere suggesting that contemporary urban life is truncated, sinister, and even threatening.

The same control applies to poetic expression. The sentences must be just long enough to achieve the poet's intended effect—no shorter and no longer. In a conversational style there should be few if any formal words, just as in a formal style there should be no slang, no rollicking rhythms, and no frivolous rhymes—that is, unless the poet deliberately wants readers to be startled or shocked. In all the features that contribute to a poem's tone, the poet's consistency of intention is primary. Any unintentional deviations will cause the poem to sink and the poet to fail.

### Tone, Choice, and Response

Remember that a major objective of poets is to stimulate, enrich, and inspire readers. Poets may begin their poems with a brief idea, a vague feeling, or a fleeting impression. Then, in the light of their developing design, they *choose* what to say—the form of their material and the words and phrases to express their ideas. The poem "Theme for English B" by Langston Hughes illustrates this process in almost outline form (see Chapter 21, p. 1112). Hughes's speaker lays out many interests that he shares with his intended reader, his English teacher, for the poem is imagined to be a response to a classroom assignment. In this way Hughes encourages all readers to accept his ideas of human equality.

In the long run, readers might not accept all the ideas in any poem, but the successful poem gains agreement—at least for a time—because the poet's control

over tone is right. Each poem attempts to evoke total responses, which might be destroyed by any lapses in tone. Let us look at a poem in which the tone misses and misses badly.

### CORNELIUS WHUR (1782–1853)

#### The First-Rate Wife (1837)

This brief effusion I indite,  
And my vast wishes send,  
That thou mayst be directed right,  
And have ere long within thy sight  
A most enchanting friend!

The *maiden* should have *lovely face*,  
And be of *genteel mien*;  
If not, within thy dwelling place,  
There may be vestige of disgrace,  
Not much admired—when seen.

Nor will thy dearest be complete  
Without *domestic care*;  
If otherwise, how'er discreet,  
Thine eyes will very often meet  
What none desire to share!

And further still—thy future *dear*,  
Should have some *mental ray*;  
If not, thou mayest drop a tear,  
Because no *real sense* is there  
To charm life's dreary day!

#### QUESTIONS

1. What kind of person is the poem's speaker? What is the situation? What requirements does the speaker create for the "first-rate wife"?
2. Describe the poem's tone. How does the speaker's character influence the tone? In light of the tone, to what degree can the poem be considered insulting?
3. How might lines 14 and 15 be interpreted as a possible threat if the woman as a wife does not keep the house clean and straight?

In this poem the speaker is talking to a friend or associate and is explaining his requirements for a "first-rate wife." From his tone, he clearly regards getting married as little more than hiring a pretty housekeeper. In the phrase "some *mental ray*" for example, the word *some* does not mean "a great deal" but is more like "at least some," as though nothing more could be expected of a woman. Even allowing for the fact that the poem was written early in the nineteenth century and represents a benighted view of women and marriage, "The First-Rate Wife" offends most readers. Do you wonder why you've never heard of Cornelius Whur before?

## Tone and the Need for Control

"The First-Rate Wife" demonstrates the need for the poet to be in control over all facets of the poem. The speaker must be aware of his or her situation and should not, like Whur's speaker, demonstrate any smugness or insensitivity, unless the poet is deliberately revealing the shortcomings of the speaker by dramatizing them for the reader's amusement, as E. E. Cummings does in the poem "next to of course god america i" (Chapter 12). In a poem with well-controlled tone, details and situations should be factually correct; observations should be logical and fair, and also comprehensive and generally applicable. The following poem, based on battlefield conditions in World War I, illustrates a masterly control over tone.

### WILFRED OWEN (1893–1918)

#### Dulce et Decorum Est° (1920)

Beni 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.  
If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud

The Latin title is taken from Horace's *Odes*, Book 3, line 13: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* ("It is sweet and honorable to die for the fatherland"). 8 *Five-Nines*: A "five-nine" was a 5.9-inch German high-explosive artillery shell that made a hoisting sound before landing. 9 *Gas*: Chlorine gas was used as an antipersonnel weapon in 1915 by the Germans at Ypres, in Belgium. 10 *Helmets*: Soldiers carried gas masks as normal battle equipment. 11 *Thick green*: The deadly chlorine gas used in gas attacks has a greenish-yellow color.

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues.—  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*  
*Pro patria mori.*

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the scene described in lines 1–8? What expressions does the speaker use to indicate his attitude toward the conditions?
2. What does the title of the poem mean? What attitude or conviction does it embody?
3. Does the speaker really mean “my friend” in line 25? In what tone of voice might this phrase be spoken?
4. What is the tonal relationship between the patriotic fervor of the Latin phrase and the images of the poem? How does the tonal contrast create the dominant tone of the poem?

The tone of “Dulce et Decorum Est” never lapses. The poet intends the description to evoke a response of horror and shock, for he contrasts the strategic goals of warfare with the speaker’s personal experience of terror in battle. The speaker’s language skillfully emphasizes first the dreariness and fatigue of warfare (with words like “sludge,” “trudge,” “lame,” and “blind”) and second the agony of violent death from chlorine gas (embodied in the participles “guttering,” “choking,” “drowning,” “smothering,” and “writhing”). With these details established, the concluding attack against the “glory” of war is difficult to refute, even if warfare is undertaken to defend or preserve one’s country. Although the details about the agonized death may distress or discomfit a sensitive reader, they are not designed to do that alone but instead are integral to the poem’s argument. Ultimately, it is the contrast between the high ideals of the Latin phrase and the ugliness of battlefield death that creates the dominant tone of the poem. The Latin phrase treats war and death in the abstract; the poem makes images of battle and death vividly real. The resultant tone is that of controlled bitterness and irony.

## Tone and Common Grounds of Assent

Not all those reading Owen’s poem will deny that war is sometimes necessary; the issues of politics and warfare are far too complex for that. But the poem does show another important aspect of tone—namely, the degree to which the poet judges and tries to control responses through the establishment of a *common ground of assent*. An appeal to a bond of commonly held interests, concerns, and assumptions is essential if a poet is to maintain an effective tone. Owen, for example, does not create arguments against the necessity of a just war. Instead, he bases the poem on realistic details about the choking, writhing, spastic death suffered by the speaker’s comrade; he also appeals to emotions that everyone, pacifist and militarist alike, would feel—horror at the contemplation of violent death. Even assuming a widely divergent audience, in other

words, the *tone* of the poem is successful because it is based on commonly acknowledged facts and commonly felt emotions. Knowing a poem like this one, even advocates of a strong military would need to defend their ideas on the grounds of *preventing* just such needless, ugly deaths. Owen carefully considers the responses of his readers, and he regulates speaker, situation, detail, and argument in order to make the poem acceptable for the broadest possible spectrum of opinion.

## TOPE IN CONVERSATION AND POETRY

Many readers think that tone is a subtle and difficult subject, but it is nevertheless true that in ordinary situations we master tone easily and expertly (see Chapter 6). We constantly use standard questions and statements that deal with tone, such as “What do you mean by that?” “What I’m saying is this . . .” and “Did I hear you correctly?” together with other comments that extend to humor and, sometimes, to hostility. In poetry we do not have everyday speech situations; we have only the poems themselves and are guided by the materials they provide us. Some poems are straightforward and unambiguous, but in other poems feeling and mood are essential to our understanding. In Hardy’s “The Workbox” (this chapter), for example, the husband’s hand-made gift to his wife indicates not love but suspicion. Also, the husband’s relentless linking of the dead man’s coffin to the gift reveals both doubt and anger. Pope, in the passage from the “Epilogue to the Satires” (this chapter), satirically describes deplorable habits and customs of his English contemporaries in the 1730s. His concluding lines (of the passage and also of the poem) emphasize his scorn:

Yet may this verse (if such a verse remain)

Show there was one who held it in disdain.

Of course, poems may also reveal respect and wonder, as shown in the last six lines of Keats’s “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” (Chapter 15). By attending carefully to the details of such poems, you can draw conclusions about poetic tone that are as accurate as those you draw in normal speech situations.

## Tone and Irony

Irony is a mode of indirection, a means of making a point by emphasizing a discrepancy or opposite (see also Chapter 6). Thus Owen uses the title “Dulce et Decorum Est” to emphasize that death in warfare is not sweet and honorable but rather demeaning and horrible. The title ironically reminds us of eloquent holiday speeches at the tombs of unknown soldiers, but as we have seen, it also reminds us of the reality of the agonized death of Owen’s soldier. As an aspect of tone, therefore, irony is a powerful way of conveying attitudes, for it draws your attention to at least two ways of seeing a situation, enabling you not only to *understand* but also to *experience*. Poetry shares with fiction the three primary kinds of ironies that afflict human beings: *verbal irony*, *situational irony*, and *dramatic irony*.

## Verbal Irony, Through Word Selection, Emphasizes Ambiguities and Discrepancies

At almost any point in a poem, a poet may introduce the ironic effects of language itself—**verbal irony**. Cummings's poem "she being Brand/-new" is built on the double meanings derived from the procedures of breaking in a new car. Indeed, the entire poem is a virtuosic piece of double entendre. Another example of verbal irony occurs in Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz," in which the speaker uses the name of this graceful and stately dance to describe his childhood memories of his father's whirling him around the kitchen in wild, boisterous drunkenness.

## Life's Anomalies and Uncertainties Underlie Situational Irony

Situational irony is derived from the discrepancies between the ideal and the actual. People would like to live their lives in terms of a standard of love, friendship, honor, success, and general excellence, but the irony is that the reality of their lives often falls far short of such standards. Whereas in fiction ironic situations emerge from extended narrative, in poetry such situations are usually at a high point or climax, and we must infer the narrative circumstances that have gone on before. Thomas Hardy, in "The Workbox," skillfully exploits an ironic situation between a husband and a wife.

