**Chapter 7**

**Figurative Language 3**

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**Much Madness is divinest Sense**   
**Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)**

Much Madness is divinest Sense -

To a discerning Eye -

Much Sense - the starkest Madness -

’Tis the Majority

In this, as all, prevail -

Assent - and you are sane -

Demur - you’re straightway dangerous -

And handled with a Chain -Much Madness is divinest Sense -

To a discerning Eye -

Much Sense - the starkest Madness -

’Tis the Majority

In this, as all, prevail -

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Demur - you’re straightway dangerous -

And handled with a Chain -

**The Sun Rising   
John Donne (1572-1631)**

Busy old fool, unruly sun,

Why dost thou thus,

Through windows, and through curtains call on us?

Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?

Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide

Late school boys and sour prentices,

Go tell court huntsmen that the king will ride,

Call country ants to harvest offices,

Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,

Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams, so reverend and strong

Why shouldst thou think?

I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,

But that I would not lose her sight so long;

If her eyes have not blinded thine,

Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,

Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine

Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with me.

Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,

And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

She's all states, and all princes, I,

Nothing else is.

Princes do but play us; compared to this,

All honor's mimic, all wealth alchemy.

Thou, sun, art half as happy as we,

In that the world's contracted thus.

Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be

To warm the world, that's done in warming us.

Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;

This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.

**Incident   
Countee Cullen (1903-1946)**

Once riding in old Baltimore,

Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,

I saw a Baltimorean

Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,

And he was no whit bigger,

And so I smiled, but he poked out

His tongue, and called me, 'Nigger.'

I saw the whole of Baltimore

From May until December;

Of all the things that happened there

That's all that I remember.

**New England  
Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935)**

Here where the wind is always north-north-east

And children learn to walk on frozen toes,

Wonder begets an envy of all those

Who boil elsewhere with such a lyric yeast

Of love that you will hear them at a feast

Where demons would appeal for some repose,

Still clamoring where the chalice overflows

And crying wildest who have drunk the least.

Passion is here a soilure of the wits,

We're told, and Love a cross for them to bear;

Joy shivers in the corner where she knits

And Conscience always has the rocking-chair,

Cheerful as when she tortured into fits

The first cat that was ever killed by Care.

**Barbie Doll  
Marge Piercy (b.1936)**

This girlchild was born as usual

and presented dolls that did pee-pee

and miniature GE stoves and irons

and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.

Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:

You have a great big nose and fat legs.

She was healthy, tested intelligent,

possessed strong arms and back,

abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.

She went to and fro apologizing.

Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.

She was advised to play coy,

exhorted to come on hearty,

exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.

Her good nature wore out

like a fan belt.

So she cut off her nose and her legs

and offered them up.

In the casket displayed on satin she lay

with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,

a turned-up putty nose,

dressed in a pink and white nightie.

Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.

Consummation at last.

To every woman a happy ending.

**The Chimney Sweeper   
William Blake (1757-1827)**

When my mother died I was very young,

And my father sold me while yet my tongue

Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"

So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head

That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,

"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,

You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, & that very night,

As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!

That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,

Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,

And he opened the coffins & set them all free;

Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,

And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,

They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.

And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,

He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark

And got with our bags & our brushes to work.

Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;

So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

**Ozymandias  
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)**

I met a traveler from an antique land

Who said: `Two vast and trunkless legs of stone

Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,

Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,

And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,

Tell that its sculptor well those passions read

Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,

The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.

And on the pedestal these words appear --

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:

Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare

The lone and level sands stretch far away.'

**Batter my heart, three- personed God   
John Donne (1572-1631)**

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you

As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;

That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend

Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

I, like an usurp'd town to another due,

Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;

Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,

But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.

Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,

But am betroth'd unto your enemy;

Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,

Take me to you, imprison me, for I,

Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,

Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

**Sorting Laundry   
Elisavietta Ritchie (b.1932)**

Folding clothes,  
I think of folding you  
into my life.

Our king-sized sheets  
like tablecloths  
for the banquets of giants,

pillowcases, despite so many  
washings, seems still  
holding our dreams.

