

### Question 3:

“This is a photograph of me” by Margaret Atwood is the first poem I chose in the Spokenweb archives. I was slightly familiar with her work prior to this as I had read her book “A Handmaid’s Tale” in an English course a couple of years ago. However, I had never read her work of poetry, much less hear her read it out loud. She begins by apologizing to the audience, saying she has “the Montreal plague,” however, this somehow works to her advantage; her low monotonous tone coincides with the grim theme of the poem. As she recites, you can hear the descriptive nature of her poetry, almost as if she’s painting a canvas for the listener. The description guides the listener to envision the environment in which Atwood places herself in. She describes the photograph itself and the distorted quality of it: “A smeared print: blurred lines and grey flecks” as if she is talking about a memory or a metaphor for a certain state of mind. Further in, the grim part of the poem appears, she states that “the photograph was taken the day after [she] drowned” explaining that her body is under the water.

Now, in written text, the last part of the poem is written in parentheses, therefore reading it gives the receiver more context. The parentheses could possibly suggest that the last part of the poem (where she drowned) is meant to be read as an anecdote, or sidebar of what is being described in the picture, or as information only the reader is given. On the other hand, out loud, Atwood continues her monotonous reading without the notion of parentheses. In effect, the poem read out loud becomes more explicit with information due to the absence of the parentheses. While in text, the parentheses make the reader feel closer to the intention of the innate feeling that Atwood is describing. Ultimately, parenthetical or not, all the information is given to the reader/ listener, but the delivery of the poem in written text and listening are different.

The second poem I chose to listen to from the archive was one that I chose randomly. I kept browsing through the archive until I found something that stood out. “Daffy Duck goes to Hollywood” by John Ashbery caught my eye and I made the decision to read and listen to it at the same time. Right off the bat, the immense magnitude of intricate, complex, and dramatic words linked together in fast-paced sentences gave me the impression that this was a work that was meant to be read out loud and listened to. After listening to it, I found that Ashbery’s poem also has a very descriptive tone, in fact, even more so than Atwood’s; Ashbery applies words that are almost incomprehensible to even fluent and native English speakers. Though, it being written with Daffy Duck in mind, the poem certainly has a very animated tone to it as well. This could arguably also relate to Ashbery’s use of words such as “geranium glow,” “borborygmic giant,” “stygian velvet,” “bivouac,” and “mulch.”

These words, effectively, both intrigue and confuse the reader/ listener. Ultimately, it could also be seen as a method to coincide the animated visualization of the poem with the animated nature of the words themselves seen written down—making the words pop just as much their use does.