### THOMAS HARDY (1840–1928)

For a photo, see Chapter 11, page 656.

#### The Workbox (1914)

"See, here's the workbox, little wife,  
That I made of polished oak."  
He was a joiner,<sup>3</sup> of village<sup>4</sup> life;  
She came of borough<sup>5</sup> folk.

5 He holds the present up to her  
As wit: a smile she nears  
And answers to the profferer,  
"Twill last all my sewing years!"

"I warrant it will. And longer too.  
Tis a scantling<sup>6</sup> that I got  
Off poor John Wayward's coffin, who  
Died of they knew not what.

"The shingled pattern that seems to cease  
Against your box's rim  
Continues right on in the piece  
That's underground with him.

<sup>3</sup> 3. 4 *village, borough*: An English village was small and rustic; a borough was larger and more sophisticated.  
<sup>4</sup> 10 *scantling*: a small leftover piece of wood.

"And while I worked it made me think  
Of timber's varied doom:  
One inch where people eat and drink,  
The next inch in a tomb.

"But why do you look so white, my dear,  
And turn aside your face?  
You knew not that good lad, I fear,  
Though he came from your native place?"

"How could I know that good young man,  
Though he came from my native town,  
When he must have left far earlier than  
I was a woman grown?"

"Ah, no, I should have understood!  
It shocked you that I gave  
To you one end of a piece of wood  
Whose other is in a grave?"

"Don't, dear, despise my intellect.  
Mere accidental things  
Of that sort never have effect  
On my imaginings."

Yet still her lips were limp and wan,  
Her face still held aside,  
As if she had known not only John,  
But known of what he died.

#### QUESTIONS

1. Who does most of the speaking? What does the speaker's tone show about the characters of the husband and the wife? What does the tone indicate about the poet's attitude toward them?
2. What do lines 21–40 indicate about the wife's knowledge of John and about her earlier relationship with him? Why does she deny such knowledge? What does the last stanza show about her? Why is John's death kept a mystery?
3. In lines 17–20, what irony is suggested by the fact that the wood was used both for John Wayward's coffin and the workbox?
4. Why is the husband's irony more complex than he realizes? What do his words and actions show about his character?
5. The narrator, or poet, speaks only in lines 3–7 and 37–40. How much of his explanation is essential? How much shows his attitude? How might the poem have been more effectively concluded?

"The Workbox" is a domestic drama of deception, cruelty, and sadness. The complex details are evidence of situational irony, that is, an awareness that human beings do not control their lives but are rather controlled by powerful forces—in this case by both death and earlier feelings and commitments. Beyond this

domestic irony, Hardy also emphasizes symbolically the direct connection that death has with the living. As a result of the husband's gift made of the wood with which he has also made a coffin for the dead man, the wife will never escape being reminded of this man. Within the existence imagined in the poem, she will have to live with regret and the constant need to deny her true emotions, and her situation is therefore endlessly ironic.

### Dramatic Irony Is Built on the Ignorance of Characters and the Greater Knowledge of Readers

In addition to the situational irony of "The Workbox," the wife's deception reveals that the husband is in a situation of **dramatic irony**. He does not know the circumstances of his wife's past, and he does not actually *know*—though he suspects—that his wife is not being truthful about her earlier relationship with the dead man; but the poem is sufficient to enable readers to draw the right conclusions. By emphasizing the wood, the husband is apparently trying to make his wife uncomfortable even to the point of extracting a confession from her; but he has only his suspicions, and he therefore remains unsure of the truth and also of his wife's feelings. Because of these uncertainties, Hardy has deftly used dramatic irony to create a poem of great complexity and pathos.

## Tone and Satire

**Satire**, a vital genre in the study of tone, is designed to expose human follies and vices. In method, a satiric poem may be bitter and vituperative, but often it employs humor and irony, on the grounds that anger turns readers away while a comic tone more easily wins interest and agreement. The speaker of a satiric poem may either attack folly and vice directly, or may dramatically embody the folly or vice himself or herself and thus serve as an illustration of the satiric subject. An example of the first type is the following short poem by Alexander Pope, in which the speaker directly attacks a listener who has claimed to be a poet but whom the speaker considers both a bad poet and a fool. The speaker cleverly uses insult as the method of attack.

### ALEXANDER POPE (1688–1744)

For a portrait, see this chapter, page 852

#### Epigram from the French (1732)

Sir, I admit your general rule  
That every poet is a fool:  
But you yourself may serve to show it,  
That every fool is not a poet.

## QUESTIONS

1. What has the listener said before the poem begins? How does the speaker build on the listener's previous comment?
2. Considering this poem as a brief satire, describe the nature of satiric attack and the corresponding tone of attack.
3. Look at the pattern "poet," "fool," "fool," "poet." This is a rhetorical pattern (*a, b, b, a*) called *chiasmus* or *antimetabole*. What does the pattern contribute to the poem's effectiveness?

An example of the second type of satiric poem is another of Pope's epigrams, in which the speaker is an actual embodiment of the subject being attacked.

### Epigram, Engraved on the Collar of a Dog Which I Gave to His Royal Highness (1738)

I am, his Highness' dog at Kew:<sup>o</sup>  
Pray tell me sir, whose dog are you?

the royal palace near London

## QUESTIONS

1. Who or what is the subject of the satiric attack?
2. What attitude is expressed toward social pretentiousness?

Here the speaker is, comically, the king's dog, and the listener is an unknown dog. Pope's satire is directed not against canines; however, but against human beings who overemphasize the significance of social class. The first line ridicules those who claim social status that is derived, not earned. The second implies an unwillingness to recognize the listener until the question of rank is resolved. Pope, by using the dog as a speaker, reduces such snobbishness to an absurdity. A similar satiric poem attacking pretentiousness is "next to of course god america i" by Cummings (Chapter 12). In this poem the speaker voices a set of patriotic platitudes, and in doing so illustrates Cummings's satiric point that most speeches of this sort are empty-headed. Satiric tone may thus range widely, being sometimes objective, comic, and distant; sometimes deeply concerned and scornful; and sometimes dramatic, ingenious, and revelatory. Always, however, the satiric mode aims toward confrontation and exposé.

## Poems for Study

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## WILLIAM BLAKE (1757–1827)

For a portrait, see Chapter 12, page 682.

### On Another's Sorrow (1789)

- Can I see another's woe,  
And not be in sorrow too.  
Can I see another's grief,  
And not seek for kind relief.
- 5 Can I see a falling tear,  
And not feel my sorrows share,  
Can a father see his child  
Weep, nor be with sorrow filled.
- 10 Can a mother sit and hear,  
An infant groan an infant fear—  
No never can it be.  
Never never can it be.
- 15 And can he who smiles on all  
Hear the wren with sorrows small,  
Hear the small birds grief & care  
Hear the woes that infants bear—
- 20 And not sit beside the nest  
Pouring pity in their breast,  
And not sit the cradle near  
Weeping tear on infants' tear.

And not sit both night & day,  
Wiping all our tears away.  
O' 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.

O! he gives to us his joy,  
That our grief he may destroy  
Till our grief is fled & gone  
He doth sit by us and moan.

## QUESTIONS

1. Describe the character of this poem's speaker. What is he like? What are the circumstances of the persons in need of sympathy?
2. Describe the tone of the poem. What connection with human suffering does the speaker establish with human sympathy and with the divine "maker"?
3. Why do you think Blake uses the word "maker" (line 32) rather than God? According to the poem, what are the continuing roles of the maker among human beings? What assurances do people in sorrow have from their belief in divinity?

## JIMMY CARTER (b. 1924)

### I Wanted to Share My Father's World (1995)

This is a pain I mostly hide,  
but ties of blood, or seed, endure,  
and even now I feel inside  
the hunger for his outstretched hand,  
a man's embrace to take me in,  
the need for just a word of praise.

I despised the discipline  
he used to shape what I should be,  
not owning up that he might feel  
his own pain when he punished me.

I didn't show my need to him,  
since his response to an appeal  
would not have meant as much to me,  
or been as real.

From those rare times when we did cross  
the bridge between us, the pure joy  
survives.

I never put aside  
the past resentments of the boy  
until, with my own sons, I shared  
his final hours, and came to see  
what he'd become, or always was—  
the father who will never cease to be  
alive in me.

### QUESTIONS

1. This poem is about the remembered attitudes of President Carter's speaker toward his father. What is the nature of these attitudes? To what degree are these attitudes of sons to fathers either usual or unusual? Why does the speaker state in line 1, "This is a pain I mostly hide"?
2. Why does the speaker use the words "despised" (line 7) and "resentments" (line 18)? Why does he mention "those rare times" in line 15?
3. What is the tone of the last stanza? Why does the speaker refer to going with his own sons to share the "final hours" of his father? What is the tone of the final two lines?

### LUCILLE CLIFTON (1936–2010)

#### homage to my hips (1987)

these hips are big hips  
they need space to  
move around in.  
they don't fit into little  
petty places, these hips  
are free hips.  
they don't like to be held back.  
these hips have never been enslaved.  
they go where they want to go.  
they do what they want to do.  
these hips are mighty hips.  
these hips are magic hips.  
i have known them  
to put a spell on a man and  
spin him like a top!

### QUESTIONS

1. What is unusual about the subject matter? Considering that some people are embarrassed to mention their hips, what attitudes does the speaker express here?
2. How do the words "enslaved," "want to go," "want to do," "mighty," and "spell" define the poem's ideas about the relationship between mentality and physicality?
3. To what degree is this a comic poem? What about the subject and the diction makes the poem funny?

### BILLY COLLINS (b. 1941)

For a photo, see Chapter 11, page 642.

