



“THE BROKEN TOWER”

HART CRANE

The bell-rope that gathers God at dawn
Dispatches me as though I dropped down the knell
Of a spent day—to wander the cathedral lawn
From pit to crucifix, feet chill on steps from hell.

Have you not heard, have you not seen that corps
Of shadows in the tower, whose shoulders sway
Antiphonal¹ carillons² launched before
The stars are caught and hived³ in the sun's ray?

The bells, I say, the bells break down their tower;
And swing I know not where. Their tongues engrave
Membrane through marrow, my long-scattered score
Of broken intervals... And I, their sexton⁴ slave!

Oval encyclicals⁵ in canyons heaping
The impasse high with choir. Banked voices slain!
Pagodas campaniles⁶ with reveilles out leaping-
O terraced echoes prostrate on the plain!...

And so it was I entered the broken world
To trace the visionary company of love, its voice
An instant in the wind (I know not whither hurled)
But not for long to hold each desperate choice.

¹ *A devotional composition sung responsively as part of a liturgy; A short liturgical text chanted or sung responsively preceding or following a psalm, psalm verse, or canticle; Such a text formerly used as a response but now rendered independently; A response; a reply: “It would be truer . . . to see [conservation] as an antiphon to the modernization of the 1950s and 1960s” (Raphael Samuel).*

² *A stationary set of chromatically tuned bells in a tower, usually played from a keyboard; A composition written or arranged for these bells.*

³ *To accumulate.*

⁴ *An employee or officer of a church who is responsible for the care and upkeep of property and sometimes for ringing bells and digging graves.*

⁵ *Intended for general or wide circulation.*

⁶ *A bell tower, especially one near but not attached to a church or other public building.*

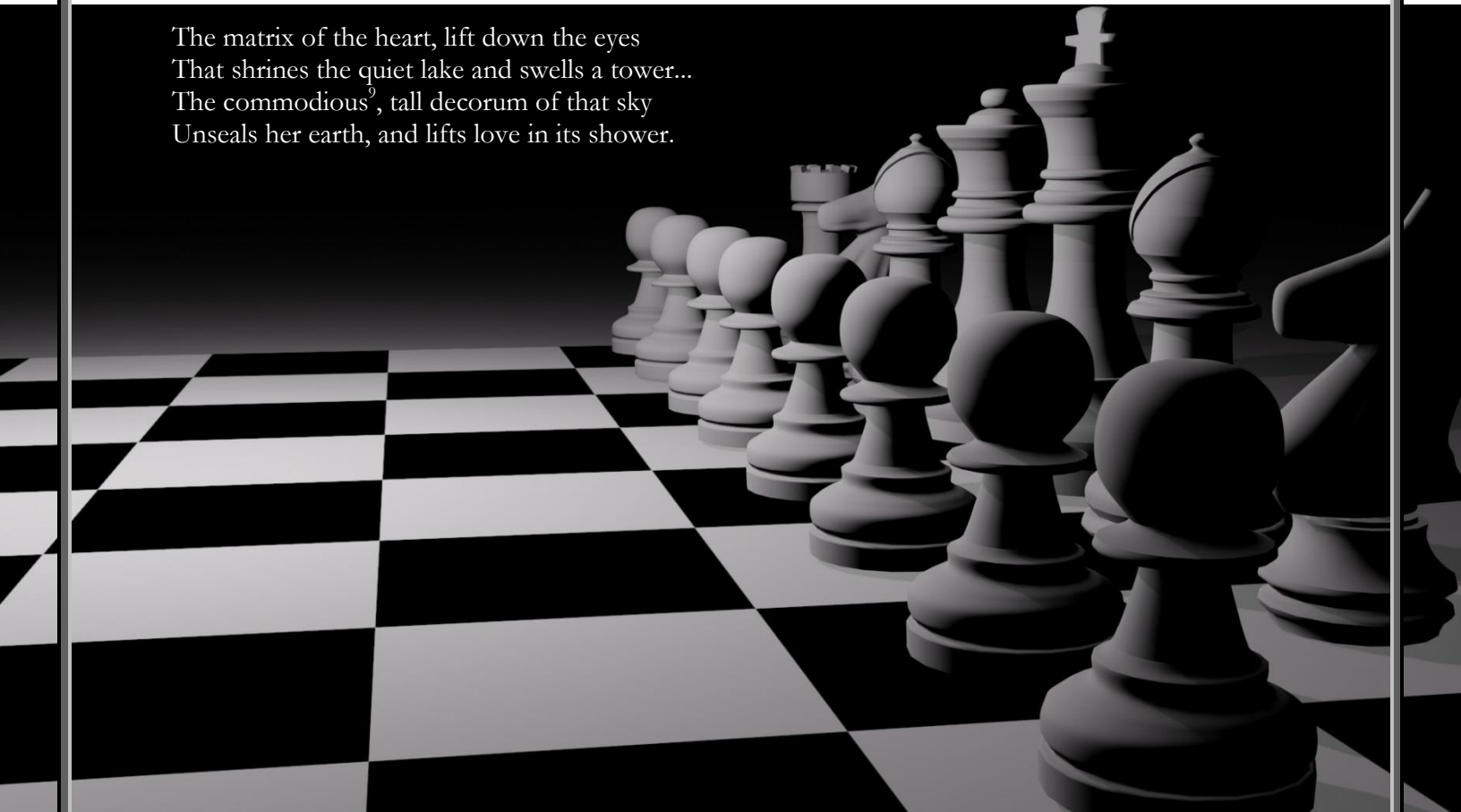
My world I poured. But was it cognate⁷, scored
Of that tribunal monarch of the air
Whose thigh embronzes earth, strikes crystal Word
In wounds pledges once to hope—cleft to despair?

