

Person and Place Poem Models

Eating Poetry

Mark Strand

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.
There is no happiness like mine.
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.
Her eyes are sad
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.
The light is dim.
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,
their blond legs burn like brush.
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,
she screams.

I am a new man.
I snarl at her and bark.
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

The Portrait

Stanley Kunitz

My mother never forgave my father
for killing himself,
especially at such an awkward time
and in a public park,
that spring
when I was waiting to be born.
She locked his name
in her deepest cabinet
and would not let him out,
though I could hear him thumping.
When I came down from the attic
with the pastel portrait in my hand
of a long-lipped stranger
with a brave moustache
and deep brown level eyes,
she ripped it into shreds
without a single word
and slapped me hard.
In my sixty-fourth year
I can feel my cheek
still burning.

Portrait in Georgia

Jean Toomer

Hair—braided chestnut,
coiled like a lyncher's rope,
Eyes—fagots*,
Lips—old scars, or the first red blisters,
Breath—the last sweet scent of cane,
And her slim body, white as the ash
of black flesh after flame.

*a bundle of sticks, twigs, or branches bound together and used as fuel, a fascine, a torch, etc.

Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio

James Wright

In the Shreve High football stadium,
I think of Polacks nursing long beers in Tiltonsville,
And gray faces of Negroes in the blast furnace at Benwood,
And the ruptured night watchman of Wheeling Steel,
Dreaming of heroes.

All the proud fathers are ashamed to go home.
Their women cluck like starved pullets,
Dying for love.

Therefore,
Their sons grow suicidally beautiful
At the beginning of October,
And gallop terribly against each other's bodies.

A Sybil

Rainer Maria Rilke

Long before our time they called her old,
But she'd walk down the same road every day.
Her age became too much to say
In years — and, like a forest's, would be told

In centuries. She comes to stand at dusk —
Her spot each time the same — and to foretell.
She is a hollow, wrinkled husk,
Dark as a fire-gutted citadel.

She has to turn her flock of talking loose
Or it will grow too crowded to relieve.
Flapping and screaming, words are flying all

Around her. Then, returning home to roost,
They find a perch beneath her eyebrows' eaves,
And in that shadow wait for night to fall.

The Neighbors by Don Stap

The wife comes out each morning barefoot, unemployed
and sweeps the porch.
And the husband? Who cares?
But Christy, who must have come to them too early
like the graying light of this September evening
flies around the yard with a bedsheet for a cape.
I watch from a safe distance,
thirty years old and childless.
She swings around and around the littlest pine tree
and falls into the grass so dizzy
she does not know what she belongs to.
I am as lucky and frightened as the crickets
that stopped chirping where she fell
and can feel her heart pounding against the earth.

Sarah by Harold Marcus

At night you scratched
at your wrists with a belt buckle
to try and let out the pressure,
and howled when the doctors took your diary
for the wire that held the pages together.
When your stomach would twist
and the rage would bloat your arms
in protest,
you would forget that your hair
flowed like honeywheat and how you could recite Blake.

I believe the
intelligent are more likely to give up on life;
that insight can be too heavy a burden.
I was once held to a bed
as I thrashed my feet like a swimmer
trying to kick myself out of my life
and they had to strap me into a straight jacket
to keep me where they wanted me.
You told me the sky was a huge arm
that the stars were needle marks
and because the night couldn't stand on its feet
it was always falling.
But I believe the universe was once a solid mass
under so much pressure it exploded
into all the stars and planets
and there was enough energy on this earth
for the sparks to begin life.

This is where we come from, Sarah,
from the one resounding blast
that will burst us into life.
Oh, I would have loved to have taken you
to the top of Pine Meadow Hill
where the clouds pound
like dark feet over the lake
and after the rage the sky opens
as the quarter moon hovers in the night like a scythe
and the stars hang on the vines of the Milky Way.

Crossing the Swamp

Mary Oliver

Here is the endless
wet thick
cosmos, the center
of everything—the nugget

of dense sap, branching
vines, the dark burred
faintly belching
bogs. Here

is *swamp*, here
is struggle,
closure—
pathless, seamless,

peerless mud. My bones
knock together at the pale
joints, trying
for foothold, fingerhold,

mindhold over
such slick crossings, deep
hipholes, hummocks*
that sink silently

into the black, slack
earthsoup. I feel
not wet so much as
painted and glittered

with the fat grassy
mires, the rich
and succulent marrows
of earth— a poor

dry stick given
one more chance by the whims
of swamp water— a bough
that still, after all these years,

could take root,
sprout, branch out, bud—
make of its life a breathing
palace of leaves.

Person & Place Poem Model Packet Analysis

Read each of the poems in the packet and answer the following questions, carefully analyzing each writer's use of concrete language and diction to enhance and convey meaning.

"The Portrait"

1. Who is the speaker?
2. What literally is the story of this poem, both past and present?
3. Who and what is this poem really about? Support your answer.
4. Quote the lines (concrete images) the writer uses to represent the following abstract thoughts:
 - a) The mother has repressed her feelings.
 - b) The speaker is still upset and hurt.
 - c) The father's memory is trying to surface.
 - d) The mother is shocked and upset.
 - e) The speaker admires the image of his father.
5. Another technique Kunitz uses in this poem is understatement. Identify the line(s) where he minimizes the statement of emotions/ tone through word choice, and explain how its absurdity affects the reader (mood).

"Sarah"

1. Who is the speaker, and to whom is he speaking?
2. What is the story in this poem—what is literally going on?
3. What is Sarah's view of life? Quote the lines/ phrases that support your answer.
4. How do we know the speaker can empathize with Sarah—that he knows how she feels? Quote the line(s).
5. How does the speaker's outlook differ from Sarah's? Support.
6. How do the final images affect the mood—how do they make you feel? What tone do they imply?
7. What concrete imagery does Marcus use to show the following abstract ideas?

a) She is suicidal.	d) She once tried suicide.
b) She is stressed out.	e) She feels hopeless.
c) She forgot how good life was for her.	f) There is hope.
8. List the abstractions in a - f above.

"Portrait in Georgia"

1. What is this poem about?
2. What is the speaker describing—literally and figuratively?
3. What specific words create an ominous (threatening, dangerous) tone?

"The Neighbors"

1. What is literally happening in this poem?
2. Who is the speaker?
3. Describe the child and her relationship with her parents.

4. What the speaker's attitude about her neighbors? Support your answers (prove it!).
5. Who is this poem primarily about? About whom do we gain insight? Support!

"Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio"

1. What do Wright's descriptions of people in the first stanza reveal about life in this town?
2. What does the second stanza say about families in this town?
3. What significance does football play in the life of this town and this poem?

"A Sybil" *

1. What metaphors does the speaker use to describe the woman in the poem?
2. What do they reveal about her and about the speaker's tone?
3. What clues in the poem reveal what a "Sybil" is?

***sibyl**

- (Myth & Legend / Classical Myth & Legend) (in ancient Greece and Rome) any of a number of women believed to be oracles or prophetesses, one of the most famous being the sibyl of Cumae, who guided Aeneas through the underworld
- (Spirituality, New Age, Astrology & Self-help / Alternative Belief Systems) a witch, fortune-teller, or sorceress

Source: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/sibyl>

"Crossing the Swamp"

1. What overall impression do you get from Oliver's descriptions of the swamp? Would you want to go there? Quote three different passages that support your claims.
2. What is the speaker's tone/attitude toward the swamp? How do you know? Discuss three different passages that support your claim.
3. Discuss the structure of this poem. What are your thoughts about it? What effects does it have on meaning?