#### The Names° (2002)

Yesterday, I lay awake in the palm of the night.  
A fine rain stole in, unhelped by any breeze,  
And when I saw the silver glaze on the windows,  
I started with A, with Ackerman, as it happened,  
Then Baxter and Calabro,  
Davis and Eberling, names falling into place  
As droplets fell through the dark.

Names printed on the ceiling of the night.  
Names slipping around a watery bend.  
Twenty-six willows on the banks of a stream.

In the morning, I walked out barefoot  
Among thousands of flowers  
Heavy with dew like the eyes of tears,  
And each had a name—  
Fiori inscribed on a yellow petal  
Then Gonzalez and Han, Ishikawa and Jenkins.

Names written in the air  
And stitched into the cloth of the day.  
A name under a photograph taped to a mailbox.  
Monogram on a torn shirt,  
I see you spelled out on storefront windows  
And on the bright unfurled awnings of this city.  
I say the syllables as I turn a corner—  
Kelly and Lee,

Molina, Nardella, and O'Connor.  
When I peer into the woods,  
I see a thick tangle where letters are hidden  
As in a puzzle concocted for children.  
Parker and Quigley in the twigs of an ash,  
Rizzo, Schubert, Torres, and Upton,  
Secrets in the boughs of an ancient maple.

Names written in the pale sky.  
Names rising in the updraft amid buildings.

Names silent in stone  
Or cried out behind a door.

Names blown over the earth and out to sea.  
In the evening—weakening light, the last swallows.

*The Names:* This poem was read by Professor Collins before a joint session of the U.S. Congress held in New York City on September 6, 2002. It was first published earlier that day in the *New York Times*.

- A boy on a lake lifts his oars.  
A woman by a window puts a match to a candle,  
And the names are outlined on the rose clouds—  
Vanacore and Wallace,  
(let X stand, if it can, for the ones unbound)  
Then Young and Ziminsky, the final jolt of Z.
- Names etched on the head of a pin.  
One name spanning a bridge, another undergoing a tunnel.  
A blue name needled into the skin.  
Names of citizens, workers, mothers and fathers,  
The bright-eyed daughter, the quick son.  
Alphabet of names in green rows in a field.  
Names in the small tracks of birds.  
Names lifted from a hat  
Or balanced on the tip of the tongue.  
Names wheeled into the dim warehouse of memory.  
So many names, there is barely room on the walls of the heart.

N.B. In light of the topic of this poem, questions seem superfluous.

### E. E. CUMMINGS (1894–1962)

For a photo, see Chapter 12, page 686.

### she being Brand / -new (1926)

- she being Brand  
-new, and you  
know consequently a  
little stiff i was  
careful of her and (having  
thoroughly oiled the universal  
joint tested my gas felt of  
her radiator made sure her springs were O.
- K.j.i went right to it flooded-the-carburetor cranked her  
up, slipped the  
clutch (and then somehow got into reverse she  
kicked what  
the hell) next  
minute i was back in neutral tried and  
again slo-wly; bare, ly nudg. ing (my  
lev-er Right-  
oh and her gears being in

A l shape passed  
from low through  
second-in-to-high like  
greased lightning) just as we turned the corner of Divinity  
avenue i touched the accelerator and give  
her the juice, good

(it  
was the first ride and believe i we was  
happy to see how nice she acted right up to  
the last minute coming back down by the Public  
Gardens i slammed on

the  
internal expanding  
&  
external contracting  
brakes Both at once and  
brought allover tremB  
-ling  
to a dead.

stand-  
still)

### QUESTIONS

- How extensive is the verbal irony, the double entendre, in this poem? This poem is considered comic. Do you agree? Why or why not? This poem might also be considered sexist. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- How do the spacing and alignment affect your reading of the poem? How does the unexpected and sometimes absent punctuation—such as in line 15, “again slo-wly; bare, ly nudg. ing (my)” —contribute to the humor?
- Can this poem in any respect be called off-color or bawdy? How might you refute such charges in light of the tone the speaker uses to equate a first sexual experience with the breaking in of a new car?

### BART EDELMAN (b. 1951)

For a photo, see Chapter 12, page 688.

### Trouble (2005)

Everything pointed to trouble;  
Danger and distress pranced  
lopliss on my wooden roof.  
Misfortune grew in the garden  
I tended day and night  
I was afflicted by the urge



To do myself in,  
 But I was so out of it  
 I failed to plan ahead.  
 I eased into my hardship  
 Like a pair of black loafers,  
 Suddenly two sizes too small.  
 Soon I began to pity  
 My big, fat, flat feet.  
 Woe became my middle name,  
 I suffered from the heebie-jeebies  
 And Saint Vitus left the order  
 When he saw me dance;  
 Alas, it wasn't a pretty picture.  
 I found my meager little life  
 Lost any sense of decency.  
 I could smell disaster in the wind—  
 Hot air breathing down my back.  
 In other words . . .

25 I was hopelessly unable  
 To shoulder the burden I bore.  
 Then I simply gave up,  
 Drove to the hardware store,  
 Bought a gallon of Dutch Boy #157,  
 And painted myself into a corner,  
 Where I now live, rather comfortably,  
 Monopolizing every moment  
 I choose to spend with myself;  
 No more a victim of boredom—  
 A teller of tall tales.

### QUESTIONS

1. How serious is this poem? How funny is it? Can it be both serious and funny? What does the diction contribute to the tone, particularly well-worn phrases such as “but-of-it” and “heebie-jeebies”?
2. What situation is the speaker describing when he says at the beginning that “everything pointed to trouble” (i.e., he was suffering from malaise or maybe depression)? What is the tone of the descriptions in the poem?
3. On what situation does the poem close? What does the speaker mean by “painted myself into a corner”? How has the speaker solved his problems and ended his trouble?

### MARTÍN ESPADA (b. 1957)

#### Bully (1990)

Boston, Massachusetts, 1987

In the school auditorium  
 the Theodore Roosevelt statue



<sup>o</sup>Theodore Roosevelt led his victorious troop of “Rough Riders” against Spanish opponents at the Battle of San Juan Hill, in southeast Cuba, in 1898. He later claimed that this was a “bully” fight.

is nostalgic  
 for the Spanish-American War,  
 each fist lonely for a saber  
 or the reins of anguish-eyed horses,  
 or a podium to clatter with speeches  
 glorying in the malaria of conquest.

But now the Roosevelt school  
 is pronounced *Herrández*.  
 Puerto Rico has invaded Roosevelt  
 with its army of Spanish-singing children  
 in the hallways,  
 brown children devouring  
 the stockpiles of the cafeteria,  
 children painting *Taino* ancestors<sup>o</sup>  
 that leap naked across murals.

Roosevelt is surrounded  
 by all the faces  
 he ever shoved in eugenic spite  
 and cursed as mongrels, skin of one race,  
 hair and cheekbones of another.

Once Marines tramped  
 from the newsreel of his imagination;  
 now children plot to spray graffiti  
 in parrot-brilliant colors  
 across the Victorian mustache  
 and monocle.

<sup>o</sup>*Taino*: The Pre-Columbian people of the Caribbean islands. When European explorers first came to the Caribbean area, they reported that the *Taino* natives wore no clothes.

### QUESTIONS

1. What summary can you make of Espada’s argument in this poem? Is his argument that the ideals of Theodore Roosevelt were wrong? That Roosevelt’s sense of American supremacy over Spanish subjects during the Spanish American War was racist and imperialistic? That time has passed by the period of American supremacy represented by the American defeat of Spain in the war? That modern Spanish residents in the United States have made the views of Roosevelt and others like him obsolete? Write an essay arguing for one of these views, or for another view that you wish to uphold.
2. Considering the details of the poem, describe the speaker’s tone. What do you think is his attitude toward Roosevelt personally, as supported by the details of the poem? What attitude is expressed by the phrase “glorying in the malaria of conquest”?
3. Consider the tone of the final stanza (lines 23–28). What might the speaker be suggesting by the phrase “parrot-brilliant colors”?
4. How can the poem’s title, “Bully,” be considered ambiguously? What are the political implications of this ambiguity?

**MARI EVANS** (b. 1923)**I Am a Black Woman** (1970)

I am a black woman  
 the music of my song  
 some sweet arpeggio of tears  
 is written in a minor key  
 and I  
 can be heard humming in the night  
 Can be heard  
 humming  
 in the night

10 I saw my mate leap screaming to the sea  
 and I / with these hands / cupped the lifebreath  
 from my issue in the canebreak  
 I lost Nat's swinging body° in a rain of tears

15 and heard my son scream all the way from Anzio°  
 for Peace he never knew . . . I

20 learned Da Nang° and Pork Chop Hill°  
 in anguish  
 Now my nostrils know the gas  
 and these trigger fire / d fingers  
 seek the softness in my warrior's beard

25 I  
 am a black woman  
 tall as a cypress  
 strong  
 beyond all definition still  
 defying place  
 and time  
 and circumstance  
 assailed  
 impervious  
 indestructible

30 Look  
 on me and be  
 renewed

°13 Nat's swinging body: Nat Turner was hanged in 1831 for leading a slave revolt in Southampton, Virginia.  
 °14 Anzio: seacoast town in Italy, the scene of fierce fighting between the Allies and the Germans in 1943 during World War II.  
 °16 Da Nang: major American military base in South Vietnam, frequently attacked during the Vietnam War.  
 °17 Pork Chop Hill: site of a bloody battle between UN and Communist forces during the Korean War (1950-1953).

**QUESTIONS**

1. What attitude is indicated by the phrase "sweet arpeggio of tears"? How does "in a minor key" complete both the idea and the comparison?

