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What struck me after reading the selected poems from Ginsberg, Plath, and Lowell is how the collection of poems broadcasts a similar dark tone. I am further struck by the manner in which the poems collectively evoke similar emotions in response to various but similar events. For the majority of this short response, I will explain the parallels I see between the tones of the poems in addition to the similarities I see between the events described in the poems and the emotions that accompany them.

Elements from each poem that elicit a dark tone…

From my experience of analyzing literature, I have learned to draw parallels between different texts. It is a tactic that I believe provides significant insight into the cultural moment of the texts. It further elicits any philosophical and moral critiques or commentaries present in the texts. Taking this into consideration with the three poets and their poems, the poems certainly create a collective dark tone. The tone is certainly not constant between poems, with some edging on the darker side of things, but they are cohesive enough for me to visualize a category for these poems.

The dark tone I have described above is characterized by the mood set by each poem’s language. Lowell’s poems with their vague diction (Christmas on Black Rock), elusive scenes (Skunk Hour), and the uncomfortably tranquil sense of comfort (Memories of West Street and Lepke) converge to manifest an air of overall discomfort, uneasiness, and what I will call attempted escapism. Attempted escapism is attempted on purpose in each of Lowell’s I believe, because it contributes to the discomforting tone that Lowell has arguably successfully rendered in each of these poems. Attempted escapism in my mind is just as it sounds; attempting to evoke the feeling of escapism (escaping from reality to some alternative for better or worse) but failing to achieve the full sense of escape, leaving the reader on the edge of escape but not quite there. For Lowell, each of these poems presents the speaker of the poem in tension between states of escape and remaining in their circumstances. In Christmas on Black Rock, the speaker is depicted in tension between the celebration of Christmas and the true nature of the celebration (I really think this poem is a critique of what the Christmas tradition has become as opposed to what its biblical origins depict. For instance, the juxtaposition of child Christ and the Christmas tree evokes a reference to how the Christmas tree has become a symbol of Christmas instead of the Christ).

This dark tone follows suit in Plath’s poems as well. Her poems are similarly focused on a fleeting sense of could have and should haves. Blackberrying build an ominous tension between the act of picking blackberries some interruptive event. It carries with it heavy allegorical and symbolic weight for Plath’s own life, much like Lowell’s poems. The tone is also similar in that there seems to be a looming weight on the speakers of each poem. There is almost a sense of dramatic irony conveyed as the speakers seem to know something that is gently hinted to the reader, but never concretely defined. My apologies if this response seems disconnected from premise to premise at times, I write this as a stream of consciousness because I seldom have the opportunity to write in this style and I quite enjoy it. Anyways, the point I was trying to make is that, like Lowell’s poetry, Plath appears to capture this quality of darkness that I can only describe as the uneasiness that follows one examining themselves and their lives and realizing what unknowns are still present. Its as if this dramatic irony is present because neither Plath nor Lowell can articulate concretely what this unknown source of darkness is that they hint to in their poems.

I am going to lump Plath’s “Colossus” and “Daddy” into one analysis because I think they fit together. “Colossus” serves as a prequel to “Daddy” in that it forbears Plath’s dilemma with the male figures in her life. “Colossus” I think is a prequel or at least comes first in the progression because it demonstrates Plath’s method to reconcile with deeply affective personal trials in a symbolic fashion. Due to the symbolic nature of “Colossus” it would appear that Plath is shielding her thoughts still and hasn’t quite processed them enough to be emboldened enough to unmask the symbols and name the torturers of her mind as she does in “Daddy”.

Finally, Ginsberg’s poems contribute to this dark tone in a similar fashion as the latter poems. I think Ginsberg hits the same notes as Plath and Lowell because his poems follow that confessional style. They confess but they also critique. I would venture to say that the best parallel to draw between these authors is that they all confess some vice or vices in their lives, but then go on to critique the system or perpetrators as partial or even whole causes of their predicaments which enable their vices.