

The Reading of Poetry: Appreciation and Evaluation

**By
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Declaration

I declare that:

The Reading of Poetry: Appreciation and Evaluation

represents original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form for any degree or diploma to any other university. Where use has been made of the work of others it has been duly acknowledged in the thesis.

[In poetry] there is always the communication of some new experience, or some fresh understanding of the familiar, or the expression of something we have experienced but have no words for, which enlarges our consciousness or refines our sensibility.

T.S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets*, p.34

In rhyme and rhythm resides a certain magical power. An amorphous world becomes at once orderly, lucid, clear, and beautiful when squeezed into regular meters.

The lyric attitude is a potential stance of every human being; it is one of the basic categories of human existence. Lyric poetry as a literary genre has existed for ages, because for ages man has been capable of the lyric attitude. The poet is its personification.

Milan Kundera, *Life is Elsewhere*, p.193 and p.309

The poet is incited to create a work that can outdistance time and surmount distance. It can survive changes of language and in language, changes in social norms and customs, the ravages of history.

Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*, p.6

Poetry can make an order true to the impact of external reality and sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's beingI credit [poetry] because credit is due to it, in our time and in all time, for its truth to life, in every sense of that phrase.

There is [a] kind of adequacy which is specific to lyric poetry. This has to do with the 'temple inside our hearing' which the passage of the poem calls into being. It is an adequacy deriving from what Mandelstam called 'the steadfastness of speech articulation', from the resolution and independence which the entirely realised poem sponsors. It has as much to do with the energy released by linguistic fission and fusion, with the buoyancy generated by cadence and tone and rhyme and stanza, as it has to do with the poem's concerns or the poet's truthfulness. In fact, in lyric poetry, truthfulness becomes recognizable as a ring of truth within the medium itself. And it is the unappeasable pursuit of this note, a note tuned to its most extreme in Emily Dickinson and Paul Celan and orchestrated to its most opulent in John Keats, it is this which keeps the poet's ear straining to hear the totally persuasive voice behind all the other informing voices.

Seamus Heaney, 'Crediting Poetry', in *Opened Ground*, pp.449-50 and 465-66

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Stylistic Note

To avoid repetition and what I perceive as stylistic awkwardness, I shall sometimes use the terms 'man' or 'mankind' for 'the human being' in this thesis, and because no personal pronoun singular exists for 'he' or 'she', 'his' or 'her', I shall use 'he' throughout. This is not in any way intended to be gender-insensitive, and should be understood always to refer to either sex.

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Introduction

The impulse that prompted me to the writing of this thesis is a profound uneasiness about the way in which the Humanities are being undervalued in the eyes of the world today, and nowhere more so, it increasingly seems, than at educational institutions, especially South African universities. As mechanisation and commodification become more and more the order of the day, and as technology replaces human interchange, the passions and sympathies of man, so powerfully expressed in English literature, steadily become of secondary importance.

My focus here, then, is on the vital importance of English literature in the affairs of human beings and their daily interactions with the world around them. My attention will be directed mainly towards poetry, for I believe that even amongst those who do read good books, a large proportion eschew poetry and, in a sense, fear it. My experience in teaching at secondary and tertiary levels of education has shown me that this is because students have not been given, or adequately instructed in the use of, the tools with which to understand or to appreciate poetry in more than a very superficial way, and that this lack leads to their not devoting much time or attention to it. Also, because they fail to understand more than simply the contents of a poem (and sometimes not even this), and because they are aware that there is a deeper significance to a good poem than what they perceive, students and other readers feel inadequate, and shy away from poetry altogether. Of course, I do not include amongst these readers those who daily concern themselves with litera-

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ture and who have made it one of the mainsprings of their lives. I am aware, too, that every generalisation has its exceptions and that there are people who at an instinctive, as well as a cognitive level, fully comprehend what the poet is saying.

My brief is not to examine the various theories of what constitutes poetry, or even to promote one of my own, nor is it to examine what it is that makes an exceptional poet, for reams of work in this field are readily available. Neither do I wish to enter into an extended debate on the nature of the various critical approaches, such as Marxism, Structuralism or Post-colonialism, that are current today. For a naïve Marxist, as great a novel as *Wuthering Heights*, with its concern with overwhelming and enduring love, hatred and the desire for revenge, might be reduced to being the mere representation of the class struggle, the Earnshaws signifying the agricultural or labouring class, the Lintons the landed gentry, and Heathcliff first the oppressed and then the emergent wealthy middle class. I am aware that this is to an extent a caricature, but a central Marxist tenet informs this caricature, and it is this which disturbs me, for it seems to me that to reduce a work that is so rich an exploration of the human condition to an arid kind of socio-economic tract is a kind of sacrilege.

My apprehensions about Marxism encapsulate my general apprehensions regarding certain extrinsically motivated approaches to literature. However, in order better to justify my position, it is necessary for me now to present a brief overview of what appear to me to have been the most important contemporary trends. I certainly concede that contemporary theorists almost all make interesting and valid points, some more so than others, but (my apprehensions

aside) I cannot subscribe to any one theory in toto as a way to the understanding and appreciation of literature, and there are several reasons for this.

Firstly, I believe that too theoretical an approach can lead to a kind of displacement of the actual literary work, which robs it of its own life and of its intrinsic value and merit. At the basis of this, it seems to me, is a misguided need to place an abstract, philosophical frame around living works of literature.

Secondly, there is a danger that a critic who has adopted a particular approach will superimpose the principles of this theory on the work under consideration and place a metaphorical stencil over it, which allows him to omit whatever is not compatible with the theory, and this has a mutilating effect in practice, and obscures and obfuscates what the writer is actually saying. Blind adherence to a particular theory can lead to the confining and narrowing of the vision of the reader.

Thirdly, the language of these theoretical critics is rife with jargon and arcane and elitist expression. Edward Said makes a cogent point when he says abstruse literary theory is written by critics for critics (Said, 1991: 4), as does E.D. Hirsch, when he relates Dilthey's dream about different groups of critics who disagree so much that members of these groups can communicate only amongst themselves (in Lodge, 1988: 258). Of course, it is also true that as critics move further away from specialised abstraction, this reliance on jargon becomes less noticeable.

Fourthly, with regard to education, the danger exists that a teacher, whether at a school or university, can be so firmly convinced of the value of

one theory that he approaches all that he teaches from that position, and thus his students are presented with only a partial picture of what constitutes good literature. Nor is the deployment of theoretical methodology suitable for the ordinary student, because in the process literature becomes truncated for him; only the professional scholar or especially gifted student has the ability to grasp the full import of what is being said. Further, while it is true that a combination of theoretical approaches can provide a fully rounded concept of the work under consideration, this might lead to a sort of mish-mash of presentation, at once disturbing and confusing.

Fifthly, many critics regard the intention of the author as almost totally irrelevant, but the author writes because he has something he wants to say, because he has a 'message' about life that he wants to impart. If we simply disregard what the author himself is saying (however ironic the author might be, whatever personae he might be deploying), we are imposing something other than what he has written. Indeed, the emphasis is shifted from the author to the reader in works by critics such as Roland Barthes in 'The Death of the Author' (Barthes, 1977: 142-48), and Michel Foucault in 'What is an Author?' (in Harari, 1980: 141-60). The *reductio ad absurdum* of this would be that the reader is simply given carte blanche in matters of interpretation.

Most important of all in my opinion, though, is that all these theorists (with the notable exception of Murray Krieger with regard to one aspect, and Wolfgang Iser to a limited extent of another) ignore some of the basic elements that constitute great literature. Firstly there is the aesthetic value of literature, which, of all the theorists I have recently been poring over, only Krieger takes

account of when he writes, for example, 'the aesthetic can have its revenge upon ideology by revealing a power to complicate that is also a power to undermine' (in Clark, 2000: 1). For surely the beauty of good literature in its elegance of expression, the acknowledgement of truth (whether that truth is in itself attractive or not—an aspect of its 'power to complicate') and the skill with which the content is actualised is what raises it above other discourses and makes for its continuing appeal? It is a combination of these factors that helps the aesthetic to 'undermine' ideology (which I define in this context as an implicitly adopted scheme, in a particular society, of self-furthering ideas).

Furthermore, none of the critics, apart from Iser, has much to say about the imagination (though Iser tends to emphasise the imagination of the reader) (Iser, 1978: 38-39, 48-49, 66-67, 76-78). The best writers possess imaginative power to a very marked extent. They have a singular talent of seeing beyond and above what the ordinary man is capable of spontaneously envisaging; through this talent they enliven the reader's imagination, and force him to look at and appreciate what he has hitherto not noticed or fully understood. The denial or disregard of the imaginative dimension dispossesses the literary work of its intrinsic value and demeans its artistry.

Already in 1993 Peter Abbs, in his *Times Educational Supplement* article 'Backwards Forward', complains that in our 'Postmodernist, Post-Marxist, Post-Progressive age' we have failed to develop a language 'based on aesthetics, on a long historic culture and on the primacy of the imagination'. He maintains that we need to connect in complex and demanding ways with the whole of the cultural continuum of Western civilisation, and that Modernism is

now only one tradition, and that much of it, in its later phases, is spiritually trite. He believes that we can gain a liberating critical perspective onto our own age by engaging with the narratives and images of writers such as Shakespeare, and so free ourselves from the 'tyranny of quick ideologies'; but to do this we need touchstones and exemplars culled from the past. In this way we will initiate the student into the best of received culture. He maintains that it is vital to cultivate in our students an imagination which attends to the intrinsic nature of works of art. Clearly, for him, the truths about life and the aesthetic and imaginative qualities of works are ultimately of supreme importance (Abbs, 1993: 9).

My own position in connection with literary criticism is connected to what is loosely called the practice of 'close reading', first espoused by critics such as I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis. This is seen by many contemporary theorists as outdated and unfashionable; but the demands of fashion should have nothing to do, in my mind, with the appreciation and evaluation of literature. In fact, a number of practitioners abroad are returning to this method in one form or another. I mention, for example, the writings of Susan J. Wolfson, whose stated purpose is to refresh an interest in criticism today by focusing "'an historically informed formalist criticism" on Romantic aesthetics' (the quote is from James Breslin's (1983) description of his methodology) (Wolfson, 1997: 1). Wolfson writes that she means to give a different picture of formalism from that found in the canonical texts of Romantic aesthetics, and along the way wants to make a case for the 'pleasures, intellectual and aesthetic, of attending to the complex charges of form in poetic writing'. She actually uses the

terms 'intensive reading' (ibid.) and 'close reading' (ibid., 9) to describe the method she employs.

She maintains that 'any criticism interested in the relation of literary form to ideology needs a more refined reading' than has been the case (ibid., 3), that form has meaning, and she cites Cleanth Brooks's (1951) radical New Critical insistence that "form and content cannot be separated" (ibid., 6). She goes on to say that her chapters feature 'texts that shape poetic form into its own critical statement', and that 'show how formalist poetics and practices can set the grain of aesthetics against dominant ideologies and their contradictions' (ibid., 29). In the chapters that follow she looks at aspects of poetry such as stanza, rhyme, and metre, in a way which flies in the face of much contemporary practice. To my mind this return to 'close reading' makes sense, for no other approach is as comprehensive and all-embracing in articulating and evaluating poetic works.

None of the books which I have encountered that claim to help in a better understanding of poetry, such as *Inscapes*, compiled by Robin Malan, *Appreciating Poetry*, compiled by H. Sadler, B. Hayllam and B. Powell, *Considering Poetry*, compiled by B.A. Phythian, along with various others mentioned in my bibliography, give more than cursory information about the appreciation of poetry. On the whole (and I exclude such an obvious exception as Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry*), these works tend to present no more than their bases of selection and grouping of various poems, brief textual and biographical information, short general discourses on poetry, comments on at most three or four poetic devices, and advice to teachers on how best to use

the anthology. Readers are invited to compare and contrast poems with similar themes or topics and, if possible, to discuss them with other readers.

Even as interesting and well-written a book as *How to Read Poetry* by Edward Hirsch (1999), in which the author comments on and discusses a good many poems (mostly modern) with great insight, enthusiasm and perspicacity, though it certainly looks at poetic form, does not do so in any systematic way. (The book's appendix on prosody, however, is extremely useful and comprehensive.)

I believe that what I unashamedly refer to as a 'great' work of literature is a work that provokes changes in the perception of the reader, that says different things at different levels to each individual at different stages of his life, though its central concerns remain constant, and it refuses to fit absolutely into a specific mould. I believe too that great literature has universality in that it transcends time, locale, and ideology, which is why it is read in translation (as well as in its native tongue) all over the world as much as, if not more so, than when it was first published. I also believe that it is concerned with basic truths about life despite the variations of mores, values, and perceived interpretations of truth at diverse times and in diverse cultures, because underlying and informing these truths is the fundamentally unchanged and unchanging nature of the human being with regard to the emotions, drives and impulses that motivate his behaviour. Furthermore, as Harold Bloom points out in *The Western Canon*, what defines 'greatness' in literature is its enduring value for the ordinary reader, who feels compelled to read the work over and over again, yet never depletes the varied richness of what it has to offer (Bloom, 1994: 30).

This last point, of course, had been made many years before by René Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature* (1956: 242). Wellek and Warren are useful, too, in providing support for my use of the term 'great' in relation to poets and poetry:

To some aestheticians, 'greatness' involves recourse to extra-aesthetic criteria. Thus L.A. Reid proposes to defend 'the view that greatness comes from the *content* side of art, and that, roughly, art is "great" in so far as it is expressive of the "great" values of life'; and T.M. Greene proposes 'truth' and 'greatness' as extra-aesthetic but necessary standards of art....For example, 'the great works of the great poets, Sophocles, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, are organized embodiments of a large variety of human experience'. The 'notes' or criteria of greatness in any realm of theory or practice appear to have in common 'a grasp of the complex, with a sense of proportion and relevance'.

(Wellek and Warren, 1956: 244)

I would endorse all the above-mentioned criteria, which have always informed my sense of 'greatness' in literature.

It is true that knowledge of the social conditions of the period in which the author was writing has much value, for how else would we understand the dread and repugnance with which Jane Fairfax contemplates her future as a governess in Jane Austen's *Emma*, Dorothea Brooke's marriage to the odious Mr Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, or the tensions caused by the differences in culture between European and American society in several of Henry James's novels, such as *The Europeans* and *Portrait of a Lady*? It is also true to say, though, that if the reader is attentive and patient enough, the

text itself will provide answers to these questions. Indeed, Leavis maintains that one can learn more about social conditions from literature than from history: 'if we want some notion of the difference involved in day-to-day living—in the sense of life and its dimensions and in its emotional and moral accenting—for the ordinary cultivated person, we may profitably start trying to form it from the novels of Jane Austen' (1952: 203).

Information about the personal lives of great authors, too, though it adds interest, can pose a great danger, because it can come between the actual text and the reader's interpretation of it, in that he may come to the work with preconceived notions that blind him to what is actually being said. For, if one is content to ignore elements of the text that are inconvenient, one can make any approach seem feasible. I have encountered students, for example, who know about D.H. Lawrence's deep love for his mother, and who then contemplate (and misinterpret) his work in the context of this knowledge. As T.S. Eliot points out:

We must not identify biography with criticism: biography is ordinarily useful in providing explanation which may open the way to further understanding; but it may also, in directing our attention on the poet, lead us away from the poetry. We must not confuse knowledge—factual information—about a poet's period, the conditions of the society in which he lived, the ideas current in his time implicit in his writing, the state of the language in his period—with understanding his poetry.

(Eliot, 1957: 117)

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To extend Eliot's terms, I am convinced (again) that something of this sort, that is, the misdirecting of our attention away from what the author is actually saying, is what occurs when we try to fit the works of great writers into the theories of a particular critical approach.

What I intend to discuss, then, in the chapters that follow, will be of a more practical nature, and will, in the main, be concentrated on poetry. Nor is what I have to say directed only at students or teachers, but at all readers of whatever age in whatever walk of life. My central concern (after I provide an overview of the importance of the Humanities and of great literature, and comment on poetry in general terms) is to formulate a method of approach to the reading and evaluation of poetry through a detailed and systematic exposition of poetic devices. I illustrate how they are employed, and how their use informs and enriches the meaning of poetry. An understanding of this will, I hope, enable the reader both to obtain greater pleasure from poetry and to achieve a fuller grasp of the poems that he reads.

Chapter One: The Importance of the Humanities

For certain people the word 'education' means an enforced period of time at an institution of learning before they go out into the 'real' world, while for others it is the means to earning a living. The former appear to think that being part of a community, interacting with other people, competing or co-operating with others, submitting to some kind of authority, and acquiring knowledge is somehow not real; the latter have, at best, a very limited idea of education and, at worst, a grossly distorted and dangerous one. Underlying both these attitudes is the desire to make as much money as possible in order to achieve status, power, and the ease, comfort and luxury that wealth can bring.

Now no-one would wish to deny that almost everyone must earn his bread through some kind of profession, trade, or other occupation. It is true, too, that South Africa needs to train people to be farmers and engineers, scientists and doctors, because a country's economic resources must be developed through technical training in agriculture, industry and technology. In addition, vast numbers of poor people in South Africa need to be trained to be economically viable. But a blind deference to utilitarianism and materialism is a sure road to moral, spiritual and aesthetic destitution, for the human soul, as much as the mind and body, needs to be fed.

Unfortunately, however, the belief that we must study what can earn us the most as soon as possible is a widely-held and pernicious one. That is why the Humanities at our universities are under so great a threat today. Disciplines such as the natural sciences, law, economics, mathematics, computer studies

and medicine all have practical purposes, and competency can be acquired through the learning of facts or skills. Moreover, success or otherwise in such subjects can be weighed and measured, and their mastery can lead to a good position in the world, but the Humanities are considered a luxury that people can ill afford. It is conceded that amongst the Humanities are some subjects that could be considered useful. Geography and Psychology can lead to professions, and are, in any case, mainly regarded as sciences today; a grasp of foreign languages can help one in business in one's transactions with people of other cultures, and is useful in the reading of scientific and technological texts; and a knowledge of History could be said to help us to avoid the mistakes of the past, though there is little evidence for this. One must also learn to read, write and speak with competence if one is to succeed in anything at all. According to this line of argument, what becomes of Music, Art, the Classics and English Literature? These subjects have no practical value whatsoever, according to the current thinking of very many people, and are therefore regarded as expensive indulgences, even pastimes, that only the well-to-do can allow themselves.

The word 'education' comes from the Latin *ex* or *e* (meaning 'out of'), and *ducere* ('to lead'). Thus, education implies not only the leading out of the darkness of ignorance into enlightenment, but also the much broader concept of the development of the individual from a narrow parochial sense of the self to a fully developed person aware of the world about him and the people who inhabit it, and his own place and significance in the universe. To achieve this, factual knowledge is not enough—morality, ethics, aesthetic values and an

understanding of the nature, importance, and significance of the human emotions must be taken into account, for only thus can we arrive at wisdom.

We are not automatons programmed with factual knowledge, whose functions can be set in motion at the press of a button. Scientific studies and pursuits, however, require (indeed demand) objectivity, for as soon as the self, primarily in the form of emotions, intrudes, results lose validity. Interestingly, the medical profession has undergone major re-assessment in this regard. It now recognises the frequency of psychosomatic illnesses which arise because of the power that the mind and the emotions have over the body, and that therefore doctors can no longer rely on a knowledge of the body and its functions only but should be versed in subjects that go beyond the acquisition of facts and take cognisance of the human aspects of their 'cases'. How often, however, do lawyers or mathematicians, for example, consider the people who will be affected by their projects? And because the body of knowledge in their fields is ever and rapidly increasing, how many have time to indulge in activities that nurture the soul? And not to do so is dehumanising.

In contrast, the study of the humanities helps us to become more fully human, less insular and prejudiced, and capable of wider views, while at the same time bringing us into contact with the best that has been thought and said, making us less limited by the local and the present.

Alan Warner in his inaugural address as first Professor of English at the University College of Kampala, Uganda, delivered on 10 May 1954 and entitled 'Shakespeare in the Tropics', says that the real reason for studying the Humanities is that we are primarily human beings and are distinguished from

other animals by our humanity; our ability to reflect upon our own experience; our ability to devise ends, individual and social, at which to aim; and our imagination of things other than those we know. I would add to this list: the depth of our intellect; the complexity of our emotions; the recognition of moral values; and the willingness to sacrifice personal gain and comfort for an ideal. Thus, though most of us must learn a trade or profession, the main purpose of all education is to make men and women better human beings. Warner says: 'What is the use of agriculture and medicine, of mathematics and science, unless they improve the minds and hearts of men as well as their bodies?' (Warner, 1954: 10). I strongly believe that the study of only factual disciplines cannot make us better and wiser.

Ken Owen, in an article entitled 'A Town Called Obedience' (Owen, 2000: 4), comments on the fact that 'Americans were walking away with the Nobel prizes (except in the "soft" options like story-telling and friendliness, known respectively as Literature and Peace)'. While I appreciate that Owen is probably being deliberately polemical, I fear his words betray his true feelings. His remark is extraordinary and astonishing, firstly in its implication that Literature and Peace are of secondary importance, and secondly in his use of the term "'soft" option', with its suggestions of 'easy' or 'simple', even 'weak', 'flabby', or 'feeble'. The inference that Literature and working towards Peace require little effort, intelligence or discipline, as suggested by the words 'story-telling' and 'friendliness', displays remarkable ignorance which is, unfortunately, not uncommon. Even if his remark was meant to be tongue-in-cheek, it reflects the attitude of many people, one which grossly undervalues the contribution of

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Literature and Peace-making to the well-being of the human race, and the capabilities of those who are engaged in these fields.

In sharp contrast to this kind of thinking (flabby and 'soft' in its own way, indeed), is that of the main protagonist in J.M. Coetzee's latest novel, *Disgrace* (1999). Professor David Lurie is forced to teach communication skills rather than literature, since Classics and Modern Languages have been closed down, as part of the 'great rationalization' (Coetzee, 1999: 3) at educational institutions. As a result, he says, the Cape Technical University (formerly Cape Town University College) is an 'emasculated institution of learning' (ibid., 4). The word 'emasculated' seems to me to be particularly apt, contradicting (as it does) the notion that the Humanities are 'soft options', and suggesting instead that without them man loses his power, his ability to function properly and efficiently, and his glory as a human being.

I was asked fairly recently by the *Natal Witness* what book I would recommend everybody should read (1998: 15). My answer was Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, because what Dickens said more than 150 years ago is, I believe, more than ever pertinent today. His novel is a dire warning of the dangers of a utilitarianism that (because of the tremendous emphasis on science, technology and a fast-paced life-style) is so entrenched in the world at present. The enjoyment of leisure and the appreciation of beauty have become sidelined. *Things* have become much more important than people and a man's success is measured in terms of his possessions. Furthermore, the perceived need for technical training and employment results in there being less money for aesthetic pursuits, and that is why so many theatres are clos-

ing, orchestras are being phased out, most performing arts councils no longer exist, and funds for the Humanities at our universities are being drastically cut.

In *Hard Times* Thomas Gradgrind honestly and sincerely believes that only facts have any purpose or value at all, and that the exercise of the imagination and flights of fancy, the indulgence of human emotions, the appreciation of beauty, and pleasurable recreation must be avoided at all costs. He forbids his children to participate in any activity of a frivolous nature or which has no measurable objective. He does so because he loves his family and believes that in this way he is doing his best for them in life. Chapter Two in this novel describes the school his children attend and which he supervises, and is appropriately titled 'Murdering the Innocents', for here all artistic creativity, all development or expression of the emotions, and all yearning for beauty and joy are stifled from an early age. Gradgrind, his bosom friend Mr Bounderby, and the schoolmaster M'Choakumchild proceed on the theory that 'Facts alone are wanted...nothing else will ever be of service to [the children]' (Dickens, 1954: 47). The children are called by numbers rather than their names, lest either individuality or idiosyncrasy (or both) should emerge.

Bitzer is the perfect product of this system and his pallid coldness is contrasted with the warmth and colour of Sissy Jupe ('Girl number twenty') whose father trains and looks after the horses in a circus. When asked to define a horse, Sissy is so taken aback and alarmed that she is unable to answer, to describe the living animal with its richness of colour, the texture of its skin, the play of light and shade on its hide as the muscles move under the skin, or the

movement, smell, feel and nature of the animal she knows so well. Bitzer, however, answers immediately, to the gratification of Mr Gradgrind. He says:

'Quadruped. Graminiverous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.'

(*ibid.*, 50)

The fact that this recital of a horse's physical attributes gives no sense of the living animal at all is not only irrelevant but commendable from the point of view of Gradgrind's scientific materialism.

Gradgrind's home is a dismal one without affection, happiness, pleasure or laughter, and everyone in his family but Gradgrind himself is dispirited. Ultimately all but one of the family is destroyed. Mrs Gradgrind is slowly ground down by her husband's harsh regime and his relentless insistence on Facts and on purely scientific and practical learning and occupations. Finally, quite bewildered and worn-out, she fades away and dies, maintaining to the end her ignorance of the meaning and purpose of life.

Louisa, the eldest, is asked by the odious Mr Bounderby to marry him, using Gradgrind as his intermediary. His motives, of course, have nothing to do with affection for her but are prompted by hope of gain. Louisa seeks her father's advice, wanting first to ascertain whether love for one another in a projected marriage is a consideration. Gradgrind brushes this aside saying that he does not do her the injustice of harbouring "anything fanciful, fantastic or (I am using synonymous terms) sentimental" (*ibid.*, 133). He then catalogues

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the Facts of the case and quotes statistics to prove the validity of the match. Louisa accepts Bounderby partly to advance her beloved brother, Tom, in his career and partly because nothing in her joyless, starved life has any meaning. She says of her life:

'While it lasts, I would wish to do the little I can, and the little I am fit for. What does it matter!'

(ibid., 136)

When she later falls in love with James Harthouse, she leaves her husband to elope with Harthouse, but at the last moment thinks better of it and goes to her father's home. She reproaches her father when she says:

'How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart?'

(ibid., 239)

She lives in her father's house in retirement and seclusion, blighted and childless for the rest of her life.

Tom steals from Mr Bounderby, allows the blame to fall on someone else, and, when he is finally found, counters his father's reproaches by quoting Gradgrind's own teachings. He says:

'So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred

'It theemth to prethent two things...one, that there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-interetht after all, but thomething very different; t'other, that it hath a way of ith own of calculating or not calculating, which thomehow or another ith at leatht ath hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of the dogth ith!

(ibid., 308)

It is Sleary's 'thomething' that is missing in poor Louisa's and Tom's stunted lives, and it is this that the Humanities foster and develop and that nourish the human spirit.

But the Humanities in tertiary institutions world wide are rapidly being eroded. A fictionalisation of this is to be found in Anna Cato's novel, *Still Lives*, which is set in Oxford where the Master of St. Barnabas College is about to retire. His successor must be elected by his colleagues and the two main contenders for the position are Justin Harkness, a senior Fellow in the Sciences, and his counterpart in the Humanities, Geoffrey Carmichael. The latter is a reluctant contestant, but he believes that he must stand because he fears that under the guidance of a science man, the humanist tradition of the college will gradually go under.

When Louisa, Carmichael's wife, asks her uncle, a retired but venerated member of the Oxford University community, whether he thinks that Harkness will be the new Master, he replies that he fears he may. He says:

'The general board has lumbered us with too many scientists in the Senior Common Room, you see. They're bound to vote for Harkness, because they see the future of the College only in their own terms; if St.

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Barnabas is not to lose its standing it must be able to endow more research fellowships, and attract more eminent physicists...'

(Cato, 1997: 115)

In a conversation with her husband Louisa asks:

'Will Justin Harkness spoil St. Barnabas—fill it with budding chemists and nuclear physicists whose only interest is in the laboratories where they're taught?'

(ibid., 119)

Louisa has put her finger on one of the worst aspects of the tendency to place so much weight on the Sciences at the expense of the Humanities at Universities: the interest of many members of the Sciences lies in research, for they must produce results to justify the money that is expended on them. The real business of a university, the imparting of knowledge and independent thinking skills to young minds, is of very little importance to them. Her husband replies:

'That's the trend in most Colleges....Classics dons may become a breed as extinct as the Dodo before long, and the rest of us will eventually follow them...'

(ibid.)

While what he says may be a little exaggerated, the point he is making is valid and extremely alarming. Later he says: "An ancient university isn't just a business, and can't be treated as such..." (ibid., 142). Unfortunately, it is true that a university must be run on business lines if it is to survive, but the crux of

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the matter lies in his word 'just'. In one of the great bastions of culture and learning, Oxford, as in other universities, the business of actually teaching is becoming less and less important, and the Humanities are being more and more undervalued in the worship of Mammon and the Great God, Science, at the expense of everything that makes us human.

When the journalist, Denis Beckett, was asked in an interview what he was most looking forward to in the next century, he said: "The world's very imperfect sociology—relations between people—taking the same sort of great leap forward as technology did this century" (Beckett, 1999: 4). While I would certainly wish relations between people to improve at a great pace, I am not at all sure of the benefits of technological advancement. When man becomes submerged by and subservient to the technology he has perfected, his knowledge becomes limited to the confines of his machines. Human social intercourse on a face-to-face basis grows ever more rare as each person sits alone with his personal computer. Social skills are lost, and there is an increasing inability on the part of man to relate to his fellow human beings in any meaningful way. This must result in a break-down in the family and society as a whole, with a consequent increase in mental illnesses, suicide, divorce, and family violence. What follows is chaos and this may well be the catalyst that enables the 'rough beast' that Yeats refers to in his poem 'The Second Coming' to gain ascendancy. For after all, man is a gregarious animal—few people are anchorites by nature, and so it is in *greater* concentration on the Humanities, not less, that our salvation lies.

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Finally, there is the issue of acquiring knowledge for its own sake. If we suppress man's natural curiosity and the innate desire to learn about our world, other people on our planet, our civilisation and that of our antecedents because such knowledge is unnecessary in the profession or occupation we have chosen, we may lose the opportunity to fulfil ourselves in this way forever. The time to indulge ourselves in the acquisition of 'useless' information in fields such as the History of Art, or Music, or Classical Civilisation, is when we are at a university or college, because once we have embarked on our careers we must spend an enormous proportion of our time on work, on domestic duties, and in keeping up with the latest data that becomes available in our area of expertise. We have little leisure in which to enrich our psyches by studying the very subjects that enable us to do so and which are the province of the Humanities.

It is my firm belief that unless we halt the trend towards an undue reverence for status, technology and material gain, and the wilful neglect of all that nurtures our aesthetic and emotional as well as intellectual needs, the human race as we know it is on the road to self-destruction.

Chapter Two: In Defence of Good Literature

'Literature' is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary (Second Edition)* thus:

1. Acquaintance with 'letters' or books; polite or humane learning; literary culture; 2. Literary work or production; the activity or profession of a man of letters; the realm of letters; 3. Literary productions as a whole; the body of writings produced in a particular country or period, or in the world in general. Now also in a more restricted sense, applied to writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect; 4. The body of books and writings that treat of a particular subject; 5. Printed matter of any kind; 6. The material in print on a particular subject.

This definition, then, includes diverse kinds of writing which vary greatly in nature. It is convenient, though, in the present context, to distinguish only between two broad groups.

First, didactic and informative literature is found in newspapers, magazines, brochures, manuals or hand-books, text-books, reference books, reports and memoranda. Apart from newspapers and magazines that offer opinion and sometimes advice as well, these consist mainly of facts and are indispensable in coping with the practicalities of our lives. We must have information if we are to be able to run an organisation efficiently, make decisions or choices, acquire knowledge, keep abreast with what is happening around us, and be able to use mechanical devices such as micro-wave ovens and computers. We are therefore exhorted to 'study the literature' if we want to be au fait, for example, with world affairs or the workings of an instrument.

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Second, what I call 'pure' literature consists of works of fiction, including novels, novellas, short stories and dramatic works. There are sub-categories, too, in fiction; namely, novels based on reality depicting ordinary or heroic life, science fiction, suspense stories or 'thrillers', detective stories, tales of adventure, fantasy, and pulp-fiction. In all these categories but the last, there are works which have merit to a greater or lesser extent, though many offer little but a good story. Pulp-fiction, however, deceives, because (unlike overt fantasy literature) it seduces the reader into accepting a false view of life. It also lacks evidence of thought and an imaginative cognisance of anything approaching the vicissitudes of real life (since it usually follows well-worn formulae). It lacks, too, insight into human nature, and instead relies on sexual titillation, gratuitous violence, and incredible feats of physical prowess. There is hardly any evidence of Aristotelian inevitability in it. The film *Pulp Fiction* is an excellent satirical portrayal of this kind of work.

Poetry too is 'pure' literature, because although it cannot, apart from narrative poetry, be called fiction, it also revolves around the imaginative expression of thoughts and ideas based primarily on profound personal observation and experience. This is true too, of course, of fiction, but in lyrical poetry it is not necessarily, indeed it is relatively seldom, presented in the form of a story. In this category, that is, pure literature, the intention is never to teach or to preach but to hold up for the reader's inspection and consideration one or more aspects of the human condition that he may never have been aware of before, that may force him to re-assess and modify, qualify or even reject

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long-held and deeply ingrained beliefs and prejudices, or adopt entirely new moral attitudes and values. Alan Warner says in this regard:

The study of literature brings us not only delight but a special kind of wisdom....It is a wisdom of the heart as much as of the head. A modern poet [Cecil Day-Lewis] has given us a clue to its nature in these words: 'The highest function of poetry is not to impart knowledge, or persuade you that certain things are right or wrong, but to sharpen your senses and give you a special kind of wisdom—the kind that comes from exercising your imagination'.

(1954: 12-13).

In the introduction to the *Faber Book of Modern Verse* Michael Roberts comments:

A good...poem may enable us to be more articulate, to perceive more clearly, and to distinguish more readily between sensitive and sentimental observation than before....But a poem may do more than that: even though we may not accept the poet's explicit doctrine, it may change the configuration of the mind and alter our responses to certain situations; it may harmonise conflicting emotions just as a good piece of reasoning may show the fallacy of an apparent contradiction in logic.

(1965: 4)

While Roberts is speaking here specifically of poetry, all of that which he enumerates above is fundamentally what any good literature does for us.

Biography, autobiography, diaries, and letters fall somewhat uneasily between the two categories above, for while these are about actual events and

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people, the account must be presented attractively and interestingly in order to do more than merely inform the reader of facts which could be found in historical texts. Many people have a curious kind of reverence for books based on facts and a disdain for fiction, and it is not seldom that one hears them boast smugly that they never read novels but only biographies or histories. This is not a new phenomenon; it is illustrated, for instance, in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Unlike Dickens, Jane Austen seldom interrupts the narrative with personal comment, but her famous defence of the novel occurs in this book. Catherine Morland has discovered the novels so popular at the time, and devours them with great interest and excitement. But she, along with almost everybody else in the novel, is ashamed of her penchant for fiction, and Jane Austen criticises this kind of attitude in the following words:

Although our [novelists'] productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers...[the novel is] some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.

