English 1201: Patrick Roache Poem Analysis Model Answers

1. State an appropriate tone for the speaker in this poem. Show how this tone is developed with two references to the text (hint: tone is developed through word choice and phrasing, repetition, etc.).

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The poem entitled “21” by Patrick Roache quite clearly reveals the bitter/resentful tone of the speaker. The speaker is bitter over the fact that his father, a serious alcoholic, has destroyed his family’s life because of the choices he makes and the behaviors he engaged in. This tone is revealed through the word choice, phrasing, punctuation usage, and clever enjambment. For example, by comparing his father’s drunken behavior to that of an “avalanche picking up speed and debris as he falls…tumbling, stumbling”, it is clear that he acknowledges the destructive, uncontrollable nature of his father, and he resents the fact that his father has fallen off of the wagon forcing the speaker to “blame” himself, and his mother to contemplate “divorce”. The speaker’s tone is also shown in the final stanza of the poem where it says, “When my mother was pregnant with me,/ I wonder if she hoped, / as so many mothers do,/ that her baby boy would grow up to be/ just like/ his father.” By breaking up this final line and putting the emphasis on this idea of the mother’s hopes and dreams being dashed because if the speaker were to be like his father, he would be an alcoholic, it further emphasizes the tone of bitter disappointment that the speaker feels as a result of his broken family situation.

2. State the main symbol of this poem. What does it symbolize? How is it effective in this poem?

In the poem “21”, there are a couple of different symbols found throughout the piece. In particular, the VHS tape seems particularly significant. By using the image of “rewinding old VHS tapes” and “home videos” Patrick is able to personalize this poem as the audience is given the opportunity to witness what life was really like in this household. By using the symbol of the VHS tapes, the poet creatively allows for the opportunity to “rewind” through his life, skipping over the drama free years, and simply focus on the moments of great significance. For example, the moments that make the highlight reel include, threatening “divorce”, exchanging “blows” during Christmas, cleaning up “vomit”, etc. Then, by the end of the poem, or the start of the “VHS”, where there should be excitement and anticipation of the story to be revealed and the potential for a great life lived, there is only heartbreaking disappointment because instead of the mother wanting her son to be “just like/ his father”, this is the last thing that she wants.

3. Discuss how the use of color and line is used effectively in visual #1. Use two references to the visual.

The use of color and line in visual #1 is effective as it helps to create the theme that emotional pain can have an isolating effect. In this visual, there is only one figure of a person that seems to be broken by the struggles they have endured. The emotional pain is symbolically represented in the black and grey values used to create the image; more significant is the fact that this individual seems to be surrounded by darkness (solid black), from which there doesn’t seem to be any escape. Additionally, the curved lines of this individual’s shoulders, bent head, and crossed arms and legs make them feel more insular, almost as if they are trying to hide within themselves. By bending the head and sloping the shoulders inward it makes it seem as if this individual is holding the weight of the world/many burdens on her shoulders.

4. State a title for visual #2. Defend, using two specific references to the visual, why your title is appropriate.

An appropriate title for visual #2 could be “journey of futility”. This appears to be an appropriate title for a number of reasons. To begin, the human figure that is present in the bottom left corner of the visual appears to be walking with a sense of burden into the empty abyss. There appears to be no destination on the horizon, and as such, a sense of hopelessness is created. His shoulders and back are curved downward into a heavy slouch indicating that he is carrying a heavy burden on his shoulders. This futility may come from the fact that his journey will never end, and he is doomed to live an eternity pursuing a journey that will never end. Additionally, the use of deep reds, oranges, and blacks, are symbolically significant of the pain, anger, and/or frustration that this individual might feel as he embarks on this never-ending journey.