Towels patterned orange and green,  
flowered pink and lavender,  
gaudy, bought on sale,

reserved, we said, for the beach,  
refusing, even after years,  
to bleach into respectability.

So many shirts and skirts and pants  
recycling week after week, head over heels  
recapitulating themselves.

All those wrinkles  
To be smoothed, or else  
ignored; they're in style.

Myriad uncoupled socks  
which went paired into the foam  
like those creatures in the ark.

And what's shrunk  
is tough to discard  
even for Goodwill.

In pockets, surprises:  
forgotten matches,  
lost screws clinking the drain;

well-washed dollars, legal tender  
for all debts public and private,  
intact despite agitation;

and, gleaming in the maelstrom,  
one bright dime,  
broken necklace of good gold

you brought from Kuwait,  
the strangely tailored shirt  
left by a former lover…

If you were to leave me,  
if I were to fold  
only my own clothes,

the convexes and concaves  
of my blouses, panties, stockings, bras  
turned upon themselves,

a mountain of unsorted wash  
could not fill  
the empty side of the bed

**The Unknown Citizen**  
**W.H. Auden (1907- 1973)**

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be

One against whom there was no official complaint,

And all the reports of his conduct agree

That, in the modern sense of the old-fashioned word, he was a saint,

For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.

Except for the war till the day he retired

He worked in a factory and never got fired,

But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.

Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,

For his union reports that he paid his dues,

(Our report of his union shows it was sound)

And our Social Psychology workers found

That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.

The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day,

And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.

Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,

And his Health-card shows that he was once in hospital but left it cured.

Both Producers Research and High--Grade Living declare

He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan

And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,

A gramophone, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.

Our researchers into Public Opinion are content

That he held the proper opinions for the time of the year;

When there was peace he was for peace; when there was war he went.

He was married and added five children to the population,

which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation,

And our teachers report he never interfered with their education.

Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:

Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

**Departmental   
Robert Frost (1874-1963)**

An ant on the tablecloth

Ran into a dormant moth

Of many times his size.

He showed not the least surprise.

His business wasn't with such.

He gave it scarcely a touch,

And was off on his duty run.

Yet if he encountered one

Of the hive's enquiry squad

Whose work is to find out God

And the nature of time and space,

He would put him onto the case.

Ants are a curious race;

One crossing with hurried tread

The body of one of their dead

Isn't given a moment's arrest-

Seems not even impressed.

But he no doubt reports to any

With whom he crosses antennae,

And they no doubt report

To the higher-up at court.

Then word goes forth in Formic:

'Death's come to Jerry McCormic,

Our selfless forager Jerry.

Will the special Janizary

Whose office it is to bury

The dead of the commissary

Go bring him home to his people.

Lay him in state on a sepal.

Wrap him for shroud in a petal.

Embalm him with ichor of nettle.

This is the word of your Queen.'

And presently on the scene

Appears a solemn mortician;

And taking formal position,

With feelers calmly atwiddle,

Seizes the dead by the middle,

And heaving him high in air,

Carries him out of there.

No one stands round to stare.

It is nobody else's affair

It couldn't be called ungentle

But how thoroughly departmental

**APO 96225  
Larry Rottmann (b. 1942)**

A young man once went off to war in a far country,  
 and when he had time, he wrote home and said,  
 “Dear Mom, sure rains a lot here.”

But his mother — reading between the lines as mothers   
 always do — wrote back,  
 “We’re quite concerned. Tell us what it’s really like.”

And the young man responded,  
 “Wow! You ought to see the funny monkeys.”

To which the mother replied,   
“Don’t hold back. How is it there?”

And the young man wrote,   
“The sunsets here are spectacular!”

In her next letter, the mother pleaded,  
 “Son, we want you to tell us everything. Everything!”

So the next time he wrote, the young man said,  
 “Today I killed a man. Yesterday, I helped drop napalm  
 on women and children.”

And the father wrote right back,  
 “Please don’t write such depressing letters. You’re   
 upsetting your mother.”