(Austen, 1972: 58)

There is also a kind of snobbery about the reading of poetry, but this is of a different kind and arises chiefly, I am convinced, because people don't know *how* to read poetry, and thus obtain no pleasure from, or understand it. Those who do, or at least say they do, are often regarded with a mixture of awe and

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suspicion. It is this ignorance of how to approach the reading of poetry that I wish to address later, and which constitutes the main thrust of this thesis.

The prevailing attitude of a large section of the world's population towards literature is that we do not have the time or energy to study that which has no practical value in this age, especially if it demands deep and rigorous thought, because what little leisure we have could be more profitably spent in participating in healthy physical activity, relaxing with a little 'light' reading, or in front of the television-set. While there are undoubtedly very good programmes on television that exercise the imagination, offer new insights, and invite reflection and the re-appraisal of long-held beliefs and attitudes (and some of these have even stimulated an interest in the reading of the books on which they are based, for example, the recent BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice*), watching a lot of inferior television indiscriminately, in fact, poses tremendous problems; it is essentially a passive activity, and there is little necessity for the viewer to exercise a faculty other than his sight; the images are fleeting and he is unable to ponder over, analyse or question statements or actions which he might return to or linger over when confronted with the written word; because everything is so graphically presented, the exercise of the imagination is severely inhibited and eventually stunted; some film versions of even really good books must be compressed to meet the demands of limited time, so that often much that is valuable is excised and the intention of the writer is lost; and 'action films', which are so rife and so popular, usually and ever-increasingly contain violence which, because the modern technology at our command enables it to be presented in horrific and realistic detail, is per-

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ceived by the undiscerning viewer as the instant and effective solution to problems. This kind of film not only promotes the immoral perception that 'might is right', but also that good always triumphs over evil, which is unfortunately not true of life, and which induces a false sense of security. I am not suggesting that all the above objections to the visual media, or even many of them, are relevant for the intelligent and selective adult, but I believe their effect is insidious and often subliminally absorbed, and therefore they pose a real threat, especially for children.

Moreover, television has become a substitute for reading for many people, the advantage for them being that a film can be seen in 90 minutes or so with very little effort on the part of the viewer, while a book takes much longer to read, and demands concentration and thought. In *English Teaching Since 1965*, David Allen quotes Frank Whitehead discussing "'now-fashionable activities'" which actually entail literature being used merely "'in the service of some other element, such as talk, writing or social relevance, or 'used' merely as a trigger to set off exchange of first-hand experience'". Whitehead says this results in "'an erosion of belief in the power of literature as such, in the value of exposing oneself to the impact of a poem, or story or novel...and a personal response which is also an informed response'" (in Allen, 1980: 91). While Whitehead discusses activities in the class-room, it is my contention that this 'erosion' is one of the destructive effects of television. Good films, both on the television and on the cinema circuit, are relatively rare because they are seldom popular, and therefore not very profitable financially.

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Literature does, in fact, have practical worth: it gives real and great pleasure to the reader, and the multitude of good works available affords him entry into 'brave new worlds', as well as presenting those that are familiar in a new light. Then, too, it gives him a respite from his daily struggles, and allows him to escape into other realms in which he need not personally strive and labour, though good literature still engages his full attention and participation. Pleasure in reading, once inculcated, has another benefit, in that it is an activity that is independent of weather conditions and other people, and it involves no expense, for subscriptions to libraries are, for the main part, free, and no special equipment or clothing is necessary. Thus the person who enjoys reading need never be, and rarely is, bored.

There are other advantages to be reaped from the reading of good literature. One's vocabulary is vastly extended so that communication with others, whether in speech or writing, is greatly facilitated, especially in imparting abstract ideas, feeling, subtleties, or descriptions, and therefore the danger of misunderstanding or being misunderstood is largely reduced. Wide reading, too, enables one to spell, punctuate, find the *bon mot*, and construct clear and correct sentences (abilities not to be under-estimated in our daily lives). Furthermore, it develops logical, precise, and critical thinking and judgement. In the 1980s a move away from including literature in the school curriculum was mooted in favour of presenting only extracts from worthy books to be used as models of how to communicate effectively, and I mentioned this kind of thinking earlier when I quoted what Frank Whitehead said. However, this was never adopted, because of the outcry from both teachers and pupils, who saw

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that not only would English as a subject then be very dull, but also that there is no substitute for the great joy and the knowledge about human nature that literature brings. The Bullock Report, which was the outcome of an investigation into the aims and purposes of English teaching, stressed the need to look at language across the curriculum, and it notes:

...language competence grows incrementally, through an interaction of writing, talking, *reading* and experience, the body of resulting work forming an organic whole.

(Bullock Report, 1975: 7 (*italics mine*))

Good literature teaches not by intent, didactically or by conventional methods about our world, ourselves and others—it does so through delight and pleasure. Andrew Furman in his article 'The Importance of Saul Bellow' says: 'For outside of the increasingly insular world of academics, readers still unabashedly rely on literature to illuminate truths about the soul'. He goes on to quote Stanislaw Baranczak who wrote in the magazine *The New Republic*: "Imagine our collective consciousness without what we learned about the human soul from *Crime and Punishment*' (in Furman, 1997: 61). I would add to this last statement—or indeed 'without what we learned about the human soul' from any of the other books by the great writers we have at our disposal.

Literature's real and most important value, though, is that it offers certain truths about life and about mankind. Mere facts can never tell the whole truth, as indicated in Chapter One in the example of Bitzer's description of a horse, for they provide only the bare bones and tangible aspects of a given subject,

and can even be misleading. It was Mark Twain who attributed to Benjamin Disraeli the words, 'There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics' (Twain, 2000). Moreover, the reading of good literature results in the development of the individual himself, because it broadens the horizons of intellectual knowledge, enhances clarity of vision, develops the imaginative perceptions and the awareness of the needs and feelings of others, the understanding of one's own attitudes and feelings, and, most of all, bestows on the reader a special kind of wisdom of the heart as well as of the mind.

Reading is, however, a sedentary and relatively slow process, while the watchwords of today's world are 'speed' and 'action'. What cannot be done rapidly and what appears to necessitate no active effort, cannot, people believe, be effective. The central character in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (Lewis, 1998) is George Follansbee Babbitt, a small town American business man, who belongs to several Lodges and a club in order to advance him in his business. He and his friends claim democratic values, yet they despise foreigners, Jews, labourers and anyone who does not conform to their idea of what an American ought to be. They have nothing but contempt for artists, authors and musicians, for people who find pleasure in reading, who discuss anything other than banal and safe topics, or have intellectual pursuits that do not lead to an acquisition of wealth. Though they profess to pity those who belong to a higher social circle in their community, they secretly envy them and revere titles and lofty positions. Their main aim in life is to make money, which they see as the duty of all red-blooded Americans, and to do this they must

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continually 'hustle', even if they engage in business transactions that are barely within the law. Lewis describes their way of life thus:

As [Babbit] approached the office he walked faster and faster, muttering, 'Guess I better hustle.' All about him the city was hustling, for hustling's sake. Men in motors were hustling to pass one another in the hustling traffic. Men were hustling to catch trolleys...to hurl themselves into buildings, into hustling express elevators....Men were feverishly getting rid of visitors in offices adorned with the signs, 'This Is My Busy Day' and 'The Lord Created the World in Six Days—You can Say All you Got to Say in Six Minutes'. Men who had made five thousand, year before last, and ten thousand last year, were urging on nerve-yelping bodies and parched brains so that they might make twenty thousand this year.

(Lewis, 1998: 159-60)

In his forties, Babbit undergoes a crisis when his best friend is jailed and, during a Union strike, he believes and tentatively states that the strikers' actions are valid. For this his friends, who begin to suspect that he might have leanings towards communism, withdraw their friendship, but his rebellious and independent spirit is aroused. When, however, he loses business and, in particular, a certain lucrative if rather shady contract he has been certain of is endangered, he reluctantly returns to the fold and his routine of hustling for money. He sees his only hope as lying in his son who is at a university because of his father's belief that a degree of any kind bestows a certain cachet that is an advantage in business; but this son defies and rejects his father and

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his world by going his own way, and it is he who is seen as being ultimately successful in terms of the better values of life.

Rudyard Kipling, it seems to me, shows the same kind of thinking as Babbit and his cronies in his poem for children entitled 'How the Camel Got His Hump'. In this poem he says that we get a hump uglier than that of the camel when we haven't enough to do. One stanza reads:

The cure for this ill is not to sit still
Or frowst with a book by the fire;
But to take a large hoe and a shovel also,
And dig till you gently perspire.

(Kipling, 1978: 22)

The word 'frowst', with its implication of sloth, lethargy, fustiness and lack of direction or purpose, suggests that any kind of physical labour, no matter how useless or redundant, is better than sitting around reading. His poem 'If' holds up for children the ideal of what a man ought to be, but which I think presents a picture not of a warm, compassionate and likeable because fallible human being, or even of a super being, but rather of something sub-human, and it makes no mention of reading's contributing to manliness at all. The lines in this poem

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run

(in Corel, 1995: 70)

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seem to endorse the idea of physical activity (consider the implications of the word 'run') being of supreme value and, together with the poem as a whole, that reading is an unproductive and lazy kind of pastime. Today speed and action are seen as being even more indispensable than in Kipling's time. The acceptance of the idea, however, that life should be filled with frenetic activity without a second's pause for meditation, leisurely reading, or appreciation of the world around us (even if the lines quoted above are not meant to be interpreted literally) must surely spell death to the soul. The first stanzas of W.H. Davies' poem, 'Leisure', are:

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

(Davies, 1942: 140)

This kind of abeyance of our daily obligatory labours is of vital importance for mental and spiritual health. Moreover, reading is, I am convinced, one of the highest kinds of activity the human being is capable of, an assertion I hope I have already justified and which I wish to vindicate further in what follows.

A maxim often used to defend an aversion for reading or formal education, is that experience is the best teacher, and of course there is a good deal of truth in this. When one experiences something in any depth, the whole of

one's being, which consists of the senses, the emotions, and the intellect, is involved. So if, for example, one is told not to touch an electric light switch in a certain room because it is faulty, one will absorb this intellectually and remember it for a short while only. Once shocked by the switch one will never tamper with it again. Being shocked constitutes a human experience from which we learn. In the same way, when reading good literature with our full attention, the three aspects of the self mentioned above are all at work, because we respond to the writer's invitation to see, smell, taste, touch and hear (or one or more of these in combination at any one time), to feel some kind and degree of emotion, and to think about what has been said. Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* says: 'The poet...brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity' (Coleridge, 1906: 173-74). Christina van Heyningen in *On the Printed Page* puts it this way: '[the reader] must read with intellect, emotions, senses, all moving and working at the same time' (van Heyningen, 1964: 1). What is being said here of poets is true of all great writers. Attentive and responsive reading then becomes an experience and, like all experiences, remains with one, even if only at a subconscious level.

The fallacy inherent in the belief that personal experience alone is the best teacher and that this is enough, is that it is clearly impossible for any one person to experience all or even a minute fraction of the multifarious situations that human beings are confronted with, but good writers make an infinite number of experiences available to us, even if vicariously. For example, all things being equal, most of us will not commit murder, but a sensitive reading

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of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* or Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* enables us to share the thoughts and feelings of the murderer, and his reactions to the physical and spiritual consequences of the act. In the same way, that is, by responding with our whole being, we absorb into our souls all the various permutations of human interactions, reactions to situations, dilemmas, and confrontations that are explored in good literature. This is education in the widest and best sense of the word and, because there can be no greater activity than one in which we are totally involved, this is what I meant when I said that proper reading is an active process. This, too, is why I believe that literature is the highest form of the Humanities, for not only does it encompass many of the other subjects such as psychology, philosophy, ethics, history and geography, but it is the only one that always actively involves the emotions as well as the intellect. For example, textbooks on psychology or psychiatry can impart the facts related to schizophrenia, and thus provide one with an intellectual knowledge of what is involved, but a reading of a *novel*, such as *I Never Promised you a Rose Garden* by Hannah Green (1970), who clearly has an intimate acquaintance with this illness, enables one to experience, if at second hand, the pain and terror, the indignities, humiliation and physical torment of the victim of this mental indisposition, and then one comes to a far better understanding of what this condition entails.

I have used the word 'good' (a word related to 'great' in my Introduction, and, like it, considered inappropriate by some relativist theorists) to qualify the kind of literature I mean, because there is much literature in print that is of little, if any, value. The kind of book that does not involve the reader in any

depth, that demands little thought or effort from him, that allows him simply to follow a story, does not do much harm unless it is to waste time that could be spent more profitably and just as enjoyably in reading something worthwhile. Almost everyone enjoys a rousing good tale for its own sake, but if it has little of importance to say to us, and if we read this kind of book exclusively, the benefits to us are very small.

There is also, I believe, a vast amount of writing that is not only worthless but actively dangerous. An example of this is the kind of love-story or tale of adventure that is churned out by publishers and avidly devoured by uncritical and ill-advised readers. Apart from the fact that most of these books are written to a formula and vary little except for the names and geographical circumstances of the protagonists, they present a vision of life that is not the truth. Matthew Arnold in *The Study of Poetry* says: 'the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance' (in Enright and de Chickera, 1962: 261). F.R. Leavis argues throughout Chapter One of *The Great Tradition* that there is a kind of hierarchy amongst literary works, and that those that are the greatest offer a yard-stick against which to measure others. Furthermore, he insists that inherent in good literature is a concern with moral values. For example, he writes of Jane Austen: 'Without her intense moral preoccupation she wouldn't have been a good novelist' (1952: 16). Of George Eliot he writes: 'it is distinctive of her, among *great* novelists, to be peculiarly addicted to moral preoccupations'; while in more general terms he asks, 'Is there any *great* novelist whose preoccupation with form is not...a responsibility involv-

ing...imaginative sympathy, moral discrimination, and judgement of relative human value?' (ibid., 39-40, my italics) It would be ludicrous to suggest that the writing of Wilbur Smith has as much value (even if of a different kind) as that of Henry James, or that the poetry of Patience Strong has as much value as that of W.B. Yeats. These are, of course, extremes, and I use them only to highlight the principle of merit in literature.

The kind of pulp-fiction love-story discussed above nearly always ends in marriage, with the inference that the partners live happily ever after. Now this may do for fairy-tales when we are very young, but it will not do for real life. In the James Bond kind of adventure story, the hero always triumphs, no matter what the odds, and evil is always vanquished, clearly not a true reflection of what happens in life at all. The harm inherent in a constant diet of this kind of book lies in the fact that its travesty of reality is consciously or unconsciously absorbed by readers, who are then unprepared to cope with the realities that may be, and often are, harsh when they encounter them. It is true that good works, such as Shakespeare's comedies with their happy endings, demand a willing suspension of disbelief, in that they are not 'realistic', but the story and the actual events in these plays are merely the frame-work upon which Shakespeare builds what he is saying about the human condition. The kind of book described above seems (in Lawrentian idiom) to 'do dirt' on life (Lawrence, 1971: 312).

This type of work is not confined to pulp-fiction. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë contains elements of it. While the book is written extremely well, in elegant language with well-constructed sentences, it also incorporates un-

questioningly many of the more formulaic and unlikely components of a gothic novel. Though *Jane Eyre* might not subscribe to the tenets of 'realism', might exult in its gothic qualities, this to me is a limitation. It is beyond belief that a mad woman can be locked up in a tower for years without anyone knowing about it, even though mysterious sounds are heard and lights are seen at odd times. The happy ending, too, is unrealistic. Jane's marriage to a blind, morose and much older man cannot in all conscience be said to be conducive to undiluted and lasting happiness, which is what Charlotte Brontë seems to be suggesting. F.R. Leavis, in his note on the Brontës, maintains that Charlotte can claim 'no part in the great line of English fiction', and even goes as far as saying that it is tempting to say 'that there is only one Brontë' (referring to Emily) (Leavis, 1948: 37).

In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney guesses what Catherine Morland (who entertains deep suspicions about the causes of his mother's death, and even fears she might be incarcerated) has been thinking. He says to her:

'...consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from?...Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this?...where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies...'

(Austen, 1972: 199)

In a sense, people who live on a diet of second-rate literature or bad films are 'prepared' for such fantastic atrocities, but not for the real eventualities of life,

and that is one of the reasons for its being so important that people read the best that is available in literature.

Even amongst good literature there are degrees of merit, as Leavis maintains, and as is apparent in the case of *Jane Eyre*, and while personal taste plays a large role in our preferences, there is no doubt that some works are better than others. The criteria for the degree of merit inherent in a piece of literature are the extent of its universality, the depth and profundity of the truths it explores, the extent and quality of its examination of moral issues, the quality of its language usage, the degree of its imaginative sensitivity, and the evidence of thought in the writer. The really good works, furthermore, can stand the test of time, which is why Chaucer's characters still seem alive today. The people who make up the group of pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* are described in the 'General Prologue', and each one has qualities that can still be understood and appreciated, from the courteous, courageous, and magnanimous 'verray, parfit gentil knyght' to the avaricious and swindling Pardoner, who trades on the ignorance, the credulity, and the fear of everlasting Hell-fires of uneducated people (Chaucer, 1988: 23-36). People just like these pilgrims can be seen in the courts, the law chambers, in business, on the sportsfields, in bars, at revival meetings, and at social gatherings today. Extensive reading helps us to establish yardsticks by which to measure the worth of what we read, and the more we read good literature, the more we are forced to reject the second-rate, because we cannot stomach the lies proffered, the paucity of thought and expression, and the shallowness and super-

ficialities of the moral content of poor literature. Alexander Pope in 'An Essay on Criticism' says:

'Tis hard to say if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But of the two, less dang'rous is th'offence
To tire our patience, than mislead our sense.

(Pope, 1956: 58)

Though Pope here actually condemns the critic more than the creative writer, the words 'dang'rous', 'offence' and 'mislead our sense' are in essence what I have suggested above in relation to poor literature.

I come now to the question of teaching English literature in Africa. I am not referring to English as a *language* here, for many Black writers use English as their medium to ensure as wide an audience as possible, and English is the *lingua franca* in much of the world. When one considers that in South Africa we have at least eleven different languages, and that if a Zulu, say, wrote in his home language his readership would be severely limited, using English makes sense. What is at issue here is the *literature* that has been written in England and the countries that were once her colonies (including the United States of America and even India).

There is a tendency in many universities in South Africa to devote a very large proportion of their literature syllabi to African writers because the feeling is that, amongst other things, students should know what is being written in the continent in which they live. I have no quarrel with this, and I believe that a section of a student's course in his average of three years of study of English

literature should be given to this field of writing. Frances M.M. Olver, in the Introduction to *The Oak and the Peach*, quotes visiting American Professor John Povey: "It is unthinkable for the national culture not to be taught in equivalent circumstances abroad. South Africa has writers of far greater literary calibre than either [Australia or Kenya]" (in Olver, 1984: xxviii). Olver balances this with Richard Rive's more critical view:

'No work in English produced by an African or South African writer as yet is up to the best in British traditions....There is much in South African literature that is mediocre and propagandist, much that strikes false poses and becomes merely pretentious....Students have a right to study their own literature *in addition to* the best that can be provided for them in the English language'.

(*ibid.*, (italics mine))

What is of concern is the preponderance of African literature at the expense of classical works in English syllabi, which (a point implicit in Rive's statement) must result in the impoverishment of students in their limited knowledge of the great works that have been written over the years in the rest of the world. In this case, ideology exacts a high price.

Apart from the necessity for proportion and comparison in terms of the merit and quality of literature, it is a fact that cultures which for centuries have had a tradition of oral literature only, and in which the written word is relatively new, must have a fairly meagre store of writing to draw on. Furthermore, when this is held up against the body of really good works that has accumulated over centuries, it must inevitably be found wanting. Then, too, the preoccupa-

tion of writers in emergent countries is, naturally, the sufferings of the oppressed, and the liberation struggle and its aftermath. This tends to result in a repetition of theme that for the reader soon begins to lack freshness and vigour.

I do not wish to suggest that there are no good writers in Africa. On the contrary, there are very good writers, for example, in South Africa, as Povey points out, but I think one must distinguish between White and Black writers, because people whose home language is English are by descent, culture, upbringing and education essentially European, and therefore their writing, apart from setting and characterisation, differs little from that written in other English-speaking countries. However, we do have many gifted Black writers who use English to excellent effect, people such as Sol Plaatje, Ezekiel Mphahlele, H.I.E. Dhlomo, Casey Motsisi, Arthur Nortje, Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali, Mongane Wally Serote, Essop Patel, Njabulo Ndebele, and Achmat Dangor. In the rest of Africa, too, there are numerous gifted writers, and books such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ngugi's *Grain of Wheat* and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* have great stature and transcend the limitations I indicated above. In these books, the names of the characters and places, the culture and tribal traditions described, and the turns of phrase employed by the characters, all place them firmly in the country of birth of the writer. If their use of English makes the works meaningful for and pertinent to people in the rest of the world, this is, I believe, a great merit, not a detraction. We come back again to the fact that literature is not sociology or history or economics, that these are necessarily part of the fabric, but not the mainspring, of a work.

There is the argument that because there are now so many Black people at our universities, all students should be presented only with concepts, characters, objects and creatures that are familiar to them. If this were followed through to its logical conclusion, there would be a very small body of literature that could be studied in each country anywhere in the world. Students everywhere need some background knowledge of literature written in a different age and in different countries, because mores, social and moral systems and ethical values vary from age to age, let alone from country to country. Further, how many English students living in England have ever seen an albatross or heard a nightingale? How many are familiar with falconry or what a falcon is? How many Americans know that a moccasin is not only a shoe, but also a kind of snake? Some explanation of the unfamiliar is necessary, and it is precisely the genius of poets such as Coleridge, Keats, Emily Dickinson and Yeats that enables readers to appreciate the unfamiliar, and its significance in the scheme of things. Good writing is meaningful anywhere; if this were not so, why are writers such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Jane Austen and Milton read, even if in translation, in so many parts of the world? Why, for that matter, do we read Homer and Sophocles, Dante and Boccaccio, Flaubert and Camus, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky?

In the same way, if we are really to understand literature written in Kenya or Ghana or the Congo, or even parts of our multi-cultural South Africa that we are not familiar with, it is necessary to have a knowledge of the historical and cultural aspects that inform it. Since background information is necessary for full understanding anywhere, one cannot accept that a book written in Africa is

necessarily more familiar to a black student in South Africa than a book by D.H. Lawrence or Joseph Conrad. What does *not* need explanation is the humanity that is common to us all and which, while morality and customs may change with time and locality, remains basically the same. For example, in 'Spring and Fall' by Gerard Manley Hopkins, the last two lines are:

It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

(Hopkins, 1953: 50)

The comment on man's mortality and his awareness of this is surely relevant to us all. For, as I mentioned in my Introduction, I believe that a good piece of writing is an organism in its own right; that knowledge of its author's life, though it may enhance, may also detract from one's enjoyment and understanding of the work, and that though a basic knowledge of the social background in which it is written can be helpful, the reader of the novel, play or poem does not *need* this information, because social differences or elements from the writer's biography are either made clear in the work itself, or they are irrelevant.

Another reason put forward for avoiding classical works is that their language is so foreign and remote to students that the words are almost unintelligible to them. This argument, too, does not seem a solid one to me. Wordsworth insisted that poetry should be couched in the language of the common people (Wordsworth, 1963: 241), but the language of his own poetry is ex-

tremely intricate and contradicts this. What ordinary man would express himself thus:

Who, with a natural instinct to discern
What knowledge can perform, is diligent to learn;
Abides by this resolve, and stops not there,
But makes his moral being his prime care...

(Wordsworth, 1904: 386)

Yet Wordsworth's poetry has been read and loved for years, even by people who may have had to wrestle with the complexity of his language, because what one gleans is worth the effort. Similarly and perhaps even more so, the language of Chaucer and Shakespeare is strange even to native English speakers today, but I have had personal experience of students who initially resisted the effort involved, but who subsequently came to really enjoy and appreciate the work of these two writers. Nor are age or lack of intellectual prowess as great factors in the non-enjoyment of good literature as one would imagine. In 1967, my class of 16-year-old boys in the then 'O stream' (or 'Ordinary stream', a stream that precluded students from going on to study at a university), on finding that the prescribed books for that year were *Macbeth*, and *Far From the Maddening Crowd*, immediately responded that they were 'thick' (their word for being stupid), and would never be able to understand the works of Shakespeare and Thomas Hardy, because they knew only basic, modern English. As the year progressed, however, and as they grew more familiar with the language of the books, their enthusiasm grew. By the end of the year all but a few of these boys reported that the works had given them

great pleasure and, because they had seen relevance to their own lives as well as new possibilities in what they had read, they had been of inestimable value to them as people.

Robin Crouch writes about his immense enjoyment of the *William* books by Richmal Crompton, and comments on the fact that Crompton never patronises her young readers in her use of language. He goes on to remark that now he is astonished that at the age of ten he had come to understand (because of the pleasure involved) every word in these books, though, he says, the author 'does not compromise her language for a young audience' (Crouch, 2000: 3). I know that he is far from being alone in his sentiments about these novels, and if what he says about language usage is true for children, why not for adults? Indeed, people such as Walter Saunders, formerly Professor of English at the University of Bophutaswana, and Dr. M.B. Schroenn, formerly English Subject Adviser for the Natal Education Department, and now Regional Director of the Independent Schools Association of South Africa, have found that many black students are eager to read Shakespeare and classical works in general, and this, to me, is one of the definitive arguments for more time being spent on the great literature of the past (and present) at our universities.

The fact that English is not the mother-tongue of a large section of South African students does not condone the neglect of important works of literature, for the reasons I have cited above. The truth is that black students learn through the medium of English, are increasingly familiar with the language, and do not wish to be fobbed off with the second rate. What is happening is that for the sake of ideology, political correctness, or fashion, we are denying

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our students contact with the richest, most prolific and greatest store of literature in the world. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves what justification there is for this kind of deprivation and accept the responsibility and the consequences which, I believe, will prove to be of the most serious nature.

Chapter Three: Poetry—A General Overview

For centuries children have delighted in nursery rhymes. The pleasure children obtain from what is fairly meaningless to them, especially since in various instances the actual words have become garbled with time, lies in their regular beat and in their rhyming, which make for harmony, a kind of verbal music, and which satisfies man's innate yearning for symmetry and order. Nursery rhymes sometimes arose from actual events. For example, James Orchard Halliwell says that 'Little Tommy Tucker' was the name of the 'Christmas Prince' at St. John's College, Oxford, in the year 1607 (Halliwell, 1970: 20), a fact enlarged on by the editors of *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Opie, 1975: 416-17). However, there is often no real clarity on the exact origin of these rhymes. The *Oxford* editors cite various claims in the cases of, for instance, 'Hush-a-bye Baby' (*ibid.*, 61-62), 'Georgie Porgie' (*ibid.*, 185-86), 'Humpty Dumpty' (including the information that the original Humpty was Richard III) (*ibid.*, 214-16), 'Mary, Mary, quite contrary' (Mary, Queen of Scots, being among the various sources suggested) (*ibid.*, 301), 'Ring o' Roses' (which dates back to the Black Death) (*ibid.*, 365), and 'Yankee Doodle' (traced by most recent research to the American War of Independence) (*ibid.*, 439). This is a fascinating subject in itself, but one which is not pertinent to the consideration of poetry as such.

Children's games, too, like skipping with a rope, are often accompanied by some kind of rhythmic and rhyming chant with which their movements are

synchronised, and group games, in which the hunter or hunted is chosen at random, are preceded by a ritual sort of verse:

One potato, two potatoes, three potatoes, four;
Five potatoes, six potatoes, seven potatoes, more.

Or

Eeny, meeny, miney, mo;
Catch the devil by his toe;
If he hollers let him go;
Eeny, meeny, miney, mo.

The meaning of these, if there ever was any, is now quite obscure, but what they have in common is rhyme, a regular beat, and repetition, and it is these things that provide satisfaction for children. Nursery rhymes and this kind of incantation could be said to be very rudimentary verse, but their lack of meaningfulness alone prevents them from being poetry.

In ancient times, before people read and wrote, and before there was such a thing as printing, ballads were used by wandering minstrels to spread tidings of events of interest and importance. These ballads were very regular in form, consisting of an ordered pattern of rhyme and metre. The rhyme, I suspect, operated as an *aide-mémoire* but also, together with the rhythm, contributed to their musicality, and indeed, ballads were often sung to the accompaniment of some kind of musical instrument, such as a lute. A fair number of these ballads have been collected (by, for example, Thomas Percy, Sir Walter Scott

and Francis James Child), and many are poetic in nature (see M.L. Rosenthal, 1987: 1154; Edward Hirsch, 1999: 270; Louis Simpson, 1972: 404; Bernard Bergonzi, 1980: 185).

There are many definitions of poetry and much of what I have said in the previous chapter about literature is, of course, true of poetry. It is writing that is complex and meaningful and transmits the poet's perceptions of values and ethics, his sensual appreciation of the world around him, together with his thoughts and feelings about what constitutes this world, and his attitude towards events and the activities of his fellow-man, and it explores one or another truth about life in a pleasurable way. The lyric is markedly different from other forms of literature in ways I wish to discuss later, and I consider it to be the most sublime of these different genres in literature, because, subject as it is to a strict discipline, it encapsulates so much profundity of thought and depth of emotion (even if the emotion is not overtly stated) in a relatively small space, and it does so in language that is evocative, powerful, and aesthetically pleasing and satisfying, though the pleasure and satisfaction may vary in degree from person to person.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines poetry as 'the elevated expression of thought or feeling in metrical form', while A.E. Housman says that poetry is not the thing said, but a way of saying it (in Phythian, 1970: 119). Both these definitions are severely limiting and I think it worthwhile at this point to look at what one or two poets themselves have said about poetry. Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* writes:

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The poet...brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination.

(Coleridge, 1906: 173-74)

Flaubert says something similar when he describes creative artists as 'triple thinkers', in that their work conveys a simultaneity of sensory, emotional, and intellectual experiences (in Hugo, 1968: 13). This corresponds to what I was saying in the previous chapter when I maintained that reading is an active not a passive occupation, in that proper reading involves the whole soul of man in action.

Shelley in 'A Defence of Poetry' says,

Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted....[It] enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight....[It] is the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man....A Poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.

(Shelley, 1995: 253-54)

He later states that 'Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds' (ibid., 274). If one is not to see a contradiction in the last quotation, in that truth, the highest criterion for all good literature, is often neither beautiful or happy, one must interpret these words in this context as meaning the ability of the poet to understand and express aptly and per-

fectly what he feels about and sees of man's condition and his world. In the case of the first of these quotations, one must understand Shelley to mean the poet's ability to make some sense out of what appears to us as chaos.

We recall Matthew Arnold's words in 'The Study of Poetry', which point to his belief in degrees of merit in literature: 'For in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound or unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or half-true, is of paramount importance' (in Enright and de Chickera, 1962: 261). With regard to what I called touchstones against which to test works of literature, Samuel Johnson makes this point in 'Preface to Shakespeare': 'nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind' (ibid., 132). Howard Sergeant, in the Introduction to *The Albermarle Book of Verse*, volume 2, writes: 'a good poem presents us with a fresh experience, or a re-ordering of past existence, and should assist us to obtain a clear perspective of the world in general, and of human behaviour as it is, not merely as we should like it to be' (1960: vii). This last quotation touches directly on the effect of poetry on the reader and it is a more elegant expression of my own belief, which is that poetry opens new vistas for the reader, clears away the dead-wood of inappropriate or even false beliefs, forces him to re-examine his moral code, invites him to explore avenues of familiar perceptions with a new and different vision, and brings into sharper focus that which we already know. In addition, and not least, it gives prodigious pleasure in its presentation of the great truths of life.

Most poets agree that the purpose of poetry is to instruct and to delight. Sidney in 'An Apology for Poetry' believes that '[poetry] doth not only teach

and move to a truth, but teacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth....No learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue and...none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry' (in Enright and de Chickera, 1962: 30). Johnson, in his 'Preface to Shakespeare', agrees, though he distinguishes between writing in general and poetry in particular: 'The end of writing is to instruct, the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing' (ibid., 137). When Johnson mentions 'writing' here, I assume he means the category of didactic or informative literature I outlined in the previous chapter, for what he says of poetry is true of good novels and plays too. Wordsworth's emphasis is much more on the giving of pleasure by poetry and on the belief that the poet's art is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe and a homage to the dignity of man. This pleasure, he says, produces sympathy with the pain of others, and leads to truth which is not individual and local, but general. He is quite emphatic in his belief that providing pleasure should be the main aim of the poet, when he states in the 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads', for example (Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1965: 257-58):

The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man.

The conviction of the universality of poetry and its application to the mind and heart of Everyman is emphasised in this quotation too. T.S. Eliot appears to agree with Wordsworth when he says that what we can be sure about is that

poetry has to give pleasure, though he does not limit the function of poetry to this (Eliot, 1957: 19). Shelley in 'A Defence of Poetry' puts more emphasis on the poet's appeal to the imagination, which he believes is instrumental in developing the moral sense:

The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination....Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man....

(Shelley, 1995: 256)

Essentially, he is asserting that without a developed imagination man is not capable of true morality. He says also that poetry replenishes the imagination by furnishing it with thoughts of new delight, thus stressing the idea of the pleasure that poetry gives. He maintains too that poetry not only has a civilising influence on man, but that it has a direct bearing on moral conduct: 'the presence or absence of poetry in its most perfect and universal form, has been found to be connected with good and evil in conduct or habit' (ibid., 259).

Writers other than poets have commented on the universality and value of poetry. In M. Heese and R. Lawton's Introduction to *The Owl Critic* we find the following:

In literature we are confronted with the most fundamental issues in life. Literature is concerned with the very stuff of Everyman's experience....Even though a literary work is many hundreds of years old...it may still comment meaningfully on problems as old as man himself....[Poetry] offers one the opportunity for the widening of one's hori-

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zons, for the refinement of one's sensibilities, and for the deepening of one's understanding of the human condition.

(1965: 2)

Of course, if poetry has much to offer, its ability to do so is premised on the rigorous demands it places on poets. Ezra Pound writes that, "Poetry is a centaur. That is, in prose one aims an arrow at a target. In a poem, one does the same thing, while also riding a horse" (in Pinsky, 1998: 8). An art form that places such demands on its writers must also place demands on its readers, and, again, this thesis will help the reader to face those demands.