The steep encroachments of my blood left me
No answer (could blood hold such a lofty tower
As flings the question true?) —or is it she
Whose sweet mortality stirs latent power?—

And through whose pulse I hear, counting the strokes
My veins recall and add, revived and sure
The angelus⁸ of wars my chest evokes:
What I hold healed, original now, and pure...

And builds, within, a tower that is not stone
(Not stone can jacket heaven)—but slip
Of pebbles, —visible wings of silence sown
In azure circles, widening as they dip

The matrix of the heart, lift down the eyes
That shrines the quiet lake and swells a tower...
The commodious⁹, tall decorum of that sky
Unseals her earth, and lifts love in its shower.



⁷ related

⁸ A prayer said three times a day by Roman Catholics in memory of the Annunciation the sound of a bell rung in Roman Catholic churches to announce the time when the Angelus should be recited.

⁹ Large and roomy.

ANALYZING A POEM

OVERVIEW

Poetry tends to differ from other literary works by its sound: its use of language. Start by reading the poem silently. Then read it aloud. Take care to note the literal meaning and figurative meaning. The literal meaning is what actually happens; the figurative meaning is the main idea behind the work, the underlying theme. The figurative meaning may be discovered by asking yourself the following question: *What does the author expect the reader to learn or experience from the poem?*

An analysis of a poem is not a summary. An analysis requires an interpretation (*explication*) by the reader. An analysis may focus upon a single element of a poem (*plot, character, point of view, symbol, tone, figurative language, irony, etc.*). An explication (*or interpretation*) of a work may concentrate on a close reading of a specific part of the work (*line-by-line or word-by-word*). An explication entails not only what the work means, but also how it accomplishes the author's purpose.

THE GENERAL PROCESS

1. **Examine the title:** Is it indicative of a conflict or a human condition? Is it symbolic of something else? Is it sarcastic, satiric, humorous, or serious? Is it descriptive? Why do you think the author chose it?
2. **Read the poem:** Are there any indications of the meaning? What is the topic? The setting? The voice (*the speaker*)? What images are evoked? Is there a historical or cultural link?
3. **Study the ending:** Where has the poem taken you?
4. **Examine the poem by parts:** Is there an organization? A sequence?
5. **Determine the tone:** What is the author's attitude toward the subject?

WRITING THE POETRY ANALYSIS

1. Write a clear introduction on the work, indicating the title and author. Follow the introduction with a precise thesis statement that tells the reader "the point" of the paper.
2. Move point by point through the paper, making certain that each paragraph has a topic sentence and the other sentences in the paragraph support or expand upon the topic sentence.
3. Write a conclusion that ties the paper together: It should re-state the thesis in different words.

TEN CLUES TO ANALYSIS

Approach a poem by looking for clues. The following questions might help you discover what a poem means and how the poet attempts to convey the meaning. When writing your paper, you may concentrate on only one of these "clues" or many of them. The first clue (*theme*), however,

is usually the most critical. Read the poem several times before starting your analysis. A slow, careful reading of the work is essential.

1. What is the theme of the poem? What is the poet trying to say? What is the poem about?
2. What happens in the poem? Are conflicts or themes introduced? Resolved?
3. Who is the speaker? What is the "point of view" or perspective of the speaker? The perspective might be social, intellectual, political, or even physical.
4. What is the setting? What is the time and place? How does the poet make use of the physical description? Does it create a mood?
5. Are there any key statements or lines that indicate meaning? Look for one key line or symbol; however, the poet may make use of recurring symbols, actions, or motifs.
6. How does the sound or language contribute to the poem's meaning? Does the rhythm affect what the poet is trying to convey? What kinds of words are used? Are there words with double meanings?
7. Does the poem refer to other literary works? For example, is there a Biblical reference or reference to another poem? How does the other work relate to the meaning?
8. Is there a historical, ideological, or cultural aspect? Does the poem refer to a world event, period of time, or particular aspect of culture (race, status, gender, class)? What are the basic ideas of the world or human condition or experience (love, hate, orderliness of the universe, etc.)?
9. What qualities or emotions does the poem evoke? How does the poem make you feel?
10. What imagery is used? Does the poet use physical imagery or figures of speech, such as metaphors?

Poets use language to express or represent thoughts, ideas, feelings, actions, or experiences. What do you "see" when you read a poem? Imagery may involve the other senses (*hearing, smell*) or an abstract concept (*thought, intellect*). When analyzing a poem, take note of the devices a poet uses to convey or emphasize meaning. The following are a few of the more common poetic devices.

Simile: Directly stated comparisons, using the words "like" or "as." He fought like a lion.

Metaphor: Implied comparisons of things that are not really alike. "All the world's a stage"—William Shakespeare.

Personification: Ascribed human attributes to non-human objects. "Meantime the heaven wept upon our heads"—Robert Louis Stevenson.

Onomatopoeia: The sound of the word reflects its sense: crack, whiz, whoosh, sputter:

Irony: The expressed thought is actually opposite from the intended meaning.

Alliteration: The repetition of consonant sounds. "Some sat, some stood, some slowly strayed"—Sir Walter Scott.