So, after a while,   
the young man wrote,   
“Dear Mom, sure rains here a lot.”

**In the inner city   
Lucille Clifton (b. 1936)**

In the inner city

or

like we call it

home

we think a lot about uptown

and the silent nights

and the houses straight as

dead men

and the pastel lights

and we hang on to our no place

happy to be alive

and in the inner city

or

like we call it

home

**Mr. Z   
M. Carl Holman (1919- 1988)**

1 Taught early that his mother’s skin was the sign of error,

He dressed and spoke the perfect part of honor;

Won scholarships, attended the best schools,

Disclaimed kinship with jazz and spirituals;

5 Chose prudent, raceless views of each situation,

Or when he could not cleanly skirt dissension,

Faced up to the dilemma, firmly seized

Whatever ground was Anglo-Saxonized.

In diet, too, his practice was exemplary:

10 Of pork in its profane forms he was wary;

Expert in vintage wines, sauces and salads,

His palate shrank from cornbread, yams and collards.

He was as careful whom he chose to kiss:

His bride had somewhere lost her Jewishness,

15 But kept her blue eyes; an Episcopalian

Prelate proclaimed them matched chameleon.

Choosing the right addresses, here, abroad,

They shunned those places where they might be barred;

Even less anxious to be asked to dine

20 Where hosts catered to kosher accent or exotic skin.

And so he climbed, unclogged by ethnic weights,

An airborne plant, flourishing without roots.

Not one false note was struck—until he died:

His subtly grieving widow could have flayed

25 The obit writers, ringing crude changes on a clumsy phrase:

“One of the most distinguished members of his race.”

**My Last Duchess  
Robert Browning (1812- 1889)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| THAT’S my last Duchess painted on the wall, |  |
| Looking as if she were alive. I call |  |
| That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf’s hands |  |
| Worked busily a day, and there she stands. |  |
| Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said | *5* |
| “Frà Pandolf” by design, for never read |  |
| Strangers like you that pictured countenance, |  |
| The depth and passion of its earnest glance, |  |
| But to myself they turned (since none puts by |  |
| The curtain I have drawn for you, but I) | *10* |
| And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst, |  |
| How such a glance came there; so, not the first |  |
| Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ’twas not |  |
| Her husband’s presence only, called that spot |  |
| Of joy into the Duchess’ cheek: perhaps | *15* |
| Frà Pandolf chanced to say, “Her mantle laps |  |
| Over my lady’s wrist too much,” or “Paint |  |
| Must never hope to reproduce the faint |  |
| Half-flush that dies along her throat:” such stuff |  |
| Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough | *20* |
| For calling up that spot of joy. She had |  |
| A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad. |  |
| Too easily impressed: she liked whate’er |  |
| She looked on, and her looks went everywhere. |  |
| Sir, ’twas all one! My favor at her breast, | *25* |
| The dropping of the daylight in the West, |  |
| The bough of cherries some officious fool |  |
| Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule |  |
| She rode with round the terrace—all and each |  |
| Would draw from her alike the approving speech, | *30* |
| Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked |  |
| Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked |  |
| My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name |  |
| With anybody’s gift. Who’d stoop to blame |  |
| This sort of trifling? Even had you skill | *35* |
| In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will |  |
| Quite clear to such an one, and say, “Just this |  |
| Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss, |  |
| Or there exceed the mark”—and if she let |  |
| Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set | *40* |
| Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse, |  |
| —E’en then would be some stooping; and I choose |  |
| Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt, |  |
| Whene’er I passed her; but who passed without |  |
| Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands; | *45* |
| Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands |  |
| As if alive. Will’t please you rise? We’ll meet |  |
| The company below, then. I repeat, |  |
| The Count your master’s known munificence |  |
| Is ample warrant that no just pretence | *50* |
| Of mine for dowry will be disallowed; |  |
| Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed |  |
| At starting, is my object. Nay, we’ll go |  |
| Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though, |  |
| Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, | *55* |
| Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me! |  |