Many authors in their writing protest against the moral abuses that exist in social systems or in man's relationships with his fellow beings. For example, Jane Austen protests against, among other things, the way in which women are seen and used as counters in the 'marriage market', Dickens against the social evils of Victorian England, George Eliot against the inferior status of women, and Henry James against the meddling of people with power in the affairs of others. Playwrights, such as Shakespeare, have similar preoccupations, as do poets. Consider, for example, Wordsworth's sonnet 'The World is Too Much with Us', Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach', and Yeats's 'The Second Coming'. These three poems all comment on the destructive effect of man's increasing materialism and his loss of faith and direction, though they do so very differently and with different emphases, as well as by embracing additional and varying elements. I am not suggesting that the purpose of all poets is to protest against prevailing conditions, far from it, but many such examples exist, particularly in modern poetry, and especially in that of oppressed peo-

ple. Many Black South African poets writing during the Apartheid era used poetry as a means of protesting against their lack of power and dignity as men. A powerful example of this is 'City Johannesburg' by Mongane Wally Serote (Serote, 1982: 22):

Jo'burg City

I travel on your black and white and robotted roads

Through your thick iron breath that you inhale

At six in the morning and exhale from five noon.

Jo'burg City

That is the time when I come to you,

When your neon flowers flaunt from your electrical wind,

That is the time when I leave you,

When your neon flowers flaunt their way through the falling
darkness

On your cement trees.

(ll.18-27)

Michael Chapman and Achmat Dangor comment thus: 'Initially Soweto poetry was directed in protest at a predominantly white "liberal" readership....In 1976, however, the emphasis had shifted with the Black Consciousness voices...finding their full power in an uncompromising poetry of resistance—a mobilising rhetoric imparting to a black audience a message of consciousness-raising and race-pride' (Chapman and Dangor: 1982: 15).

More than merely protesting against political and social oppression, poetry can be used as a weapon. The poet and critic Christopher van Wyk, though, expressing concern at the lack of finish in much Black protest poetry, says

that it is best to have a weapon that can pierce and get to the bone quickly, rather than a blunt instrument that bludgeons and leaves a mess, and that to write with a sharp instrument means writing articulately, employing all the skills of poetry (in Coovadia, 1988: 13). In response to this, Imraan Coovadia makes the point that Black poetry is primarily oral and read at political gatherings and funerals, and that, as a weapon, it has the power to arouse and to mobilise thousands of people at these functions (Coovadia, 1988: 13-15).

Much of what I have said above is true of all forms of literature, and thus I think it is necessary at this point to look at the differences between prose and poetry. W.H. Gardner, in his Inaugural Lecture at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg in 1965, entitled 'Language, Literature, and Human Values', says: 'Poetry is not restricted to language in verse-form: it is an essential ingredient in any really great play or novel' (Gardner, 1966: 5). However, while what he says may be true of the language employed, poetry, prose, and drama are, obviously, different and distinct genres of literature.

One of the things commonly seen as distinguishing poetry from prose is that poetry has a rhyme scheme. This is not, however, an acceptable criterion or even true, for not all good poetry rhymes. Although most earlier traditional poetry does have rhyme, the bulk of the contents of Shakespeare's plays is written in blank verse, and much modern poetry is written in free verse. The second commonly accepted difference is that poetry has a regular metrical system, and while, again, this is true of a vast body of poetry, it is not so of all poetry, and particularly not of modern poetry. Furthermore, all good writers use the rhythms associated with various metres to enhance the effect and

meaning of what is being said. In fact, metre in poetry is not a strict antithesis to prose, because lines and passages of metre so naturally occur in writing prose, that it would be scarcely possible to avoid them, even if it were desirable. As Louis Simpson says:

So important is rhythm in poetry that in the first edition of *An Introduction to Poetry* I said that poetry was "thought expressed in rhythm", and that in poetry rhythm was essential to the meaning, while in prose it was not....

He continues, however:

A poem consists of several elements....It is not possible to isolate one element and show that this is what poetry consists of; and we cannot say exactly what the difference is between poetry and prose, for they have several elements in common.

(Simpson, 1972: 3-4)

What does distinguish poetry from prose then? Firstly and most obviously the form, or appearance, or shape of poetry differs markedly from that of prose. Poetry is nearly always indented. It is often, though not always, divided into stanzas, which may be regular or may vary in length, depending on the poet's purpose. The lines do not necessarily end at the termination of a sentence, and vary in length either in a regular pattern or irregularly; sometimes they consist of only a word or two. In addition, the language in a poem is intense in texture, to comply with the need for concentration into a short space;

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there is nearly always some deliberate use of rhythm; and, except for long epic poems, usually only one theme is dealt with. C.T. Probyn in *English Poetry* puts it this way:

Poetry uses any language at the poet's disposal...but the poet endows it with a specially significant form and content....Poetry is a system of discourse which signals its presence by shape (form) and intensity of meaning....Line length is significant in poetry but not in prose....Poetry may use rhyme-schemes, a regular metre, and so on.

(Probyn, 1984: 9)

I said earlier that poetry is subject to a strict kind of discipline but this is true of all the different forms of literature, though I believe that prose and even drama do not impose quite the stringent requirements that poetry does. However, prose must be written in sentences, paragraphs, and chapters, which must be carefully punctuated and be cohesive if the writer wishes to make his meaning clear. This is why the kind of writing sometimes called 'stream of consciousness', which abandons these conventions, is so difficult to understand, and so rarely successful. Novellas and short-stories are subject to restrictions that the novel is not, because there is less time to develop character, setting, situation and plot, and the climax and denouement must be arrived at fairly soon. They are limited, too, in the matter of theme, while the novel can develop and explore any number of related and interacting themes. Drama has its own stipulations, because it is meant to be acted out, with words spoken aloud, so that it must use devices such as stage directions and 'asides'.

None of these forms, though, must comply as rigorously to saying as much in as few words as lyrical poetry.

There is still much more that distinguishes poetry from prose. The poet, in order to emphasise some aspect of what he wants to impart, often does not use normal and accepted syntax. Coleridge observes in *Biographia Literaria*: 'The true question must be, whether there are not modes of expression, a *construction*, and an *order* of sentences, which are in their fit and natural place in a serious prose composition, but would be disproportionate and heterogeneous in metrical poetry' (Coleridge, 1906: 205). While I certainly agree with Coleridge, I might point out that the opposite is also true, that poetry often depends upon sentence constructions inappropriate to prose. For example, Hopkins frequently uses very unusual sentence construction. The following lines from 'Spring and Fall' would never occur in prose:

Leaves like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?

(Hopkins, 1953: 50)

Then, too, the poet uses imagery to a much greater extent than does the novelist; he makes constant and effective use of figures of speech; and he uses punctuation with greater calculation, deliberation and purpose than does the writer of prose. But perhaps the most important difference of all is that because he is not able, in the short space available to him, to define, refine, modify, qualify or explain exactly what he wants to convey, he must choose his words with consummate care, precision and accuracy.

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All these things together combine to elevate what may be mundane prose into pure poetry. I find it useful here to illustrate this point by comparing the King James Version of the well-known Chapter 13 of Corinthians 1 with that of the Revised Standard Version. The King James Version reads thus:

13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

13:4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.

13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth:

13:7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophesies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

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13:11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13:13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

The Revised Standard Version translates these verses thus:

13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

13:2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

13:3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

13:4 Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful;

13:5 it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

13:6 it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.

13:7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

13:8 Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

13:9 For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect;

13:10 but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

13:11. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; but when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

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13:12. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

13:13. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

In my examination of the differences between these two versions of the same chapter, the King James Version will be referred to as 'the former', and the Revised Standard as 'the latter'.

The former version begins with the concessional 'Though', which concedes that there may well be, indeed even *are*, people who possess the qualities mentioned in the first three verses, and that while this may be admirable, it is not enough. In the latter, the conditional 'If' is used, which postulates only a possibility, so that the sense of the gravity of the lack of charity or love is considerably diminished. In the former version, in both verses 2 and 3, the word 'And' precedes 'though', which has the effect of heaping up the number of possible praiseworthy attributes, but in the latter 'And' appears only in verse 2, which weakens the effect of the repetition, found in the former. Moreover, 'If' must be followed by the short, harsh word 'but' rather than the softer, smoother word 'and' that follows 'Though', which affects both the smoothness of the rhythm, and the musicality of these verses.

The words chosen in these first three verses of the former are much more mellifluous than those of the latter, by virtue of the long rounded sounds of 'though', 'prophecy', 'and', and 'bestow', as compared with 'if', 'prophetic powers', 'but', and 'give'. This is true, too, of the whole chapter. 'Unseemly' as compared with 'arrogant and rude', 'glass darkly' for 'mirror dimly', 'seeketh'

rather than 'insist', 'vaunteth' for 'boastful', and 'faileth' for 'ends', are all much more musical and pleasing to the ear, and, in addition, make for a smooth rhythmic pattern in contrast with the sharp, broken rhythm of the latter. Also, in the first three verses, words such as 'become' make the line much longer, and build up to a climax in the rhythm, which slows down after 'charity', giving a feeling of utter worthlessness. This is not felt nearly so strongly in the latter version, because expressions such as 'Love never ends' for 'Charity never faileth', and 'So faith, hope, love abide' for 'And now abideth faith, hope, charity', interrupt the forward movement of the first part of this verse. The bluntness of most of the words in the whole chapter of the latter version fracture the flow of movement as well as the long, even, smooth rhythm that the longer words, often lengthened by '-eth', of the former, ensure.

The words of the latter version frequently rob the chapter of the profound implications, nuances, and even meaning found in the former. The word 'charity', for example, means different kinds of love, but also tolerance, kindness, generosity, freedom from censure, liberality, and magnanimity, which are not always present in 'love'. 'Sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal' imply both loud, echoing sound and frivolous, meaningless noise, but 'noisy gong' and 'clanging cymbal' are almost synonymous. 'Bestow' has a much stronger implication of benevolence and philanthropy than 'give away', which is almost casual in comparison. 'Suffereth' contains an element of pain and distress that is missing in 'patient'; and 'charity never faileth' suggests more than just the unlimited duration of charity—it includes the idea of stamina and endurance in adversity, which is not apparent in 'Love never ends'. 'Am become' suggests a

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process of steady erosion of spiritual merit, whereas simply 'am' in the latter version is static. Similar examples are evident everywhere in the two versions of this chapter.

The last verse of the former begins with 'And', which heralds the culmination and conclusion of what has gone before, and 'now' makes what has been said pertinent for the present time as well as when the words were written. 'So' in the latter version signals simply that an implication is being drawn from what has gone before, while 'now' is not there at all. 'Abideth' in the former slows down the rhythm, almost insisting on a pause, and is followed by the three stressed words that come next, an emphasis that 'abide' does not achieve.

The imagery in the former version is much richer and more meaningful than that in the latter, and the best example of this is 'For now we see through a glass, darkly', compared with 'For now we see in a mirror dimly'. The latter implies that we see things faintly and in a blurred way, as well as, perhaps, back to front. In the former all that is true of the latter can be inferred, but, in addition, the word 'through' rather than 'in' has the implication of striving to penetrate meaning and gain understanding. The comma, absent in the latter version, forces the reader to halt. It is then followed by 'darkly', a much stronger word than 'dimly', which gives also a sense of distortion, mystery, and murkiness, so that the intensity of a lack of clarity and comprehension is vastly increased. The measured beat of the latter is affected, too, by the use of 'mirror' rather than 'glass'.

The whole of the former version, then, is poetic in its imagery, use of rhythm, choice of words, depth of meaning, and tone. The tone of the latter is brisk, conversational, stern, and down-to-earth, while that of the former is gentle, compassionate, and even sorrowful at first, and then becomes reassuring and comforting, ending on a note of certainty and conviction. One is a homily, the other a paean to the virtue and value of charity. In brief, the Revised Standard Version is explicit and easily intelligible, but it loses the mystery, the profundity, the beauty, and, I believe, much of the significance of the King James Version.

Richard Dawkins, in his book *River Out of Eden*, speaks of the errors and mutations that occur in biblical translations; he quotes from the Song of Solomon 2:12:

For lo, the winter is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

Of this Dawkins says, 'The poetry is so ravishing that I am reluctant to spoil it by noting that here, too, is an undoubted mutation. Re-insert "dove" after "turtle", as the modern translations correctly but leadenly do, and hear the cadence collapse' (1995: 40). 'Cadence' is a musical term; when the word 'dove' is re-inserted, the writer asserts, there is a kind of discord which jars and mars the harmony, not to mention that the metre and even the imagery are changed, to the detriment of the passage. Dawkins's use of the word 'leadenly' suggests how what was light, beautiful and magical is pinned down and

becomes heavy and ungainly so that the reader no longer is 'ravished'. (I point out, as a minor corrective to Dawkins, that 'turtle' was the archaic form for 'turtledove'—from the onomatopoeic Latin 'turtur'—and is not, in the context of the seventeenth century, a 'mutation'.)

Ultimately, the marvel of good poetry is that so much thought, feeling, and perception is distilled into so concise a form and so small a space. Gardner, in the inaugural lecture mentioned above, says of poetry that it is, 'the most *concentrated*, delicate and memorable of man's perceptions of truth and value' (1966: 18; my italics). Later he talks of the poet's 'concern with precise feeling, thought and communication, his imaginative use of image and symbol, and the...*compactness* of his utterance' (1966: 19; my italics). Only a good poet can write so few lines which, when analysed, discussed, or explained, necessitate pages of prose, and this alone is proof, if there is need for proof, that a great poem is little short of miraculous.

With regard to proper and fitting poetic language, one thinks of Wordsworth, who was adamant that the poet should adopt the very language of men, and that he wanted to bring his language near to the 'real language of men' (Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1965: 251). I have already said that Wordsworth's poetry is not really accessible to the 'common man' he had in mind. The common man's language often consists of very few words, and meaning is conveyed by facial expression, gesture, and body language. Moreover, the words 'real language' are ambiguous. What *is* the 'real language' of all men? No such thing exists, as Coleridge long since pointed out (Coleridge, 1906: 189), since people speak differently at different levels of education, in different

occupations, or in different regions. The nearest one can come to being intelligible to all men is to use standard and unobscure English, and Wordsworth's own poetry is anything but geared to the level of the man with little or no reading or education.

T.S. Eliot seems to agree with Wordsworth:

poetry has primarily to do with the expression of feeling and emotion....Emotion and feeling then are best expressed in the common language of the people—that is, in the language common to all classes.
(1957: 19).

I believe, however, that Eliot was not thinking of 'the common language' in the same way that Wordsworth was when he spoke of the language of the common man. He means, rather, that the obscure words and complex language structures of very highly educated people should be avoided in favour of the ordinary vocabulary of the average, educated man, though, again, when one takes into account factors such as dialect and the differences in idiomatic usage in the various strata of people in a society, there seems to be no language common to all classes. Much of Eliot's own poetry, though, does indeed consist of the language of ordinary speech, and is readily comprehensible. One thinks, for example, of poems such as 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' (Eliot, 1963: 59), or 'Portrait of a Lady' (ibid., 18). But many of his poems contain so many allusions to mythology and classical works that the man who, albeit intelligent and educated, but who has not had a thorough education in the classics, finds them incomprehensible unless he has a guide or ref-

erence book to consult (provided by Eliot himself, of course, in the case of *The Wasteland*). Some of his poems, 'Dans le Restaurant' (ibid., 53), for example, are even written entirely in French. Consider also, 'Mr Appollinax' (ibid., 33)—lines 3-5 mean nothing to the ordinary man:

I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure among the birch trees,
And of Priapus in the shrubbery
Gaping at the lady in the swing.

Coleridge says that prose comprises words in their best order, and that poetry comprises the best words in the best order (Coleridge, 1990 vol.1: 74). By itself, I find this simplistic and not even really true. The novelist and dramatist, if they are good writers, are just as intent as the poet on finding the best words to impart their meaning. Consider, for example, Jane Austen's description of her heroine in the opening sentence of *Emma* in which she calls her 'handsome, clever and rich' (Austen, 1966: 37). The word 'handsome' suggests much more than the words 'pretty', 'beautiful' or even 'lovely'—it implies strength, as well as lasting good looks and a statuesque quality. 'Clever' is not the same as 'wise'. Thus a good deal about Emma is conveyed in the first sentence of the novel. Coleridge, though, is not thinking of any particular kind of language to be used in poetry, but rather that the poet works within different parameters from prose writers, and he must therefore use language more economically.

Most poets use the language current in their time. People who believe they should use elevated or 'poetic' language and employ archaic forms of words

such as 'thee' and 'thou', or the old form of the verb, such as 'hearketh', produce stilted, pretentious, and artificial writing, which is immediately apparent to the reader. But poetry is artificial in the sense that the poet *is* especially conscious of the sequence of the words he chooses, the way in which he uses them, the division of his lines and stanzas, and his sentence structure, for the reasons I have given above.

Clive Probyn in *English Poetry* says: 'Poetry uses any language at the poet's disposal, but the transformation of language into poetry requires that the poet endows it with a specially significant form and context'. He then notes:

The English language is public property, but a poem is an attempt to convey the unique and the particular....However extreme the deviation from 'normal' language may be, there is nevertheless an intelligible (though fantastic) world of decipherable meaning and structure.

(1984: 11)

He uses as an example of this Lewis Carroll's poem 'Jabberwocky', in the first stanza of which, he says, we can infer sufficient grammatical structure and identify the function of words. I shall refer to his example later, when I talk about the interpretation of poetry.

There are some modern poets who agree with Wordsworth that the language of 'real men' be used, because they are intent on conveying the flavour and essence of a particular social situation or class of person, and they do so through the use of language that is inherent in these. South African poets tend

to do this. Examples of this are Motshide wa Nthodi and Jiggs. Jiggs's 'Doornfontein' starts with the lines:

Doornfontein
ek sê
is not like it was

Rollicking full of life
you met all the manne
everywhere.

(in Chapman, 1981: 358)

It continues in the same vein, and contains Afrikaans words and expressions that are peculiar to South Africans; the poem, as a consequence, must include much that is incomprehensible to English speakers elsewhere. Similarly, Nthodi's 'South African Dialogue' begins thus:

Morning Baas,
Baas,
Baas Kleinbaas says,
I must come and tell
Baas that,
Baas Ben's Baasboy says,
Baas Ben wants to see
Baas Kleinbaas if
Baas don't use
Baas Kleinbaas,
Baas.

(in Chapman, 1981: 347)

The poem continues in this way with almost every line containing the word 'Baas'. This poem must be quite perplexing to non-South Africans, or non-Afrikaans speaking people, who would not know that, in order to show deference and respect to someone of age, authority, or superiority, one never addresses one's interlocutor or the person one is talking about by name, by the word 'jy' or even the polite 'u', because that would be presumptuous and disrespectful. The Afrikaans words, too, even 'Baas' (though close enough to 'boss'), would be foreign, so that while the South African reader understands exactly what the poet is saying, the poem in its entirety would need to be explained to English speakers abroad. This kind of poetry, then, must remain localised and parochial, and can never lay claim to universality, which I am convinced all great writing must have. I believe, then, that most good poets use the languages current in their time, accessible to all speakers of some education. Of course, good translations, too, make poetry available to speakers of languages other than that in which the poetry is written, at the cost of various subtleties and nuances, though. The two poems I referred to above, for instance, would be difficult to translate without one's rendering them clumsy.

When we come to the interpretation of a poem, I must take exception to T.S. Eliot's views on poetic meaning. He says that it is dangerous to assume that there must be just one interpretation of a poem 'as a whole', even if facts and historical allusions in a poem and meanings of words in a poem written in a different age are explained. He goes on to say: 'as for the meaning of the

poem as a whole, it is not exhausted by any explanation, for the meaning is what the poem means to different sensitive readers' (1957: 113). I cannot agree with this at all, for if a poem *as a whole* means something different to every sensitive reader, what truth, what universally consistent pattern of existence, can be arrived at? Yet what most critics and writers, as well as, I believe, discerning readers agree on, is that 'truth' (as problematic as the term has become today) is the essential and integral feature of good writing, and is what the writer aims at revealing. Johnson, for example, says that "the poet must divest himself of the prejudice of the age and country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same" (in Roberts, 1965: 28). Even Wordsworth, with his insistence that the first purpose of poetry is to delight, goes on to say that the pleasure the reader derives from a good poem leads to a universal truth, neither *individual* nor local. Furthermore, how can poetry instruct as well as delight if every reader, even a sensitive one, is entitled to reach his own conclusion about a poem in its entirety? Eliot's route here reminds us of Barthes' conception of 'the death of the author'.

Now it is a fact that truth can vary according to the empirical demands of a situation at a given moment, but the basic truths about the human condition, about the motivations and aspirations of mankind, at least in our Western civilisation, do not. Man's basic nature, no matter how value systems, fashions, and social systems have changed, remains the same.

I agree that every reader comes to a poem with different sensory perceptions, a different personal background, and different associations with words and images, so that for every reader the sensory imagery, the degree and nature of the emotions aroused, and even intellectual considerations of *parts* of the poem will vary, but the central theme of the poem must be constant, otherwise why should the poet be so careful about the words, the rhyme scheme and metre, and all the other poetic techniques he uses? Why bother even to use meaningful language at all?

I referred earlier to Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky', the first stanza of which goes thus:

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

(Corel, 1995: 80)

These lines have grammatical structure and the words have distinct functions, but fewer than half of the words have any accepted English meaning. The whole piece is highly evocative, but no two people will agree on the sensory or even emotional imagery, and thus there is an absence of intellectual content. The sense aroused in the reader will range from the ominous and sinister, to the exuberant, joyous and vigorous, but, because of the total absence of real meaning, no truth or moral purpose is discernible, even if one looks at the poem as a whole. The sensory and emotional experiences of the reader when reading this poem are valid, but since the third element, the intellectual fac-

ulty, is entirely in abeyance, the whole soul of man cannot be functioning, and no moral insight can be extracted from these lines. The beauty of the poem, too, is effected by the absence of discernible truth, for what partly constitutes beauty is the leap of recognition of a half-hidden, unconsciously felt or unconsidered truth which catches at the reader's heart.

I may be doing Eliot a grave injustice by misinterpreting what he says, but I stand by my conviction that if the poem as a whole, with every part of it taken into consideration, lays bare no central truth which every discerning man can perceive after careful reading, then the poet may as well be writing in gobbledegook and every sensitive reader can make what he will of it. Denys Thompson points out:

It is sometimes contended that there are no standards in literature and the arts, that 'one man's taste is as good as another's', and that it is just a matter of individual preference. The argument is not uncommon, and among the probable reasons for it are: (i) There is a tendency in a 'democracy' to believe that, because all men are level when it comes to totting up their ballot papers, they are also equal in other qualities—moral worth, intelligence and ability. From this it is an easy step to the view that the popular view is always right. (ii) This is a 'scientific' age and in the sciences arguments can be checked by facts, and facts by other facts....But the question whether a book or poem is 'good' cannot be scientifically established.

(Thompson, 1962: 13-14)

Related to what Thompson specifies is the conviction often expressed by students that as long as one can read and think, one's interpretation of a

poem is as valid as anyone else's. This argument for a *laissez faire* approach to interpretation is fallacious for several reasons: these youthful readers tend to be inexperienced in the affairs of life; they also tend to lack experience in the extensive reading and careful evaluation of good poetry; many of them often fail to take into consideration the whole text, and omit what does not fit into their theory; many of them also have a tendency to twist what they read to fit into that theory, and are unable to rid themselves of personal prejudices. Most refuse to accept as valid anything that is at odds with their own experiences or beliefs. For example, when I conducted a tutorial reading of Thomas Hardy's 'Neutral Tones' (to be considered in detail at a later stage in this thesis), some first year students could not believe that love can die for no apparent reason and become indifference, not anger or hatred, or even dislike. There is wretchedness and bitterness expressed in this poem because the lovers have been betrayed by the concept of love itself. Love, which promised such warmth and joy and, most important, everlastingness, has faded and gone stale. The students insisted that there must be quarrels, some sort of betrayal, or some kind of unacceptable behaviour for this to happen. Obviously there is *some* reason for love to cease to exist in a relationship, but what that reason is might be quite unknown to the people or person involved. Clearly, this had not been part of the experience of these young people at that stage, but they could not or would not see further than this, and refused at first to consider that what the poet was saying might be true. It was only with guidance and careful analysis of every line that they conceded there might be some truth in this idea.

Even more difficult to contend with is the inability of some students to judge the merits of a poem that is not in accordance with their personal beliefs. If, for instance, they do not believe in God or an after-life, they may dismiss some of the greatest poetry extant, because it is at variance with their beliefs (or disbeliefs). For example, if they believe that death is final, they might reject John Donne's 'Death Be Not Proud', and refuse to consider the substance of the poem as a possibility, and then will be unable to assess its merits.

The wider the reading of poetry, the greater the knowledge of literature of the reader (and, consequently, the greater his ability to make valid comparisons and assessments), the more legitimate his opinions are. B.A. Phythian in *Considering Poetry* says in this connection:

Opinions that are based on knowledge are likely to be sounder than those based on ignorance, so the best critic is likely to be the one who knows the most about poetry.

(Phythian, 1970: 13)

To understand a poem fully, we must analyse it in depth. A single reading of a poem, or even frequent readings of a poem without our looking closely at all the factors that make up the whole work, will not yield the full significance of its meaning. There are people, however, who allege that to analyse a poem is to destroy it, just as, for example, pulling apart a plant or bisecting a portion of it to reveal its make-up, or dissecting a frog to study its organs, means the death of a living organism. On the contrary, analysing a poem is like peeling an onion—each layer one peels off reveals another until one reaches the

heart. Far from destroying a poem, analysis enhances, not destroys, the meaning in manifold ways. Sadler, Hayllar and Powell in *Appreciating Poetry* put it this way:

Some people believe that...analysing a poem will make the whole process [of appreciating poetry] mechanical and lifeless, and end up reducing works of art to clockwork gadgetry....It risks destroying...personal response. And yet...the impact of the poem was immeasurably enhanced, not diminished [by analysis].

(1986: 1)

Susan Wolfson, in *Formal Charges*, quotes W.K. Wimsatt in this regard:

'it is something like a definition of poetry to say that whereas rhetoric—in the sense of mere persuasion or sophistic—is a kind of discourse the power of which diminishes in proportion as the artifice of it is understood or seen through—poetry...is a kind of discourse the power of which—or the satisfaction we derive from it—is actually increased by an increase in our understanding of the artifice.'

(in Wolfson, 1997: 4)

Proper analysis does not always come naturally, though. The student must learn how to analyse by knowing what to look for and what questions to ask himself. To do this purposefully, the student must be aware of the techniques or devices the poet uses in order to compress so much meaning into so few lines. Over many years of teaching, I have isolated nine different devices that the poet employs, though I do not claim that these are entirely comprehensive, or that they may not be stated in diverse ways. These devices may be

examined in any order, but at best the reader keeps them all in mind when analysing a poem. If he does so, he will achieve a real understanding and critical appreciation of the work under consideration. They are:

1. Rhyme
2. Rhythm
3. Punctuation
4. Figures of speech
5. Imagery
6. Form or shape
7. Tone
8. Choice of words
9. Repetition

It is very important to remember that to identify these in a poem is not enough—their significance and their contribution to the meaning of the poem as a whole must be commented on.

In the chapters that follow I shall discuss each one of these in detail, but I should like to stress now that I think it important that the student reads the poem several times, thinks about it for some time, and only then begins his analysis. He must differentiate between content and theme. Content answers the question 'What?' and theme 'Why?'—in other words the question, 'What is the poem about?' reveals content, and 'Why is the poet writing this poem?' reveals theme. The content emerges quite soon, but the student should not

decide on the theme until he has fully analysed the poem. If he does decide on what he believes the theme to be too soon, he is in danger of distorting what he reads to fit this belief, while analysis often discloses that his initial idea of what the theme is was mistaken.

The thesis, then, will provide demonstrations of analyses of various poems or parts of poems as it explores the poetic devices mentioned above. A comprehensive analysis of one short poem, deploying all of these devices, will form the penultimate chapter of the thesis.

Chapter Four: Rhyme

In this discussion of the various devices or techniques that the poet uses, it must be made clear at the outset that it is difficult to isolate each one, since frequently more than one is at work in a given example. Thus the whole exercise is, in a sense, artificial and fragmented, but, as stated at the end of the previous chapter, I hope to put all the parts together in the full analysis of one poem at the end of this thesis. I shall deal with each device under a separate heading, but it may be necessary on occasion to involve another when they are interdependent.

In certain periods in the past a great deal of European poetry rhymed. (One must exclude, of course, classical hexameters, old English alliterative verse and blank verse.) The rhyme-scheme, together with the rhythm and the sounds of the words, makes for the musicality of poetry, as well as bestowing a sense of harmony and order. M.L. Rosenthal notes that 'rhyme, a wonderfully powerful device for pleasing the ear, shaping rhythm and organising poems, is second only to metre in the poet's armament of prosodic techniques' (Rosenthal, 1987: 1150). Also writing about rhyme, Edward Hirsch uses Rilke as a touchstone (Hirsch, 1999: 304):

Rainer Maria Rilke called rhyme "a goddess of secret and ancient coincidences"....Rhyme has the joyousness of discovery, of hidden relations uncovered, as if by accident. Rhyme is a form of relationship and connection, of encounter and metamorphosis....There is something charged and magnetic about a good rhyme, something both unsus-

pected and inevitable, something utterly surprising and unforeseen, and yet also binding and necessary.

In ordinary language usage, spoken or written, rhyme is either used inadvertently or avoided, so that its use in poetry makes this form of writing notable and pleasurable.

Rhyme imposes a strict discipline, however, partly because the poet is kept within certain bounds, and partly because he must use rigorous care in choosing rhyme words, for the rhyme must appear natural and not create the impression that words have been chosen simply because they rhyme with one another. In this connection, Dryden's character Neander, in 'An Essay of Dramatic Poesy', says that writers should, "'make our rhyme so properly a part of the verse, that it should never mislead the sense, but itself be led and governed by it'" (in Enright and de Chickera, 1962: 100). Neander also says:

'[T]his way of writing [verse] was a help to the poet's judgement, by putting bounds to wild overflowing fancy....And verse...[is] a rule and line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwise lawless imagination would raise either irregularly or loosely.

(ibid., 108-9)

In *The Owl Critic* Marié Heese and Robin Lawton say:

Poetry is a form of music....Rhythm and vowel and consonantal sounds, especially those which reflect each other in rhyme, compose this musical effect....Rhyming verse is pleasurable because it empha-

sises rhythmic patterns by creating expectation, the gratification of which pleases the ear and satisfies our natural love of repetition.

(Heese and Lawton, 1965: 30)

Modern poetry, however, is often written in free verse (that is, 'in the cadences of speech' (Simpson, 1972: 4)), with few, if any, words that rhyme, but when there is rhyme, one must ask oneself what the effect of this is. Already centuries ago, though, Shakespeare, one of the world's greatest poets, used mostly blank verse in his plays (which can thus be viewed as extended poems), and when he deviated from this by using rhyme, he did so for a specific purpose. In trying to gauge the significance and effect of rhyme it will help us to consider Shakespeare's uses of it in some detail. We find rhyme in Shakespeare in the following situations:

- a) Sometimes, but not always, when the Fools speak. This is because their words are often meant to be in the form of a song, but also because what they say contains a comment on what is happening in the play, advice, or a warning. In most cases, one understands, fools were not stupid at all—they were usually highly intelligent, quick-witted, resourceful and inventive. The reason for this is that their duty was to entertain, and they needed to draw endlessly on their ingenuity. When their function in Shakespeare's plays is not only to amuse but also to comment, advise, or to warn, they couch what they say in rhyme, either to enhance the humour in their words, or to stress the gravity of the content of their speech, and to demonstrate their clarity of vision, which many of the other characters lack. In *King Lear*, the Fool and Kent believe that Lear is being unwise in dividing

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his kingdom amongst his daughters, because in doing so he will lose all his power and make himself dependent on his daughters's love for him, their mercy, and their sense of duty. When Lear persists in his purpose and Gonerill and Regan have begun to show their true colours, the Fool points out Lear's folly to him, saying:

That lord that counselled thee
 To give away thy land,
Come place him here by me,
 Do thou for him stand.
The sweet and bitter fool
 Will presently appear:
The one in motley here,
 The other found out—there.

(I.iv.135-42)

Later, when Kent is in the stocks, he comments on the fact that loyalty and honesty, like Kent's and Cordelia's, is often punished rather than rewarded in an imperfect world. He says:

That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
 And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins to rain,
 And leave thee in the storm;
But I will tarry, the fool will stay,
 And let the wise man fly.
The knave turns fool that runs away;
 The fool no knave, perdy.

(II.iv.251-58)

His advice here is ironical in several ways, but he is also pointing to the callous and self-seeking natures of Goneril and Regan, and warning Kent that they will have no mercy on him.

When Kent is banished, his words to Lear's daughters express in rhyme his knowledge of their true natures, and contain an oblique warning to Lear. He says:

Fare thee well, King, sith thus thou wilt appear,
Freedom lives hence and banishment is here.

[To Cordelia]

The gods to their dear shelter take thee, maid,
Thou justly think'st and hast most rightly said.

[To Goneril and Regan]

And your large speeches may your deeds approve
That good effects may spring from words of love.

(I.1.179-84)

Kent has altered his normal form of speech (blank verse) to convey his sense of foreboding.

- b) In certain traditions and languages at certain times, rhyme was used in spells, incantations and prophecies, or to convey hidden meaning in order to add to the mystery in the words. The witches in *Macbeth* speak to Macbeth in rhyming riddles when they prophesy and, at his bidding, foretell his future in the form of apparitions which say:

Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth, beware Macduff!
Beware the Thane of Fife! Dismiss me. Enough....

Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn
The power of man; for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth....

Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
Shall come against him....

(IV.i.71-94)

In *The Merchant of Venice*, when Portia's three suitors have made their choice of casket, each casket contains a declaration of the significance of their choice and the reason for its being the right or wrong one. The scroll in the golden casket that Morocco chooses begins:

All that glisters is not gold;
Often have you heard that told.

(II.vii.65-6)

Aragon's choice of the silver casket, reveals a scroll containing, in its verse, the words:

There be fools alive iwis,
Silvered o'er, and so was this.

(II.ix.67-8)

Bassanio, who decides on the leaden casket, has chosen correctly, and the verse in this one begins thus:

You that choose not by the view
Chance as fair, and choose as true.