2. What phrases and descriptions does the speaker use to indicate her attitudes of anguish, despair, pain, and indignation?
3. In the last fourteen lines, what contrasting attitude is expressed? How does the speaker make this attitude clear? On balance, is the poem optimistic or pessimistic? Why?

**SEAMUS HEANEY** (b. 1939)**Mid-Term Break** (1966)

I sat all morning in the college sick bay  
 Counting bells knelling classes to a close.  
 At two o'clock our neighbors drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying—  
 He had always taken funerals in his stride—  
 And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram  
 When I came in, and I was embarrassed  
 By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were "sorry for my trouble,"  
 Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,  
 Away at school, as my mother held my hand

In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.  
 At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived  
 With the corpse, stanced and bandaged by the nurses.

Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops  
 And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him  
 For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,  
 He lay in the four foot box as in his cot.  
 No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four foot box, a foot for every year.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What is the situation of the poem? Who is the speaker? Why has he been called to come home? What are his responses to the circumstances at home?
2. How old was the speaker's brother at the time of the accident? How do you know? When you read line 19, what do you at first make of the "poppy bruise"?
3. Describe your responses to the last four lines of the poem the first time you read them. What clues in the earlier part of the poem prepare you for these final three lines? Do they sufficiently prepare you, or does the final line come as a surprise? Why is the poem unrhymed until the final two lines?

**WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY (1849–1903)****When You Are Old (1888)**

When you are old, and I am passed away—  
 Passed, and your face, your golden face, is gray—  
 I think whate'er the end, this dream of mine,  
 Comforting you, a friendly star will shine  
 Down the dim slope where still you stumble and stray.  
 So may it be: that so dead Yesterday,  
 No sad-eyed ghost but generous and gay,  
 May serve you memories like almighty wine,  
 When you are old!  
 Dear Heart, it shall be so. Under the sway  
 Of death the past's enormous disarray  
 Lies hushed and dark. Yet though there come no sign,  
 Live on well pleased; immortal and divine  
 Love shall still tend you, as God's angels may,  
 When you are old.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the organization of thought as it is affected by time. How much attention is given to a visualization of the old age of the listener? What does the speaker imagine will have happened to him? What consolation does the speaker believe the listener will have in this future period?
2. What comfort does the speaker say will justify the listener's living on "well pleased" (line 13)? What "shall still tend" the listener? Why does the speaker say "God's angels may" rather than "God's angels will"?

**DAVID IGNATOW (1914–1997)****The Bagel (1993)**

I stopped to pick up the bagel  
 rolling away in the wind,  
 annoyed with myself  
 for having dropped it  
 as if it were a portent.  
 Faster and faster it rolled,  
 with me running after it  
 bent low, gritting my teeth,  
 and I found myself doubled over  
 and rolling down the street  
 head over heels, one complete somersault  
 after another like a bagel  
 and strangely happy with myself.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What situation does the speaker describe in this poem? Does it make sense? If it doesn't, what is the real situation that the speaker describes?

2. Considering the tone of the poem, how reasonable is it to conclude that some poems, like some activities, exist solely so that readers—and writer—might simply be made happy and be amused.

**YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA (b. 1947)****Facing It (1988)**

My black face fades,  
 hiding inside the black granite.  
 I said I wouldn't,  
 dammit. No tears.  
 I'm stone. I'm flesh.  
 My clouded reflection eyes me  
 like a bird of prey, the profile of night  
 slanted against morning. I turn  
 this way—the stone lets me go.  
 I turn that way—I'm inside  
 the Vietnam Veterans Memorial  
 again, depending on the light  
 to make a difference.  
 I go down the 58,022° names,  
 half-expecting to find  
 my own in letters like smoke.  
 I touch the name Andrew Johnson;  
 I see the booby trap's white flash.  
 Names shimmer on a woman's blouse  
 but when she walks away  
 the names stay on the wall.  
 Brushstrokes flash, a red bird's  
 wings cutting across my stare.  
 The sky. A plane in the sky.  
 A white vet's image floats  
 closer to me, then his pale eyes  
 look through mine. I'm a window.  
 He's lost his right arm  
 inside the stone. In the black mirror  
 a woman's trying to erase names:  
 No, she's brushing a boy's hair.

*black granite:* The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., designed by the sculptor Maya Lin (b. 1959) and dedicated in 1982, is composed of polished black granite. Carved into the panels are lists of the names of all the military personnel who died during the Vietnamese War. 14-58\_002; In 2007, the list had grown to 58,256 names.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What sights and actions does the speaker describe in the poem? What does he see? Why does he state that his "black face" fades and is hiding inside the black granite? What is meant by the vet's having "lost his right arm / inside the stone" (lines 28–29)?
2. What other people are at the memorial? What is the significance of what they are doing?

3. Considering the actions of the speaker and the other visitors, how would you characterize the tone of the poem?
4. Compare this poem with “The Vietnam Wall” by Alberto Rios in Chapter 22.

### ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1809–1865)

#### My Childhood's Home<sup>o</sup> (1844)

My childhood's home I see again,  
And sadden with the view;  
And still, as memory crowds my brain,  
There's pleasure in it too.

- 5 O Memory! thou midway world  
Twixt earth and paradise,  
Where things decayed and loved ones lost  
In dreamy shadows rise,

And, freed from all that's earthly vile,  
Seem hallowed, pure, and bright,  
Like scenes in some enchanted isle  
All bathed in liquid light.

As dusky mountains please the eye  
When twilight chases day;  
As bugle-notes that, passing by,  
In distance die away.

As leaving some grand waterfall,  
We, lingering, list its roar—  
So memory will hallow all  
We've known, but know no more.

Near twenty years have passed away  
Since here I bid farewell  
To woods and fields, and scenes of play,  
And playmates loved so well.

Where many were, but few remain  
Of old familiar things;  
But seeing them, to mind again  
The lost and absent brings.

The friends I left the parting day,  
How changed, as time has sped!  
Young childhood grown, strong manhood gray,  
And half of all are dead.

<sup>o</sup>In 1844, while on a political campaign in Indiana, Lincoln visited the home where he had been raised and where his mother and sister were buried. The occasion prompted him to write this poem.

I hear the loved survivors tell  
How nought from death could save  
Till every sound appears a knell,  
And every spot a grave.

I range the fields with pensive tread  
And pace the hollow rooms,  
And feel (companion of the dead)  
I'm living in the tombs.

#### QUESTIONS

1. How does Lincoln's speaker explain the importance of memory? How is the sentence “So memory will hallow all / We've known, but know no more” (lines 19–20) related to the descriptions and ideas that follow?
2. Do stanzas 6 and 7 seem exaggerated, self-indulgent, or sentimental? What seems to forestall this criticism of the ideas here?
3. What leads the speaker to the conclusion he makes in the last two lines?

### PAT MORA (b. 1942)

#### La Migra<sup>o</sup> (1993)

Let's play *La Migra*  
I'll be the Border Patrol.  
You be the Mexican maid.  
I get the badge and sunglasses.  
You can hide and run,  
but you can't get away  
because I have a jeep.  
I can take you wherever  
I want, but don't ask  
questions because  
I don't speak Spanish.  
I can touch you wherever  
I want but don't complain  
too much because I've got  
boots and kick—if I have to,  
and I have handcuffs.  
Oh, and a gun.  
Get ready, get set, run.

Let's play *La Migra*.  
You be the Border Patrol.

*La Migra*: border patrol, border guards, immigration police.

I'll be the Mexican woman.  
Your jeep has a flat,  
and you have been spotted  
by the sun.

All you have is heavy: hat  
glasses, badge, shoes, gun.  
I know this desert,  
where to rest,

where to drink.  
Oh, I am not alone.

You hear us singing  
and laughing with the wind,

*Agua dulce brota aquí*  
*aquí, aquí,*° but since you  
can't speak Spanish,  
you do not understand.  
Get ready.

°32–33 *Agua* . . . *aquí*: “fresh water springs [are] here, here.” The idea is that the Mexican woman can survive in the desert because she knows where to find fresh water, whereas the border patrolman does not.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why does Mora create “La Migra” as a drama, with the first speaker being a border patrolman, and the second being the “Mexican woman”? What is gained by this arrangement?
2. How is the tone created in the first stanza? What kind of person is the border guard shown to be? What attitude toward him does Mora create? What current political concerns does this attitude address?
3. What is the tone of the second stanza? What resources does the Mexican woman have? What handicaps of the border guard does she point out? In terms of the poem's tone, what is the implication of the final line?

### SHARON OLDS (b. 1942)

#### The Planned Child (1996)

I hated the fact that they had planned me, she had taken  
a cardboard out of his shirt from the laundry  
as if sliding the backbone up out of his body,  
and made a chart of the month and put  
her temperature on it, rising and falling  
to know the day to make me—I would have  
liked to have been conceived in heat,  
in haste, by mistake, in love, in sex,  
not on cardboard, the little x on the  
rising line that did not fall again.

But when a friend was pouring wine  
and said that I seem to have been a child who had been wanted,

I took the wine against my lips  
as if my mouth were moving along  
that valved wall in my mother's body, she was  
bearing down, and then breathing from the mask, and then  
bearing down, pressing me out into  
the world that was not enough for her without me in it,  
cartwheeling across the dark, not  
the earth, the sea—none of it  
was enough, for her, without me.

### QUESTIONS

1. Who is the speaker? What is she like? What is she talking about? Why does she begin the poem talking about something she hated?
2. What change of attitudes is described by the poem? Why does the poem seem to require such a change?
3. What attitude is expressed in the concluding global, planetary, solar, and stellar references? Why does the speaker state that, to her mother, she has more value than this image?
4. What unique qualities of perception and expression does the speaker exhibit? Have you ever read a poem before in which details about conception and childbirth have been so prominent? Why are these details included in this poem?

