

## Two Campers in Cloud Country

Sylvia Plath

The term **sublime** is often used in philosophy and literature to describe the power of nature to inspire a profound sense of awe, which often manifests as a simultaneous feeling of personal insignificance and connection to the vastness of the universe. Keep this concept in mind as you read this poem, along with the SOAPSTone (Subject, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Speaker, and Tone) approach to identifying and interpreting the poem's essential elements.

- In this country there is neither measure nor balance  
To redress the dominance of rocks and woods,  
The passage, say, of these man-shaming clouds.
- 5 No gesture of yours or mine could catch their attention,  
No word make them carry water or fire the kindling  
Like local trolls in the spell of a superior being.
- Well, one wearies of the Public Gardens: one wants a vacation  
Where trees and clouds and animals pay no notice;  
Away from the labeled elms, the tame tea-roses.
- 10 It took three days driving north to find a cloud  
The polite skies over Boston couldn't possibly accommodate.  
Here on the last frontier of the big, brash spirit
- The horizons are too far off to be chummy as uncles;  
The colors assert themselves with a sort of vengeance.
- 15 Each day concludes in a huge splurge of vermilion
- And night arrives in one gigantic step.  
It is comfortable, for a change, to mean so little.  
These rocks offer no purchase to herbage or people:
- 20 They are conceiving a dynasty of perfect cold.  
In a month we'll wonder what plates and forks are for.  
I lean to you, numb as a fossil. Tell me I'm here.
- The Pilgrims and Indians might never have happened.  
Planets pulse in the lake like bright amoebas;  
The pines blot our voices up in their lightest sighs.
- 25 Around our tent the old simplicities sough  
Sleepily as Lethe, trying to get in.  
We'll wake blank-brained as water in the dawn.

### Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. Describe the **tone** of the poem. What is the speaker's attitude toward the fact that "there is neither measure nor balance/To redress the dominance of rocks and woods"?

2. Discuss the use of sound devices (e.g. **alliteration**, **consonance**, **assonance**, and **onomatopoeia**) in the poem. Find a few specific examples and discuss their effect.
3. In what sense could the clouds be “man-shaming” (line 3)? Why is the speaker unable to “catch their attention” (line 4)?
4. What connotation do the words “labeled,” “tame,” “polite,” and “chummy” have in lines 9-13?
5. Who are “they” in line 19, and what **rhetorical device** does the speaker use to describe them? Given the context of the speaker’s description of nature, what meanings does the phrase “a dynasty of perfect cold” (line 19) suggest?
6. Why do you think the speaker will “wonder what plates and forks are for” (line 20)?
7. What do you think “the old simplicities” (line 25) might be, and what does it mean to be “blank-brained” (line 27)? What **rhetorical devices** are contained in lines 25-26?