(III.ii.131-32)

Here the rhyme focuses on the fact that appearance can be deceptive, and highlights the motives of the suitors for their choice. The scrolls also moralise, though not quite in the same way that the Duke does in *Measure for Measure*, which I consider below.

When Lear disowns Cordelia and withdraws his love from her, his words take on the nature of a curse. He says:

Thou hast her, France; let her be thine, for we
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see
That face of hers again. Therefore begone,
Without our grace, our love, our benison!

(I.i.262-65)

The rhyme, compounding the removal of 'benison' with the imperative 'begone', emphasises the strength of Lear's disappointment and the enormity of what he is doing.

c) Where Shakespeare's characters are disguised or behaving in a way that is not normal or natural to them, they often speak in verse. Thus when Ed-

gar in *King Lear* is disguised as a poor, homeless half-wit, Poor Tom, he sometimes speaks in rhyme. On the heath he speaks gibberish to disguise his identity and to indicate his (apparently) wandering mind.

Ophelia, in *Hamlet*, sings in rhyme when the strain of what has been happening is too much for her and her wits turn. She sings:

And will 'a not come again?

And will 'a not come again?

No, no, he is dead.

Go to thy deathbed.

He never will come again.

(IV.v.188-92)

The pathos of Ophelia's grief and madness is heightened by the rhyme of her song, because the rhyming 'dead' and 'deathbed' foreshadow her own and Hamlet's death. The thrice repeated 'again', in the context of the song, emphasises the finality of death. The Players in *Hamlet*, too, speak in rhyming couplets, so that their speeches sound almost like jingles. This brings to our notice not only that they are engaged in an artificial activity, but also that they are acting on specific instructions from Hamlet and so appear rather mechanical.

- d) Rhyme is often used in moralising speeches like the Duke's soliloquy in *Measure for Measure* which begins:

He who the sword of heaven will bear,

Should be as holy as severe;

Pattern in himself to know,

Grace to stand, and virtue go.

(III.i.517-20)

The rhyme here lends an air of authority and wisdom to his words, by linking the 'sword of heaven' with an ideal conflation of 'severity' and 'holiness'.

- e) Shakespeare also uses rhymed verse to punctuate his plays structurally, and so it is frequently found in epilogues and prologues. Then, too, he uses it to give a decisive ending to a scene, and the rhyme, which often suggests what is to come, adds an air of finality to the words. In the same way, when the tragedy has played itself out or the loose ends of a play are tied up, one of the characters makes a pronouncement on what has happened, announces his intentions or decision on what must be done to set things right again, or invites everyone to celebrations and festivities. Thus at the end of *King Lear* Edgar says:

The weight of this sad time we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
Shall never see so much nor live so long.

(V.iii.299-302)

Malcolm at the end of *Macbeth* tells the company what he proposes to do for those Macbeth has wronged, and he ends his speech thus:

...this, and what needful else

Chapter Four

That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace
We will perform in measure, time and place.
So thanks to all at once, and each to one,
Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone.

(V.xi.37-41)

At the end of *Henry IV, Part 1*, King Henry relates how he has decided to divide his power, gives orders to John and Westmoreland, and tells those present what he intends to do. He ends by saying:

Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway,
Meeting the check of such another day,
And since this business so fair is done,
Let us not leave till all our own be won.

(V.v.42-45)

An example of an invitation to revelry is found at the end of *King Henry the Sixth, Part 3*, when King Edward says:

And now what rests but that we spend the time
With stately triumphs, mirthful comic shows,
Such as befit the pleasure of the court?
Sound, drums and trumpets! Farewell sour annoy!
For here, I hope, begins our lasting joy.

(V.vii.42-46)

The rhyming couplets in these examples enhance our sense of a satisfactory conclusion, of restored order, and of a return to peace and stability.

I have divided the purposes of Shakespeare's use of rhyme in his plays into broad categories in which many more examples than those I have given are to be found. There may be some that are not quite apt for any of these categories, but I believe that, broadly speaking, I have dealt with most. The reader, then, is alerted to some specific reason for the change to rhyming form in Shakespeare's plays, and this aids in the understanding of the work, and adds to the pleasure of the reader.

Interestingly, by way of an extended aside, Shakespeare uses almost the opposite technique too; that is, he changes from blank verse to prose when he wants to draw our attention to a particular aspect he is focussing on in his plays. He does so in the following instances:

- a) Letters are nearly always in prose and are read aloud in order to forward the plot, to let his audience know what is happening elsewhere, and to speed up the action by avoiding lengthy dialogue.
- b) He uses prose when it is necessary to impart something *prosaic* or mundane.
- c) He uses prose to emphasise contrasts or differences in approach. For example, in *Othello*, in Iago's machinations with regard to Roderigo, his interchanges with the latter are always couched in prose, because Roderigo is avaricious and a fool, and therefore Iago need use no subtlety with him. In his manipulation of Othello's emotions, however, he must use a completely different technique. Therefore in the long, so-called 'temptation' scenes, when he wants to convince Othello that Desdemona is being un-

faithful to him with Cassio, he speaks always in blank verse. This stresses the fact that Othello is by no means stupid nor is he jealous by nature, and Iago can only achieve his objective with the utmost skill in the use of hints, innuendoes, and shrewd, credible lies.

- d) When one of the protagonists in a play is either behaving in a manner that is out of character or abnormal, or pretending to do so, his words are in prose. Cassio in *Othello* usually drinks very little, for he is well aware of his weakness with regard to alcohol, so that when Iago has engineered his becoming drunk, Cassio speaks in prose, firstly, when he is inebriated, and then, when he is sober and overwhelmed by his stupidity in failing to adhere to his usual moderation in drinking, and by the manner in which he has disgraced himself. In *Hamlet*, when the Prince is feigning madness, he addresses everyone except his closest friend, Horatio, who is aware of what he is doing, in prose. In *Macbeth*, however, there is no pretence about the change in Lady Macbeth. Before she cracks under the weight of her own guilt and the horror of the events she has precipitated, she speaks in blank verse, but in the sleep-walking scenes before she kills herself (off-stage), her speeches are in prose. In the scenes on the heath in *King Lear*, the disguised Edgar, Lear himself (when he is losing his reason) and the Fool often use prose. In this way, the abnormality of the behaviour of those cited above is conveyed and emphasised.
- e) Finally, prose is often used when plans are being hatched or information is given. Hamlet's conversations with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are conducted in prose to signify that Hamlet is aware of what they are about,

and that he has plans of his own to counteract theirs, besides the fact that, because they are not very astute, Hamlet knows full well that he can outwit them. Also, when Hamlet gives instructions to the Players, he uses prose, partly because he is dealing with the technicalities of acting, but also to alert the audience to his purpose with regard to Claudius and Gertrude in the context of the play they are about to see.

To return to my principal brief in this chapter, one of the most popular and challenging forms of poetry deploying rhyme is the sonnet, which expresses and resolves an argument, or presents a certain situation and the poet's thoughts and feelings regarding this, in fourteen lines. The two chief types of sonnet that were used for many years, and often still are, are the Shakespearean (or English, or Elizabethan) and the Italian (or Petrarchan). It is their rhyme schemes which differentiate one from the other, and determine the way in which the sonnets function. I must stress again here that only to indicate the type of rhyme scheme is futile and does not say anything at all, since rhyme scheme is obvious to the most undiscerning reader. What is of value is to state the significance of the particular rhyme scheme under consideration.

The Shakespearean sonnet is divided according to its rhyme scheme into three quatrains and a concluding rhyming couplet. In the quatrains the lines rhyme alternately (*abab*), and when they have an enclosed rhyme (*abbc*) they are hybrid, partially Italian. In the first quatrain a situation or argument is presented, and in the next two there is either a progression of the argument or additional or different aspects of what the poet has said in the first quatrain.

quite suddenly and the sun has allowed itself to be obscured by them in a manner that is unworthy of it, making the rest of the day dark and gloomy. In the third quatrain, the sun is compared with the poet's beloved, who once showed such warm love and beneficence for the poet, but who has now turned his back on him, betrayed him, and is cold and indifferent. In the rhyming couplet, the poet's tone changes completely and, rather than sum up in some way what he sees as the perfidy and ignoble behaviour of his beloved, he excuses this by pointing out that if so great and powerful a presence as the sun can show imperfection, a mere mortal cannot be expected to be without fault. Therefore, he says, his love for his beloved is not diminished or impaired in the least.

What I have indicated here is merely an outline of what is happening in the three quatrains and the rhyming couplet as defined by the rhyme, and is not meant to be taken as anywhere near a full analysis of this great and complex sonnet.

The Italian or Petrarchan sonnet 'consists of an octave (eight lines rhyming *abbaabba*), and a sestet (six lines rhyming *cdecde*). Italian readers coined the term *volta* (or turn) to refer to the rhetorical division and shift between the opening eight lines and the concluding six' (Hirsch, 1999: 309). There are no true quatrains as such in the original Petrarchan form, but English poets have sometimes divided the octave into two quatrains, rhyming *abba* and *cddc*, or *abab* and *cdcd*, or a variation of these. The octave contains the argument, situation or sentiment of the poem. The final six lines, the sestet, may resolve the argument, form a generalisation about, or give the final thoughts or

judgement on, what the poet has said in the octave. The rhyme scheme that connects these lines is *efgefg* or a variant of this. Consider the following by Christina Rossetti:

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day 5
You tell me of our future that you planned:
Only remember me, you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve: 10
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

(Allison et al, 1983: 818)

Here the octave is divided into two quatrains by virtue of the full stop after line 4, but the rhyme scheme in these is the same, namely, *abba*. Both quatrains contain a plea to be remembered by her beloved after the poet's death, and a reminder of the implications of death, and the doubled rhyme scheme emphasises this. The first four lines comment on the poet's reluctance to leave the one she loves, and the lack of physical contact after death, while lines 5-8 comment on the fact that there can also be no future for them, or daily verbal communication between them, when she is dead.

The rhyme scheme of the sestet is *cddece*, and the word 'yet' heralds a qualification of the poet's exhortation to be always remembered, in that, she says, to have constantly in mind someone who has died is unrealistic and not even desirable. She expresses her belief that it is preferable by far to be remembered, even only sometimes, with happiness because of the love she bore him, than to be thought of all the time until grief sours the joy they had in each other. The sestet, then, is the poet's final expression of the way she wishes to remain in the heart and mind of her beloved, of the way she wishes to be 'remembered'.

Knowledge of the way in which sonnets are divided by virtue of their rhyme schemes alerts the reader to changes of thought and direction, thus aiding full comprehension.

I have already said that sometimes in free verse certain words rhyme, and that when there is rhyme one must look carefully for its significance. Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' is not free verse, but it has a very irregular rhyme scheme, and it is worthwhile to look at what words rhyme and why they do so. This is a fairly long poem to quote in full, but I shall have occasion to return to it throughout this thesis, in different contexts:

The sea is calm to-night,
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits;- on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay. 5
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!
Only, from the long line of spray

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Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling, 10
At their return, up the high strand.
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago 15
Heard it on the Aegaeon, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea. 20

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, 25
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems 30
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain 35
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

(Arnold, 1944: 226-27)

At the end of line 1 the word 'night' rhymes with 'light' at the end of line 3, and points to the contrast between the darkness of night and the brightness of light, which together with the words 'Gleams and is gone' in line 4, suggests the fairly piercing but fleeting quality of the seconds of light in the darkness. The word 'light' occurs again at the end of line 33, but this time the poet is focusing on a consideration of life in general, as opposed to particular aspects of a physical nature that he has been observing previously. Together with 'Hath really neither' at the beginning of this line, the word denotes spiritual darkness and an absence of even momentary relief from the prevailing murkiness of life. The word 'flight' at the end of line 36, rhyming as it does with 'light', heightens our awareness of the hazards of fleeing without illumination to aid us in finding a direction in which to go for refuge.

By this time the reader has long been alerted to the fact that the poet is commenting on our lack of faith and purpose in life, and our consequent desolation. The sorrow is hinted at in line 14 in the words 'the eternal note of sadness', and his assertion that this began as long ago as the time of the Greek civilisation when Sophocles wrote his tragedies, is expressed in the second stanza, but the word 'eternal' implies that this is a constant in human nature, while the rest of the poem illuminates his conviction of its increasing intensity. The final word of the poem, 'night', rhyming with 'light' and 'flight', is an echo of 'night' in line 1, but this time it brings feelings of fear, devastation, and lonely confusion, rather than the calm tranquillity of line 1. Together with the word

'darkling' in line 35, it conveys a sense of the gradual advance of utter darkness. These words, then, indicate the progression of the poet's thought from an appreciation and enjoyment of the peace and beauty of one lovely evening, to the chaotic, indecisive, destructive turbulence the poet sees the world as being in today.

In this poem there is also an echo in the word 'roar' in line 25 of 'roar' in line 9. In line 9, 'roar' is preceded by the word 'grating', which depicts the way in which the noise of the sea washing over the pebbles as it ebbs disturbs the calm silence of the first six lines. Together with 'Only' at the beginning of line 7, it has an ominous ring. At this point, however, the poet is merely referring to the sound of the actual movement of the sea, but by line 25 he is commenting on what is happening to faith as it recedes from mankind, and the sense of foreboding in 'Only' (line 7) and 'roar' (line 9) is heightened here, for now in its association with a fierce wild beast, it represents the danger, vulnerability and the devastation that humanity faces when faith is lost.

Some of the rhymes in the poem complement one another too. For example, the word 'stand' at the end of line 4 rhymes with 'land' at the end of line 7, and both have a connotation of stability, permanence, solidity and security, as against the transitory nature of the gleams of light, and the movement and restlessness of the water. Similarly, 'fair' at the end of line 2, and 'night-air' at the end of line 6, which is described as being 'sweet', evoke beauty and serenity, which lull the reader into a feeling of tranquillity before the jarring notes of the lines that follow.

'Unharvested' by Robert Frost is a sonnet that does not comply with either of the forms discussed under the topic of the sonnet above, since the rhyme scheme is very different, being irregular, except for the rhyming couplet at the end:

A scent of ripeness from over a wall.
And come to leave the routine road
And look for what had made me stall.
There sure enough was an apple tree
That had eased itself of its summer load, 5
And of all but its trivial foliage free,
Now breathed as light as a lady's fan.
For there had been an apple fall
As complete as the apple had given man.
The ground was one circle of solid red. 10
May something go always unharvested!
May much stay out of our stated plan,
Apples or something forgotten and left,
So smelling their sweetness would be no theft.

(Frost, 1995: 277)

The rhyming of the word 'wall' at the end of line 1 with 'fall' at the end of line 8, together with the fact that it is apples that have fallen (the word 'apple' is repeated three times: in lines 4, 8 and 9), and that a wall often encircles a garden, immediately brings to mind the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man. This is confirmed by the words 'As complete as the apple had given man' in line 9. What follows from this is the thought of man's existence before his expulsion

from the Garden of Eden, when he lived in a natural, free and unregulated way.

The word 'wall', however, also represents something that not only keeps out intruders, but restricts one's freedom of movement and the area of space that is one's own. This ties in with the idea of an end to man's enjoyment of freedom, naturalness and the use of an unlimited area in which he could roam at will, which has been replaced by routine ('the routine road', line 2), confined spaces, conformity, rules, and the accumulation of material goods.

The word 'stall' at the end of line 3, which rhymes with 'wall' and 'fall', depicts the poet's sudden halt, but it also suggests the way in which he jibs at the thought of the kind of systematised, compartmentalised and circumscribed mode of living man has fashioned for himself. This leads to his fervent plea that there should be some absence of categorisation and planning, some spontaneity, and some things that are untamed, and that we allow ourselves not to utilise everything, but even waste a little.

The implication of the rhyme in the final couplet of 'left' and 'theft', is that if we do refrain from putting everything to practical use, that which is left over, which is wasted, perhaps, can be enjoyed for its own sake, and rather than depriving us (of material gain), can enrich us aesthetically and spiritually.

The last poem that I want to look at here is largely in unrhyming free verse, though it does contain two rhyming words. It is 'Leviathan' by the South African poet Douglas Livingstone:

A puff-adder, khaki
fatter than a stocking of pus

except for its short, thin tail,
obese and quick
as certain light-footed dancers 5
took a dozing lizard.

Scaly little monster
with delicate hands and feet
stupidly sluggish in the sun.
Panting, true, 10
but lizards breathe mostly
as if their lives depended.

Gone.
Enveloped by a slack
wormy yellow bowel. 15

O Jonah, to tumble to
those sickly deadly depths,
slick walled, implacably black.

(Livingstone, 1984: 35)

In this poem phrases and words such as 'stocking of pus', 'wormy' and 'obese', make Livingstone's repugnance for the snake very apparent, in sharp contrast with his tenderness for the little lizard with its 'delicate' limbs. This contrast heightens our pity for the lizard when it is devoured by the snake. In addition, when Livingstone compares the snake with a whale, our sense of the 'little' lizard's helplessness is enhanced.

The two words that rhyme in this poem are 'slack' and 'black', at the ends of lines 14 and 18 respectively. The rhyme here has both the quality of 'pleas-

ing the ear' (Rosenthal, 1987: 1150), of 'relationship and connection', of 'something charged and magnetic', and of 'hidden relations uncovered, as if by accident' (Hirsch, 1999: 304). This is because 'slack' can mean relaxed, loose or languid, which do not have altogether unpleasant connotations, but the strong ending of the poem in the heavy word 'black', stresses the 'hidden' suggestion of flabbiness, laxity, a dangerous lack of structure and firmness, even sliminess. The effect of this is to intensify our horror at the fate of the lizard, for not only does it fall into terrifying darkness, but it is surrounded by flabby, loose, viscous tissue.

Without wishing to belabour the point, then, I must re-iterate that in all good poetry rhyme is never random or without purpose, and it is the *effect* or *significance* of the rhyme that must be commented on. The cognisance of this heightens the comprehension and appreciation of the reader.

Chapter Five: Rhythm

The words 'metre' and 'rhythm' are often used interchangeably, but metre is only a particular aspect of rhythm. Hirsch discusses this at some length and in detail (1999: 290-92), as does Rosenthal (1987: 1138-48). I would also refer the interested reader to Catherine Addison's 'A Reader-Response Approach to Prosody' (Addison, 1995: 665-76), Robert Pinsky's *The Sounds of Poetry* (Pinsky, 1998: 13-21; 30-41; 57-60), and Simpson (1972: 34-38). Metre is the name given to the repetitive and symmetrical pattern of stressed (or strong) and unstressed (or weak) syllables in a line of poetry. The metre of a line can be indicated by marking stressed syllables thus: $\bar{\quad}$, and unstressed syllables thus: $\tilde{\quad}$. Though other diacritical markers have been used in more recent times (see Rosenthal, *ibid.*), I have chosen to use these 'classical' markers, as does Simpson (*ibid.*). Here is an example based on a well-known line:

— ∼ ∼ — ∼ — ∼ — ∼ —

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes

Like Simpson, again, and like Hirsch, I use the word 'foot' when referring to the basic unit of measurement of metrical patterns. The foot consists of a group of two or three syllables (although there might be even only one), at least one of which is stressed. The feet in the line above are separated by virgules (/) and would be represented thus:

— / — / — / — / —

When in/ disgrace/ with for/tune and /men's eyes

There are five feet in this line (a *pentameter*, from the Greek for 'five'), consisting, after the first inverted foot, of one unstressed- followed by one stressed syllable (an *iamb*, also from the Greek, a name which implies the type of syllabic pattern closest to ordinary speech), making this metrical form the *iambic pentameter*. It was a form much favoured by Shakespeare. This line is fairly regular but there could be irregular lines ending in or beginning with a half-foot (that is, a single accented or unaccented syllable), and there could be a half-foot elsewhere in the line. In a good poem this type of variation is done deliberately with a specific purpose in mind.

There are variations of the pattern I have given as an example, both in the number of stressed and unstressed syllables, their order in a foot, and in the number of feet in a line, but I do not wish to go into detail in this regard here.

The number of feet is not always the same in every line of a poem. Often there are more feet in the first and third lines than in the second and fourth, but there are many variations of this too. Nevertheless, once a pattern has been decided upon, it is adhered to (though sometimes with deliberate aberrations) in a good poem.

The marking off of lines into these divisions is called scansion, and once the poet has determined the metre he wishes to use, the poem must scan (that is, conform to this pattern), unless the poet uses an irregularity for a distinct reason.

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge see one function of metre as being to curb unbridled emotions in poetry, Wordsworth focusing on the effect on the reader, and Coleridge seeing it from the point of view of the writer. Thus Wordsworth says in the 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*':

...there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose.

(Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1965: 264)

Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* says, 'This [metre] I would trace to the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion' (Coleridge, 1906: 206). Both these poets regard metre as doing more than this though, for Wordsworth also says, 'a very small part of the pleasure given by Poetry depends upon the metre' (Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1965: 263). Although in somewhat negative terms, he nonetheless indicates that metre is an element that cannot be ignored in the enjoyment derived from poetry.

Coleridge is much more enthusiastic about the value of metre. He says:

But for any poetic purposes, metre resembles (if the aptness of the simile may excuse its meanness) yeast, worthless or disagreeable by itself, but giving vivacity and spirit to the liquor with which it is proportionately combined.

(Coleridge, 1906: 208)

Shelley too sees metre as being an important factor in the creation of the delight that poetry produces:

An observation of the regular mode of the recurrence of harmony in the language of poetical minds, together with its relation to music, produced metre, or a certain system of traditional forms of harmony and language.

(Shelley, 1995: 252-53)

Though there is an interplay between metre and rhythm, the latter is a word meaning 'flow', and it arises from the sense of *movement* created by the writer's use of emphasis or tempo. By this I mean that when one reads a poem one does not emphasise the strong syllables in the way one does when scanning it, because, if one did, the line or lines would sound so unnatural as to make them meaningless. When read or spoken naturally, the line I used as an example above might be stressed thus (though, strictly speaking, one also needs to take into account relative stress within separate feet, where the stressed foot in one syllable might have the value of an unstressed syllable in another foot):

· · · · · - · · · · · - · · · · · - · · · · · -

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes

Simpson defines rhythm as the repetition of stress and goes on to say that regular rhythm in verse is *meter*, irregular rhythm is *free verse*. He then

quotes Pound in *ABC of Reading* as saying, "Rhythm is form cut into time". He also quotes Theodore Roethke in 'Some Remarks on Rhythm', who says:

'Rhythm is the entire movement, the flow, the recurrence of stress and unstress that is related to the rhythms of the blood, the rhythms of nature. It involves certainly stress, time, pitch, the texture of words, the total meaning of the poem.'

(Simpson, 1972: 450)

If a metrical system has been attempted and a poem does not scan, this lack of scansion jars on the reader. While it is true that there are many poets, especially modern ones, who deliberately reject the use of regular metre, there is of course rhythm in their poetry; and precisely because the absence of any systematic metrical pattern is immediately apparent, there is no expectation of scansion on the part of the reader.

My concern with rhythm here is the way the lines in a poem, or the poem as a whole, move, why they move in a particular way, and why the movement in a poem, or even in a line, changes.

I would like to consider three poems in which the rhythm at one or more points suggests incessant motion, but which varies in kind from poem to poem, or even in the same poem. The first one is a sonnet by William Wordsworth:

The world is too much with us: late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in nature that is ours;

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We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This sea that bares her bosom to the moon: 5
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for every thing, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. – Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn; 10
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

(Wordsworth, 1904: 206)

In lines 1 and 2 the words 'late and soon/ Getting and spending' respectively have a regular, measured beat in each section, though they are not the same in nature. This, together with the repetition suggested by 'and', gives the feeling of a to and fro movement much like that of a pendulum, and induces a compulsion to keep repeating them. The effect is a sense of ceaseless movement from one extreme to another, in an unchanging pattern which Wordsworth believes is that of the expenditure of man's energies in acquiring wealth only to spend it on worldly possessions, so that the whole process must begin again.

The words 'late and soon' I understand to mean all the time or endlessly but also sooner or later which is suggested by the way in which Wordsworth expresses his conviction of man's undue materialism in the opening words of the poem: 'The world is too much with us'. Here the implication is that the

world, or materialism, makes itself so indispensable to man that he ultimately submits and, depending on his proclivities, eventually ('late and soon'), or sooner or later, participates in the endless swing between earning and spending.

The words 'too much' are also interesting in that the poet seems to be saying that he is not advocating a total denial of worldly preoccupations, only that materialism has become excessive at the expense of our appreciation of *natural beauty and spiritual values*. The stress falling on 'too' helps underline this excessiveness. The irony is that firstly we so undervalue the aesthetic and unworldly powers we have been given that they have become blunted, and secondly that what we give, our 'hearts' (also emphasised by the stress pattern), or the price we pay, is valueless because our essential beings have become tarnished ('sordid') by our relentless pursuit of worldly goods.

The rhythm in line 5 is slow and even, reflecting the serenity of the scene depicted but line 6 is turbulent and much quicker, and then in line 7 the word 'upgathered' breaks the smoothness of the rhythm which together with 'howling' in line 6, and 'now' and 'sleeping' in line 7 evokes a sense of foreboding. In line 8, the rhythm is jerky and this heightens the effect of a jarring element in the harmony between the different components of nature. This discordant element is man who is at odds with nature of which he himself is a part.

In line 9 the dash induces a pause in the movement and then the violence of the words 'Great God!' make for an abrupt, explosive, and emphatic break in the rhythm to convey the vehemence of Wordsworth's protest against what

is happening. In the last lines, the movement is in general slow and firm as the poet gives his reasons for preferring to be a heathen (a choice against his own convictions, and which implies the option of the lesser of two evils) rather than to neglect God's manifestations of Himself in nature. The regular and even beat of the last two lines recalls that of line 5, reflecting its calm tranquillity and the poet's quiet but unshakeable beliefs.

In Arnold's 'Dover Beach', too, we find a pause in movement in the description of the light on the French coast in line 4.

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits;— on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone...

The even, smooth rhythm reflecting the tranquil beauty of the evening in the first three lines is broken first by the irregularity of rhythm in 'on the French coast the light', and then by the heavy emphasis on the word 'Gleams', which enforces a pause, because, although there is no comma, the long, drawn-out sound of the word makes the reader linger over it, before the much quicker movement of 'and is gone'. This produces an almost irresistible urge to repeat this phrase after using the word 'and' again and thus the effect of incessant motion is created. This time, though, the movement is a circular one because through the use of the word 'the' rather than 'a' before 'light' we realise quite soon that the source of the light is a light-house which the poet has probably often seen before.

The rhythm of this poem undergoes several changes. Lines 5 and 6 have a slow, gentle, even movement, but the word 'Only' in line 7 breaks this soft regularity, heralding the disturbance of the words that are to follow in lines 9-11.

the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay. 5
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling, 10
At their return, up the high strand.

'Listen!' in line 9 has a similar effect as it breaks the reverie of the reader's visual appreciation of what he has seen, commanding him to use his aural sense which has been in abeyance. The rhythm in lines 9-11 is much more turbulent than in the preceding lines, as the restless movement of the sea is described. In line 10 the heavy stress on the words 'draw back' slows the rhythm and this suggests the effort and power needed to drag the water over the pebbles as well as implying heaviness and reluctance to move on the part of the water. The emphasis on the word 'fling' at the end of this line together with the shortness and sharpness of the word itself forms a strong contrast with the slowness of 'draw back' and conveys a forceful, violent, random, almost abandoned movement which is indicative of the strength of the waves.

This is followed by the monotonous movement of line 12 which again depicts ceaseless and repetitive motion, though this time not a circular one, and which is echoed in the second stanza by the words 'ebb and flow' in line 17.

Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago 15
Heard it on the Aegaeon, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery...

In lines 13 and 14 the rhythm is very slow and the idea of music is suggested by the words 'cadence' and 'note'. The words 'tremulous' and 'sadness' together with the slowness of pace give the feeling of a dirge or requiem which is consistent with the theme of the poem as a whole.

In the second stanza the even rhythm is disturbed by the harsh word 'turbid' in line 17, which describes the quality of the backward and forward movement of 'ebb and flow' and which unsettles the rhythmic pattern and contemplative tenor of this stanza, because what the tragedian Sophocles is thinking about is the dark sorrow that seems to be part of the human condition.

In the third stanza the movement of lines 22 and 23 is slow and even and reinforces the idea of beauty and security:

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, 25

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

But in line 25 the words are much longer, more drawn-out and punctuated by commas, which all slow down the movement dramatically, and is in direct contrast with that which is induced by 'stand' and 'land' in lines 4 and 8, which convey stability and assurance. They have the same effect as 'draw back' in line 10, and the word 'melancholy' reminds us of the 'sadness' in line 14. Lines 25 and 10 both imply that man's loss of faith is a gradual, long, slow but inexorable process, and the rhythm of these two lines produces a feeling of reluctance as though faith does not willingly leave us but is defeated by man's indifference. The word 'roar', however, with its heavy emphasis at the end of line 25 is ominous in its echo of 'roar' in line 9 and it heralds an abrupt change in the rhythm to the unevenness of line 26 and the first half of line 27. 'Retreating' again implies a defeat and the jerkiness of what follows brings with it the haste and breathlessness of a defeated army as it flees. The movement in the rest of this stanza is heavy and sombre to convey the bleakness, emptiness and vulnerability (especially as expressed in the word 'naked') of what is left.

In the last stanza, after the poet's plea to his beloved that they remain steadfast and loyal to one another since no other certainty is left them, the rhythm gradually speeds up to an almost intolerable pace as the poet heaps up one after another the many deprivations we must suffer in the face of a lack of purpose and direction, until the semi-colon after 'pain' in line 33 brings some relief to the reader who is made to feel that there is nothing at all to bring happiness and security to us in life.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems 30
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain 35
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

The last two lines of the poem, however, are rough, tempestuous and irregular in movement in their portrayal of a battle that is being lost, and the idea of a defeat reminds us of 'withdrawing' (line 25) and 'retreating' (line 26). In these lines, though, the rhythm reflects panic, pain, fear and hopelessness and this is strengthened by the word 'ignorant' with its meaning of a complete absence of knowledge of whom, what or why we are fighting and where to go for help.

This poem which starts so calmly and which conveys so much beauty and peacefulness ends in discordance and terror, all of which is enhanced by the poet's use of rhythm.

The third poem I wish to look at with regard to incessant motion is W.B. Yeats's 'The Second Coming':

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere 5
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand. 10
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun, 15
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again, but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle, 20
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

(Yeats, 1950: 210)

In this poem an endless circular movement is depicted right away in the repeated opening words ('Turning and turning'—the first syllables of which are stressed) of line 1, and the rhythm of this line adds to the feeling of ceaseless gyration that is reinforced by the accented word 'gyre' at the end of the line. The implication here is that in the incessant turning and wheeling, no constructive goal is ever reached. The gyre is 'widening' which means that the circles grow ever larger in diameter until the falcon is so remote from the centre of the circle that it is beyond contact with it. By line 6 the rhythm has steadily increased in pace (with, for example, the polysyllabic 'ceremony' taking one stress on its first syllable, and the galloping release in the unstressed syllables which follow) as the consequences of this are described and this evokes a feeling of panic and fear.

The falcon represents mankind in our Western civilisation while the falconer is God, and Yeats asserts that when man loses contact with God, the civilisation disintegrates. The words 'twenty centuries' (line 19) and 'Bethlehem' (line 22) (all emphasised by the stress pattern) are the indication that the poet is referring to the Christian God and since Christianity is the recognised religion of our civilisation, we know that this is what Yeats sees as being subject to imminent collapse.

It is interesting to note that the word the poet uses in line 2 is 'cannot' rather than 'will not' or 'does not' because he seems to be doing something similar here to what Wordsworth does in the opening line of the sonnet quoted above, for 'cannot' means 'is not able to' which suggests that it is not that man

is unwilling to respond to God but that because he has removed himself so far from God he can no longer be in touch with the tenets of a faith that was once so prevalent and strong.

The circular movement is portrayed again in the word 'Reel' at the beginning of line 17 and the rhythm, with its heavy emphasis on this word, reflects a staggering, unsteady, dizzying movement so that the circle is not a true one, and this movement is produced by shock and uncertainty. In line 21, a cycle is again implied in 'its hour come round at last' and the slow, steady iambic rhythm of these words reinforces the idea of the implacable and unshakeable patience of the 'Beast' which represents what is to replace our civilisation. This has already been suggested in line 16 in the words 'is moving its slow thighs' in which the measured, heavy rhythm also enhances the idea of power and unhurried purpose.

The idea of a cycle is central to this poem for what Yeats is saying is that all civilisations originate to fill a gap, rise, reach a climax, and then decline and fall, and then different ones take their place. The poet here sees the reason for this decline of our civilisation as being man's loss of faith which causes an absence of stability, unity and strength and this opens the way for something else to gain ascendancy.

The slow, heavy and regular rhythm of lines 13-16 reinforces the idea of something implacable but also inhuman (line 15) moving forward with power and leisurely confidence ('is moving its slow thighs') and the poem ends with a question, for Yeats does not know exactly what form this 'rough beast' will take, and the accent falling on 'what' and on the final syllable gives added

force to it. What he has seen in his vision, though, is that it is something that is *alien and frighteningly inimical to us*.

There is another poem I would like to comment on that describes a circular movement but this time it is not quite as central to the poem as it was in the three above. I shall quote only the last stanza of William Blake's 'The Garden of Love' (Blake, 1972: 215), which departs from the rhyming and rhythmic pattern of the first two. It reads thus:

And I saw it filled with graves,
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds
And binding with briars my joys and desires.

The last two lines of this poem are much longer than any others in the poem, and the effect of this is of a kind of endless, patient, but sterile activity. The rhythm of the penultimate line is a heavy, ponderous, monotonous one (two-syllable feet alternating with three-syllable feet) which reflects the ceaseless plodding of the priests in a circular ('rounds'), pointless, and mechanical movement, the sense of which is enhanced by the internal rhyme. Moreover, the priests are dressed in black, which is or was the accepted colour of clerical dress, but it is also the colour of mourning, so that the implication of death first raised in 'tombstone' in the second line is very clear. The conclusion that Blake reaches is that organised religion has reduced faith to something dreary, sombre and unhappy, when it should provide joy, hope, and security.

The rhythm of the last line is not quite as slow (the internal rhyme suggests two short lines of two iambic feet each), and this reflects the busyness of the priests in fashioning painful ('briars') restrictions on man in order to kill his natural impulses towards happiness and the fulfilment of his instinctual longings. Though the rhythm here is quicker than that of the previous line, it is just as purposeful in its sure regularity. The poem as a whole is one expression of the poet's distaste for and horror of what man has made of religion.

