

Example Poetry Analysis, - Prepared by Sara Patrick

1. Copy of poem:

"Auto Wreck" by Karl Shapiro

Its quick soft silver bell beating, beating,
And down the dark one ruby flare
Pulsing out red light like an artery,
The ambulance at top speed floating down
Past beacons and illuminated clocks
Wings in a heavy curve, dips down,
And brakes speed, entering the crowd.
The doors leap open, emptying light;
Stretchers are laid out, the mangled lifted
And stowed into the little hospital.
Then the bell, breaking the hush, tolls
once.

And the ambulance with its terrible cargo
Rocking, slightly rocking, moves away,
As the doors, an afterthought, are closed.
We are deranged, walking among the cops
Who sweep glass and are large and
composed.
One is still making notes under the light.
One with a bucket douches ponds of blood
Into the street and gutter.
One hangs lanterns on the wrecks that
cling,
Empty husks of locusts, to iron poles.
Our throats were tight as tourniquets,
Our feet were bound with splints, but now,
Like convalescents intimate and gauche,

We speak through sickly smiles and warn
With the stubborn saw of common sense,
The grim joke and the banal resolution.
The traffic moves around with care,
But we remain, touching a wound
That opens to our richest horror.
Already old, the question Who shall die?
Becomes unspoken Who is innocent?
For death in war is done by hands;
Suicide has cause and stillbirth, logic;
And cancer, simple as a flower, blooms.
But this invites the occult mind,
Cancels our physics with a sneer,
And spatters all we knew of denouement
Across the expedient and wicked stones.

2. Poem published: 1941

3. Facts about Karl Shapiro:

- Karl Shapiro was born in Baltimore, Maryland on 10 November 1913
- Shapiro was Jewish, and felt rejected by students at the University of Virginia (1932-1933) who, Shapiro claims, regarded themselves as superior to Jews.

- Due to his self-consciousness about his background, he thought of changing his name to "Karl Camden," to sound more Germanic. Although he never changed his last name, he did legally change the spelling of his first name from Carl to the more Germanic Karl.

4. If I could ask Shapiro any question, I would want to know what inspired him to write "Auto Wreck." Was he ever in a major car crash or perhaps did he witness one?

5. **Physical analysis:** word count: 259; lines: 39; stanzas: 3

6. **Topic:** A car crash

7. **Summary:** The poem starts with a description of an ambulance rushing to the scene of a crash, and hurriedly gathering up the victims and rushing them away. The second and third stanzas explore the emotions felt after the car crash from the perspective of a witness.

8. **Theme:** A major theme from "Auto Wreck" is death. The author is exploring the random and illogical nature of mortality by contrasting the car crash with other forms of death (war, suicide, stillbirth, cancer) that are more understandable.

9. **Mood:** gloomy, reflective

10. "Auto Wreck" is a lyric poem because it gives a description of an event and reflections on it, but does not tell a story.

11. **Personal reflections:** I selected this poem because of the realistic images and how a reader can vividly picture the accident as if he/she was there to see it. It's a morbid poem, but the theme is relevant, since everyone will die some day and no one knows if it will be sudden, like a car crash, or come on slowly like cancer. My favorite line is, "One with a bucket douches ponds of blood." It refers to the police man washing away the exaggerated ponds of blood from the accident. I know this line is unpleasant, but I like it because it so powerfully displays the shock of the onlooker.

12. "Auto Wreck" reminds me of John Donne's poem, "Death Be Not Proud" because they both deal with the themes of mortality. However, they are very different poems since Donne's poem denies death's power and mock's death, while Shapiro seems perplexed by the unpredictableness of death by car crashes.

13. **Confusing passage:** I'm not sure I understand this passage: "We speak through sickly smiles and warn / With the stubborn saw of common sense, / The grim joke and the banal resolution."

14. Vocabulary:

- douche: (verb) here it means to wash away with water
- convalescent: (noun) a patient who is recovering from an illness or the effects of medical treatment
- gauche: (adjective) lacking grace or tact in social situations; socially awkward
- banal: (adjective) boringly ordinary and lacking in originality; dull; unoriginal
- occult: (adjective) not capable of being understood by ordinary human beings
- denouement: (noun) a final part of a story in which everything is made clear and no questions or surprises remain

15. Poetic Devices:

A. rhyme scheme: none

B. meter: none

C. alliteration: soft, silver; bell, beating; bell, breaking; down, dark; light, like; dips, down; tight, tourniquets; sickly, smiles; stubborn, saw

D. repetition: "beating, beating", "floating down", "dips down", "rocking, slightly rocking"

E. imagery: "Pulsing out red light like an artery"; "One with a bucket douches ponds of blood"; "simple as a flower, blooms"; "stretchers are laid out the mangled lifted"

F. personification: none

G. parallel structure: "One is still...", "One with a bucket...", "One hangs..."; "Our throats were tight...", "Our feet were bound..."; "And cancer...", "And spatters..."; "Who shall die", "Who is innocent"

H. hyperbole: "ponds of blood"

I. allusions: none

J. enjambment: The entire poem uses enjambment. Here is an example from lines 28-30: "The traffic moves around with care, / But we remain, touching a wound / That opens to our richest horror."

K. onomatopoeia: "silver bell beating, beating"

L. simile: "like convalescents innocent and gauche," "red light like an artery," "throats tight as tourniquets," "cancer, simple as a flower"

M. metaphor: "the stubborn saw of common sense;" lanterns are described as "empty husks of locusts"

N. irony: "grim joke"

O. oxymoron: "grim joke"

P. paradox: none

Q. understatement: none

R. refrain: none

S. symbolism: light

16. **Effect:** Shapiro uses similes and metaphors to emphasize the fantasy-like and wild setting of the auto wreck. He describes the light as "Pulsing out" "like an artery," contrasting the red light emitted from an ambulance to the blood of an artery. The idea that a light is spurted out like blood is abstract and bizarre. In addition to that simile, Shapiro describes the wreckage as "Empty husks" locust like in the devastation they cause. This depiction of the auto wreck is extravagant and almost unreal. Using figurative language, Shapiro reinforces the theme of death as being bizarre and perplexing.

17 **Sources:** www.departments.bucknell.edu/stadler_center/shapiro/bio.htm / www.enotes.com/auto-wreck-salem/auto-wreck