Tone Notes

Dear Miss Manners: What are the **proper presents** to give bridesmaids and my fiancé's ushers? Is something so untraditional as a good book – different books for each, of course, according to their tastes – all right instead of things like bracelets and cufflinks they may never use?

GENTLE READER: Are you trying to give these people something they might enjoy, or are you trying to do the proper thing by them? Books, at best, are only read, but useless, monogrammed silver objects that cannot be returned serve to remind one of the occasion of their presentation every time one sees them tarnishing away, unused. Cuff links and bracelets are all right, since everyone has too many of them, but silver golf tees or toothpaste tube squeezers are ideal.

⁻⁻ Judith Martin, Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior

GENTLE READER: Are you trying to give these people something they might enjoy, or are you trying to do the proper thing by them? Books, at best, are only read, but useless, monogrammed silver objects that cannot be returned serve to remind one of the occasion of their presentation every time one sees them tarnishing away, unused. Cuff links and bracelets are all right, since everyone has too many of them, but silver golf tees or toothpaste tube squeezers are ideal.

What is Miss Manners' attitude toward typical bridesmaids/ushers' presents?

What is her attitude toward the gentle reader? Does she answer the question?

Tone

- The attitude a writer (not speaker) takes toward the reader, a subject, or a character.
- Tone is conveyed through the writer's:
 - DICTION (choice of words)
 - SYNTAX arrangement of words
 - Purposeful arrangement of DETAILS and IMAGES

Sylvia Plath, "Cut: For Susan O'Neill Roe"

What a thrill –
My thumb instead of an onion.
The top quite gone
Except for a sort of a hinge

Of skin,
A flap like a hat,
dead white.
Then a red plush.

What is the poet's attitude toward the cut?

What images and diction create the tone?

Author's attitude toward cut = IRONIC

What a thrill –
My thumb instead of an onion.
The top quite gone
Except for a sort of a hinge

While she calls the CUT a "THRILL" she really means it's horrific

Of skin,
A flap like a hat,
Dead white.
Then a red plush.

Plath actually increases the sense of horror by trivializing the cut --comparing her thumb to an onion and the partially severed top to "a flap like a hat".

What attitude toward the cut and, by implication, toward life itself, does Plath's use of colors and diction reveal?

Of skin,
A flap like a hat,
Dead white.
Then a red plush.

White is associated with death (pallor of corpses) – it generalizes the cut and forces the reader to consider death itself

"red plush" = indicates luxurious lushness, almost seductive

Attitude revealed here is a dual one – fear of death and attraction to it

Mother to Son

by Langston Hughes

Well, son, I'll tell you: Life for me ain't been no crystal stair. It's had tacks in it, And splinters, And boards torn up, And places with no carpet on the floor --Bare. But all the time I'se been a-climbin' on, And reachin' landin's, And turnin' corners, And sometimes goin' in the dark Where there ain't been no light. So boy, don't you turn back. Don't you set down on the steps 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard. Don't you fall now --For I'se still goin', honey, I'se still climbin', And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Understanding the Poem

- Extended Metaphor:
 - Life to stairs
 - "tacks", "splinters", "boards torn up", and "no carpet" = obstacles
 - "reachin' landin's" and turnin' corners" = successes

Poem's Subject Matter

- Perserverance
- Obstacles could be alluding to:
 - Poverty
 - Prejudice
 - Illness
 - Loss of loved ones
- Why does she leave it vague?

Diction

"Life for me ain't been no crystal stair."

- Diction = "crystal"
 - Connotations of crystal are luxury, beauty
- Dialect = "ain't" and "I'se still going'"
 - Adds authenticity to an uneducated mother working hard to support herself and her son

Details

- Detail = why does the author choose to make the comparison between the mother's life and a staircase?
 - Stairs are common
 - Strong parallel between climbing the staircase and fighting to get ahead in life
- Detail = why repeat "Don't you"?
 - Negative phrasing to motivate son to do something

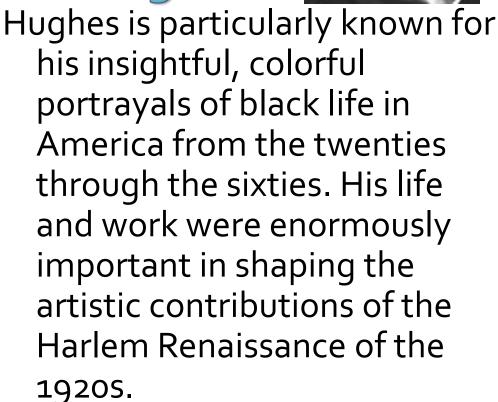
Tone – Must Distinguish

between...

Speaker = mother

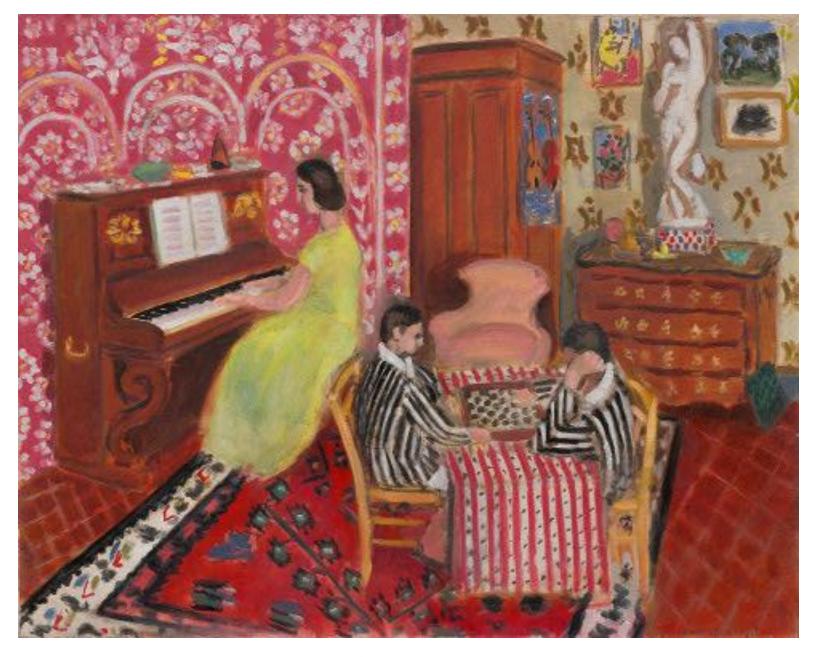


Writer = Hughes



Tone

- What is the tone of the author towards the mother character?
 - respectful
- What is the tone of the author towards the subject matter?
 - empathetic



Henri Matisse, Pianist and Checker Players, 1924