In George Herbert's poem 'Love' there is a constant backward and forward movement in terms of the advance and retreat in the interaction between the poet and God:

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guiltie of dust and sinne.
But quick-ey'd Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning 5
 If I lack'd any thing.

A guest, I answer'd worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee. 10
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.

And know you not, sayes Love, who bore the blame? 15

My dear, then I will serve.

You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat;

So I did sit and eat.

(Herbert, 1974: 191)

The imagery in this poem is that of a host (God or Love) offering a 'dusty' traveller (the poet) the warmth, comfort and rest of his abode, which is seen as a sanctuary. The advances and retreats described here are portrayed as physical movements but the word 'soul' in the first line makes us at once aware that they are actually spiritual in nature. Stanzas two and three consist of a dialogue between the poet and God, but because of the absence of quotation marks it is sometimes difficult to determine who exactly is speaking at a given moment. With careful reading, though, this soon becomes clear.

In the first four words of line 1, God moves forward towards the poet with an open, welcoming gesture of hospitality, which conveys love and warmth and His readiness to receive the poet into the comforting haven of His love. The semi-colon after these four words enforces a pause, in which the poet's first instinct to accept Love's offer, his indecision, and then his struggle to reject it, is made clear. The considerable slowing down at the end of this line, effected by the emphasis on the two words 'drew back' (a combination of duration, or length of sound, and accent), reflects the poet's extreme reluctance to move backwards from Love, and the effort he must make to do so. The short three beat line that follows gives the poet's reason for his action in incisive and what seem irrefutable terms—he feels that his sins and the tarnishing of his purity on his journey through life make him ineligible to accept

God's invitation. The rhythm here is heavy, reflecting the weight of sin that the poet feels, as the accents fall on 'Guilt-', 'dust', and 'sinne'.

The terms 'God' and 'Love' are interchangeable in this poem, because Herbert sees God as personifying love. In line 3, the poet shows that when love is present, every nuance of the behaviour of the beloved is readily discernible to the one who loves him. In addition, God is all-seeing ('quick ey'd', with its short, quick rhythmic movement) so that He notices immediately Herbert's initial impulse to move towards Him ('my first entrance in' in line 4) and then his retreat in the slow retraction of this advance. The words 'grow slack' again slow down the rhythm and suggest the poet's unwilling realisation of his own unworthiness. Moreover, the words 'grow slack' indicate the relaxation of the tautness which his eagerness to accept Love's offer has generated, and the word 'grow' shows that this is a relatively gradual and slow process because the admission to himself of his own unworthiness is a reluctant realisation, which goes so greatly against what he actually longs to do.

In line 5, God moves forward again towards the retreating poet, and here the words 'drew', 'nearer' and 'sweetly' have a gentle, even, and unhurried rhythm. When the poet says that what is wanting is his own suitability for acceptance into God's love, the rhythm of line 8, in which God replies, is very deliberate and decisive, and is indicative of the unhesitating quality of God's assurance that the poet does indeed merit His love, as well as illustrating the unstinting nature of His love. The word 'shall' in this line denotes that it is God who determines the qualification of Herbert as the 'guest'.

The words 'I the unkinde, ungrateful?' are an expression of the poet's incredulity which is heightened by the hesitant, faltering rhythm of these words. I find the singularity of the sins the poet enumerates very illuminating and thought-provoking for they are neither any of the seven deadly sins nor are they a transgression of any of the Ten Commandments, and yet they are the cause of more grief, anger and pain on a daily basis than most normally accepted forms of sinning. When the poet expresses first his great love for God ('Ah my dear') and then his enormous regret that his shameful worldliness and moral shabbiness have made him unworthy even of considering being acceptable, the movement is a backward one again. God, however, moves towards the poet yet again with a loving and reassuring action ('Love took my hand') and though His reply is gentle in line 12, it yet contains a mild rebuke when He reminds Herbert that, since He Himself made man, He is also responsible for the fact that he is fallible.

In lines 13 and 14, however, there is still a kind of retreat by the poet when he admits the truth of this but points out that because God also gave man free will, man by his sinning is responsible for the defiling of what God has made, and then he follows this argument with a plea to be punished for this. In this reply lies the theme, or part of it, of the poem: that man is reluctant to accept forgiveness without deserving it, or without doing something to atone before being admitted into God's grace. God's reply in line 15 involves another advance towards the poet when He reminds him that his sins have already been redeemed by Christ's death.

The response by Herbert in line 16 is immediate, and this time represents the poet's purposeful movement forward towards God, underlined by regular iambics, and his reply is preceded by an expression of immense love in 'My dear', but the syllable 'serve' at the end of the line is quite long, and it slows down the rhythm. It is evidence of the fact that Herbert is not yet fully aware of the magnanimous nature of God's mercy for he feels that he must actively labour in the service of God before really earning God's love. The duration of the drawn-out word 'serve' together with its being accented, gives a sense of arduous, lengthy toil.

God's response in the long regular pentameter in line 17 has a steady rhythm, and the stressed word 'must' signifies that He will brook no refusal of His desire that the poet should rest in Him and participate in the sacrament of Communion ('taste my meat'). In the speaker's response in the last short line, with its clipped accent (in the repetition of the stop, |t|) and short duration, the movement is firm, steady and resolute, and represents a decisive, unhesitating advance by the speaker towards God. Its brevity denotes the poet's final and total acceptance of God's invitation and his grateful acquiescence in God's command. In its humble simplicity it is an extremely moving climax to the poem.

The last example of the way in which rhythm enhances and supports meaning that I intend to discuss here is the difference in the way two poets explore the same concept: man's inability to regulate the movement of time.

Chapter Five

Andrew Marvell's poem 'To His Coy Mistress' (Marvell, 1976: 50) is a *tongue-in-cheek seduction poem* which nonetheless evinces deep insights and several profound observations. It begins thus:

Had we but World enough, and Time,
This coyness Lady were no crime.

The poet goes on to declare how much time he would allow for love to grow and develop, and for how long he would be patient if time permitted. He says in lines 9-12

And you should if you please refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable Love should grow
Vaster than Empires, and more slow.

The stress on and length of words such as 'refuse', 'Jews', 'conversion', 'vegetable', 'grow', 'vaster', and 'slow', all slow down the rhythm considerably in these lines. The poet goes on to enumerate the various lengths of time he would devote to the adoration of the different parts of the lady, and the stanza ends:

For Lady you deserve this State;
Nor would I love at lower rate.

The first two lines of the next stanza, however, begin with the words:

But at my back I always hear
Times winged Chariot hurrying near:

In these lines the rhythm is so regular that they can be rigidly scanned, without much changing the sense, in the manner I discussed at the beginning of this chapter:

 - - / ~ - - / ~ - / ~ - - /
But at/ my back/ I al/ways hear
 - - / ~ - - / ~ - / ~ - - /
Times win/ged Char/iot hurr/ying near/.

The effect of this strict steadiness of rhythm (apparent in much of the poem) is to emphasise the poet's central thesis, that time moves forward implacably and inexorably, that we cannot halt its progress, and that therefore we must take our pleasures in life when they are presented to us, or we may lose our chance to do so altogether.

Christopher Marlowe's play, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, on the other hand, is an intensely serious work and lacks altogether the playful tones of Marvell's poem.

Faustus has become versed in all the branches of learning he has had any interest in, is bored by them, and yearns to acquire knowledge of necromancy. Mephistophilis and Lucifer offer to enable him to master this art, but in return he must sign over his soul to them. Faustus willingly does so, but towards the end of the play, the time when he must fulfil his part of the bargain has

arrived. The clock strikes eleven and at midnight he must give up his soul. From this point the lines are interspersed with the chiming of the clock, and the steady rhythm of the lines have the feeling of a clock ticking on in a regular, even way. This rhythm reinforces the sense of the relentless advancing of time, and Faustus has realised that the worst aspect of his fate is that his torment and suffering will never end, and so looms over him as unbearable, everlasting anguish. He says:

Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransomed me,
Impose some end to my incessant pain...

(Marlowe, 1955: 157)

He pleads for mercy, but knowing there is no hope of this, he implores time at least to slow down. The steady beat of Marlowe's mighty line is interrupted when Faustus says:

O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!
(O slowly, slowly run, horses of the night!)

(ibid.)

The movement of this line is in stark contrast to our sense of time moving on at an unvarying pace, which the lines before and just after produce, for it is jerky and uneven with its middle dactyls (a three beat foot, with the emphasis on the first beat), yet at the same time, because it must be said slowly, it has a dragging quality. This heightens our awareness of Faustus's extreme

agitation, his panic, his ardent desire to slow down the passage of time, and his knowledge that the hour of his fearful doom cannot be averted or delayed.

Both these poets are concerned with the concept of the progress of time, but they deal with it very differently. Marvell accepts that we cannot halt time—indeed he uses this fact as a weapon for persuasion—whereas Marlowe makes Faustus regard time as an enemy, and almost as an accomplice in exacting the penalty he must pay.

I have chosen six or seven examples to demonstrate the way in which rhythm works in poetry, but the number of poems I could have chosen is myriad, for every poem of merit has changes of rhythm throughout, and there is usually a reason for this. The sensitive reader feels these changes, and he should ask himself how and why the rhythm changes, what the effect of the changes is, and whether the changes have any significance. In answering these questions he will not only become aware of the importance of rhythm, but his understanding and appreciation of the poem he is reading will be immeasurably enhanced.

Chapter Six: Punctuation

It has been my experience in teaching at tertiary level that a vast proportion of students have a very limited knowledge of the function of the various punctuation marks, and thus fail to see the significance of the way the poet uses punctuation when he writes. While they know how to use question and exclamation marks, though in a fairly limited way, colons and semi-colons seem to present a deep mystery to them. They know, too, that a full-stop marks the end of a sentence, but because they have had little or no instruction in formal grammar, and therefore are ignorant of the difference between a phrase, a main clause and a subordinate clause, let alone a compound, complex or compound-complex sentence, they do not know what constitutes a finite sentence. Hence their writing is often liberally peppered with commas, and the reader has great difficulty in making sense of what they say.

The purpose of punctuation is to promote clarity in writing which might otherwise be unintelligible or misleading. The following sentence, for example, would highly incense feminists:

A woman without her man is nothing.

Insert punctuation marks, however, and the sentence takes on a completely different meaning:

A woman: without her, man is nothing.

Commas in particular pose problems, and their omission, inclusion and placing can change meaning, elucidate meaning, or lead to the utter confusion of the reader, so that great care must be taken in their usage. For example, the omission of just one comma renders the following sentence preposterous:

Helping at the Christmas party will be the vicar's wife, who will cook the turkeys and six other women.

Insert a comma after 'turkeys', and the sentence avoids any suggestion of cannibalism! In this connection, Oscar Wilde once confessed that he had spent the whole morning putting in a comma, and the whole afternoon taking it out again.

In addition, apart from their well-known functions of separating two or more adjectives and adverbs, or individual items in a list, marking off words in parenthesis, or denoting the end of a subordinate clause before a main clause, they are used in long, complex and compound sentences which, without them, the reader would have great difficulty in disentangling. Therefore, almost all good writing is carefully punctuated, though there are writers who deliberately dispense with punctuation almost entirely. I have mentioned stream of consciousness writers in a previous chapter and there are also some poets who engage in a similar practice. e.e. cummings is one, as the following example, 'in Just', demonstrates:

Chapter Six

in just—
spring when the world is mud—
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's spring
and
the
goat-footed
balloonman whistles
far
and
wee

(Malan, 1970: 120)

There are critics (Hirsch is one) who see great value in this kind of writing (they might argue, for example, that 'eddieandbill' and 'bettyandisbel' suggest the inseparability of these two sets of friends), but I believe there are far better and less confusing ways of conveying meaning than this.

Most poets do use punctuation, and they often do so in a much more conscious way than writers of prose, because they have so much less space and time to convey with precision and conciseness undertones or nuances of meaning than do the latter.

Line 1 in Arnold's 'Dover Beach' ends, we recall, with a full-stop:

The sea is calm tonight.

The effect of this is two-fold: firstly, it places emphasis on the word 'tonight', which implies that while at this particular time the sea is smooth and still, it might not have been so previously and it may not be so at any time in the future, and this is related to what the poet says later, in the stanza which mentions Sophocles, and at the end of the poem, when he describes the confusion of battle and expresses his concern about mankind's future. Secondly, it enforces a pause before the reader's visual sense is directed to a different range and perspective, that is, from a contemplation of the sea either directly in front of him, or downward from the top of the cliffs to the light across the sea and much further away.

In the poem 'Leviathan', Livingstone describes first the snake and then the way in which it catches and consumes a small lizard. The third stanza begins with a line consisting of a single word:

Gone.

The full-stop here lends absolute finality to the vanishing of the lizard into the snake's insides, so that the reader feels a kind of desolation at the irrevocability of the abrupt death of the 'scaly little monster' that has endeared itself to us.

Although it is difficult to comment with certainty about punctuation in the face of sixteenth and seventeenth century punctuation conventions (or lack of them), in Michael Drayton's sonnet 'The Parting' there is also a full-stop at the end of the first line. The first two lines read thus:

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part.

Nay, I have done; you get no more of me;

(Chambers, 1932: 603)

Here the full-stop is an indication of a conclusive decision (conveyed by the words 'Since there's no help') the poet has at last come to, after many attempts to revive a failing relationship. The long pause the full-stop ensures, however, also points to some kind of activity between the end of the first line and the beginning of the second, as though either the poet needs time to strengthen his resolve, or the object of his love has made some kind of objec-

tion or a movement towards effecting a reconciliation between them. At the end of the poem, the reader's suspicions as to which of these two it actually is are confirmed.

There are an infinite number of examples of the ways in which poets use a full-stop in a place where some other form of punctuation would not be incorrect, and the reader must consider carefully why the poet has, in fact, made a specific choice, in order to glean the full significance of what is being said.

The term 'exclamation mark' is self-explanatory and is used for commands, warnings and exhortations, or to express strong emotions like surprise, disgust, joy or scorn. In good prose or poetry they tend to be used sparingly, lest they lose impact, but in poetry, their effect is more complex than it is in prose. A comparison between Wordsworth's sonnet 'The World is Too Much with Us' and Arnold's 'Dover Beach' in the use of the exclamation mark will, I believe, prove profitable.

In Wordsworth's sonnet the exclamation mark comes after the words 'Great God' in line 9:

It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;

The words 'Great God!' appear after the long pause created by the full-stop, and the dash after 'not', in which the poet reflects on the foolishness of man in his lack of accord with nature. These words ('Great God!') are not an invocation of the Lord's name in vain, but are addressed directly to God, and they are an expression of his vehement rejection of, and dissociation from, man's

unresponsiveness to the different components of nature, and thus the greatness and glory of God. This focuses attention on the magnitude of the poet's recoil from what we are doing, which is so extreme that he would rather resort to paganism than be insensitive to the way in which God manifests Himself in nature.

In 'Dover Beach' there is an exclamation mark after 'Listen' at the beginning of line 9. In the previous eight lines Arnold has been describing a scene in which we are invited to *look* at the sea, the cliffs, the light on the French coast, and the meeting of sea and sand. In line 9 with the words

Listen! you hear the grating roar

a different element, that of sound, is introduced and the quiet and peace is disturbed. The exclamation mark after 'Listen' exhorts the person with him and the poet himself (and through them, the reader) to divert their attention from what they see, to what there is to be heard. The fact that attention must be drawn to the sound of the water over the pebbles is an indication that preoccupation with the visual has made the viewers unaware of what is actually clearly audible. However, the word 'Listen' and the exclamation mark express the poet's desire to pause and hear consciously what has been there all along, but has only gradually penetrated the poet's consciousness, so that eventually the ominous quality of the 'grating roar' can no longer be ignored. The suggestion that the sounds have increased in volume is also present, and this reflects the idea of faith gradually withdrawing, with the consequent in-

crease of the 'struggle', 'flight', 'darkling', and 'ignorant armies' of the last stanza.

The second stanza of Yeats's 'The Second Coming' begins:

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming!...

The first two lines depict the poet's fervent longing for something to rescue us from the plight he has described in the first stanza. Christians have been promised that Christ will come again to save us from destruction, and that is why Yeats thinks of the Second Coming almost immediately. The repetition of 'Second Coming' followed by an exclamation mark is an indication of the way in which these words take on new meaning for the poet but also, and more significantly, of the force of the impact which triggers off the vision that the poet describes in the lines that follow.

One last example of the way in which the exclamation mark works is in Oswald Mtshali's 'Boy on a Swing':

Slowly he moves
to and fro, to and fro,
then faster and faster
he swishes up and down.

His blue shirt
billows in the breeze
like a tattered kite.

The world whirls by:
east becomes west,
north turns to South;
the few cardinal points
meet in his head.

Mother!
Where did I come from?
When will I wear long trousers?
Why was my father jailed?

(Chapman and Dangor, 1982: 73)

After the word 'Mother' it would be possible to have a comma to indicate that the boy is addressing his mother and looking to her for an answer to the questions he poses in the last three lines. The exclamation mark after 'Mother', however, changes what would be the relatively quiet, though bewildered tone with which the poem would end, for it denotes here a cry for help which is wrenched from the boy by his sense of disorientation and the resultant confusion and fear this arouses in him.

The first three stanzas of this poem begin quite slowly and then increase in pace as the swing moves ever more quickly and then begins to rotate, until the boy loses his sense of location altogether. This gives rise to his alarm and loss of a centre of gravity and prompts the questions at the end of the poem. Notice, too, that each of the first three stanzas is a complete sentence, but in the last stanza, each line is a sentence. The first three stanzas convey the gradual and intensifying confusion in the boy, until by the fourth stanza—with

the much more halting rhythm achieved by the separation of each line by an exclamation mark and then question marks—the boy's lack of understanding of the much broader issues of his situation in life is clearly depicted. There is much more to this poem than this of course, some of which I shall deal with in the next section of this chapter.

It is important for the full understanding of a poem not simply to note an exclamation mark in passing, but to assess its effect. One way of doing this is to substitute for it another suitable punctuation mark, consider which adds more to the meaning, and then decide on how it forms part of the fabric of the poem as a whole.

It would be trite to say that a question mark denotes that a question has been posed, but it is worthwhile to look carefully at the way in which questions enhance the meaning at a particular point in a poem. While in prose questions can be answered by another character in the novel or play, in poetry they are rhetorical (unless the poem is a narrative one), since the poet naturally does not expect an answer from his readers. The function of a rhetorical question is to enrich meaning by adding one or more layers of significance to what could be phrased as a statement. They may emphasise or pour scorn on some thought or action, point to an absurdity or incongruity, ridicule, or express surprise or some other strong emotion.

The questions posed at the end of 'Boy on a Swing' express the bewilderment and helplessness of a whole community which has been dispossessed, dislocated, deprived of cultural ties and cohesion, as well as stature and dignity, both as a whole and of its individual members (the family lives of whom

have been disrupted perhaps irretrievably), and which has been impoverished and enslaved by harsh oppression, until many of its members no longer have a feeling of a common identity, security, or the consciousness of a place of worth in the society in which they live. The poem, which begins innocently enough, ends as a protest against the atrocities of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Two poems that begin with questions are one of Shakespeare's sonnets (XVIII) and Gerard Manley Hopkins's 'Spring and Fall', and I should like to look at the difference in the way in which these questions work in these poems. Shakespeare's sonnet begins:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, 5
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:

(Vendler, 1997: 119)

The question in the first line here represents the poet's own dilemma of how best to describe the beauty of his loved one. It is a tentative one, for it suggests he is aware of many other possible comparisons, but though summer occurs to him first as being one of the loveliest aspects of nature, he soon be-

gins to see its flaws which, he concludes, do not apply to the beauty of the person he is addressing.

The question, then, represents the musing of the poet over the many choices he could make to illustrate the perfection of this person, and it is really himself the poet is questioning. Ultimately, however, the question becomes a statement of the impossibility of finding anything to equal in beauty the one he loves, as well as being a tribute to such flawless comeliness.

The poem 'Spring and Fall' by Hopkins reads:

Margaret are you grieving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leaves like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! As the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sorrows springs are the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It is the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

(Hopkins, 1953: 50)

The question in the first two lines here expresses the poet's surprise at the grief displayed by Margaret over so natural and apparently trivial a phenome-

non as trees losing their leaves in autumn. In the second question in lines 3 and 4, the transposition of the normal order of words implies much stranger feelings than surprise, especially in the placing of the words 'can you?' at the end of line 4. The ability of the young girl to feel as deeply over inanimate and relatively unimportant things like falling leaves as people do over disasters and catastrophes that affect them personally, arouses first the poet's astonishment, and then his awe, wonder and nostalgic admiration.

The questions, then, are an expression of the poet's own feelings about the strong emotions of the young, which are so easily aroused but which, he notes with sadness, all too soon become dulled with age. He points this out in the next two lines:

Ah! As the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder

The 'Ah!' here represents a deep sigh of regret at the normal course of events in life.

The difference between the questions in these two poems is that in the first the question is a reflection of the poet's difficulty of choice, which heralds a kind of song of praise, while in the second, the questions portray strong feelings at first of a kind of pleasure in the poet, which is actually the precursor of much more sombre emotions as the poet ponders over *universal sorrow and the inevitable fate of mankind*.

In George Herbert's 'The Collar' (Herbert, 1974: 161), the questions have yet another function. In the first sixteen lines of this poem there are 9 ques-

tions, and these represent the progressive changes in the poet's feelings as he rebels against what he sees as the fruitlessness and lack of reward of his life and work as a priest.

The poem opens with a forceful and decisive expression of the poet's resolve to abandon the priesthood. His first questions (in line 3) are:

What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?

Here there is indignation and resentment that are present too in line 6:

Shall I be still in suit?

The words 'still' and 'ever' are a portrayal of the endlessness of what appears to him to be barren labour, and in lines 7 to 10 he complains that he obtains only tribulation and pain as a reward for all his efforts:

Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me bleed, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?

By this time a strong note of self-pity is present in his reflections, which is confirmed in line 13:

Is the year only lost to me?

The questions in lines 14 to 16 are:

Have I no bays to crown it?
No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?
All wasted?

In these questions the sense of injustice and deprivation is strong, and they are charged with indignation, reproach and finally, in the last question, melancholy.

In lines 17 to 34 he assures himself that he need not continue as he is, for he has the strength and talent to succeed and achieve in other spheres in life; and, because God apparently does not acknowledge his labours, he defies Him and all his own apprehensions. Finally, in his internal ravings, he seems to hear God's voice calling him and he immediately submits to Him.

In this poem, the questions represent the despair and the turbulence of the poet's feelings, which he must work through until he regains his equilibrium and sense of vocation.

Questions in poetry are highly significant, and so charged with feeling that the reader cannot afford to neglect their implications.

I have already commented on the function of commas, which usually occur quite naturally in poetry, but that of the colon requires some consideration. The colon is slightly less final than the full-stop and is used to introduce a quotation, extract, or a list, which last may comprise separate words, or a single or series of clauses or phrases. In poetry it may arouse a sense of expectation, signal the fulfilment of a proposition that precedes it, or signify a pause in

which the poet gathers his thoughts to make a pronouncement on or state the conclusion of what his thoughts have led to.

In 'Spring and Fall', which I quoted above, the colon after 'guessed' at the end of line 13 alerts us to the fact that the poet is to formulate exactly what the fundamental sorrow is which all men basically undergo and that the inexperienced young girl intuitively senses—man's mortality.

In Marlowe's *Faustus*, the red clouds of the evening sky remind Faustus of Christ as our saviour and he says:

See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!

One drop would save my soul—half a drop: ah, my Christ! (Marlowe, 1955: 157)

The colon after the second 'drop' follows Faustus's contemplation of the fact that Christ's blood was shed to save sinners, and that even as little as half a drop would, in the normal course of events, be enough to spare him too, but also that he has forfeited this privilege. The pause the colon enforces suggests firstly, his despair, and then, the gathering of a resolution to call on Christ's mercy anyway.

Notice the exclamation marks here too. The one after the first line indicates excitement in his momentary upsurge of hope when he is reminded of what the blood of Christ signifies, and the one after 'Christ', his deep sorrow (also portrayed in the sigh of 'ah') and fear because he is excluded from all hope of salvation.

In the first stanza of 'The Journey of the Magi' by T.S. Eliot (Eliot, 1963: 109), one of the travellers recites a long list of hardships that he and his fellows have had to undergo on their journey. In these lines the rhythm gradually speeds up as one privation after another is disclosed, until the climax is reached in line 15. Lines 15 and 16 are:

And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.

Here the colon after 'prices' indicates a long pause, as though the speaker has to catch his breath after the accelerating recital of his grievances, and then follows a sort of summing-up of all these in such simple words that they come almost as an anti-climax. They represent a resigned kind of synopsis, something that would not be achieved by a full-stop in the place of the colon. This is so because the colon heralds a synopsis or summary.

In 'The Cool Web' Robert Graves comments on the fact that children do not have the vocabulary to express what they strongly feel, but that, as adults, we are able to 'spell away', or use words as a kind of magic to take away the pain from, or disturbance of, strong emotions about what we experience.

In the third stanza he says:

There's a cool web of language winds us in,
Retreat from too much joy or too much fear:
We grow sea-green at last and coldly die
In brininess and volubility.

(Graves, 1948: 51)

The colon after 'fear' heralds the fact that the poet is to give us his opinion of what the result is when we have become so accustomed to using language to temper our feelings that we become enmeshed in words—eventually we drown all vestiges of emotion until we become hardened and callous and, because we no longer really feel deeply, cease to live in the full sense of the word.

The semi-colon (though it also has a grammatical function) is an indication of a break stronger or longer than that represented by a comma, but weaker or shorter than that represented by a full-stop. It is used to separate clauses not joined by a conjunction or before a clause beginning with words such as 'so' or 'therefore' in a sentence, to separate antithetical clauses, to separate items in a list when commas are insufficient because they have already been used within the items, or to act as a kind of rest in long sentences before the next clause when it tends to sum up the preceding clause. All those functions are employed by the poet, and the use of the semi-colon is frequent in poetry.

Consider the first lines of 'Musée des Beaux Arts' by W.H. Auden (Auden, 1968: 28):

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window
or just walking dully along...

Notice the colon after 'Master' in line 2, used here because what is to follow is a long list of the circumstances suffering takes place in, and how other people or animals react to what is happening. The semi-colon after both 'position' and 'along' avert the need for a conjunction such as 'and' or 'or', for these would eliminate the pause between them and the next clause, and in this way take away the effect of the poet's reflecting on yet another situation in which suffering occurs while others go on with their ordinary, everyday activities.

In 'The World is Too Much with Us', Wordsworth describes the activities of four natural elements: the sea, the moon, the wind, and man (lines 5 to 8).

This sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for every thing, we are out of tune;
It moves us not, –

He uses a semi-colon rather than a comma after line 5 for three reasons: firstly, because he is separating clauses; secondly, the semi-colon induces a pause longer than that which a comma would, in which he contemplates with awe the relationship between the sea and the moon, where the former willingly exposes herself to the fluctuations of the latter; and thirdly, the longer pause accentuates the contrast between the calm serenity of line 5 and the wild ferocity of line 6. After line 7 the semi-colon performs the same function as the first two mentioned above, and then the longer pause offers an opportunity for him to ponder and marvel over the diversity and splendour of these

natural forces. The semi-colon after line 8 has a rather different function, for it could be replaced by a full-stop but the poet hurries on to convey how appalled he is, firstly, by humanity's disharmony with nature, and then by our utter indifference to it.

The first stanza of Dylan Thomas's 'Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night' reads:

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

(Thomas, 1971: 159)

The semi-colon after 'day' makes for a pause before the alternative to dying without a fight, and heightens the emphasis and urgency of the poet's conviction that even old men should not submit passively to their demise.

The last two lines of the poem repeat lines 1 and 3 of the first stanza, but are punctuated differently, thus:

Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

This time there is a full-stop after 'night', because the poet wants a much longer pause here. This is partly because he is repeating what he has said in the first stanza, but has omitted his belief in what old men should do, mainly because the long pause strengthens and reaffirms the statement of his conviction that *no-one*, not only old people, should accept death quietly.

Lastly, in Andrew Marvell's 'To his Coy Mistress', lines 5 to 7 are:

Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Should's't rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain...

This is an example of a semi-colon separating not antithetical clauses, but a complete contrast in location. Again, the semi-colon enforces a pause which has the effect of stressing the effort required to wrench the reader's imagination from the contemplation of a warm, exotic, romantic Eastern setting to that of a cold, mundane, familiar (to people living in England) northern climate.

There are countless examples of semi-colons in poetry and each one is important in a good poem, for it is used intentionally and deliberately to strengthen and heighten meaning.

The dash (—), the last kind of punctuation mark I intend to consider here, is used to mark a parenthesis instead of brackets, to indicate an abrupt change of thought, or to separate a repeated word. When it is used in poetry, *it tends to signify a long pause or a change in tone or pace.*

In 'Greater Love' by Wilfred Owen (Malan, 1970: 75) the first five lines of the third stanza are:

Your voice sings not so soft—
Though even as wind murmuring through rafters loft,—
Your dear voice is not dear
Gentle, and evening clear,
As theirs whom none now hear

The dashes after 'soft' and 'loft' make the second of these lines parenthetical. In the first of these lines the poet describes the voice as not singing as softly (as those who are dead), then between the dashes comes the concession that though not soft it is even, and then in the third line he begins a statement regarding the strength of his affection. The clause between dashes comes between two comparisons, and the effect of this is that the concession is a grudging one, which his sense of justice forces him to make.

In 'Dulce et Decorum Est' by the same poet there is a dash at the end of line 8:

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—

This line is the last of a long catalogue of the horrors that he has seen in battle, and the dash here signifies an abrupt change of topic. This serves to highlight the ghastliness of the images that have gone before, the poet's revulsion as he remembers these sufferings, and finally the change when he turns to and shows his bitterness to the person he is addressing about people who perpetuate the myth that war is glorious or noble.

In this poem the dash is also used to signify a pause. The first line of the second stanza is:

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling

The dash here portrays the apparent length of time between the frantic warning and the clumsy reaction, clumsy because of the panic and fear that prevails, to it.

In Marlowe's *Faustus* are the lines:

Yet will I call on him: O spare me, Lucifer—
Where is it now? 'Tis gone

Here the dash has a double function. Firstly, the colon after 'him' signifies Faustus's pausing as he recollects that a condition of his compact with Lucifer is to 'abjure the Trinity', and so he turns to Lucifer for mercy. Then the dash after 'Lucifer' signals both a pause as Faustus reflects on the absolute certainty that Lucifer will never release him from his part of their bargain, and an abrupt change as he turns again to God, looks at the sky and sees that the reddish light, which reminded him of Christ's blood, has gone and the heavens are dark, a sign to Faustus of God's anger.

The last example of the use of the dash I shall offer here comes from Anthony Delius's 'The Gamblers' (Malan, 1970: 150). The poem describes the early morning preparations for their day's work of the Coloured fishermen of the Cape, and the first line of the last stanza is:

Day flips a golden coin—but they mock it.

The image here is that of a coin being tossed to decide an issue purely by chance, in this case to determine the favourability or otherwise of the weather,

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one of the gambles inherent in the fishermen's line of work. In the pause engendered by the dash it is as though they await the outcome with baited breath, but the words that follow contradict this idea and we realise that the exigencies of their lives forbid them from taking into account the fact that a storm could quite soon succeed the sunny brightness of the morning. In a kind of bravado born of need, they pause only for an instant and then scoff at the danger that a change in the weather could bring.

In this chapter I have shown how much greater the significance of punctuation is in poetry than it is in prose. It must not be seen as a device merely to clarify meaning but rather as one of the tools of the poet which he uses to invest his writing with layers of meaning, of nuances, and of implications, as concisely as possible. When the reader is aware of the way in which punctuation is used in any particular poem he gleans much greater cognizance of the import of what the poet is saying.

Chapter Seven: Figurative Language

Figurative language is any departure from plain statement or the literal use of words. There are many figures of speech at the disposal of writers, but I shall deal with those most frequently encountered in poetry.

'Onomatopoeia' is the name given to a word that imitates a sound, for example, 'thud' or 'clap', and its mimetic function is obvious. What is important, though, is that good poets select such words very carefully, so that they are effective not only in conveying a particular sound, but also in their overtones. In 'Dover Beach', Matthew Arnold uses the word 'roar' twice to depict the sound of the water retreating over rough pebbles, but also to convey the menacing, ominous feeling suggested by the noise a wild, savage beast makes. In 'The World is Too Much with Us', Wordsworth does a similar thing when he uses the word 'howling'. This word reflects the noise a strong wind makes, but it also invests the line with ferocity, desolation and even grief.

Catherine Addison, in her article 'Introduction to the Study of Simile', says that a simile entails the explicit comparison of one thing (or person) with another, which can be signalled not only by 'like' and 'as', but also by 'just as', and the elision of these in words such as 'gnome-like'. These point to the similarity of the two things being compared. However, a simile can also be a comparison of inequality, and these similes are indicated by words such as 'unlike', 'like – but', and 'greater or lesser than'. Addison refers to Christine Brooke-Rose, who says that simile, unlike metaphor, is basically constituted by grammar, and comments on the fact that 'a simile, though it cannot actually express identity or

opposition, can express any among an infinity of degrees of likeness and unlikeness'. Things are not simply 'the same' or 'the opposite', but are similar or dissimilar in infinitely subtle ways. Similes can be literal, as in a word such as 'workmanlike', or figurative, as in 'my love is like a rose'. They are also found in category differences and differences of generality or spheres of existence. Category difference is found in the expression 'he has an elephant tread', but not in 'the boy is man-like' (Addison, 1993: 404).

Often, though, only 'like' or 'as' are used to signal this figure of speech. Two objects or actions are compared, but it is important to remember that usually only one aspect or quality of these two is common in both, and that in all other aspects they may be quite unlike. Thus in the sentence 'He is like a bear with a sore head', the irascibility or bad temper of a man is compared with that of a bear in pain, but in other respects they are completely different. In the same way in the sentence, 'Her dress is as green as grass', the colour is common both to the dress and grass – in shape, size, texture, function and componental make-up they are utterly dissimilar. This is not to deny that other qualities of both bear and grass might also be at work in such similes – the freshness of grass, for instance, the growling of the man in pain.

In good poetry, similes are used in a much more complex way than in the examples given above. A very effective use of simile features in a poem by Amy Lowell called 'A Decade' (Malan, 1970: 69), which reads:

When you came you were like red wine and honey,
And the taste of you burnt in my mouth like sweetness;
Now you are like morning bread,

Smooth and pleasant,
I hardly taste you at all, for I know your savour,
But I am completely nourished.

