ENG 102 – Introduction to Literature
Poetry Project Template

In this project, you will be conducting a close reading and analysis of song lyrics of your choosing. To complete the assignment, please respond to each of the prompts below by typing into the empty fields. Responses should be thorough and thoughtful.

Initial Information
Please include basic information about your poem here.

Artist	Pinback
Title	"Bbtone"
Year	2001

Analysis
Answer each of the prompts below thoroughly by typing in the space provided.

Poem Summary (Brief Overview)
Briefly describe the poem in a single paragraph. Think of this as an elevator pitch where you only have thirty seconds to describe something fully.

The poem "Bbtone" is about the consequences that come from being in the throes of a drug addiction. At first glance, one might assume this poem is about surfing or being on the beach due to the poem's imagery. Looking closer, it is clear there are themes of being paranoid, feeling stuck in a cycle, and getting physically sick. Other signs of drug addiction and drug withdrawal in this poem come from the subject wanting to get their mind off the pain with "the medicine." As this poem alludes to, the cycle of addiction may feel comparable to the legend of Sisyphus; one may feel doomed to repeat the cycle for what may seem like eternity. Overall, this poem has a melancholic temperament to it.

Personal Relevance (Importance to You)
Please describe why you selected this poem with a focus on why the poem is important or meaningful to you.

At first, I picked this song to use for the poem analysis because I had it on repeat for over a month. Upon looking at the lyrics, it seemed perfect for the project. Working on this project has given me the opportunity to understand why this poem was stuck in my head. Now that I have dissected the poem, I finally understand the reason. I relate to this poem because it is an honest representation of what it is like to be addicted to drugs, to experience psychosis, and other forms of mental disturbances. This poem is meaningful to me because I feel less alone in the experiences I have endured. This poem is extremely comforting and soothing all around. At the time of submitting this project, I have listened to this song/poem over 94 times. Also, fun fact, this song came out the year I was born and for some reason that makes it even more special to me.

Section Overview (What is Happening)

Divide the poem into sections. Once you have determined where the sections can be divided, walk the reader carefully through the surface level events in each section. Please also note how the sections fit together.

Section I: Lines 1-2.

- The subject of the poem is inside a wave. A literal interpretation would indicate surfing. An abstract interpretation would suggest the subject is dealing with a wave of emotion.

Section II: Lines 3-6

- The subject feels like something is coming for them. It is unclear what exactly that "something" is. A plausible explanation is that the subject is experiencing paranoia. In other words, they are experiencing delusions of persecution.

Sections III (Left): Lines 7-10	Section III (Right): Lines 7-10
The subject hears a sound and sees a door suddenly appear. Perhaps the subject is not only experiencing delusions of persecution, mentioned in section II, but also other symptoms of psychosis such as auditory and visual hallucinations.	The walls feel like they are closing in on the subject because they are not able to access their "old habits." Old habits would be in reference to their drug addiction. It is common for long term addicts to experience psychosis from using and not using. This explains why the subject is experiencing symptoms of psychosis in section II and III (left). Although the sections referenced do not suggest there is drug addiction, there is further evidence to support this theory in section V (right).

Section IV: Lines 11-12

- Theory: Depression
- The subject of the poem feels trapped. They cannot escape their unpleasant state of mind. There is a sense of desperation and a desire to be set free.

Section V: Lines 13-20 (Left)	Section V: Lines 13-20 (Right)
At line 13, the pronoun "we" is introduced. Besides this, the primary subject does not mention another person in the rest of the	Line 13 states that something is making the subject sick. Also, it is unclear what the rest of this line could mean. "Think too hard on

