

The Landlady

By Margaret Atwood

Diction is very evident. Observe the careful word choice — “lair” evokes the feeling of a wild animal’s den.

This is the lair of the landlady.

She is
a raw voice
loose in the rooms beneath me,

One of the terrific examples of enjambment in this poem, which creates a specific effect.

the continuous henyard
squabble going on below
thought in this house like
the bicker of blood through the head.

Notice the rhythm in the poem and how it contributes to the reader’s sense of the landlady.

Notice the effective use of alliteration. Can you pick out other examples in the poem?

Note the dissonant, jarring sound of the phrase, “continuous henyard squabble”.

She is everywhere, intrusive as the smells
that bulge under my doorsill;
she presides over my
meagre eating, generates
the light for eyestrain.

The poem introduces imagery capturing the boarding house’s smells. It is illogical to suggest smells can “bulge”, yet it is evocative. The image suggests that the landlady, too, *bulges*.

From her I rent my time:
she slams
my day like doors.
Nothing is mine

Effective use of simile.

and when I dream images
of daring escapes through the snow
I find myself walking
always over a vast face
which is the land-
lady’s, and wake up shouting.

The poet shows the nightmarish proportions of the landlady’s presence.

Breaking up the word “landlady’s” to create a specific effect in the mind of the reader.

She is a bulk, a knot
swollen in space. Though I have tried
to find some way around
her, my senses
are cluttered by perception
and can’t see through her.

She stands there, a raucous fact

Diction and word choice provide a further example of putting different images together.

Poetic closure is achieved through imagery that conjures up the repetitious smell of the boarding house. This confirms for the reader the speaker's negative impression of the landlady, which is repeatedly affirmed.

blocking my way:
immutable, a slab
of what is real,

solid as bacon.

Concluding statement repeats the negative feeling about the landlady.

Atwood, Margaret. "The Landlady". Reference Points: A Guide to Language, Literature, and Media. Ed. Robert T. Dawe, John Borovilos, Paul Malott, and Wendy Lee Mathieu. Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2001. 164-165. Print.