Here the way in which the quality of a good, lasting relationship changes is depicted in terms of taste. When two people first fall in love, the exciting and heady wonder of their feelings for one another is almost unbearable, for wine is associated with sweetness, intoxication, excitement, festivity and euphoria, and the word 'red' suggests passion, vitality, vigour and intensity. So intense are the sensations that this 'red wine' and the sweetness of the honey bring that they almost hurt ('burnt in my mouth'), but as the lovers get to know one another well and their relationship matures, it becomes a condition all but taken for granted, like something as commonplace as bread, though bread, the staff of life, has a pleasant taste, especially 'morning' bread which is fresh and crisp. Yet, says the poet, the 'you' in the poem is as life-sustaining as a staple diet like bread; while wine and honey are delicious, they are luxuries that are not essential for the preservation of life.

In Herbert's 'The Collar', which I mentioned in the last chapter, the poet uses three similes in lines 4 and 5:

My lines and life are free; free as the road
Loose as the wind, as large as store.

The speaker is commenting here on his freedom of choice in life in three ways: firstly, just as a road goes in various directions, so he has many ways in which he can direct his talents and energies; secondly, he has no more to bind him to

what he is doing than does the wind to blow in any particular direction; and thirdly, that the options open to him to choose from are as abundant as a well-stocked larder. These three similes accentuate just how little there is to force him to continue in the way of life he is leading at present.

Emily Dickinson, in the opening line of a poem describing a storm, says (Dickinson, 1970: 1593):

There came a wind like a bugle

Here she compares the abrupt, sudden force of the blast of wind that heralds the storm with the impact of the harsh, strident note of a bugle. Both are startling and awesome in their strength, and both announce some significant event, while the shape of the bugle also reflects the way in which the wind comes from a compact point and then quickly spreads out to encompass a vast space. In addition, both the sound of a bugle and that of the wind have as their source a great disturbance of air, so that this simile contains a many-layered comparison, thus richly describing their quality and the startling effect they have on people.

One last example of a simile occurs in the first four lines of 'Passivity' by Mary Fullerton (Finn, 1961:57):

Call not on comfort lest she come
with all her helpers sleek and dumb –
soft ropes that seem as frail as air,
to bind you in a cushioned chair...

This poem in its entirety warns us that giving oneself over always to the easy, comfortable way of dealing with our lives eventually results in a kind of death. The simile in line 3 is a complex one, since the 'ropes' are also symbolic, and it compares these ropes, which represent the way in which constant ease ultimately restricts one by making one incapable of exercising any kind of strength, with air, which is insubstantial and therefore largely unnoticed and apparently fragile. What the ropes and air have in common is their enormous power, for, since it is essential, air is indispensable in our lives, just as the 'ropes', which so gradually sap us of our ability to cope with difficulties, become necessary to us. This simile brings home to us just how insidiously a life without exertion and strain enfeebles us.

I have chosen only some of the countless examples of simile to be found in poetry to comment on, but I should like to emphasise again that the force of the simile lies in the imaginative aptness of the comparison that it makes.

A 'metaphor' is a kind of condensed simile in which the words denoting comparison are absent. Michael Roberts says,

The condensation of metaphor involves no denial of logic: it is simply an extension of the implications of grammar, the development of a notion which, being less cumbersome, enables us to think more easily....The new is defined in terms of the old, it is in shorthand which must be learned by patient effort.

(Roberts, 1965: 17).

Louis Simpson quotes Aristotle: 'the greatest thing for a poet is to be a master of metaphor: "It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; and it is

also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars” (Simpson, 1972: 2). Ridout and Wittig, in *The Facts of English*, comment on metaphor thus:

Many apparently literal words began as metaphorical applications and many are now looked upon as fossilized metaphors, for example, “The camel is the *ship* of the desert”. In this sense the metaphor is the life-blood of our language, for without it no new idea could be expressed, no new thing named, without the invention of a completely fresh word.

(Ridout and Wittig, 1964: 268)

The comparison in metaphor is implied by the identification of the two things compared. Thus in a sentence such as : ‘She poisoned her sister’s mind’, the two things being compared are the words used to influence ‘her sister’s’ outlook in an adverse way, and poison which destroys a healthy entity. Metaphors are not as easily recognisable as similes and they are often more complex.

In the poem ‘Leviathan’ by Douglas Livingstone which I quoted in an earlier chapter, the first two words of the first line of the last stanza after the snake has swallowed the lizard are:

O Jonah, to tumble to...

What has happened to the lizard is here compared with Jonah’s being swallowed by a whale. In this comparison the difference in size between that being swallowed and that which swallows is equally great, for the lizard exists in equal proportion to the snake as does Johan to the whale. The feelings of terror and

helplessness, together with despair at ever finding salvation, are implicit in both *Jonah and the lizard*, though the lizard's despair would be instinctual, while Jonah's would have been a product of rational thought and speculation. The sadness of the poet and the pathos of the fate of Jonah and the lizard are conveyed by the word 'O', and through the metaphor our sympathy and compassion for the little creature are increased.

I made mention of Emily Dickinson's poem beginning, 'There came a wind like a bugle' in my comments on simile. The whole poem reads:

There came a wind like a bugle;
It quivered through the grass,
And a green chill upon the heat
So ominous did pass
We barred the windows and the doors 5
As from an emerald ghost
The doom's electric moccasin
That very instant passed
On a strange mob of panting trees,
And fences fled away. 10

And rivers where the houses ran
The living looked that day.
The bell within the steeple wild
The flying tidings whirled
How much can come 15
And much can go,
And yet abide the world!

In line 7 the 'moccasin' referred to is a highly poisonous American snake, not the footwear of American Indians. The long, thin, undulating snake is compared with forked lightning as it moves down the sky. Both move very quickly, so that one sees them only fleetingly, and both can be highly destructive. The word 'electric' refers to the property of lightning which gives it the power to kill defenceless people and animals, just as a venomous snake can kill, so that both are dangerous and terrifying. The lightning is seen as an instrument of 'doom' which could be true of a snake too, and this heightens our fear and apprehension.

The 'emerald ghost' in line 6 compares the eerie colour of the light, which often takes on a greenish hue when a storm is imminent, with that of a ghost. Both are things one can neither protect oneself against nor fight against, and thus man's powerlessness in the face of either of these threats is very tellingly invoked.

The 'mob of panting trees' in line 9 is like a large group of people who, in the frenzy of some kind of group passion, have become uncontrollable and have lost their individual identity because, buffeted by the strong wind and the driving rain, the trees no longer have various shapes, sizes and colours but resemble one large, heaving, formless mass. In addition, as a group of people caught up in frenetic activity pant with exertion, so these trees in their battering and wild swaying and upheaval appear to be panting. The metaphor here invites us not only to feel the power of the wind but to see graphically what it can do.

Another evocative metaphor in this poem is 'fences fled away' in line 10. The fences are being washed away by the heavy rain but they break and disinte-

grate in a disorderly and piecemeal fashion, just as people who are fleeing in feverish haste from some terrible fate run in all directions and at different speeds in complete disarray. The strength and ruthlessness of the storm are thus brought home to us.

'Preludes' by T.S. Eliot (Eliot, 1963: 23) has many powerful metaphors. Line 4 in the first stanza is:

The burnt-out ends of smoky days.

Here the ends of unpleasant and unhealthy days ('smoky') are compared with cigars or cigarettes that have burned down to the end until they are dead, and this portrays the sordid, dreary and energy-draining quality of the evening. This is heightened by the words that follow:

And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;

The sordidness of the newspapers blown about and the 'grimy scraps' of 'withered' leaves, though part of a literal description, all continue the metaphor of 'burnt-out ends' in their absence of life and vitality.

In line 8 of the third stanza, the poet says:

And the light crept up between the shutters

The comparison is between the furtive movement of a person bent on some nefarious deed and the morning light inching almost imperceptibly through crevices, an unwelcome visitor, and this presents us with a picture of people's weary reluctance to face a new day and suggests that they would, if they could, prolong the night indefinitely.

In 'Insensibility' by Douglas Gibson (Finn, 1961: 63), the poet avers that real death is not actual physical death, but that which comes long before, when one ceases to feel strong emotions or notice the beauty around one. Lines 4 and 5 go:

Is a cancer, stealing
Over the bright eyes, glazing

In these lines the way in which people die spiritually when they no longer feel strongly is compared with death by cancer. The word 'stealing' suggests a gradual and stealthy process which is so slow that, by the time one becomes aware of it, it is too late. The word 'glazing' compares the way in which the eyes of a person dying gradually film over with the way in which people allow their vision of beauty and splendour to fade, and so kill their souls.

The last examples of metaphor I shall look at occur in a poem called 'Skin' by Philip Larkin (Larkin, 1988: 92). In line 1, the poet calls the skin:

Obedient daily dress

The skin is seen as clothing worn every day, which has no alternative but to obey the way it is cut and sewn. Just as clothing protects us against the elements, so the skin protects our bones and organs, and both give some kind of definition to our bodies. Neither clothing nor skin have the power to change what may be unacceptable to them; they are at the mercy of their owners ('obedient'). I find this a novel and refreshing way of looking at skin.

In line 4,

You must learn your lines –

the skin is being compared with an actor who must learn by rote the words he is to say during the course of a play he has a role in. The lines the skin learns are the physical marks that are etched into it with time but the skin has no choice in the matter and learns to know its own scoring willy nilly. The word 'must' suggests compulsion in both actor and skin, for the actor must earn a living and the skin

... cannot always keep
That unfakable young surface

(ll. 2-3)

'Alliteration' is the commencing with the same sound of two or more words in close proximity, while 'assonance' pertains to a correspondence in sounds, especially vowel sounds. I intend to discuss these two at the same time because they often, though not always, appear together. In speaking of assonance I am

Chapter Seven

not necessarily referring to sounds that agree and are used to form rhyme, but rather to the way in which sounds are used, as with alliteration, to enhance the 'melody' of poetry and to strengthen meaning.

The first stanza of 'Silver' by Walter de la Mare is memorable for its beauty and serenity:

Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon.
This way and that she peers and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees.

(de la Mare, 1954: 16)

The sibilance created by the many s's in these lines together with the full, round vowel sounds of 'slowly', 'moon', and 'shoon', make for the quiet, hushed tones, the slow pace, and the tranquillity, peace and beauty of this stanza. A similar effect is created by Wordsworth in his sonnet 'The World Is Too Much with Us', In line 5:

This sea that bares her bosom to the moon;

Here, even the first word is 'This' rather than 'The', thus adding to the number of s's in the line, and 'bares', 'bosom' and 'moon' all have long, full, round sounds.

Probably the poet who makes the greatest use of these devices is Gerard Manley Hopkins, who made a careful study of Anglo-Saxon verse, with its reliance on alliteration. There are examples of alliteration and assonance in all his poems. In 'Spring and Fall', quoted previously, line 8 reads:

Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;

The w's and long sounds of 'worlds' and 'wanwood' create in my mind a sense of an unending, vast expanse of dreary, colourless, dead foliage, together with a feeling of woe and desolation, and the l's and 'ee' sound of 'leafmeal' give, I feel, a sense of fragmentation and rupture which, together with 'lie', make for a halting, slow rhythm that suggests utter lifelessness and bleakness.

His poem 'Inversnaid' is a very good example of how frequently the poet uses these devices. It reads thus:

This darksome burn, horseback brown,
His rollrock highroad roaring down,
In coop and in comb the fleece of his foam
Flutes and low to the lake falls home.

A windpuff-bonnet of fawn-froth 5
Turns and twindles over the broth
Of a pool so pitchblack, fell-frowning,
It rounds and rounds Despair to drowning.

Degged with dew, dappled with dew
Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through, 10
Wiry heathpacks, fitches of fern,
And the beadbonny ash that sits over the burn.

What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,

O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

15

(Hopkins, 1953: 50)

In the first three stanzas of this poem the poet describes the way in which a river moves at different speeds and narrows and widens as it makes its way through various features of the countryside.

The first line describes the colour of the burn as being a rich, fairly dark ('darksome') brown, but the word 'horseback' might suggest the play of light and shade on the water as on a horse's back as it moves. The many b's in this line create the effect of an interruption of colour because of constant movement, as the voiced stop 'b' breaks the smooth, even flow of the words, and thus the water. Another effect of the many b's is to slow down the pace of the voice at this point.

In the second line, however, the pace speeds up dramatically, for now the stream has become a much wider river that flows downhill, and the numerous r's create the effect of rough and tumultuous movement as the steady progress of the water is hampered by rocks and other obstacles. The alliterative sounds of the onomatopoeic words 'rollrock' and 'roaring' add to the noise and turbulence of this line by placing four alveolars in close proximity.

In line 3 the river has reached the valley, and the feeling of its slower movement in the confinement of the narrow space, as compared with the 'highroad' of the previous line, is reflected in the snugness of 'coop' and 'comb'. The f's of 'fleece' and 'foam' impart the feeling of the bubbly lightness of the patches of spume which have collected on the water in the river's descent and create a

frothy airiness. The sound of 'Flutes' at the beginning of the next line continues the feeling of the softness and weightlessness of the previous line, and also echoes the sound of the water as it falls until it comes to rest in 'home', with this word's overtones of refuge and safety.

In the first line of the second stanza, however, only a small patch of this airy lightness is left ('windpuff-bonnet'), and this is now slightly tarnished for it is 'fawn' in colour. In the next line the t's of 'turns' and 'twindles' suggest the decreasing gyration of an eddy which is also ever constricting, as the word 'twindles' suggests. This rotation occurs just as water falls down into a pool and the p's in line 3 give the feeling of depth and darkness, which is enhanced by the long sound of 'pool'. The repetition of 'rounds' and the many d's in line 4 of this stanza result in the sense of the much slower and heavier turning of the water in the pool itself.

In the next stanza the river flows out into a little valley and the first line describes the weight of the dew on the vegetation on the banks of the river. The many d's in this line again create an uneven, heavy, halting rhythm, especially because the word 'dappled' and the comma also slow down the movement. This echoes the feeling that was produced already in the last half of the previous line in 'Despair to drowning', which seems so weighted down by the d's that nothing can stay afloat, but the word 'dew' in line 1 of stanza three rescues the d sound from its heavy darkness, as it associates the d now with the glistening brightness of dewy substance.

In line 2 of the third stanza the r's and the b's slow down the pace, as do the long syllables 'groins' and 'braes', but the word 'treads' imparts a feeling of

steady though difficult movement, for the brook must now trace a path through the twists and turns that the steep banks of a gorge enforce.

In the next line the f's in 'fitches of fern' together with the shortness of the plosives and affricates in 'fitches' speed up the movement and this time impart the weightlessness and delicacy of the plants growing by the river. In the last line of this stanza the b's in 'beadbonny' suggest the weight of the 'beads' that make the tree so 'bonny', and this slows down the pace again, but also adds to the sense of the sturdiness and stability of the tree that 'sits' there as though watching over the brook.

The last stanza contains Hopkins's plea that some things in the world be left in their natural state even if they are wet and uncomfortable; his question is an indication of how much we would lose if everything were tamed. The many w's in this stanza heighten the feeling of untamed wildness by repeating the w sound of 'wildness' into 'wilderness', 'weeds', and 'wet'. The '-eft' of 'left' (used twice) because conjoined with 'bereft', impart a strong sense of the deprivation we would suffer if some things were not allowed to remain in their natural state, and so add to the poignancy of the poet's plea.

There are examples of alliteration and assonance in almost every good poem, for these devices are an invaluable tool in the creation of atmosphere, mood, rhythm and tone.

I turn now to 'personification', a device often marginalized by critics. I, however, agree with Hirsch and Emerson: 'Personification has sometimes been thought a quirky or marginal poetic activity, but it may be central to the Orphic function of the poet, who, as Emerson said, "puts eyes and tongues into every

dumb and inanimate object” (Hirsch, 1999: 298). That is, through personification inanimate or abstract things are referred to as if they were human. Shakespeare, for example, calls night a ‘sober-suited matron, all in black’ (*Romeo and Juliet*, III.ii.11), while morning ‘in russet mantle clad/ Walks on the dew of yon high eastward hill’ in *Hamlet* (I.i.166-67). Poets fairly often use this figure of speech, and if they are good poets, they do so to great effect.

A poem in which personification is sustained throughout is one of John Donne’s Holy Sonnets:

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so,
For, those, whom thou think’st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me;
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be, 5
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul’s delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell, 10
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell’st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.
(Donne, 1986: 313)

In this monologue addressed to Death itself, Death is presented as an ordinary man who has delusions of power and whom the poet accuses of the sin of pride with which he is so highly inflated, because ‘some’ regard him as being ‘Mighty

and dreadful'. The opening words, 'Death be not proud' are said jeeringly for, says Donne, *Death is neither powerful nor frightening.*

In lines 3 and 4 the poet exposes the first of Death's delusions when he says that the people Death thinks he has destroyed are not actually dead, a statement he enlarges on at the end of the poem. Nor, says Donne in measured tones full of conviction, will Death be able to kill him. In line 4, the poet's pitying scorn is clearly evident in the words 'poor Death'.

In the lines that follow the poet strips layer after layer of pretension from Death, starting with the fact that since we get so much pleasure from sleep which is only an imitation of death, we must certainly get more from death itself. Furthermore, because this is so and because men's souls are released by death, the best people die soonest and they do so willingly and gladly. In this way Death can actually claim no victory, since there is no fight against him.

In lines 9 and 10 Death's status is reduced to that of a slave, because he is subservient to, and must obey, the different forces that cause men's death. In addition, he is forced to have as companions foul and vicious things like poison, war and sickness.

In lines 11 and 12 Donne returns to the concept of the pleasure of sleep when he taunts Death with the fact that there are things men can procure that ensure a sounder and better sleep than Death is able to provide. By the end of line 12, in the mocking words 'why swell'st thou then?' Donne has reduced Death to a pitiful, deluded, insignificant and ineffectual being who has nothing at all to be proud of.

In the couplet at the end, Donne delivers the coup de grace: because our souls live on, we do not die at all—it is Death that does, and the victory is ours (and God's). By the end of the poem, Death has been divested of any vestige of power; 'Death, thou shalt die' is a calm statement of triumph in the inevitability of Death's fate.

Donne is typically a metaphysical poet, and one can see how he presents an argument and then develops it with what seems irrefutable logic, until the climax is reached, in which the final unanswerable point is made. The effect of the personification in this poem is very potent indeed, for by humanising Death he diminishes its implacable power and, together with his arguments that Death is in reality something desirable, he robs it of the fear and dread associated with it.

Donne does something similar in his poem 'The Sun Rising', in the opening words of which he calls the sun 'Busy old fool' (*ibid.*, 80). The sun, always regarded as mighty, majestic, and desirable by men, is reduced in these words to an interfering old fool who has nothing better to do than to pry into other people's business. I shall not go into his purpose in doing this here, but merely point out that again the result is iconoclasm.

A.E. Housman wrote the short poem 'Eight O'Clock' (Housman, 1994: 115):

He stood, and heard the steeple
Sprinkle the quarters on the morning town.
One, two, three, four, to market-place and people
It tossed them down.

Strapped, noosed, nighing his hour, 5
He stood and counted them and cursed his luck;

And then the clock collected in the tower
Its strength and struck.

The clock in this poem is personified as it sprinkles and tosses down the quarter hours, while in the second stanza it collects its strength and strikes the hour. The clock is presented as someone casually, almost gleefully, showering down the sound of its chimes like so many favours, and then exerting itself to strike the hour.

To the person waiting to be hanged there is something sadistic and malicious about the clock, as though it were a man about to enjoy the spectacle of the victim's death. The word 'struck' at the end comes with enormous force, and seems to represent the callous brutality of man, who, with the authority of the law behind him, strikes down a fellow human being.

Roy Campbell's 'Autumn' (Campbell, 1930: 91) begins with the lines:

I love to see, when leaves depart
The clean anatomy arrive

The tree and its leaves are personified in the words 'depart', 'arrive', and even 'anatomy'. In the words 'arrive' and 'depart' it is as though the leaves go and the bare limbs of the trees reveal themselves of their own volition, almost with relief and pleasure. This takes away the sadness people like Margaret in 'Spring and Fall' feel when the trees lose their leaves, especially as 'depart' and 'arrive', strengthened by the word 'when', suggest the process will be reversed and occur over and over again. The personification also stresses the natural and

stanza is imputed, in ironic manner, with the human quality of magnanimity, for it alone might be generous enough to give a glimpse of perfect love, which it itself has made unattainable.

'Fate' is presented in stanza 3 as being hard, unrelenting and ruthless, and always interposing itself between the lovers to keep them apart. The reason for this is that she is jealous of her power, and if she does not prevent a union between these two lovers, she will lose her power over them. The word 'Tyrannic' in this stanza (l.16) portrays her as a cruel despot. Moreover, like a human tyrant she makes harsh, inflexible laws ('Decrees of steel' (l.17)) which cannot be broken by the ordinary man.

In the last stanza of the poem 'Fate' is depicted as being envious as well (l.30), as though, because she herself is unable to love, she begrudges fulfilment to those who can, and separates them.

The total effect of the personification in this poem is that of the whole world and everyone in it, conspiring to keep apart two people who have perfect love for one another. This, says Marvell, is why there is no such thing as perfect love between humans.

Again, there are many examples of the use of personification to choose from, for it is a very powerful device with which to convey a wealth of meaning.

The last figure of speech I wish to deal with is the 'symbol', which is closely allied to the metonym, but which is more complex than the latter. In the case of a symbol a word or concept which has analogous qualities with another is used to represent it for heightened meaning or effect. An example is: the pen is mightier than the sword. The pen represents the power of men's ideas or words

(which can be written), while the sword represents force or actual warfare. Discussing the symbol, Hirsch draws on the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*: 'in literary usage a symbol refers to "a manner of representation in which what is shown (normally referring to something material) means, by virtue of association, something *more* or something *else* (normally referring to something immaterial)". Hirsch comments: 'How a thing can be both itself and something else is one of the great mysteries of poetry. In poetry, a symbol offers a surplus of resonance, of significance, since a poem can have great suggestive power, like a dream' (Hirsch, 1999: 315). While Hirsch is right to underscore 'surplus of resonance' and a certain imponderability in connection with symbols, I prefer Brooks and Warren's more factual and practical approach to the subject:

The symbol may be regarded as a metaphor from which the first term has been omitted. For example:

Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls

is a metaphor, but if the poet simply refers to the rose in order to suggest the qualities of love which he is treating, and does not indicate the metaphorical framework, he has turned the rose into a symbol. We use the term *metaphor* when we are emphasising the metaphorical transfer: for example, the girl is a rose—that is, the qualities of the rose are transferred to the girl. We use the term *symbol* when we are thinking of the object or action as standing for something else. Symbols, then, are 'signs' pointing to meanings. Certain symbols are conventional, that is, arbitrary, and we agree upon what they are to signify. For instance, the cross is by convention a symbol of the Christian religion and the flag is

the symbol of a nation. The important use of symbol which the poet makes, however, is not a conventional one: he must frequently create his own symbols.

(Brooks and Warren, 1964: 556)

Let me return to 'The Second Coming' by Yeats to provide an illustration of what I perceive Brooks and Warren to be saying. The poem begins:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer...

In the second line metaphoric transfer is clearly *not* emphasised: the falcon symbolises a mankind not present in the formulation, and the falconer, in similar manner, God. The image would have been metaphoric had Yeats written, 'The falcon that is man cannot hear God the falconer'.

Now, to focus on the specifics of this symbol: in falconry, the falconer trains his bird, which is then tied to the wrist of his master by leather straps until released to hunt. When the falconer wants the falcon to return, he calls him by means of a distinctive whistle or cry, but if the bird flies too far away it cannot hear its master's call, and so does not return. One line here, then, encapsulates all this meaning by the use of symbolism.

Fhazel Johanesse's poem, 'my township sunset' (Chapman and Dangor, 1982: 150), goes as follows:

when the sun begins to melt just above the
horizon and the clouds disappear to undress

the stars I'll squat against a corroded
washline pole and take a deep breath
sigh and breathe again 5

i always enjoy these dusk solitudes
these languid cigarettes and floating smoke
rings and I'll note with surprise how content
the overflowing dustbin looks
but the zenith of my township sunset is when 10
the swallows begin to chase the retreating light
the sudden dip smooth bank and frenzied darting
is a ballet at high speed
but just as the last drop of sunlight
dribbles below the skyline my sunset will 15
reach its nadir and I'll flick my
cigarette butt angrily because it is then
that my graceful ballerinas become
sneering devils flitting to a
tune with words by langenhoven 20

In this poem there is beautiful imagery, and there is at least one excellent example of personification in lines 2 and 3. The symbolism appears only in the very last word of the poem – 'langenhoven'. Langenhoven was the man who wrote the word for the national Anthem of South Africa, 'Die Stem', which was seen as irrelevant to them by the vast majority of people in South Africa, especially as the lyrics were in Afrikaans, which many black people regarded as the language of the oppressor. Thus the 'tune with the words by langenhoven' represents everything that the poets hates. It is symbolic of oppression and suppression, and the withholding from black people of stature, dignity, earning-

power, and possession of land, along with all the other rights human beings are entitled to.

William Blake's poem 'London' has symbolism in every stanza:

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man
In every Infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appals;
And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new born Infant's tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

(Blake, 1972: 216)

In this poem Blake lashes out at the constitution of three institutions prevailing at the time: the church, the state, and marriage. These institutions are man-made and they have shackled the ordinary man at every turn.

In the first stanza he wanders through 'Charter'd' streets. A charter was a written grant of rights and privileges given, especially by a sovereign to a borough and its people. These streets (and the Thames) symbolise the freedom and happiness people should enjoy, but all the poet sees, scored into people's faces, are sorrow and powerlessness.

In the second stanza the cries of men and infants symbolise their unhappiness, desperation, fear, and yearning for some kind of relief. The 'manacles' in the last line are symbolic of the many constraints and constrictions that restricted and chained people physically and mentally, but what the poet sees as being horrifying is that they are not natural but fashioned by man. The significance of the word 'mind-forged' lies in the fact that 'forged' suggests a forcible wrenching by drastic means to a prescribed pattern, and in 'mind' which symbolises human thought.

In the third stanza the Chimney-sweeper symbolises child-labour; the poet chose the chimney-sweeper in particular because he was deliberately starved in order to remain small enough to fit up into the chimneys he had to clean. Here he was forced to work in the unhealthy conditions of darkness, airlessness and choking soot. The symbolism in 'black'ning Church' is that the church not only condoned these practises but encouraged them in the doctrine it preached: that it was man's duty to be content with his lot in life, and that to try to raise himself above his station to ensure better conditions for his children, was to be vainglorious. The church is 'black'ning' then, because, instead of trying to help the poor and the humble and to inveigh against their exploitation, it helped to perpetuate the system.

In this stanza the 'Palace' symbolises the state which required its subjects to be absolutely obedient to it, and which embarked on wars that the 'hapless soldier' had to fight in, whether he knew what the war was about or not, and whether he wanted to or not. The 'blood' that runs down the walls symbolises the death of so many helpless, ordinary people, as well as being a mark of disgrace and shame which is, however, unfelt by the politicians.

In the last stanza the 'cry' of the young chimney-sweep and the 'sigh' of the 'hapless' soldier give way to the 'curse' of the harlot. The force of the symbolism here lies primarily in the word 'hearse', which comes as the shocking final word of the poem. Blake speaks of the 'marriage hearse' because the prevailing restrictions and prohibitions inherent in this institution killed everything that should make this relationship joyful, enriching and fulfilling. Marriage was a bond which could only be broken with the greatest difficulty and consequent disgrace, but there were very many unhappy marriages, and people were bound together usually for life. Part of the reason for the dissatisfaction in marriage was that a woman was indoctrinated from an early age with the belief that sex was disgusting and that only a wanton and immoral woman could find pleasure in it. She was taught that sex must, however, be stoically endured because it was the price that must be paid for the respectability and security that marriage provided, and any evidence of enjoyment on the part of the woman should be rigidly suppressed or concealed. The result was that neither partner had satisfaction in their sexual contact, and the man then often looked for this elsewhere. Where there is a demand, a supply arises, and the prostitute filled this role. There were, and I suppose always will be, other reasons for men resorting to

prostitutes, sometimes only because the ties of marriage are so constraining for many people, but the damage to the marriage is still the result.

The 'harlot' here is forced to ply her trade because of the poverty imposed by the shortage of legal gainful employment. The fact that she is 'youthful' aggravates for the reader the misery of her degrading, demoralising and abhorrent trade, and consorting with prostitutes further withers ('blights') the ailing marriage with literal and spiritual disease ('plague'). The words 'midnight streets' heightens the sense of a shameful and illegal activity that must take place under cover of darkness.

Finally, the 'new born infant' is not necessarily the illegitimate offspring of the prostitute, but all babies born into this kind of situation, and the 'tear' of the infant is the precursor of many that he will shed in misery and frustration throughout his life. The poet clearly sees marriage as an institution that needs drastic revision.

This poem is a bitter protest by Blake against the abuses of his times, and the symbolism that he uses enables him to condense into relatively few, short lines of apparently simple words a good deal of meaning forcefully expressed.

The last example of symbolism I want to offer is to be found in the first two lines of a sonnet by John Keats:

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain

(Keats, 1975: 296)

In these lines the poet expresses his fear that he may die before he has had time to impart his many thoughts and ideas. His 'pen' in line 2 symbolises (by drawing on the imagery of harvesting through the word 'glean'd') his gathering together, sifting and then transmitting the observations and notions that are so prolific in his imagination (symbolised by 'brain') by writing them down for others to read.

There are many other figures of speech I have not mentioned, because some of them, such as 'euphemism', 'fable' and 'prolepsis' are seldom, if ever, employed by poets, and others are used very sparingly. I have therefore concentrated on those most often found in poetry and which are used by poets to such great effect. Again, the figure of speech not only adds to the concentration of thought in few words, but must be fully recognised by the reader if he is to gain a full understanding of the poem.

It might surprise the reader that I have, as yet, made no detailed reference to 'imagery'. Imagery is sometimes used as a blanket term that incorporates all the figures of speech (Brooks and Warren, 1964: 555), but I prefer to use the word in a more specific way, based on my understanding of the image as being a type of extended metaphor. This field is so broad that the next chapter in its entirety is devoted to it.

Chapter Eight: Imagery

The word 'image' has various meanings in various contexts: psychological, sculptural, pictorial, optical. The word may also allude to a reflection in a mirror or in water, and when one thing or person resembles another very closely the former is often said to be the image of the latter as, for example, in man's being created in the image of God.

In literature an image is sometimes defined as a mental picture that is created in the mind of the reader by the words of the writer, but the word 'picture' is very limiting in that it gives the impression of a flat, visual, almost photographic representation, while a literary image is, in fact, much more complex than this. In the most general terms, it 'relates to the visual content of language, speaking to our capacity to embody meaning through words' (Hirsch, 1999: 286). Ridout and Wittig write that 'images or pictures...help the poet achieve his intended purpose. These pictures are not as important in themselves as in the effect they produce in the reader's mind' (Ridout and Wittig, 1964: 140). Martin Gray has the following definition:

In its narrowest sense an "image" is a word-picture, a description of some visible scene or object. More commonly, however, "imagery" refers to the figurative language in a piece of literature (metaphors and similes); or all the words which refer to objects and qualities which appeal to the senses and feelings.

(Gray, 1984: 102)

This last clause seems not to be definitive enough, and could be taken to mean one single word such as 'aroma'; this on its own may well appeal to the feelings and certainly to at least one of the senses, but clearly no comparison can be implied, and the association with the word in isolation may vary so greatly that it cannot remotely be specific, and therefore does not constitute a poetic image.

Hirsch develops his conception of the image when he calls it a 'sudden salience in language', and continues:

the poetic image...passes through the circuits of language...engaging our capacity to make mental pictures...but it also taps a place in our minds that has little to do with direct physical perceptions. There are poetic images that give us the remembrance of things past...that summon up the memory of the dead...that have the character of day-dreams, of dreaming consciousness...that have the hallucinatory powers of fevers and dreams.

(1999: 286-87)

He quotes the *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poets and Poetry* as defining the image as "the reproduction of the mind of a sensation produced by a physical perception" (ibid.). Brooks and Warren call an image 'the representation in poetry of any sense experience' (Brooks and Warren, 1964: 555), while Ezra Pound says,

An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives the sense of sudden liberation; that sense of lib-

eration from time limits and space limits; that sudden sense of growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.

(Pound, 1954: 4)

All these definitions have merit, but none seems to take cognisance of the fact that for an image to work properly, all three elements, the senses, the emotions, and the intellect should be appealed to, though Ezra Pound's words seem to imply this.

A short but effective definition of imagery is that it is an extended metaphor that is a reference to or representation of something (usually abstract) in terms of something else (often concrete) by an explicit or implicit comparison. In my discussion on simile and metaphor, I stressed that in their case this comparison touches on only one aspect or feature that is common to the two things being compared, but in imagery, because it is so much fuller and more complicated than either of these, more than one facet may be compared and even more than one comparison may be involved.

Similes, metaphors and images depend largely on association with words, so that when one calls someone 'lion-hearted', for example, one is referring to a person who is courageous and not easily daunted, because these are the qualities one associates with lions. In this regard, there are two factors the reader must be meticulous about.

The first is to distinguish between general and personal associations, for a failure to do so could result in a total misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the image under consideration. An example of this can be found in the case of the word 'sun'. The associations with this word for most people are qualities

such as light, warmth, radiance, the source of life, majesty and power, all of which are desirable or admirable. If, however, one had at one time been subjected to intense heat and exposure to the sun for an extended period, one might well associate this word with suffering, pain, and exhaustion. It is imperative that his kind of personal association be discarded in favour of those that are general to a particular culture if one is to comprehend how the image in question works.

The second factor to be aware of is that a particular word may have contradictory associations; for example, the word 'green' is associated with vitality, growth, new life, lushness, youth and innocence, all of which are desirable qualities, but it may also be associated with envy, jealousy, and nausea, which are distinctly unpleasant, while inexperience could be either desirable or undesirable. Clearly these contradictory connotations cannot be accommodated within the same image, and the reader must choose which is apt. In order to make the correct choice, the reader must look very closely at the text and the context in which the word appears, not only in the poem as a whole, but particularly in the line or lines it is used, and the words surrounding it. Great caution must be exercised here, for the choice made may at first glance appear to be appropriate in the context of the poem as a whole, but further careful analysis may reveal inconsistency. I shall touch on an example of this in the detailed analysis of a poem in my last chapter.

In Chapter One I made the observation that when reading, the whole soul of man (or those elements that compose the essential being of a person) is in action, and that therefore the senses, emotions, and intellect are all at work.