poem. Moving forward, lines 14 to 16 focus on looking for an escape route… Similar to section IV, the subject wants to be free. Lines 17 to 19 have similar psychotic symptoms that are also mentioned at lines 7 to 9 (left). Line 20 states that “something” has appeared near the subject. It could be the light object from line 19, or it could be what the subject fears most — “something” has come to harm them. It is unclear if this is real or imagined. One can assume it is most likely the latter.	the other side” (?) Line 14 clearly states that the subject is experiencing light sensitivity to even the softest of lights (photophobia). This is another symptom of drug withdrawal. Line 15 to 17 are the three lines I used for this project's “under the surface” section. These lines are essential to my thesis. Without these lines, it would be hard to argue that this song represents addiction and its consequences. Line 18 symbolizes how difficult it is to think about anything at all when one is in the depths of addiction. For example, when someone is addicted, they are always thinking about their next high. Another theory for line 18 is that the pronoun “it” is also the “something” of the poem that is mentioned in Line 20 (Left). Perhaps the subject is scared to think because their paranoia is easily triggered. Line 19 and 20 are the same. The subject wants to get their mind off the pain they are experiencing. This is emphasized because it is repeated. As mentioned in the “under the surface” section, the pain the subject is experiencing could be both physical and mental.

Section VI: Lines 21-23

- Theory: Prison
- The subject is in prison. “The ropes are tight are my wrists” symbolizes handcuffs and imprisonment.

Section VII: Lines 24-31

- Unlike most of the sections of this poem, section VII has concrete imagery. Similar to

section I, there seems to be a setting of a beach or an ocean. Lines 24 to 28 represent the subject's happy place. Similarly, it could be a memory the subject remembers fondly because it took place during a better time in their life. At lines 28 and 29 there is a transition from the happy place to a harsh reality. One can assume that lines 30 and 31 regard getting in trouble with the law. The misdemeanor referenced could be from possessing a controlled substance. For example, in the state of New York possessing a controlled substance is a class A misdemeanor and it can result in serving time. As a result, this supports the prison theory mentioned in sections VI, VIII, X, XI, and XIII.

Section VIII: Lines 32-34

- Theory: Prison

If one connects this section to the section above, then one could assume that line 32 is about the subject being in prison for a long time. Lines 33 and 34 suggest the subject feels unwell in prison which explains why they spend a lot of time on their bunk bed.

Section IX: Lines 35-36

- Lines 35 and 36 are not closely related to any other sections of the poem. The literal interpretation for this section is that there is an empty movie film roll; however, it is not entirely empty and there is a scene that was cut out of it. Another interpretation is that the subject feels empty inside due to their depression.

Section X: Lines 37-40

- Theory: Prison
- The subject's drug addiction landed them in prison as line 59 suggests the subject is in solitary confinement. Solitary confinement is an extreme punishment that can result in psychiatric disturbances such as "anxiety, depression, anger, cognitive disturbances, perceptual distortions, obsessive thoughts, paranoia, and psychosis" (Metzner & Fellner, 2010). The cognitive disturbances the subject is experiencing can be a direct result of solitary confinement instead of drug induced/withdrawal. Both are plausible explanations.

Section XI: Lines 41-48 (Left)	Section XI: Lines 43 and 48 (Right)
Similar to section VII, the subject mentally recalls their happy place. At line 43 the subject wants to build a sandcastle, but they are unable to because of their misdemeanor (line 48).	Line 43 and 48 (right) directly relate to the (left) lines. The subject wants to build a sandcastle, but they are unable to because their hands are tied. The subject mentions the ropes being tight directly after the

	misdemeanor. This heavily supports the prison theory.

Section XII: Lines 49-51

- Theory: Depression
- The subject is lying in bed “too long” and moving “way too slow” because of their depression. One of the main features of MDD (Major Depressive Disorder) is psychomotor retardation. This explains why the subject is moving too slowly.
- Something to note is that the theory of depression and theory of imprisonment can coexist.

Section XIII: Lines 52-59

- Theory: Prison
- Lines 54 and 55 symbolize drug addiction and repeating doomed cycles. “Pushing” means both pushing the plunger of a syringe filled with drugs and pushing a boulder like Sisyphus.
- Line 59 directly supports the prison theory because “the hole” is a term that can be used interchangeably with solitary confinement.

Section XIV: Lines 60-61 The subject is experiencing symptoms of psychosis. They believe hands are coming from the sky to rip them open. As section V (line 18 left) suggests, this is the source of the subject's paranoia. The subject's mind physically manifests their delusion in the form of a terrifying hallucination.	Section XIV: Line 61 Suffering begins.