### ROBERT PINSKY (b. 1940)

#### Dying (1984)

Nothing to be said about it, and everything—  
The change of changes, closer or further away:  
The Golden Retriever next door, Gussie, is dead,

Like Sandy, the Cocker Spaniel from three doors down  
Who died when I was small; and every day  
Things that were in my memory fade and die.

Phrases die out: first, everyone forgets  
What doornails are; then after certain decades  
As a dead metaphor, “dead as a doornail” flickers

And fades away. But someone I know is dying—  
And though one might say glibly, “everyone is,”  
The different pace makes the difference absolute.

The tiny invisible spores in the air we breathe,  
That settle harmlessly on our drinking water  
And on our skin, happen to come together,

With certain conditions on the forest floor,  
Or even a shady corner of the lawn—  
And overnight the fleshy, pale stalks gather,

The colorless growth without a leaf or flower;  
And around the stalks, the summer grass keeps growing  
With steady pressure, like the insistent whiskers

That grow between shaves on a face, the nails  
Growing and dying from the toes and fingers  
At their own humble pace, oblivious

As the nerveless moths, that live their night or two—  
Though like a moth a bright soul keeps on beating,  
Bored and impatient in the monster's mouth.

### QUESTIONS

1. What details about death does the poem introduce? How are they connected in the poem's development? What is the effect of these details on the tone of the poem?
2. What is meant by line 12, "The different pace makes the difference absolute"? How strongly does this statement counter the phrase "everyone is" in line 11?
3. Up until line 25 this poem can be considered negative or even despairing. What is the effect of lines 26 and 27 on this negative tone? What is the meaning of the phrase "monster's mouth" in these last two lines?

### ALEXANDER POPE (1685–1744)

#### from Epilogue to the Satires, Dialogue I Lines 137–72 (1738)

Virtue may choose the high or low degree,  
'Tis just alike to Virtue, and to me;  
Dwell in a monk, or light upon a king,  
She's still the same, beloved, contented thing.  
Vice is undone, if she forgets her birth,  
And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth:  
But 'tis the Fall degrades her to a whore;

Let Greatness own her, and she's mean no more;  
Her birth, her beauty, crowds and courts confess,  
Chaste matrons praise her, and grave bishops bless:  
In golden chains the willing world she draws,  
And hers the gospel is, and hers the laws;

Mounts the tribunal, lifts her scarlet head,  
And sees pale Virtue carted<sup>o</sup> in her stead!  
Lo! at the wheels of her triumphal car,  
Old England's genius, rough with many a scar,  
Dragged in the dust! his arms hang idly round,  
His flag inverted trails along the ground!<sup>o</sup>

<sup>o</sup>144 mean no more: i.e., if the rich and powerful follow vice, vice is no longer low but fashionable. 145 Her birth confess: i.e. under the dictates of fashion, both crowds and courts claim that Vice is both high-born and beautiful. 146 carted: It was an eighteenth-century punishment to display prostitutes in a cart; in addition, condemned criminals were carried in a cart from prison to Tyburn, in London, where they were hanged. 152–154 Old England's genius along the ground: i.e., the spirit of England is humiliated by being tied to Vice's triumphal carriage and then dragged along the ground. The idea is that corrupt politicians have sacrificed England's defensive power for their own gain.



Our youth, all liveried o'er with foreign gold,  
Before her dance; behind her crawl the old!  
See thronging millions to the pagod<sup>o</sup> run,  
And offer country, parent, wife, or son!  
Hear her black trumpet through the land proclaim,  
That "not to be corrupted is the shame."  
In soldier, churchman, patriot, man in power,  
'Tis avarice all, ambition is no more!

See, all our nobles begging to be slaves!  
See, all our fools aspiring to be knaves!  
The wit of cheats, the courage of a whore,  
Are what ten thousand envy and adore.  
All, all, look up, with reverential awe,  
On crimes that scape,<sup>o</sup> or triumph o'er the law:  
While truth, worth, wisdom, daily they decry—  
"Nothing is sacred now but villainy!"  
Yet may this verse (if such a verse remain)  
Show there was one who held it in disdain.

<sup>o</sup>157 pagod: i.e., a pagoda, a symbol of how people have forsaken their own religion and adopted foreign religions.

### QUESTIONS

1. The entire poem is in the form of a dialogue, in which these concluding lines are identified as being spoken by "P" (Pope). Should readers therefore take these lines as an expression of Pope's own ideas? In your answer, pay special attention to the final couplet.
2. Explain this poem as social satire. What is attacked? What evidence does the speaker advance to support his case that society has deserted virtue and religion?
3. Describe the poem's tone. What specific charges does the speaker make against the prevailing sociopolitical structure?
4. How timely is the poem? To what degree might such charges be advanced in our society today?

### SALVATORE QUASIMODO (1901–1968)

#### Auschwitz<sup>o</sup> (1983)

Translated by Jack Bevan

Fair from the Vistula,<sup>o</sup> along the northern plain,  
I live, in a death-camp there at Auschwitz:  
In the pole's rust and tangled fencing, rain  
Funeral cold.

No tree, no birds in the grey air  
Or above our thought, but limp



<sup>o</sup>Auschwitz: the German name for the town of Oswiecim in southern Poland, site of the most notorious of the German concentration-extinction camps in World War II. There were two major camps—Auschwitz itself, a former Polish army garrison, and nearby Birkenau, which contained many temporary barracks for worker-prisoners, together with gas chambers and crematoria for the extermination of hundreds of thousands of victims. See pages 71–78, 113–114. <sup>o</sup>Vistula: The Vistula River rises in the northern Carpathian Mountains, south of Auschwitz.

10 pain that memory leaves  
 to its silence without irony or anger.  
 You ask no elegies or idylls: only  
 the meaning of our destiny, you, here,  
 hurt by the mind's war,  
 uncertain at the clear  
 presence of life. For life is here  
 in every No that seems a certainty:  
 15 here we shall hear the angel weep, the monster, hear  
 our future time  
 beating the hereafter that is here, forever  
 in motion, not an image  
 of dreams, of possible pity.  
 20 Here are the myths, the metamorphoses.  
 Lacking the name of symbols or a god,  
 they are history, earth places,  
 they are Auschwitz, love. How suddenly  
 the dear forms of Alpheus and Arethusa<sup>24</sup>  
 25 changed into shadow-smoke!

Out of that hell hung with a white  
 inscription "work will make you free"<sup>25</sup>  
 there came the endless smoke  
 of many thousand women thrust at dawn  
 30 out of the kennels up to the firing-wall,  
 or: screaming for mercy to water, choked,  
 their skeleton mouths under the jets of gas.

You, soldier, will find them in your annals  
 taking the forms of animals and rivers,  
 or are you too, now, ash of Auschwitz,  
 35 medal of silence?  
 Long tresses in glass urns can still be seen  
 bound up with charms, and an infinity  
 of ghostly little shoes and shawls of Jews:<sup>26</sup>  
 40 of man whose knowledge takes the shape of arms,  
 they are the myths, our metamorphoses.  
 Over the plains where love and sorrow  
 and pity rotted, there in the rain  
 a No inside us beat;  
 45 a No to death that died at Auschwitz  
 never from the pit of ashes  
 to show itself again.

<sup>24</sup> Alpheus and Arethusa: a river and fountain in Greece. In ancient mythology, Alpheus, who loved Arethusa, was transformed into the river (bearing his name) to be united with Arethusa, who was transformed into the fountain (bearing her name). <sup>25</sup> work will make you free: a translation of the large metal sign Arbeit macht frei, which stood the main gate of Auschwitz and is still on display there. A copy of the sign is displayed in the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. For a drawing of scenes of Auschwitz, see pp 72–77. <sup>26</sup> Long tresses . . . shawls of Jews: items in the barracks at Auschwitz house permanent displays that include the hair, shoes, eyeglasses, luggage, and clothing of thousands of the victims.

## QUESTIONS

1. Compare the tone of the first ten lines with that of the last six. What differences do you notice? How does the idea of the last three lines answer the question posed in lines 9 and 10?
2. Even though the speaker is referring to the deadliest of all the camps, what does he mean by "For life is here / in every No that seems a certainty" (lines 13–14)?
3. In line 20 the speaker mentions ancient myths about metamorphoses or transformations. What type of metamorphosis is linked to the death camps in lines 26–42? What attitudes are brought out by this linkage?

## ANNE RIDLER (1912–2001)

### Nothing Is Lost (1994)

Nothing is lost.  
 We are too sad to know that, or too blind;  
 Only in visited moments do we understand:  
 It is not that the dead return—  
 They are about us always, though unguessed.

This penciled Latin verse  
 You dying wrote me, ten years past and more,  
 brings you as much alive to me as the self you wrote it for,  
 Dear father, as I read your words  
 With no word but Alas.

Lines in a letter, lines in a face  
 Are faithful currents of life: the boy has written  
 His parents across his forehead, and as we burn  
 Our bodies up each seven years,  
 His own past self has left no plainer trace.

Nothing dies.  
 The cells pass on their secrets, we betray them  
 Unknowingly: in a freckle, in the way  
 We walk, recall some ancestor,  
 And Adam in the color of our eyes.

Yes, on the face of the new born,  
 Before the soul has taken full possession,  
 There pass, as over a screen, in succession  
 The images of other beings:  
 Face after face looks out, and then is gone.

Nothing is lost, for all in love survive.  
 I lay my cheek against his sleeping limbs  
 To feel if he is warm, and touch in him  
 Those children whom no shawl could warm,  
 No arms, no grief, no longing could revive.