The same is true of imagery, for in good writing three kinds of imagery — sensory, emotional and intellectual — operate together to produce a fully evocative and rich image. If one of these is absent an important dimension is lost, and the resultant image is thin at best.

Sensory imagery corresponds to the five senses, namely, visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory, and here the poet records and transmits the impressions he has received through his senses and then invites the reader to see, hear, touch, smell and taste what his words conjure up. All of these five are seldom present in the same image, though the works of some poets, Keats and Dylan Thomas, for example, often encompass all of them. When using emotional imagery the poet invites the reader to feel one or more emotions, which correspond to those the poet himself feels and which arise from what his senses have impressed on him. In this regard I think it is important to be aware of the fact that what one feels is not always consistent with the evidence of one's senses or even one's intellect. There are many instances when one may feel exactly the opposite of what one knows one ought to. For example, one may have sensory and intellectual evidence of the fact that a certain person is decidedly not what he ought to be, and yet one cannot help feeling affection for him. An example of this occurs in *Othello*, where Othello has apparently been given 'ocular' and other evidence of Desdemona's deviousness and dishonesty, and yet he cannot help loving her deeply, and must force himself to feel what he thinks he should. One must remember too that what the poet says he feels at a particular juncture of a poem may not be the same as the emotion aroused in the reader; his poetic strategy might be to present

himself as not being really aware of the true nature of his feelings, which the reader, however, senses through the tone of the words.

Wordsworth seems to see emotion as the most important component of poetry, for in the 'Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*' he says:

...poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity...

(Wordsworth and Coleridge, 1965: 266)

The second part of this quotation is very significant, in that it scotches the common notion that one writes best when one is in the grip of a powerful emotion. This is, in fact, not so, because the intellectual faculties are partly suspended when one feels very strongly, and it is only on reflection that one can see the situation which has aroused these feelings in true perspective and proportion.

Lastly, intellectual imagery invites the reader to think and come to some conclusion about what has been presented in the image, but which is not necessarily explicitly stated by the poet himself. It does, however, in conjunction with the intellectual content of other images and the poem as a whole, usually provide the *raison d'être* for the poem. This is not always easy or even possible to do in an image consisting of one line, but in conjunction with the other images or in the context of the poem as a whole, it takes on meaning that is not at first apparent.

The sensory or emotional imagery of shorter poems usually stems from the actual experience of the speaker, particularly when he expresses what he

says in the first person, though this is not always so. It is almost always not true of longer poems such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or in narrative, epic or the poetry of drama. It is not possible, for example, that Shakespeare could have experienced in terms of the senses or emotions everything that comprises the contents of his plays (though his sonnets do record personal experience). Because, however, a great poet is possessed of what Coleridge calls 'secondary imagination' (Coleridge, 1906: 159-60), or the capacity for vital and unifying recreation, it is possible for him to portray with absolute verisimilitude what he presents to the reader. The intellectual content of his work is different, however, for the great poet extracts from what he has imagined, meaning that always consists of a profound truth about life.

To illustrate what I have said above with regard to imagery and the reader I shall use one line from Keats's 'To Autumn':

To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees.

(Keats, 1975: 650)

In this line the sensory imagery evoked is as follows: a) one sees a small house in a rural setting with apple trees in close proximity to it. The trunks and perhaps the branches of these trees are green with moss and the branches are so heavily laden with fruit that they bend under its weight; b) one may *hear* the creaking of branches as they buckle under their burden, the thud of apples falling or even the crunch that biting into a crisp apple makes. It is even possible to experience the quiet that this peaceful scene evokes; c) what one may

smell in this image is the strong scent of ripe apples in autumn and perhaps the mustiness of moss; d) the smoothness of the skin of ripe, fresh apples, the roughness of the bark of the trees, and the variegated texture of the moss is what one *feels*. In conjunction with the auditory imagery of the crunch made when biting into an apple, one might feel the cool, smooth wetness of the juice of an apple as it enters the mouth or runs down the chin; and e) lastly, one might *taste* the sweetness or tart flavour of the apples.

With regard to emotion, this line arouses feelings such as pleasure, delight, tranquillity and contentment, for the image is a peaceful and satisfying one.

Finally – in the context of the poem as a whole – the line helps to arouse thoughts of the wonder and bounty of nature, which might lead to a consideration of whether or not there is a higher power that creates such perfection, or even that autumn, despite all its ripeness and mellowness, also leads to winter, with its associations of old age and death.

Everyone is unique, because people all have different backgrounds and experiences, and therefore there will be differences in the individual perception of this image, but it is at least certain that one *will* see a cottage, trees, moss and apples, though these will vary in shape, size, colour, texture and structure from person to person, and the variation in response is true for the other senses as well. The emotions aroused by the image will also differ in intensity and number. The question of personal association may arise here, in that some people may well be out of sympathy with bucolic life, and therefore feel something like boredom, apathy or irritation. In conjunction with the rest of

the poem, however, its mood and its tone, this would be an inappropriate response and reveal insensitivity to the poet's words.

Personal association could play a role in the intellectual response to this line too, for even if they look at the image in the same way the poet does, readers would still experience differences in, for example, the depth and complexity of thought that the image gives rise to. These slight variations, which I believe people are referring to when they talk about poetry being personal, are unimportant, however, for the sensitive reader will glean from the image the central perceptions, feelings and considerations the poet wishes to evoke.

Each image in a poem is of vital importance to one's understanding of it, for it contributes to, and forms part of, the central theme or argument of the poem as a whole.

I have not commented on the fact of comparison implicit in imagery in the above, because the line in question is only part of a much larger image, and my purpose is to discuss the three different kinds of imagery. Consider now, however, the opening lines of Chaucer's Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1988: 23):

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote* *showers sweet
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,

Chapter Eight

And bathed every veyne in swich licour* *such liquid
Of which virtue* engendered is the flour; *By power of which
Whan Ziphurus eek* with his sweete breeth 5 *also
Inspired hath in every holt* and heeth *wood
The tendre croppes, and the younge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,* *run
And smale foweles* maken melodye, *birds
That slepen al the nyghte with open ye* 10 *eye
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages*), *Nature inspires them in their hearts
Thanne longen* folk to goon on pilgrimages. *long

The central idea in these lines is the regeneration that spring brings to various aspects of nature; there is a progression here from a relatively simple form of life, plants, through a more advanced one, birds (and, by implication, animals) to the most complex of all, the human being.

In lines 1-8 the three elements necessary for plant life, and therefore for animal and human life as well, are mentioned—the first in the form of April rain (water), the second in the breeze (air), and the third in the sun. In the first four lines the concept of regeneration is portrayed through procreation, for April is compared with a man engaged in the sexual act, that is, penetration ('perced to the roote'), ejaculation ('bathed every veyne in swich licour'), and conception followed by birth (line 4). In lines 5 to 7, from 'Whan Zephirus eek' to 'tendre croppes', regeneration appears in the comparison between Zephirus and someone breathing life into what appears to be dead; and in line 7, from 'and the yonge sonne', to 'yronne' at the end of line 8, the comparison is between the fairly weak sun of spring and a young man who is half-way around a circuit he is running, and becoming increasingly warmer as he runs.

These comparisons are vividly contained in very beautiful imagery. The sensory imagery enables one to see the soft but penetrating rain falling onto and sinking deep into the hard, parched ground of winter, and visualise the roots of plants soaking in the plentiful water it supplies, while the dazzlingly bright green of the young and tender shoots thrusting their way through the bleak darkness of the earth in every nook and cranny of the countryside is brought vividly to the mind's eye. Finally one sees birds with eyelids fluttering in their inability to keep them tightly shut so filled with zest for life are they, and perhaps even people, restless and longing to be outdoors.

Auditory imagery, too, is clearly evident in the gentle sound of the rain (gentle rather than loud and fierce, because it is described as 'shoures soote') and in the lovely, clear song of the birds. One might be prompted to smell, too, the distinctive smell of rain on earth that has long been dry, and that of the new plant life, and feel the warmth of the balmy breeze that blows and the refreshing moisture of rain on one's skin.

The emotional imagery in this extract is also very strong in the feeling of *gratitude and relief at the breaking of the drought and the advent of warmer weather*, while the excitement, exhilaration and upsurge of energy that man feels in spring is caught up in the image of the birds who are unable to sleep deeply, so filled are they with new vigour. The effect of this on man manifests itself in the urge to release energy in some form of activity, and is presented here in the desire for movement and adventure, for which a pilgrimage provided the ideal opportunity.

The intellectual imagery in this extract is manifold. Firstly, one is led to reflect on the miracle of regeneration and to marvel at the abundance of growth that often follows a period of cold, dry weather with its bleak, pinched sparseness of vegetation. Then line 12, following the description of the life and vitality that comes with spring, impels the reader to wonder how deeply religious the motives of the pilgrims really were. One suspects that the pilgrimage undertaken by these people was perhaps an excuse for doing something exciting and different after their long incarceration indoors during winter, and was embarked on in spring not merely because during the winter months roads were often impassable and conditions unendurable for pilgrims travelling either on foot or, if they could afford it, on horseback.

The imagery of this extract, then, is so rich and powerful that the reader becomes fully involved and is enabled to participate, even if vicariously, in what Chaucer describes in these lines. The rest of this Prologue, and indeed most of what follows, is just as rewarding and well worth the effort necessary to overcome the problems presented by the language of the original.

Shakespeare's work so abounds in rich and vivid imagery that it is difficult to fix on any particular illustrative and instructive passage. I have chosen the following extract, however, because the sexual imagery on which it centres offers so sharp a contrast to the fresh, natural and invigorating quality of that of the first lines of Chaucer's Prologue quoted above. It appears in Act I scene i of *Othello* and though short, it is prolific in highly evocative images. Iago says, or rather shouts, the following:

Zounds, sir, you're robbed, for shame, put on your gown;
Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul,
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise,
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell, 90
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.
Arise, I say!

(I.i.86-92)

Iago and Roderigo have awakened Brabantio, Desdemona's father, to tell him that she has eloped with Othello; this is the first step in Iago's campaign to discredit and ultimately destroy Othello, whom he inordinately envies and therefore hates. From the very first scene in this play the reader learns that Iago is a hypocrite and a Machiavellian schemer, and then later becomes aware of just how clever he is when so many of the other characters (except his wife Emilia who knows him well) refer to him as 'honest Iago', and like and trust him. His attitude towards sex, though, reveals the greatest flaw in Iago. Later on in this scene he tells Brabantio that his daughter is being 'covered by a Barbary horse', that she and 'the Moor are now making the beast with two backs'. It is true that he quite deliberately uses crude imagery here because his purpose is to inflame Brabantio, but not once in this play does he refer to or give any evidence of love. He sees sex only in terms of lust. It is his actual inability to love, I believe, that makes it impossible for him ever to enjoy the warm love and trust that exist between Othello and Desdemona in the face of all the circumstances that make this unlikely, and this is really what makes him hate and envy Othello, despite the many other reasons he himself gives

for this. He does so because, I think, he does not himself know what the cause of his feeling towards Othello exactly is. The imagery here, then, points towards Iago's outlook on life and his essential nature.

In this speech the information Iago imparts is couched in such repellent terms, and the imagery is so deliberately disgusting, that it cannot but incense Brabantio, and make what has happened utterly impossible for him to accept. Consider how much less agitation might have been aroused in Brabantio if, firstly, he had not been woken in the middle of the night (probably from deep sleep, with great noise and shouting), secondly, if he had not been told that he should feel disgrace ('for shame') even before he knew what had happened, and thirdly and most significantly, if he had been apprised of events in words such as the following:

Wake up, Brabantio, and put on your gown;
You may well be distressed and angry about what has happened,
For just recently an older black man
Has eloped with your daughter.
If you want to prevent a marriage
You had better do something about it.

Of course there is no pretension to poetry in this paraphrase, and Brabantio would in all likelihood still be greatly displeased, for though he likes and admires Othello, enjoys his company, and often entertains him at his home with pleasure, it is quite another thing in Brabantio's eyes for his daughter to marry Othello.

The whole speech is imbued with warning of impending tragedy, a sense of urgency, and a prompting to immediate and drastic action. In the image in lines 88 and 89 there is firstly the comparison between the act of love and bestial coupling, and then between Desdemona as a young, pure inexperienced girl and a white female sheep, and Othello as a lascivious, much older black man and sexually rampant old ram. The connotations of 'white' and 'black' with innocence and youth as opposed to evil and age are very clear here, and are used deliberately to suggest unnatural debauchery.

In line 90 there is a comparison between innocently sleeping citizens and the snoring of the swinish unconsciousness of callously unconcerned people. Finally, Othello is compared with a devil. The comparisons here point to a desperately unhealthy and alarming situation.

The sensory imagery throughout is very strong and extremely repugnant, for in lines 88 and 89 one cannot help but see a large, black, powerful ram with a naturally strong sexual drive mounting a small, young, delicate white ewe who is possibly in distress and struggling to escape. The reader may hear the guttural sounds of rutting animals, and feel the softness of the ewe's fleece, how it contrasts with the roughness of the ram's coarse, hairy coat.

The emotions aroused by this image include repulsion, extreme distaste, outrage, and utter aversion. Intellectually, the reader (like Brabantio) considers what Iago describes as being prompted simply by carnal desire, by grossly degrading, aberrant behaviour in a well-bred, delicate and beautiful young woman *if* she is voluntarily involved; for there is a hint in the way Iago ex-

presses himself that Othello has forcefully abducted Desdemona, and is abusing her physical weakness and innocence.

This image is most distasteful but also very effective, for Iago knows how to use words to create exactly the impression he wants, and he compounds the horror of his description by his claim in line 91 that the issue of such a mating (Brabantio's grandchildren) will be the offspring of the devil. Even the most objective and level-headed of men might well be appalled by the picture Iago paints, which is made even more graphic by the words 'Even now, now, very now...' in line 3. These words increase the lurid quality of what he says by placing it into the immediate present.

The imagery in line 90, because of the word 'snorting', also contains sharp sensory imagery. It conjures up a picture of insensate, motionless people snoring stolidly in their heavy, dull sleep. The reader feels indignation and some anger at the thought that these people are stupidly indifferent to the fate of Desdemona and Brabantio and the tragedy it represents for them.

This imagery, then, has the power to involve the reader's senses, emotion and intellect so that he sympathises with Brabantio, not despite but because of the abhorrent crudity of Iago's language, especially because at this stage of the play the reader is unaware of the actual facts of the matter.

In the poetry of Metaphysical poets such as John Donne, George Herbert and Andrew Marvell there is a radical departure from the kind of imagery current at the time, in which concepts such as love were compared with something beautiful, majestic, soft, gentle and glowing, while the Metaphysical poets drew on science, geography, mathematics and other forms of factual

knowledge in their imagery. This kind of imagery was regarded as both ugly and inappropriate at the time, especially when the softer emotions were the subject involved. Later, of course, this attitude changed, and Metaphysical poetry is now placed amongst the greatest.

There is, however, a common misconception by many people that, because the intellectual imagery in this kind of poetry is so strong and often complicated, it is one-dimensional in its absence of sensory and emotional imagery. The fact that this is indeed a misconception is revealed by a close examination and analysis of the many good examples of this poetry that exist, and I quote John Donne's 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' (Donne, 1986: 84):

As virtuous men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,
The breath goes now, and some say, NO!

So let us melt, and make no noise, 5
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;
'Twere profanation of our joys
To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th'earth brings harms and fears, 10
Men reckon what it did, and meant;
But trepidation of the spheres
Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love

(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove 15
Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined
That ourselves know not what it is,
Inter-assuréd of the mind,
Care less eyes, lips and hands to miss. 20

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so 25
As still twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixéd foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if th'other do.

And though it in the centre sit,
Yet, when the other far doth roam, 30
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th'other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just, 35
And makes me end where I begun.

In the first two stanzas there is an explicit comparison signalled by the words 'As' in the first and 'so' in the second stanza but there are also comparisons

within these stanzas themselves. In the first stanza a picture is presented of the death of a virtuous man who dies willingly, peacefully and quietly, surrounded by friends who are unable to pinpoint the exact moment of death, so imperceptibly does it occur. The implicit comparison here is with that of a man whose death involves a noisy struggle because of his fear of death occasioned by the fact of his frequent sinning during his life.

This comparison is made explicit in the second stanza when the speaker urges his beloved to make their imminent parting similar to that of the death of the first man, and here there is a comparison between their parting and a kind of death. More specific, though, is the comparison between the noisy wailing and weeping involved in the parting of some people with that of the second kind of death, and in line 2 of the second stanza, the extravagant and excessively overt expressions of grief (and by implication their insincerity) are compared with violent phenomena related to climatic conditions like floods and tempests (tears and sighs).

In the last two lines of this stanza the comparison is in theological terms when he compares a public display of their sorrow with the exposure of the inner mystery of religion to laymen incapable of understanding it, thus rendering it worldly and unhallowed.

In the third stanza geographical and astronomical phenomena are employed in the comparison between movements of the earth – presumably tremors and earthquakes, which have a perceptible effect on men and are explicable – with the oscillation of heavenly bodies, which in the larger scheme

of things have much greater significance but generally do not impinge on our lives.

This comparison is extended in the next stanza to include lovers whose love is mainly composed of physical attraction, and is therefore earthly (under the moon) and subject to inconstancy and mutability, because when the physical presence is removed the 'love' dissipates and thus such lovers cannot tolerate separation. The speaker and his beloved, in contrast, have a love which has strength and durability because it consists of physical but also spiritual elements. The word 'less' in this stanza is very important in its implication that there is a strong physical component in their love but that this is only one of its elements and therefore separation cannot impair it.

In the sixth stanza the poet compares their souls to a metal (gold, to express the precious quality of their love) which is beaten out so thinly that its surface expands to cover a very wide area without changing the characteristics of the metal. When he is obliged to travel away from his wife, their souls still remain one and the same entity, even though there is physical distance between them, and therefore their souls are stretched, as it were, over a much larger space than when they are together.

Stanzas 7, 8 and 9 contain mathematical imagery and here the two lovers are compared to a pair of compasses which are joined at one point but whose feet move differently. One of the feet remains fixed in the same place and the other moves, and this (combined with the fact they are joined at one point) enables a true circle to be drawn. His beloved is like the fixed foot which remains firmly in position while he is the one who must 'roam', but although she

remains in one place her thoughts and imagination are with him just as the fixed foot of a pair of compasses gyrates and inclines as the other foot moves. Moreover, because the speaker knows that she is patiently and staunchly waiting for him at home, he is able to do what he must efficiently and profitably and looks forward to his inevitable return to her which restores his own complete identity.

Up to now I have pointed out the many comparisons in this poem but have *not commented on the emotional and sensory elements of the images involved* because to do so with each one would be over-lengthy and tedious. I shall therefore look only at the imagery of the last three stanzas though it is entirely possible to do so with all the others.

These stanzas contain strong emotional imagery, for a warm feeling of loving contentment and satisfaction is engendered by the poet's description of the way he and his wife complement one another. There may perhaps also be envy in the reader for a love in which there is such trust, comfort, and mutual assurance and strength. The word 'must' in line 22 and line 33 conveys the reluctance of the speaker to leave his beloved and evokes admiration in the reader for both the speaker and the woman he loves.

The intellectual content of this image is that in any love relationship the two people concerned have different personalities, and have different talents and preoccupations. In a good relationship they are, however, able to pursue the activities they enjoy and are fit for (which may not be the same for both) but they are always spiritually, emotionally and mentally united even when they are apart, so that temporary separation is not deeply tragic for them.

I have already said that each one of the comparisons the poet draws is based on one or another branch of learning and each one is used with supreme art by him, nor do they, because of their practical nature, at all detract from the fullness, beauty or significance of the images in which they are contained. I consider this to be one of the finest poems that there is.

I have commented in a previous chapter on another Metaphysical poem, Andrew Marvell's 'The Definition of Love', but would like to look here at only one stanza in this poem in connection with imagery. In this stanza the poet uses a mathematical premise on which to base the comparison in the image. This stanza is the seventh in the poem:

As lines, so loves, oblique may well
Themselves in every angle greet;
But ours so truly parallel,
Though infinite, can never meet.

(Marvell, 1976: 49)

Here the intellectual imagery, which is completed in the last stanza, contains a comparison between lines which run parallel to one another and therefore can never touch with lines that run at an angle to one another and thus at some point connect with each other. This comparison is then extended to that between lovers whose love is so perfectly matched, presumably in quality and depth, that fate conspires against them because if they were allowed to unite they would be immune to the blows of chance, with that of lovers whose love differs in one or more ways and who are therefore vulnerable to any inauspicious event that might befall them but because of this, are permitted to unite.

This image, as with those of all the other stanzas in the poem, is not at all devoid of rich and powerful sensory and emotional imagery, for one sees two lines running inexorably apart into infinity as opposed to those, coming from different directions, which meet to form an angle.

This arouses pity for the sad loneliness of the two lines condemned to run forever side by side without at any point touching. In contrast a feeling of cosy warmth and companionableness is aroused by the meeting of the two lines that run at different angles, and so, from something apparently as cold and featureless as lines on a piece of paper, the poet succeeds in evoking such various and strong feelings.

In one of Hopkins's so-called 'dark' sonnets there is a comparison between physical torture and mental torment and the imagery in this poem is extremely forceful and evocative:

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief 5
Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing—
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked 'No ling-
ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief.'

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap 10
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all

Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

(Hopkins, 1953: 61)

This sonnet portrays Hopkins's struggle with despair and loss of faith as he wrestles with the feeling that he has been abandoned by God and comes to believe that the only comfort he can find is in death or sleep.

The octave compares what he is suffering with physical pain, and the image in the words 'on an age-old anvil wince and sing' in line 6 seems to sum up the anguish of his despair and agony. What one sees in this image is a metal object lying helplessly on an anvil while being furiously and repeatedly pounded by a hammer. One sees the object flattened and changing shape as it seems to cringe away from the relentless blows of the hammer *wielded with force and strength, and perhaps smoke rising from it*. The repeated clang of metal on metal and the sound made by the object being beaten which seems to be a kind of high-pitched vocalising ('sing') is clearly heard. One can feel, too, the pain that such a heavy battering would inflict on living matter because the poet compares himself with the piece of metal that is being struck again and again.

The emotions aroused by this image are pity and sorrow but also anger at the fury and ruthlessness of the blows that descend on the small and helpless object of the assault. One thinks then of the defencelessness of the human being when fate seems to be *unremittingly opposed to him and, in the context of the whole octave, that just when one thinks the pain is over because there is a lull in the activity of one's adversary, another blow falls which seems even harsher and inflicts even greater pain*. This is related to the concept explored

in the second half of line 7 and in line 8 which is that Fate, well aware of man's limited ability to endure suffering, compensates for the resultant brevity of time at its disposal, by being as fierce and unremitting as possible.

In the sestet that follows this physical agony is compared with mental torment which, in the image of the mountains, cliffs and deep gorges of the mind, is presented as being even worse than what is described in the octave. This pain is the more terrible because it is intangible, seems unending, and is incurable by practical and easily obtainable remedies.

In the image: 'Hold them cheap/ May who ne'er hung there', in lines 10 and 11, the sensory imagery is particularly strong. One sees a man hanging from a cliff by the tips of his fingers over a dark, unfathomably deep abyss, his face white and contorted with terror and his body and legs swaying in the wind, while above him is empty sky and below him pitch blackness. One might hear the gusts of wind whistling in his ears and the flapping of his garments in the breeze, and taste the bile of fear as it rises in his throat. One may feel the almost unendurable ache and tension of his fingers as they clutch desperately at the rocks above him and the strain on his arms as his weight stretches them.

This image is so powerful that the reader cannot but feel the torment and pain of one in so dire a predicament and at the same time the reader feels pity for and sympathises with him in his suffering. The sensitive reader will feel too, with a catch at the throat, the horror of the apparent impossibility of salvation in such a situation.

The intellectual imagery here suggests that unless one has suffered similar mental anguish one might think mental and spiritual suffering is not really too terrible, but in the context of the whole poem, these are more excruciating than physical pain because one is almost totally defenceless against them.

This poem, then, presents an excellent example of how imagery can involve the whole being of the reader.

The last poem I would like to look at in connection with imagery is in complete contrast to the one above in mood, tone and feeling. It is Roy Campbell's 'Autumn' (Campbell, 1930: 91):

I love to see, when leaves depart,
The clear anatomy arrive,
Winter, the paragon of art,
That kills all forms of life and feeling
Save what is pure and will survive. 5

Already now the clanging chains
Of geese are harnessed to the moon:
Stripped are the great sun-clouding planes:
And the dark pines, their own revealing,
Let in the needles of the noon. 10

Strained by the gale the olives whiten
Like hoary wrestlers bent with toil
And, with the vines, their branches lighten
To brim our vats where summer lingers
In the red froth and sun-gold oil. 15

Soon on our hearth's reviving pyre

Their rotted stems will crumble up;
And like a ruby, panting fire,
The grape will redden on your fingers
Through the crystal of the cup. 20

This poem is so replete with beautiful and vivid imagery that I have decided to concentrate only on the third stanza though any one would have served my purpose as well.

In lines 11 to 13 the olive trees with their burden of ripe fruit are compared with aged wrestlers whose limbs have become deformed and twisted or which are intertwined with those of their opponents as they struggle against one another.

One can see here the greyish-white branches, which look as though they are bleached by age as they strain and twist under the onslaught of the winds of autumn. One sees also the abundance of fruit which weighs them down as it ripens. There is at first almost a feeling of distress or fatigue because of the labour ('toil') the trees seem to be forced to undergo, but this is quite soon followed by relief as the fruit falls and the tugging of the weight on the boughs of the trees is lessened. This is true too for the vines in autumn when the grapes are plucked and the stems regain their airy lightness.

In lines 14 and 15 one sees vats filled to overflowing with the beautiful gold of the oil and the deep red of the grape juice on which the froth of newly-poured liquid rests, both of which, the oil and the grape juice, capture the essence of summer, for in these one sees the colours produced by the warmth of the sun and the fertility that summer induces. One might taste the delicious

flavour, smell the fragrant scent of the wine and olive-oil, and feel the smooth but viscous texture of the oil and the velvety softness of the wine.

The word 'brim' in line 14 arouses a feeling of gratitude for nature's bounty, richness and generosity which goes together with the pleasure and happiness that come with the contemplation of such copiousness. There might also be a touch of sadness here in the thought that the lovely warm days of summer and autumn will soon be over for winter is at hand, but the word 'lingers' in line 4 suggests the reluctance of summer to leave. The whole stanza, though, evokes for the reader the specific sensuousness of nature at a certain time of the year.

The intellectual imagery of this stanza and indeed of the whole poem suggests that each season has its own beauty but also that each is intrinsic in the other. This last is suggested by the words 'summer lingers' in this stanza and later by the image of the ruby-red wine in the crystal cup at the end. The last stanza centres on winter with its 'rotted stems' and the death of much of the vegetation of summer and autumn, but the next season is hinted at in the words 'reviving pyre' with their implication that what decays in winter serves to nourish new growth in spring, and so the cycle of the seasons, each of which contributes something to the next, is complete.

In every stanza of this poem there is evidence again of the way in which imagery works to involve all the faculties of the reader. Good imagery then is indispensable to the poet in the writing of great lasting poetry, and an analysis of images in poetry heightens the enjoyment, understanding, and realisation of the full significance of the poem for the reader.

Chapter Nine: Form

When I use the term 'form' or 'shape' I am not alluding to stanza form or poetry written in a formal design like the sonnet or the ballad, which I have already commented on previously, or to any other regular pattern the poet has chosen to use. What I am interested in here is a line or lines that differ markedly in length from others in a poem, diversity in length of stanzas, unusual stanzaic division in a poem, or the placing of a word or words on the page. These variations are used quite deliberately by the good poet in order to give emphasis or impact to specific aspects of a poem as a whole. The term 'form' is probably not the best word there is to express the above, and may even be misleading, but 'format' does not have a wide enough connotation in my opinion, and I confess that I am unable to find any other better word to encompass these features of poetry.

Some, though very few, poets arrange words to actually form the shape of the object (or its movement) that they are writing about. One such is e.e. cummings, and an example of his use of this device is found in the poem 'r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r' (cummings, 1963: 120). This poem depicts the sudden leaps in different directions, haphazardly and without any visible purpose, of a grasshopper, but while the *appearance* of the poem certainly portrays this, the actual sense of the words is rendered so obscure by the use of anagrams and eccentric punctuation and word formation, that many readers will not think it worthwhile to puzzle it out and so, even if the poet intends meaning to be ir-

relevant, or precisely so if he *does*, it seems to me not really to be poetry at all:

r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
who
a)s w(e loo)k
upnowgath
PPEGORHARASS
eringint (o—
a The) : I
e A
! p:
s
(r
rivlnG gRrEaPsPhDs)
to
rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
, grasshopper;

Cummings's 'a he as o' is less confusing than the above poem (cummings, 1963: 73):

a he as o
ld as who stag
geri
ing up some streetfu

l of peopl
e lurche
s viv
idly

from ti(& d
esperate
ly) m
e to ti

me shru
gg
ing as if to say b
ut for chreyesake ca

n
i s
ell drunk if i
be pencils

Attempting to make sense of this poem requires some effort and is much like doing a sort of jigsaw puzzle, but once one is able to understand what is being said one wonders whether it was worth taking pains over. While it certainly portrays the incoherence and staggerings of a drunken man, there is little attempt here to examine, explore or reveal a truth about life. For me, the poem remains a curiosity both superficial and trifling.

Another example of this kind of arrangement of words, but one I think much more successful, is Robert Herrick's concrete poem, 'The Pillar of Fame', in which the words have been deliberately arranged by the poet to represent in visual terms the central image, thereby reinforcing the main theme and ideas in the poem.

Fame's pillar here at last we set,
Out-during marble, brass or jet;
Charmed and enchanted so
As to withstand the blow
Of overthrow;
Nor shall the seas
Or outrages
Of storms, o'erbear
What we uprear,
Tho' kingdoms fall,
This pillar never shall
Decline or waste at all;
But stand for ever by his own
Firm and well-fixed foundation.

(Malan, 1970: 26)

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The typographical presentation provides the shape or form of a pillar and so adds an extra dimension to what the poet wants to convey.

George Herbert does a similar thing in 'Easter Wings' (Herbert, 1974: 63), in which comparisons are made between man's sin and an illness, and then his redemption and the flight of a bird. The shape of the poem itself is that of a bird:

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same
Decaying more and more
Till he became
Most poore;
With thee
O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victorie;
For if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

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In this poem the poet is expressing his joy at God's mercy, which is celebrated at Easter, by comparing his happiness with the carefree flight of a lark. If the page is turned crosswise the fact that each stanza is shaped like a bird becomes evident.

In the first stanza the lines first diminish in length as Herbert describes how man became 'most poore' because of his sinning, but then become longer as he compares God's victory through the sacrifice of Christ with the rising and flight of the lark.

In the second stanza the lines become shorter as the poet compares man's (including his) sin with an illness, the ravages of which make the poet 'thinne', but lengthen again when the poet reflects on God's victory and man's redemption, and as the poet's exaltation (because of this fact) increases.

Essop Patel deploys the words of his 'Telepoem The News' in an intriguing pattern (Gray, 1984: 191):

Telepoem

Children's winter breath
and morning mist assemble
yards

the graffiti on the wall
conscious exhortations
chanting OUT EVIL OUT EVIL OUT EVIL OUT
 children marching

 their lives a forsaken dream

 marching be
 BLACK & PROUD
 marching because

The News

reinforce township bitterness
 in forlorn school

urging BAN Afrikaans
in liberated tongues
 singing 5
marching children

10

they have a cause called

FREEDOM

children marching

marching children

stones flying in the air

buses brightly singing an orange flame

15

there's fire & more fire

ISISTIMELA SIYE GOLI EMPTY

its cold out here

there's gong to be

ACTION

ACTION

television crew

riot police

20

READY

READY

mark your target

your man is only a child

AIM

AIM

fingers tighten

don't be frighten

FIRE

25

zzzzooooooooooooommmm

ripping through

bullethole

tearing skin

face oplit

blood gushing

perfect shot

brought to you

30

in full panoramic view

GOODNIGHT, JO'BURG SEE YOU TOMORROW, SOWETO

In this poem the divisions in the first seven lines represent the void between what children's activities ought to be in a normal society and what they actually are in this one. Lines 8 to 12 are presented in a fragmented format, first to portray the children's partial understanding of what their parents know and feel, and then their terror and confusion when violence erupts. Lines 15 and

16, as the destruction and violence begin to rage unabated, are not interrupted by spaces.

From lines 18 to 24, the gaps in the lines signify the distances between the television crews (intent only on obtaining material for a 'good' story) and the policemen under orders to destroy, as well as the chaos and fear in the rioting crowd, which culminates in the explosive 'FIRE' of line 25. The gaps here also reflect the division and distance between the oppressed and the oppressors.

In line 26 the interval between the two sections of the line represents the time between the guns being fired and the bullets reaching their targets, and in lines 27 and 28 the spaces in the lines portray the disintegration of the flesh that is torn apart by these bullets. Lines 29 to 31, in their increasing length and unbroken state, depict the complacency, excitement and triumph of those watching these events on television in the safety and comfort of their homes. Line 32 not only makes a comment on the stark contrast in life-styles of the people who live in the main city and those who live on its outskirts, but it also expresses the poet's conviction that the people represented by 'SOWETO' will ultimately be the victors. Up to the last line the poem as a whole is disorderly and disconnected, a deliberate device to mirror an unnatural and unbalanced society.

This kind of representation is unusual though, and much more common is the disposition of words, lines and stanzas to convey meaning. In Douglas Livingstone's 'Leviathan', which I have already discussed for different reasons, the first line of the third stanza consists of one word only: 'Gone'. This very short line contrasts glaringly with the others in the poem and is extremely ef-

fective in its portrayal of the startling abruptness and rapidity with which the snake catches and disposes of the lizard, and also the finality and irrevocability of its disappearance. George Herbert does the same sort of thing in the last line of 'Love', which I referred to in detail in the chapter on rhythm:

So I did sit and eat

Everything that has gone before expresses the poet's hesitation and reservations and Love's arguments to counter these, and the length and pattern of these lines is fairly constant. The shortness of this last line is in marked contrast with these, and it reflects the poet's quiet but total capitulation and simple acceptance.

Blake does exactly the opposite in 'The Garden of Love', which I also quoted in Chapter Five, in which the last two lines are:

And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.

These are much longer than any of those preceding them, to convey the apparently endless perambulations of the priests and the tedium of their activity, while at the same time commenting on the destructiveness of what they are doing.