Poetry Analysis (Under the Surface)

Select three lines (or groups of lines) to analyze beyond the surface. The sections you select should be key parts of the poem. For each line (or set of lines) provide the exact text and deeper meaning.

Section V (Right)

15. (Old wounds get infected by)
16. (The heat of an oven gone cold too long)
17. (Get my mind of the pain with the medicine)

I believe the deeper meaning of these three lines directly correlate with the main theme of the poem: substance abuse.
Line 1 mentions old wounds getting infected which is a common result of long-term intravenous drug use. Line 2 mentions “the heat of an oven” which is the source the subject heats up their drug of choice (possibly heroin, meth, etc.) It is possible the drug was not properly “cooked” due to the heating issue. Failure to heat up a drug properly before IV injection can result in parts of the drug getting stuck under the skin which can cause an infection. Finally, line three directly states the desire to escape pain with medication. Generally, a person addicted to drugs, like opiates and stimulants, gets high to escape their pain. For the subject of the poem, the pain could very well be both physical and mental. Unfortunately, as drug use becomes a repeated occurrence, the subject becomes physically and mentally dependent on the drugs. They feel immense pain and sickness if they miss a single dose. On a final note, the subject of the poem may feel more comfortable referring to their drug of choice as “medication” rather than an illicit substance.

Adding Context (Outside the Poem)
Sometimes, learning about an author’s life or researching a specific moment in time can add valuable context to a poem’s meaning. What have you learned that can shed light on the poem and provide additional meaning.

Pinback is a band Rob Crow and Zach Smith put together as roommates. The song “BBtone” comes from their album “Blue Screen Life.” There is not a lot of information about this album other than the fact that Wikipedia states the album was recorded in Zach Smith’s house.
[source]

Although information about the band members’ lives and what their songs mean is scarce, I was able to find an interview that sheds some light about Rob Crow’s mental health. In an interview conducted by Sean Kitching, a journalist from The Quietus, an answer from Rob Crow confirms he himself had struggled with depression and substance abuse for years. In the 2017 interview, Rob Crow said "I've been sober and healthy for over two years.” However, since I am not Rob Crow, I cannot say with confidence that “Bbtone” is about his personal experience with substance abuse and mental health.
[source]

Since I was not able to find any information from Pinback about the song, I decided to ask my friends what they thought. One of my friends said, “I think it’s about surfing. From [inside the wave] to [summer in the hole.] But also, depression. Or a video game, but probably surfing.” I liked this friend's theory because it is what I thought at first. There are themes about surfing and being at the beach in this poem. The video game comment made sense too because a lyric mentions a “cutscene,” which could be from either a film or a video game. Another friend said, “I think it's about someone going through withdrawals while rehabbing from a drug addiction.” I was happy to hear this response because I had not even considered the rehab part. Instead of going prison, it is entirely possible the subject went to rehab.

Unfortunately, “Blue Screen Life” did not receive the recognition it deserved and there were only a few reviews from mainstream music publications. One of these reviews came from David M. Pecoraro from Pitchfork. He posted a review criticizing Pinback for being too emo. He took it a step further and called the album “[expletive] boring.” Mr. Pecoraro seems to think this album is “boring” and “uninspired,” but that is the furthest thing from the truth. Pinback’s style is unique, and I would even go so far to say they are a highly underrated. Another thing I found funny about this 2001 review is that Mr. Pecoraro starts with, “Did I miss something here? Is emo the next big thing?” After all, it does seem like Mr. Pecoraro missed the memo because the bands he mentioned, Death Cab for Cutie and Sunny Day Real Estate, became highly successful for their emo sound. Sure, Pinback never became highly popular, but they made a beautiful song with lyrics that read exactly like a poem, and I feel comforted listening to it. Honestly, I have no idea if my analysis is correct, but I do know Pinback’s lyrics make me feel infinitely more inspired than Mr. Pecoraro’s words.
[source]