Thus what we see, or know,  
Is only a tiny portion, at the best,  
Of the life in which we share; an iceberg's crest  
Our sunlit present, our partial sense,  
With deep supporting multitudes below.

35

### QUESTIONS

1. What is unusual about the phrase “nothing dies” (line 16)? How successfully does the poet explain and exemplify the idea?
2. In what ways does the “face of the new born” reflect the “images of other beings” (lines 21–24)? How might the “color of our eyes” demonstrate that we are descended from Adam (line 20)? How true is it that “all in love survive” (line 26)?
3. In what ways might this poem offer comfort to readers who believe strongly in the concept of their own uniqueness and originality?

### THEODORE ROETHKE (1907–1963)

For a photo, see Chapter 12, page 697.

#### My Papa's Waltz (1942)

The whiskey on your breath  
Could make a small boy dizzy;  
But I hung on like death:  
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans  
Slid from the kitchen shelf;  
My mother's countenance  
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist  
Was battered on one knuckle;  
At every step you missed  
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head  
With a palm caked hard by dirt,  
Then waltzed me off to bed  
Still clinging to your shirt.

15

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the tone of the speaker's opening description of his father? What is the tone of the phrases “like death” and “such waltzing”?
2. What is the “waltz” the speaker describes? What is the tone of his words describing it in lines 5–15?
3. What does the reference to his “mother's countenance” contribute to the tone? What situation is suggested by the selection of the word “unfrown”?

4. What does the tone of the physical descriptions of the father contribute to your understanding of the speaker's attitude toward his childhood experiences as his father's dance partner?

### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

For a portrait, see p. 1354

#### Fear No More the Heat o' th' Sun°—1623 (ca. 1610–11)

Fear no more the heat o' th' sun;  
Nor the furious winter's rages.  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home-art gone, and ta'en° thy wages;  
Golden lads and girls all must,  
As° chimney sweepers come to dust.

taken  
like

Fear no more the frown o' th' great,  
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke:  
Care no more to clothe and eat;  
To thee the reed is as the oak;  
The sceptre, learning, physic, must  
All follow this, and come to dust.

10

Fear no more the lightning flash,  
Nor th' all-dread thunder-stone°;  
Fear not slander, censure rash;  
Thou hast finished joy and moan°;  
All lovers young, all lovers must  
Consign to thee and come to dust.

15

sadness

No exorcisor harm thee.  
Nor no witchcraft charm thee.  
Ghost unlaid forbear thee.  
Nothing ill come near thee:  
Quiet consummation have,  
And renowned be thy grave.

20

*Fear No More:* This poem is a dirge or lament spoken (but not sung) over the supposedly dead body of Innogen in Act IV of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (she has taken a potion which makes her appear to be dead). The speakers are Guiderius and Arviragus, who are the actual brothers of Innogen, although at this time neither the brothers nor the sister know of their relationship. 14 *thunder-stone*: The sound of thunder was believed in Elizabethan times to be caused by stones falling from the sky.

### QUESTIONS

1. Describe the attitude of the speakers toward death. How do they try to soften the bitterness of death?
2. In what ways is the fourth stanza a climax to the poem? How does it differ from the first three stanzas?
3. In the play *Guiderius* and *Arviragus*, though princes, have been deprived of their status and rights, and have been brought up simply. How does the language of the song reflect their rustic nature?



**CATHY SONG** (b. 1955)**Lost Sister** (1983)

1 In China,  
 even the peasants  
 named their first daughters  
 Jade<sup>4</sup>—  
 the stone that in the far fields  
 could moisten the dry season,  
 could make men move mountains  
 for the healing green of the inner hills  
 glistening like slices of winter melon.  
 And the daughters were grateful:  
 they never left home.  
 To move freely was a luxury  
 stolen from them at birth.  
 Instead, they gathered patience,  
 learning to walk in shoes  
 the size of teacups,<sup>5</sup>  
 without breaking—  
 the arc of their movements  
 as dormant as the rooted willow,  
 as redundant as the farmyard hens.  
 But they traveled far  
 in surviving,  
 learning to stretch the family rice,  
 to quiet the demons,  
 to the noisy stomachs.

2 There is a sister  
 across the ocean,  
 who relinquished her name,  
 diluting jade green  
 with the blue of the Pacific.  
 Rising with a tide of locusts,  
 she swarmed with others  
 to inundate another shore.  
 In America,  
 there are many roads  
 and women can stride along with men.

But in another wilderness,  
 the possibilities,

<sup>4</sup> Jade: In China, both the mineral and the name are considered signs of health and good fortune. In traditional China, girls' feet were bound at the age of seven because minuscule feet were considered beautiful and aristocratic. The binding inhibited the natural growth of the feet and made it painful to walk.

the loneliness,  
 can strangulate like jungle vines.  
 The meager provisions and sentiments  
 of once belonging—  
 fermented roots, Mah-jongg<sup>4</sup> tiles and firecrackers—  
 set but a flimsy household  
 in a forest of nightless cities.  
 A giant snake rattles above,  
 spewing black clouds into your kitchen.  
 Dough-faced landlords  
 slip in and out of your keyholes,  
 making claims you don't understand  
 tapping into your communication systems  
 of laundry lines and restaurant chains.

You find you need China:  
 your one fragile identification,  
 a jade link  
 handcuffed to your wrist.  
 You remember your mother  
 who walked for centuries,  
 footless—  
 and like her,  
 you have left no footprints,  
 but only because  
 there is an ocean in between,  
 the unremitting space of your rebellion.

<sup>4</sup> Mah-jongg: a Chinese game played with 144 domino-like tiles marked in suits, counters, and dice.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why is the poem titled "Lost Sister"? Why is it not titled something like "Lucky Sister"?
2. In light of the poem's title, what is the speaker's evaluation of the circumstances of women's life in historical China, and her attitude toward the life of a physically freer woman who has emigrated to the United States?
3. What is meant by the speaker's assertion that both mother and daughter (the "lost sister") have "left no footprints" (line 61). What does the speaker find to praise both the women who stayed in China, and the woman who came to America?

**JONATHAN SWIFT** (1667–1745)**A Description of the Morning** (1709)

Now hardly here and there a hackney-coach  
 Appearing, showed the ruddy morn's approach.  
 Now Betty from her master's bed had flown,  
 And softly stole to discompose her own.  
 The slipshod<sup>4</sup> prentice from his master's door  
 Had pared the dirt, and sprinkled round the floor.



Now Moll had whirled her mop with dextrous airs,  
 Prepared to scrub the entry and the stairs.  
 The youth with broomy stumps began to trace  
 The kennel's edge,<sup>9</sup> where wheels had worn the place.  
 The small-coal man<sup>10</sup> was heard with cadence deep,  
 Till drowned in shriller notes of chimney-sweep.  
 Duns<sup>11</sup> at his lordship's gate began to meet;  
 And brickdust Moll had screamed through half the street.  
 The turnkey<sup>12</sup> now his flock returning sees,  
 Duly let out a-nights to steal for fees.  
 The watchful bailiffs take their silent stands,  
 And schoolboys lag<sup>13</sup> with satchels in their hands.

<sup>9</sup> kennel's edge: that is, the edge of the gutter. Swift annotated this line "To find old Nails." <sup>10</sup> small-coal man: an entrepreneur, operator of a jail for profit, who allowed prisoners to go free at night so that they might bring him a night's booty to pay for the necessities provided them in jail. <sup>11</sup> Duns: schoolboys lag; cf. Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, 2.7.145-47.

### QUESTIONS

1. What images of life in early-eighteenth-century London are presented in this poem? Who is "Betty"? Why is she discomposing her bed? Are such images to be considered ordinary, heroic, or antiheroic? Why?
2. Why does Swift conclude with the reference to "schoolboys" lagging "with satchels in their hands"? Why would it not have been preferable to conclude with reference to adult behavior?
3. How do you know that Swift's poem is satiric? What is being satirized?

### DAVID WAGONER (b. 1926)

#### My Physics Teacher (1981)

He tried to convince us, but his billiard ball  
 Fell faster than his pingpong ball and thumped  
 To the floor first, in spite of Galileo.<sup>9</sup>  
 The rainbows from his prism skidded off-screen  
 Before we could tell an infra from an ultra.  
 His hand-cranked generator refused to spit  
 Sparks and settled for smoke. The dangling pith  
 Ignored the attractions of his amber wand,  
 No matter how much static he rubbed and dubbed  
 From the seat of his pants, and the housebrick  
 He lowered into a tub of water weighed  
 (Eureka!) more than the overflow.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> 3-12 Galileo: These lines describe classic classroom demonstrations in physics. Galileo first formulated the law of uniform falling bodies. Newton explained that a prism divides light into the colors of the rainbow ("infra" refers to infrared light; "ultra" to ultraviolet.) Sparks leaping across the space between two wires graphically demonstrate electrical generation and power. The motion of dried pith toward a charged piece of amber demonstrates the magnetic power of static electricity. Archimedes explained how the weight of a floating object is the same as the weight of water it displaces, and also how the volume of an immersed object (not the weight) is the same as the volume of displaced water. The physics teacher did not understand this distinction. (According to legend, Archimedes made this discovery when taking a bath, and then shouted "Eureka!" ["I have found it!"])

He believed in a World of Laws, where problems had answers,  
 Where tangible objects and intangible forces  
 Acting thereon could be lettered, numbered, and crammed  
 Through our tough skulls for lifetimes of homework.  
 But his only uncontested demonstration  
 Came with our last class: he broke his chalk  
 On a formula, stooped to catch it, knocked his forehead  
 On the eraser-gutter, staggered slewfoot, and stuck  
 One foot forever into the wastebasket.

### QUESTIONS

1. What idea underlies the physics teacher's use of classroom demonstrations? What is the speaker's apparent response to this idea?
2. What happens to these demonstrations? Why are these failures comic and farcical? What effect do the poem's farcical actions have upon the validity of the teacher's ideas?

### C. K. WILLIAMS (b. 1936)

#### Dimensions (1969)

There is a world somewhere else that is unendurable.  
 Those who live in it are helpless in the hands of the elements,  
 they are like branches in the deep woods in wind  
 that whip their leaves off and slice the heart of the night  
 and sob. They are like boats bleating wearily in fog.

But here, no matter what, we know where we stand.  
 We know more or less what comes next. We hold out.  
 Sometimes a dream will shake us like little dogs, a fever  
 hang on so we're not ourselves or love wring us out,  
 but we prevail, we certify and make sure, we go on.

There is a world that uses its soldiers and widows  
 for flour, its orphans for building stone, its legs for pens.  
 In that place, eyes are softened and harmless like God's  
 and all blend in the traffic of their tragedy and pass by  
 like people. And sometimes one of us, losing the way,  
 will drift over the border and see them there, dying,  
 laughing, being revived. When we come home, we are half way.  
 Our screams heal the torn silence. We are like scars.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why should this poem be called ironic? Should the irony be called situational? Cosmic? Why?
2. What is intended by the poem's title? What is the implication of the first line? What irony does the line bring out? Describe the irony of the second stanza (lines 6-10).

3. What is meant by “losing the way” and drifting “over the border” (lines 15–16)? What is the meaning and the irony of the last three lines? What does it mean to be “like scars” (line 18)?

### WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770–1850)

For a portrait, see Chapter 12, page 700.

#### The Solitary Reaper (1807)

Behold her, single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland Lass!  
Reaping and singing by herself;  
Stop here, or gently pass!

5 Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
And sings a melancholy strain;  
O listen! for the Vale profound  
Is overflowing with the sound.

10 No Nightingale did ever chaunt  
More welcome notes to weary bands  
Of travelers in some shady haunt,  
Among Arabian sands;  
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
15 In springtime from the Cuckoo bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.

20 Will no one tell me what she sings?  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago;  
Or is it some more humble lay,  
Familiar matter of today?  
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,  
That has been, and may be again?

25 Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang  
As if her song could have no ending;  
I saw her singing at her work,  
And o'er the sickle bending—

30 I listened, motionless and still;  
And, as I mounted up the hill,  
The music in my heart I bore,  
Long after it was heard no more.

<sup>16</sup> Hebrides: a group of islands off the west coast of Scotland. 17 Will . . . sings: The speaker does not understand Scots Gaelic, the language in which the woman sings.

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the scene described in the poem? Where is the speaker? What actions does he describe?
2. Why does the poet shift from present tense to the past tense at line 25? What is gained by this shift?
3. What speculations does the speaker make about the meaning of the woman's song? What conclusions does he make? What do you conclude from his observations?

### WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865–1939)

#### When You Are Old (1893)

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,  
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look  
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false or true,  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled  
And paced upon the mountains overhead  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the speaker of this poem like? How does the speaker describe himself?
2. To whom is the speaker speaking? What are you asked to conclude about the past relationship between the speaker and the listener?
3. Describe the dominant attitudes expressed by the speaker. What words might describe the poem's tone?
4. Compare the tone of this poem with that of Henley's "When You Are Old" (p. 846).

### WRITING ABOUT TONE IN POETRY

Be careful to note those elements of the work that touch particularly on attitudes or authorial consideration. For example, you may be studying Hughes's "Theme for English B," where it is necessary to consider the force of the poet's claim for equality (see Chapter 21). How serious is the claim? Does the speaker's apparent matter-of-factness make him seem less than enthusiastic? Or does this tone indicate that equality is so fundamental a right that its realization should be an everyday part of life? Devising and answering such



questions can help you understand the degree to which authors show control of tone. Similar questions apply when you study internal qualities such as style and characterization.

### Questions for Discovering Ideas

- What is the speaker like? Is he or she intelligent, observant, friendly, idealistic, realistic, trustworthy? How do you think you should respond to the speaker's characteristics?
- Do all the speeches seem right for the speaker and situation? Are all descriptions appropriate, all actions believable?
- If the work is comic, at what is the comedy directed? At situations? At characters? At the speaker himself or herself? What is the poet's apparent attitude toward the comic objects?
- Does the writer ask you to (1) sympathize with those in misfortune, (2) rejoice with those who have found happiness, (3) lament the human condition, (4) become angry against unfairness and inequality, (5) admire examples of noble human behavior, or (6) have another appropriate emotional response?
- Do any words seem unusual or especially noteworthy, such as dialect, polysyllabic words, foreign words or phrases that the author assumes you know, or especially connotative words? What is the effect of such words on the poem's tone?

### Strategies for Organizing Ideas

The goal of your essay is to examine all aspects bearing on the tone. Consider the following topics.

1. *The audience, situation, and characters.* Is any person or group directly addressed by the speaker? What attitude is expressed (love, respect, condemnation, confidentiality, confidence, etc.)? What is the basic situation in the work? What is the nature of the speaker or persona? What is the relationship of the speaker to the material? What is the basis of the speaker's authority? Does the speaker give you the whole truth? Is he or she trying to withhold anything? Why? How is the speaker's character manipulated to show apparent authorial attitude and to stimulate responses? Do you find any of the various sorts of irony? If so, what does the irony show (optimism or pessimism, for example)? How is the situation controlled to shape your responses? That is, can actions, situations, or characters be seen as expressions of attitude or as embodiments of certain favorable or unfavorable ideas or positions? How does the work promote respect, admiration, dislike, or other feelings about character or situation?

2. *Descriptions and diction.* Your concern here is to relate attitudes to the poet's use of language and description. Are there any systematic references,

such as to colors, sounds, noises, natural scenes, and so on, that collectively reflect an attitude? Do connotative meanings of words control response in any way? Is any special knowledge of references or unusual words expected of readers? What is the extent of this knowledge? Do speech or dialect patterns indicate attitudes about speakers or their condition of life? Are speech patterns normal and standard or slang and substandard? What is the effect of these patterns? Are there unusual or particularly noteworthy expressions? If so, what attitudes do these show? Does the author use verbal irony? To what effect?

3. *Humor.* Is the work funny? How funny, how intense? How is the humor achieved? Does the humor develop out of incongruous situations or language, or both? Is there an underlying basis of attack in the humor, or are the objects of laughter still respected or even loved despite having humor directed against them?

4. *Ideas.* Ideas may be advocated, defended mildly, attacked, or ridiculed. Which attitude is present in the work you have been studying? How does the poet make his or her attitude clear—directly, by statement, or indirectly, through understatement, overstatement, or the language of a character? In what ways does the work assume a common ground of assent between author and reader? That is, are there apparently common assumptions about religious views, political ideas, moral and behavioral standards, and so on? Are these common ideas readily acceptable, or is any concession needed by the reader to approach the work? For example, a major subject of Arnold's "Dover Beach" (Chapter 13) is that absolute belief in the truth of organized religion has been lost. This subject may not be important to everyone, but even an irreligious reader or a follower of another faith may find common ground in the poem's psychological situation or in the desire to learn as much as possible about so important an institution as religion.

5. *Unique characteristics.* Each work has unique properties that contribute to the tone. For example, Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" is a brief narrative in which the speaker's recollected feelings about his father's boisterously drunken behavior must be inferred from understatement. Hardy's "Channel Firing" (Chapter 14) develops from the comic and absurd joke that the sounds of cannons being fired from ships at sea are so loud they could waken the dead. Be alert for such special circumstances in the poem you are considering, and as you plan and develop your essay, take them into account.

Your conclusion may summarize your main points and from there go on to any needed definitions, explanations, or afterthoughts, together with ideas reinforcing earlier points. If you have changed your mind or have made new realizations, briefly explain these. Finally, you might mention some other major aspect of the work's tone that you did not develop in the body.

## Illustrative Student Essay

Although underlined sentences are not recommended by MLA style, they are used in this illustrative essay as teaching tools to emphasize the central idea, thesis sentence, and topic sentences.

Regal 1

Willa Regal

Professor Tyler

English 102

18 May 2010

The Speaker's Attitudes in Sharon Olds's "The Planned Child"<sup>o</sup>

"The Planned Child" is unusual and striking because in it Sharon Olds deals so frankly with her speaker's concern about the circumstances of her conception and birth. Few people ever learn about how they were conceived, and even fewer ever think about it enough to criticize it, and yet the poem's details concern this topic. As unusual as such details are, however, the poem's power results from the way the speaker traces the development of her attitudes towards her origins—from hate, to uncertainty, to acceptance.\* These attitudes may be traced in the poem's two stanzas, its ordinary diction, and the way its use of the first-person pronoun indicates the speaker's importance.†

Olds's first stanza contrasts the speaker's hatred for planning and organization and her preference for disorganization. The stanza is arresting, if not shocking, because in it the speaker goes into the past to describe her feelings about how her mother calculated ovulation times to insure conception. Rather than finding it comical that she owes her existence to the chart her mother made on a laundry cardboard, the speaker says she hated this planned record keeping. She explains this attitude because the planning, to her way of thinking, reduced her to little more than an X on a rising graph line and by implication, therefore, it seemed cold and impersonal. From the description the speaker makes of conception in lines 7 and 8, it seems that spontaneous and

<sup>o</sup>This poem appears on page 850.

\*Central idea.

†Thesis sentence.

disorganized love by her parents would have created a warmer, more welcoming reason for her existence.

The second stanza is continuous with the first because it stems out of feelings occasioned by an unplanned but significant moment. A friend serves wine to the speaker and tells her that she seems to have been "a child who had been *wanted*" (line 12, italics added). This casual social event is symbolic (is it similar to an experience of communion?) because it gives the speaker a lifegiving insight into her existence. The conclusion of the poem is then devoted to the speaker's newly created feelings of involvement with her mother. She finds affection for her mother in the details of childbirth—bearing down, breathing, pressing, and the emergence into life of the speaker herself. The poem's climax is the speaker's apparently amazed realization that she herself was actually *wanted*. The X on the graph therefore was a means of achieving a far greater goal, for her mother valued her more than the world or the galaxy. As the speaker imagines her mother's lifegiving act, she imagines how loving it was, and therefore she senses her own importance.

With such an unusual topic, one might expect a fair amount of abstract and medical diction, but such is not the case. Most of the words are flat and ordinary (e.g., "a friend was pouring wine"). Despite their simplicity, however, the diction confronts readers with direct physical details of planned conception and the labor of childbirth. The speaker refers matter-of-factly to a temperature chart, the birth canal, and breathing into a mask and bearing down during labor. Of major note is the intensity that Olds achieves through the selection of simple but strong verbs and verbals ("hated," "planned," "had taken," "sliding," "made," "pouring," "were moving," "bearing down," "breathing," "pressing," and "cartwheeling"). All these words fit the poet's aim to connect with one of life's first facts—being conceived and then delivered.

As this basic detail indicates, the central figure of the poem is the speaker and her attitudes. This centrality is emphasized by the frequent use of the first person pronoun throughout the poem. A form of the pronoun appears twelve times, and the poem begins with "I" and concludes with "me." This number may not seem high in a personal poem of twenty-two lines, but it is

## Regal 3

high enough to support the idea that the poem is about attitudes toward self-realization. The poem explores some vital personal questions: Could the speaker love herself knowing that she was planned and not spontaneous? Not when these calculations seemed to result from nothing more than cold science. But could she love herself after learning that the calculations were preceded by love for her? Yes, and as a result the speaker makes inferences from this new information. She imagines that nothing in the world was more important to her mother than she. She therefore has more value than the earth and stars themselves, and this vision closes the poem on a strongly positive and affirmative note:

not the moon, the sun, Orion  
cartwheeling across the dark, not  
the earth, the sea—none of it  
was enough, for her, without me. (20-22)

[6] Thus, an examination of “The Planned Child” reveals both the need and difficulty of self-understanding. The poem is a confession of changing attitudes in the light of a growing sense of personal origin. Olds makes this point through the commonness and universality of details about birth. Yet the poem is not personal or egocentric because it is about the need of discovering who one is. Without this knowledge the poem’s speaker is uncertain and hostile. But once she can see that she is part of a pattern of love and creativity, she becomes positive and assertive. The tone of “The Planned Child” reflects the speaker’s growing confidence that results from her increased knowledge and awareness.

## Regal 4

## Work Cited

Olds, Sharon. “The Planned Child.” *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*. Ed. Edgar V. Roberts and Robert Zweig. 10th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2012. 850–51. Print.

### Commentary on the Essay

Because this essay embodies a number of approaches by which tone may be studied in any work (situation, diction, special characteristics), it is typical of many essays that use a combined approach. The central idea, expressed in the first paragraph, is that the dominant attitudes in “The Planned Child” are the speaker’s change from hostility to certainty.

Paragraph 2 considers the poem’s first section, in which the speaker explains why a preference for spontaneity caused her initial hatred of how she came into being (strategy 4, p. 865). Paragraph 3 shows how the explanation of a unique situation can be seen as a feature of tone (strategy 5, p. 865). The paragraph pursues the speaker’s thoughts that develop from an unexpected comment from a friend. In this sense, a casual moment explains how the speaker’s relative confusion shifts to the greater self-confidence and acceptance of her mother’s labors to bring her into the world.

Paragraph 4 concerns the poem’s treatment of the unusual subject matter through comparatively simple diction (strategy 1, p. 864). Words in the paragraph that indicate attitudes are “confronts,” “matter-of-factly,” “intensity,” and “desire.” Paragraph 5 considers how Olds’s use of the first-person pronoun fits into the poem’s recognition of the speaker’s importance (strategy 2, pp. 864–65). The paragraph asserts that the poem’s positive conclusion is augmented by images on a planetary, solar, galactic, geographic, and marine scale (strategy 5).

The concluding paragraph points out that the speaker’s concern with her origins is not simply a matter of egocentrism, but rather results from her need to connect with an attitude that is more human and loving than the act of planning at first seems to convey.

### Writing Topics About Tone in Poetry

#### Writing Paragraphs

1. Consider the tone of Roethke’s “My Papa’s Waltz.” Some readers have concluded that the speaker is expressing fond memories of his childhood experiences with his father. Others believe that the speaker is ambiguous about the father and that he suppresses childhood pain as he describes the father’s boisterousness in the kitchen. Basing your conclusion on the tone of the poem alone, write a paragraph about how you believe the poem should be interpreted.
2. How does Edelman establish a friendly relationship between the speaker and the reader in “Trouble”? Write a paragraph describing in what way this relationship creates the tone of the poem.

#### Writing Essays

1. Consider Clifton’s “homage to my hips,” Cummings’s “she being Brand / -new,” Hardy’s “The Workbox,” Whurr’s “The First-Rate Wife,” and Henley’s “When You Are Old” as poems about love. Write an essay that answers the following questions. What similarities do you find? That is, do the poets state that love creates joy, satisfaction, distress, embarrassment, trouble? How does the tone

of each of the poems enable you to draw your conclusions? What differences do you find in the ways the poets either control or do not control tone?

2. Consider these same poems (from question 1) from a feminist viewpoint (see Chapter 28). What importance and value do the poems give to women? How do they view women's actions? Write an essay arguing that any of these poems deserve praise or blame because of their treatment of women?
3. What judgments about modern city life do you think Léger conveys in his painting *The City* (p. 1-8)? If the tone of paintings can be considered similar to poetic tone, write an essay in which you consider in what ways *The City* is comparable to the presentation of detail in Eliot's "Preludes" (Chapter 14), Blake's "London" (Chapter 13), Sandburg's "Chicago" (Chapter 22), and Swift's "A Description of the Morning" (p. 859)—together with any other poems you wish to include?
4. Write an essay that explains how the details and ideas in Ridler's "Nothing Is Lost" (p. 855) shape the poem's tone. What is the effect of the stanzaic pattern and the rhymes on your understanding and on your responses to the poem's ideas? In terms of ideas and tone, how does this poem compare with Pinsky's "Dying" (p. 851)?
5. Quasimodo's "Auschwitz" (p. 853) concerns one of the twentieth century's central evils, the most abhorrent of the Nazi death camps, about which people have expressed anger, horror, indignation, outrage, disgust, hatred, and vengefulness. Write an essay in which you discuss to what degree you find these attitudes in Quasimodo's poem. How do such attitudes, or others, govern the poem's tone?

#### Creative Writing Assignment

1. Write a poem about a person or occasion that has made you either glad or angry. Try to create the same feelings in your reader, but create these feelings through your rendering of situation and your choices of the right words (*Possible topics*: a social injustice; an unfair grade; a compliment you have received on a task well done; the landing of a good job; the winning of a game; a rise in the price of gasoline; a good book or movie.)

#### Library Assignment

1. From resources in your library or online, find two critical biographies about Theodore Roethke published by university presses. What do these works disclose about Roethke's childhood and his family, particularly his father? On the basis of what you learn, should your interpretation of the tone of "My Papa's Waltz" be changed or unchanged? Why?

## Chapter 17

### Prosody: Sound, Rhythm, and Rhyme in Poetry

**P**rosody (the pronunciation or accent of a song or poem, a song set to music) is the general word describing the study of poetic sounds and rhythms. Common alternative words are **metrics**, **versification**, **mechanics of verse**, and the **music of poetry**. Most readers, when reading poetry aloud, interpret the lines and develop an appropriate speed and expressiveness of delivery—a proper *rhythm*. Indeed, some people think of rhythm and sound as the *music* of poetry because they convey musical rhythms and tempos. Like music, poetry often requires a regular beat. The tempo and loudness of poetry may vary freely, however, and a reader may stop at any time to repeat the sounds and to think about the words and ideas. It is the music of poetry that makes the speaking and hearing of poetry dramatic, exciting, and inspiring.

In considering prosody, we should recognize that poets, being especially attuned to language, blend words and ideas together so that "the *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the sense" (Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, line 365. The spelling of "eccho" is authentic; don't be alarmed.). The consequence of this idea is that *prosodic technique cannot be separated from a poem's content*. For this reason, the study of prosody aims to determine how poets control their words so that the sound of a poem complements its expression of emotions and ideas.

#### Important Definitions for Studying Prosody

To understand and discuss prosody, you need to be able to explain the various sounds of both speech and poetry. Let us grant that the subject is technical, detailed, and also subtle, and as a result, the study of vocal production can take, and has taken, entire careers. A basic knowledge of spoken sound, however, will enable you to analyze that aspect of the poet's craft that pertains to qualities of pronunciation and rhythm.

#### Vowel Sounds Create the Flow of Poetic Speech

The continuous stream of speech, whether conversation, oratory, or poetry, is provided mainly by **vowel sounds**. A vowel (from the Latin word *vox*, or "voice") results from vibrations resonating in the space between the tongue and the top of the mouth. As our tongues go up or down or forward or backward, or as they curl or flatten out, and as our lips move synchronously with our tongues, we form vowels. Some vowels are "long," such as the *ee* sound in "flee," the *ay* sound in "pay," the *ai* sound in "open," and the *oo* sound in "food" and "fruit." Others are "short," such as the *ih* sound in "fit" and "sit," the *uh* sound in "fun" and "done,"