It is interesting to note that the rhythm and the particular length of the last lines of 'Love' and 'The Garden of Love' (and consequently the shape of the poem) complement one another, so that my comments on these two different

devices (rhythm and form) will necessarily have great similarity. This, then, is an instance of how closely the different techniques of the poet work together and how difficult it is to view them separately.

In Arnold's 'Dover Beach' each stanza represents a stage in the progression of the poet's train of thought throughout the poem. In the breaks between the stanzas it is as though the poet pauses to think, and is then led on to a further development of his theme. In the first stanza, the imagery is predominantly sensory; it is the longest stanza of the poem, because in it there is a progression from one kind of sensory image to another, starting with visual and advancing through tactile to auditory imagery. The last lines of this stanza are:

...and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Here the element of human emotion, that of sorrow, which the poet hears in the sound of the movement of the sea, is introduced.

In the pause after this stanza the poet seems to reflect on the word 'eternal', which leads to the thought of a civilization long past which also had its burden of sadness. The image of the sea shifts from that of the English Channel to the Aegean, and he visualises Sophocles being inspired to write his tragedies by the same sad notes of a sea of a different time and in quite a different region, so that the second stanza deals with the universality of sorrow as part of the human condition.

In the third stanza the sea has become symbolic in the 'Sea of Faith', and the break between the second and third stanzas represents the poet's shift in thought. He now compares the way in which faith once gave shape, definition, joy and security to men's lives, with the way in which the sea does this for the land mass it surrounds. He then compares the ebbing of the sea with the way in which faith, which was at one time present in almost everyone, has gradually receded, leaving mankind unprotected and vulnerable.

The pause before the last stanza is pregnant with desolation, regret and fear, and so in the next stanza the poet turns to the person he loves for comfort and security since there is nothing else in life to cling to that can give hope or consolation. The poem ends on a note of terrible despair; we have come a long way from the pleasure of a warm, tranquil evening to the confusion, clamour and loss of hope, purpose and direction of the last lines.

The last line of Emily Dickinson's poem 'The Bustle in a House' consists of only two words:

*The bustle in a house
The morning after death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon earth,—*

*The sweeping up the heart,
And putting love away
We shall not want to use again
Until eternity.*

(Dickinson, 1970: 1078)

And my words
slid like a ball 10
of hard blue soap
into the tub
to be grabbed and used by you
to rub the clothes.

A poem isn't all 15
there is to life, you said
with your blue-ringed gaze
scanning the page
once looking over my shoulder
and back at the immediate 20
dirty water

and my words
being clenched
smaller and
smaller. 25

The poet, filled with a sense of achievement and the pleasure of giving, shows her mother a poem she has obviously written for her, but the latter, busy washing clothes and worn down by hard work, shows no appreciation or gratitude for her daughter's gift, for she sees literary activity as a kind of indulgence which contributes nothing useful to people's lives.

The first stanza describes her mother's distorted posture and work-roughened hands with marvellous clarity; the length of lines 2 and 3 are a reflection of the long hours of manual labour her mother endures. The shortness

of lines 5 and 6, in contrast, are a verbal representation of the way the skin of her mother's hands has contracted and shrunk through constant immersion in water.

The second stanza is concerned with the way in which the poet's poem is received by her mother. In line 10 the word 'slid' suggests how little value her mother places on the poem, and how she shrugs off what her daughter has done. Lines 11 to 14 depict her mother's concentration on her task; the length of line 13 suggests how everything around her mother is secondary to her absorption in the task at hand, and this is echoed by the word 'immediate' in line 20. The end of line 13 at first arouses an expectation in the reader that the poet's mother might find something of value in the poem, however little, but this is dashed in line 14, in which the word 'rub' implies the pain her mother inflicts on her daughter by her uncompromising attitude.

This attitude is expressed verbally in the third stanza in lines 15 and 16 but the word 'scanning' in line 18 imparts the feeling that perhaps she has relented a little and is willing to give some attention to her daughter's offering. This is immediately contradicted by the first word, 'once', in the next line, which is an indication of how cursorily she glances at the poem and how grudgingly she takes the time to look away from her work. This fact is reinforced by the rest of this line, which suggests that her mother does not really look at the poem at all. The absence of punctuation in this fairly long line is an indication of the brevity of her glance and the rapidity of the return of her attention to her work, which is confirmed by the use of the words 'immediate' and 'back' in the next line. The shortness of line 21, with its two words, 'dirty

water', denotes just how little weight she places on her daughter's poem and at the same time suggests the way in which, in the space of a minute, she has taken the gloss off her daughter's pride and joy.

The last stanza with its four very short lines is an indication of how well she has succeeded in diminishing her daughter's sense of achievement; it depicts the melting away of her daughter's feeling of elation. Lines 24 and 25, which consist of two and then only one word respectively, convey very effectively the dwindling to nothing of the poet's delight in her accomplishment. The variation in the length of lines in this poem have the additional effect of swaying the sympathy of the reader from the daughter to the mother and back again, but the final stanza, which portrays the gradual but unhalting dwindling of the pride and joy of the poet, makes the reader come down heavily on the side of the poet.

In 'Musée des Beaux Arts', by W.H. Auden, the run-on lines are very effective, especially in the second stanza. The theme of this poem is that tragedy goes largely unnoticed by everyone except those immediately concerned, and Brueghel's painting of the fall of Icarus is one of the paintings that depict this. The third stanza of this poem is:

In Brueghel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may 15
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky, 20

Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

(Auden, 1968: 28)

The words 'Quite leisurely' at the beginning of line 15 come as a surprise after the words 'turns away' at the end of the line before, because these words ('turns away') lead one to expect repulsion, shock or horror, feelings which are associated with the word 'disaster' from the following line, but which are negated by 'Quite leisurely'. At the end of line 15, however, the word 'may' arouses the hope that the ploughman at least *might* have taken notice of what is happening, but in line 16 we are disappointed by the words 'Have heard...', which imply that he only may have *heard* the sound of Icarus hitting the water, or his forlorn cry, but even if he does, it matters not at all to him.

Again the word 'green' at the end of line 18, with its suggestion of something lush, rich and perhaps life-giving, is contradicted by the first word of the next line, 'water', with the connotation here of death by drowning.

The first words of line 20, 'Something amazing', are unexpected after the words 'must have seen' of line 19, for we have been prepared by what has gone before for the mundane and unexceptional. The last line, however, reverts to a recording of the placid indifference of the witnesses of Icarus' tragic fate, engrossed as they are in their own concerns.

The poet's skill in presenting ambiguous elements through the use of well-placed enjambed lines (lines whose grammatical structure and sense bridge subsequent lines), is clearly evident in this poem, and he uses this device to excellent effect.

An example of a slightly different linear technique is found in Mongane Serote's 'For Don M.—Banned' (Serote, 1982: 52):

it is a dry white season
dark leaves don't last, their brief lives dry out
and with broken heart they dive down gently headed for the
earth
not even bleeding.
it is a dry white season brother, 5
only the trees know the pain as they still stand erect
dry like steel, their branches dry like wire,
indeed, it is a dry white season
but seasons come to pass.

This poem is ostensibly about the effects of drought on trees. These trees, however, their leaves and their branches, symbolise the oppressed in South Africa, the privations they suffer under oppression, and the torment, exile, and, ultimately, death that is the result of the struggle for liberty for many of its members. Apart from the title, the reference to 'white' and 'dark' make this unmistakable. The tremendous variation in the length of the lines of this poem not only lends great interest to the poem, but is used with deliberate intent by the poet as a tool to heighten significance.

The opening line, of average length, makes a factual statement regarding the weather conditions of a particular period; the words 'dry white' immediately invoke aridity and the blanching of foliage starved of the means to survive.

The second line, though, is much longer. It describes the slow but inexorable debilitation of vegetation as the drought drags on. There is irony in the fact

that this line is so long, in that the life span of the leaves themselves is very short when there is no water to sustain them, but that of the drought is not.

Line 3 is the longest line in the poem and expresses the leaves' gradual loss of control and the surrender to forces they have no power over. One by one, drained of vitality and the energy to continue in their struggle to live, they relinquish their hold and flutter down. They seem to die of grief, as, weakened by deprivation, they 'dive down' to oblivion. These words suggest the sudden though quiet loosening of their grip as they succumb, and return to the dust ('earth') they sprang from. This long, slow, sombre line is like a lament in its description of the death of what was once fresh, green, vibrant foliage. It symbolises, too, the slow draining of hope and vigour, as well as the gradual weakening of resolution and confidence of so many of the downtrodden in the face of the brutal suppression of their efforts to gain liberty and recognition.

The very short line which follows is stark in its bitterness for, deprived of the means with which to confront the enemy, their battle has been lost only because of the sapping of their strength by the unremitting, implacable wearing-down of an inviolate foe.

Line 5 is a repetition of line 1, but with the addition of the word 'brother', which lengthens the line and acts as a reminder of the length of the duration of the drought. Moreover, the word 'brother' comments on the fact that what is destroyed belongs to the same species or group, and suggests their affinity and camaraderie in their desperate plight.

Line 6 is again much longer and the word 'only' indicates the sparseness of what is able to withstand the ravages of drought. The bare branches and the

trunks of trees alone are left, but because they have been denuded of their natural covering, they seem bereft and grief-stricken. Together with the words 'still' and 'stand erect', however, the length of this line depicts the indestructibility of the central structure on which the foliage depends, and the vigour and pride which sustains it. This is re-enforced by the next pithy and somewhat shorter line which portrays the trunk and limbs of the tree as having the strength and resilience of steel and wire.

In line 8 the words of the opening line are used for the third time, now preceded by the word 'indeed', which indicates the poet's concession that the victory of the drought in this unequal contest seems indisputable, but the short, emphatic last line, beginning with 'but', is a warning of the poet's certainty that things must change, that nothing, however powerful, can last for ever, and that a revival of life, hope and power is imminent.

I find this short poem, tightly woven in texture and rich in imagery, beautiful and very powerful. Douglas Livingstone does something somewhat different in 'Leviathan', in lines 10 to 12:

Panting, true,
but lizards breathe mostly
as if their lives depended.

Though there is a full-stop at the end of line 12, the sentence appears unfinished because 'depended' needs an object. Yet the effect of this lines hanging in the air, as it were, exactly depicts the fragility and vulnerability of these little

creatures to predators and other environmental hazards, and at the same time foreshadows the lizard's sudden capture and devouring by the snake.

There are many examples to be found of the way poets use form or shape to enhance the significance and direct attention to the intent of their poems, especially in modern poetry, and when this device is used well it is a very useful and valuable means of compressing meaning. The reader needs to take the shape of the poem into account to grasp fully the poet's intention. As Susan Wolfson so rightly argues: 'language shaped by poetic form is not simply conscriptable as information for other frameworks of analysis; the forms themselves demand a specific kind of critical attention' (Wolfson, 1997: 30).

Chapter Ten: Tone

'Tone' refers to the modulation of voice to express emotion or sentiment; thus it is clear that tone and emotion are closely linked. 'Tone' is also a musical term, and this accounts for the fact that one alludes to the note in the voice of a speaker when describing his tone. In poetry (or indeed in all literature) tone communicates the poet's attitude towards his subject, his audience, or even to himself. I.A. Richards writes:

[T]he speaker has ordinarily *an attitude to his listener*. He chooses or arranges his words differently as his audience varies, in automatic or deliberate *recognition of his relation to them*. The tone of his utterance reflects his awareness of this relation, his sense of how he stands towards those he is addressing.

(Richards, 1964: 182)

To my mind, the purpose of the use of a particular tone is to show progression to self-knowledge in the poet himself (and thereby to a central truth), to point to some absurdity, inconsistency or obscurity, to define the intention of the poet, to create mood, and to heighten meaning.

Though there is a strong connection between the poet's feeling and the tone he uses, these are not always the same and this can be detected by the words he chooses to use. The same is true when the tone a poet uses to impart a certain feeling arouses quite a different one in the reader, but in both

cases a good poet does this quite deliberately in order to achieve one of the effects mentioned above. At times it seems that the poet is not aware of the fact that he has given away the nature of his real feelings by his choice of words, though of course, if the poem is a good one, as it progresses the reader recognises that this is not actually so and that the poet has used this device for his specific purpose.

Tone, then, could be said to describe not so much *what* a poet says as *how* he says it, though the latter ultimately leads to a better understanding of the former. In a good poem, tone changes frequently as does feeling, the frequency of these changes depending largely on the length of the poem. If this were not so, the poem would be dull, repetitive, and, most important, static, and it would fail because it would not conform to the main characteristic of good literature—that it is an *activity* involving the senses, emotions, and intellect of its creator and therefore of the sensitive reader.

It is not, however, always easy to gauge tone because we are speaking here of the way words or lines would *sound* if spoken and we are actually dealing with the printed word. Thus if the reader is not giving his full attention to the text, he may be misled because he has failed to notice the significance of a word or words, which, in fact, determine the tone. At times it may even be necessary for the reader to say certain words or lines aloud before he can arrive at the exact nuance of tone and therefore the precise meaning of the poet.

All good poets understand very well the subtleties that tone can convey and John Milton's sonnet 'On his Blindness' demonstrates this:

When I consider how my light is spent,
E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present 5
My true account, least he returning chide,
'Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd?'
I fondly ask. But Patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, 'God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best 10
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His State
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post oe'r land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait.'

(Milton, 1968: 328)

The first thing that strikes the reader about this poem is the use of the Simple Present Tense throughout. Together with the first word of the poem, 'When', this indicates that what the poet is describing here does not refer to one isolated incident only, but rather to similar occurrences that have arisen before, that may do so again, and that must be overcome with no little effort on the part of the poet.

At first glance the first line and half of line 2 have a tone of contemplative melancholy, but on closer inspection the word 'consider' modifies the reader's perception of this tone and introduces an aggrieved, indignant note. (Examine a speaker's tone when he says for example: 'When I consider how much I've

done for him....') The second part of line 2 highlights the extent of the poet's *plight but the tone also contains bitterness.*

Line 3 and the first half of line 4 with their tone of disgruntled resentment confirm the reader's suspicions with regard to the tone of the first two lines, and in the rest of line 4 and in line 5 the note of wounded discontent and even a certain peevish querulousness is clearly discernible as the poet reflects on what seems to him to be gross injustice. In the reference to the biblical parable in which a master gives his servants certain amounts of money to do with what they think best, the poet meditates on the fact that the servant who buried his in order to keep it intact was reprimanded, but that he did so by choice while the poet's grievance is that he has no alternative. This is what induces his hurt feelings and his brooding over his sense of being misjudged, feelings which are manifestly apparent in the first 6 lines of the poem.

The fact that line 7 is in the form of a rhetorical question together with the word 'exact' and the contradiction between 'day-labour' and 'light deny'd' serves as the culmination of these feelings, for the elements contain a note of criticism and strong reproach.

By this time the reader has become aware of the fact that, although the poet certainly has reason for deep unhappiness, he is now wallowing in unattractive self-pity which is both tedious and alienating.

In line 8, however, the word 'fondly' (meaning 'foolishly') signals the fact that the poet, after the fretful dissatisfaction of the first seven lines, has come to a realisation of his own folly through the intervention of Patience, the virtue that enables man to bear what he must as well as possible. The words 'fondly'

there is also a wry, sardonic note in his acceptance that in the scale of things in life, his misery is merely a nuisance ('trouble').

The tone of line 4 is forlorn, self-derogatory, but also fairly savage as he sees himself as being singled out by fortune in being made to suffer.

The dash at the end of line 4 indicates a pause during which the poet's thoughts change in direction from a consideration of his state in general to a comparison of his lot with that of others of his acquaintance. In lines 5, 6 and 7, then, the tone is envious and covetous as the poet thinks of others, all of whom are more blessed than he for some have brighter prospects, some are better looking, some endowed with good friends, and some have greater skills and better opportunities than he, until it seems to him that he alone is deprived of any advantages at all. By the end of line 7 a note of resentful destitution has crept into his voice.

In line 8, however, there is also bewilderment and frustration in the tone as though he cannot understand why what he is accustomed to enjoy, now seems to give him no pleasure at all but rather increases his depression.

The word 'Yet' at the beginning of line 9 alerts the reader to the fact that a change of tone is imminent. In this line the tone is still gloomy and discontented and on the brink of self-contempt ('almost') but the approaching lift in the poet's spirits is clearly felt by the reader.

The word 'Haply' at the beginning of line 10 is a combination of 'fortunately', 'by chance', and 'happily', and here again there is a contrast with Milton's sonnet. Milton, consciously and with some exertion, must summon his resources and his moral convictions to his aid, while Shakespeare fortuitously

remembers what he has temporarily lost sight of. There is gratitude in the latter's tone as he recalls the love that he is the recipient of, and from the middle of this line to the end of line 12 there is elation in his voice and the tone is almost wildly joyous as he luxuriates in the bliss that this relationship brings him. The tone has changed dramatically from morose despondency to ecstatic felicity and jubilation.

The last two lines are warmly euphoric, deeply contented and grateful in tone, for he regards himself as being more fortunate and more powerful than the greatest potentate because of the quality of the person whose love he enjoys.

The theme of this poem is that the power of love is so great that it overrides all other factors that control or influence our lives and this theme is underlined by the dramatic change in tone from that of profound gloom which is the result of harshly adverse circumstances to that of the highest exhilaration which springs from the knowledge of the gift of love he enjoys from one he highly esteems.

Michael Drayton in his sonnet 'The Parting' does something quite different from what Milton and Shakespeare do in the sonnets discussed above—he demonstrates an attempt to conceal feelings he is ashamed of through his use of tone:

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part.
Nay, I have done; you get no more of me,
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,
That thus so cleanly I myself can free;

Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows, 5
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain.
Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies, 10
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,
Now if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou mightst him yet recover.

(Chambers, 1944: 603)

In the first part of line 1 the tone is one of reluctant resignation in the face of what is obviously the defeat of repeated endeavours, but in the second part of this line the note of cajolery betrays a longing for some sort of loving contact.

In the first part of line 2, however, the tone is adamant and uncompromising, and in the rest of this line there is a note of firm rejection of what might be some sort of protest from his interlocutor, though this is accompanied by a note of resentment in the suggestion that it is the poet who has made all the effort necessary to sustain their relationship.

In line 3 there is relief and gratitude in the poet's tone, and line 4 gives the reason for this as being the fact that the ending of the relationship can be finally and absolutely achieved without pain or regret. Moreover, the implication that it is the poet who is the instigator of the break is conveyed in the words 'myself can free', and the tone of these words contain a feeling of liberation and gratification.

By the end of this line, however, the reader's growing suspicion about the veracity of the poet's profession of happiness in his release from emotional ties that have become irksome has strengthened. In the combination of his request for a kiss (line 1) together with the excessive protestations in the repetition of 'glad' in conjunction with 'with all my heart', the reader recognises the bravado in the poet's tone in his attempt to save face.

This is confirmed by his second request for some kind of physical contact in 'Shake hands' in line 5, and the determination and resolution in the tone of 'for ever' and 'all', both of which seem to be superfluous. In addition there is a note of hope in the poet's tone when he envisages their next meeting, which he implies is unhappily inevitable, but which he quite patently looks forward to.

Lines 7 and 8 contain an exhortation that would be unnecessary, at least for the poet, if he felt, as he says he does, no trace of the love he once had for the woman he is addressing. Clearly he is not free of his intense feelings for her at all nor is he able to envisage a clean break from her. The tone of apprehension in his voice in his fear that he might betray his feelings of love for her in public goes hand in hand with a note of longing for a sign that she still has a vestige of feeling for him. The reader is now fully aware of the anguish underlying everything the poet has said in these lines, and the pathos of the situation when only one of two lovers ceases to love, and the poet's brave efforts to conceal his grief and despair are profoundly moving.

In the last six lines there is a complete change of tone. The image in these lines is that of an extremely ill man on the point of death as his faculties begin to fail one by one. The terms the poet uses for the people in attendance on

this dying man are the elements of love, and in his description of this imminent death there is a hushed and solemn tone. The repetition of the word 'Now' in line 13, though, is an expression of his refusal to give up hope, and his conviction that it is not too late for them, in that a reversal of what appears to be final is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

In the last two lines of the poem all pretence on the part of the poet of his absence of regret in their parting has been abandoned. The tone in his expression of his belief that she could resurrect the feeling she once had for him is that of wistful yearning and wishfulness. In the words 'if thou wouldst', however, there is a note of plaintive bitterness in the suggestion that it is only her obduracy that prevents her from feeling what he wants her to. At the same time his willingness to accept unconditionally her change of heart is evident in his pleading, coaxing tone.

In this poem the change of tone from seemingly fierce, proud resolution to that of almost abject entreaty is very marked.

In 'To his Coy Mistress' the speaker does not attempt to conceal his feelings at all and in the first stanza he seems to be doing almost the opposite of what Drayton does in 'The Parting' in that he wants the reader, and the woman he loves, to know quite clearly that he does not mean his words to be taken too literally or too seriously though this changes considerably in the second and third stanzas. Also, the tone of the poem is in general much lighter than Drayton's, and there is often laughter in the poet's voice, even when he reveals deep truths, but the poem as a whole is a profound comment on an aspect of life that affects us all:

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day;
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side 5
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood;
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews. 10
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast, 15
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate. 20

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found, 25
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long preserv'd virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust. 30

Chapter Ten

The grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires 35
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chapp'd power. 40
Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one ball;
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun 45
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

(Marvell, 1976: 50)

In this poem there is a progression in the argument signalled by the first word of each stanza. The first words 'Had we' suggest a condition, the second stanza begins with 'But' which denies this condition, and the third with 'Now therefore', which offers an alternative. In the first line of the first stanza the speaker's concern with the limitations and constraints that space and, particularly, time place on man is proclaimed. This is embodied in a reasoned argument apparently in an attempt to persuade the woman he loves to abandon her scruples and submit to her passion and to him.

In this first stanza, however, we are aware right from the word 'crime' at the end of line 2 that the poet's tone is playful, for coyness might be misplaced,

inappropriate or even unattractive but it is certainly not criminal. As the stanza progresses, the reader becomes even more certain that the poet is saying what he does in jest (though there are interesting and serious comments on aspects of time in some lines, for example, lines 8 to 10). This is because of the numerous exaggerations, the impossible propositions, and the careful apportioning of explicit periods of time to the contemplation of the various parts of the lady's body.

The last two lines of this stanza, however, are much more serious in tone and we sense that, however little of what he has said in lines 1 to 18 should be taken literally, he has genuinely deep feelings for this woman.

In the first two lines of the second stanza the playful tone has been replaced altogether by one of earnest awareness, not unmixed with trepidation, of our inability to halt the progress of time. His vision of what happens after death in lines 23 and 24 is bleak in the extreme and the tone of these lines is sombre and comfortless. The words 'marble vault' and 'echoing song' in lines 26 and 27 together with the notion of the disappearance of her beauty have a terrifying ring of emptiness in the suggestion of nothingness and death's imperviousness to warmth and joy.

The playful tone returns in a macabre way in the second part of line 27 and in line 28 in the idea of worms being the only recipients of a priceless treasure that man should enjoy, but the word 'quaint' in line 29 to describe her honour lends a mocking tone to these words. In the next line, however, there is a sense of terrible waste in the idea of the dissipation of ardent passion, and the gravity of tone cannot be ignored.

The last two lines of this stanza contain a solemn warning of the absence of joy and sensuality that death entails as well as a note of melancholy and a sense of aridity.

In the last stanza the sepulchral tone of the previous two lines has been replaced by a tone of urgency in the poet's voice which is enhanced by the repetition of the word 'now' in lines 33, 37 and 38, suggesting the fleeting nature of youth and passion as the poet exhorts his lady to make use of her sexuality, vitality and energy while she is still able to do so.

In lines 38 to 40 there is a tone of abandonment and even profligacy in the poet's belief that it is better to enjoy, indulge and use our senses to the full (even if this shortens life) than to live on into a pusillanimous old age by conserving our energies.

The image in lines 41 to 44 has an almost ruthless, savage note (consider words such as 'tear' and 'rough strife') as the poet incites his mistress to wrest from life, no matter what the cost, whatever pleasures are available before it is too late, and in the words 'iron gates of life' there is a grim reminder of the way in which life seems to conspire against man in its thwarting of his desires and pleasures.

The last two lines contain a note of determination (especially suggested by the word 'will') and triumph as the poet points out that although we cannot prevent the passage of time, we can make it pass more quickly by enjoying ourselves rather than suffering the tedium of time dragging on when we do not enjoy ourselves. These last two lines are a comment on the relativity of time,

come as a culmination of the poet's reflections on how we should use the time allotted to us, and are a reflection of the poet's serious intention in this poem.

There is, of course, a vast amount more which could be said about this poem but which is not relevant to the issue under discussion here.

The poem 'Telephone Conversation' by Wole Soyinka has very little in common at all with those already discussed but is very interesting in its variation of tone in the voices of both speakers (Sadler et al., 1986: 246):

The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off-premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. 'Madam,' I warned,
I hate a wasted journey—I am African.' 5
Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.
'HOW DARK?'...I had not misheard... 'ARE YOU LIGHT 10
OR VERY DARK?' Button B. Button A. Stench
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak
Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender 15
Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis—
'ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?' Revelation came.
'You mean—like plain or milk chocolate?'
Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light 20
Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
I chose. 'West African sepia'—and as afterthought,

'Down in my passport.' Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness changed her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. 'WHAT'S THAT?' conceding 25
'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.' 'Like brunette.'
'THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?' 'Not altogether.
Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused— 30
Foolishly madam—by sitting down, has turned
My bottom raven black—one moment madam!'—sensing
Her receiver roaring on the thunderclap
About my ears—'madam,' I pleaded, 'wouldn't you rather
See for yourself?' 35

In this poem the first words up to 'Indifferent' have a factual and informative tone but the word 'swore' in line 2 in the lady's reply has an eager and reassuring note. In lines 3 to 5 there is a note of resigned weariness in response to the landlady's eagerness and it is obvious to the reader that because the poet's speech is clearly educated and unaccented, he has had many wasted journeys in his search for accommodation, having been turned away the moment it is seen that he is black. The word 'self-confession' in line 4 contains a note of tired irony in its implication that to be black is a misdemeanour.

In line 4 from 'Madam', to 'African' in line 5 the 'warning' is tinged with a kind of stoical expectancy, for the poet knows what kind of response his 'confession' usually brings. There is contempt in the tone of line 6 to 'good-breeding' in line 7, since the poet realises that the lady restrains her instinctive response not out of concern for the feelings of the poet, but because she has been 'pressurized' into behaving with a modicum of decency but her limita-

tions in this regard prevent her from knowing what she should say in this situation.

The disdain and discernment in the poet's tone is carried through from 'Voice' in line 7 to 'pipped' in line 9 as the poet visualises the appearance of and type of person the lady is. In 'Caught I was, foully' in line 9, there is a note of ironic and sardonic resignation.

After the guarded 'HOW DARK?' in line 10 the marks of ellipsis represent baffled astonishment, and those after 'misheard' incredulous recognition of the meaning of the lady's question. The tone of her response after the second set of marks of ellipsis in lines 10 and 11 is first suspicion, and then impatient and cagey sharpness.

From 'Button B' in line 11 to 'tar' in line 14 the tone is a mixture of disgust, repugnance, and mild irritation because of the nature of his surroundings, and panicky astonishment which renders the poet unable to speak in the light of the bizarre nature of the question, and he must insert more coins into the telephone's apparatus in order to continue the conversation. In the words 'It was real!' there is stunned comprehension in the poet's tone.

In the rest of line 14 to 'simplification' at the end of line 16, the tone changes from bewilderment to reluctance as the poet is forced by the demands of courtesy to speak and to ask in perplexed tones what exactly she means.

In line 17 the tone is again ironic especially in the word 'considerate' and in line 18 there is a note of relief as understanding of the precise implications of

her question comes to the poet. His question in line 19 has a note of wry humour.

In line 20 there is subdued humiliation in the poet's tone in response to the arrogant indifference of the landlady's assent, and then from 'Rapidly' in line 21 to 'passport' in line 23 there is a note of amused nonchalance. The amusement stems from his knowledge that she will be non-plussed by these words and the nonchalance from his self-confidence in his knowledge of the fact that he can prove what he says though it will mean little to her.

The tone in line 23 from 'Silence' to 'mouthpiece' in line 25 changes from that of puzzled incomprehension to abrupt, suspicious harshness in the grudging admission of ignorance in her reply and in her question. In the poet's reply from 'Not altogether' in line 27 to 'black' in line 32 the tone is facetious and full of weary derision, especially in his reference to the colour of his bottom and his mock apology in the sarcastic 'Foolishly madam', as if he could help sitting down.

From 'One moment, madam' in line 33 to 'ears' in line 34 there is a note of dismayed apprehension, and in the rest of this line to the end of the poem there is a mixture of pleading, reasonableness, and defeated sadness in the poet's tone, for he knows that his appeal to her sense of justice will be futile.

The work represents a grimly realistic indictment of the attitudes and prejudices of white people which still exist today. The intolerance towards and rejection of black people by many whites is insulting and becomes ludicrously stupid when it extends even to the different shades of colour in people, with its implication that the lighter the colour of a man, the more acceptable he is.

In Act IV scene i of *Othello*, Shakespeare uses tone to reflect the turbulence of emotions that Othello is wrestling with, and the tone of Othello's speeches from lines 171 to 200 veers from one end of the emotional scale to the other:

OTHELLO: O Iago!

IAGO: And did you see the handkerchief?

OTHELLO: Was that mine?

IAGO: Yours, by this hand. And to see how he prizes
the foolish woman your wife! She gave it him, 175
and he hath given it his whore.

OTHELLO: I would have him nine years a-killing!
A fine woman, a fair woman, a sweet woman!

IAGO: Nay, you must forget that.

OTHELLO: Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damned 180
tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is
turned to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand.

O, the world hath not a sweeter creature! She
might lie by an emperor's side, and command
him tasks. 185

IAGO: Nay, that's not your way.

OTHELLO: Hang her! I do but say what she is. So
delicate with her needle, an admirable musician!
O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear!
Of so high and plenteous wit and invention! 190

IAGO: She's the worse for all this.

OTHELLO: O, a thousand, a thousand times. And then, of
so gentle a condition!

IAGO: Ay, too gentle.

OTHELLO: Nay, that's certain. But yet the pity of it, Iago! 195

O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!

IAGO: If you are so fond over her iniquity, give
her patent to offend, for, if it touch not you,
it comes near nobody.

OTHELLO: I will chop her into messes. Cuckold me! 200

In this scene of Act IV Othello has been finally convinced that Desdemona has been unfaithful to him with Cassio when he sees the latter give the handkerchief Othello gave to Desdemona to Bianca, and he has been persuaded by Iago that both Cassio and Desdemona must die.

In the extract quoted above the conflict in Othello's mind and emotions between jealousy and his love for Desdemona is clearly reflected in the violent changes in tone of his speeches.

In line 171, in response to Iago's question as to whether Othello has seen Cassio laughing about his own viciousness, there is horrified anger but also some regret in Othello's tone, for he has loved Cassio, but in his question in line 173 the note of incredulity mingled with the faint hope that there may yet be some mistake is evident. When, however, Iago assures him that the handkerchief he so prizes is indeed his and points out how little it is valued both by Desdemona and Cassio, rage and the desire for revenge are revealed in the tone of Othello's words in line 177. When he thinks of Desdemona after a short pause, though, the note of nostalgic fondness for and admiration of the woman he cannot stop loving is patent in his voice.

In line 179 Iago quickly intervenes, advising him to remember only her infidelity and the grossness of her and Cassio's treachery and deceit, and in line

180 Othello at once responds by expressing in tones of savage fury his resolve to kill her and to banish from his heart all vestiges of feeling for her. In line 183, however, his doting fondness for her overwhelms him once more and his adoration of her and his appreciation of her exquisite beauty and the qualities that raise her far above other women is apparent in his tone again, and Iago is forced to reprimand him for lapsing from his stated purpose.

At once Othello is consumed by fierce rage and he assures Iago in a defensive tone that he is only stating facts. Almost immediately, though, he thinks again of Desdemona's virtues in her accomplishment, charm and intelligence and the 'O' in line 189 reveals his grief and longing when Iago replies in line 191 by pointing out that these very qualities increase the baseness of what she has done, Othello agrees in heartfelt tones but then thinks again of Desdemona's endearing qualities, this time of her gentleness which he rates so highly.

The implication in Iago's reply in line 194 is that this gentleness is in fact wanton looseness and Othello assents, but after a pause he speaks with a deep pathos from 'but yet' in line 195 to 'Iago' in line 196. His words are full of tragic anguish, yearning and pitiful lamentation and Iago must counter this in apparently indifferent tones with the argument that if Othello condones her actions because he is so unmanly as to be unmoved by what she has done, then it is no-one's business but his own, but the clear inference that he would then be a weakling and a fool incenses Othello, and the struggle in his heart is over. In Othello's words in line 200 there is brutal ferocity and outraged pride and dignity. Iago has triumphed and the tragedy must run its course. Shake-

speare is, of course, supreme in his ability to convey feeling through tone with the utmost credibility.

Tone is used by poets in many ways—it can disguise or reveal feelings, accentuate attitudes and perceptions, and underline the nature of interrelationships and conceptions of life and the world around us. Properly used, it is a very effective tool in the writing of poetry. As Richards notes, 'poetry, which has no other very remarkable qualities, may sometimes take very high rank simply because the poet's attitude to his listeners—in view of what he has to say—is so perfect' (Richards, 1964: 206). The reader must be sensitive, then, to changes in and different kinds of tone, or he might run the risk of misunderstanding the meaning and sense of the poem altogether.

Chapter Eleven: Repetition

Repetition is often seen in the form of a refrain, that is, a line or several lines repeated at regular intervals throughout the poem, and this occurs frequently in the ballads where each stanza ends with the same lines. The refrain satisfies a human love of reiteration and rhythmic pattern, and enhances the lyrical quality of a poem.

Poets use repetition for purposes other than refrains too, never unnecessarily or tediously if the poem is a good one, but to accentuate some aspect of a poem (and this repetition is often related to or forms the main theme of the poem), to intensify meaning, or to drive home a particular point, as well as to fulfil the functions of the refrain mentioned above. Hirsch notes that:

Ethnographic examples abound of how repetitions induce transport and bliss; think of magic spells and erotic charms, obsessive chants, hypnotic incantations. 'It must not be forgotten that for centuries poetry was used for purposes of enchantment', Paul Valéry reminds us. The devices of archaic poetry have always infused poetic forms, even (and perhaps especially) of the most cultivated and aristocratic kinds. There have always been poets who energise and ruffle the forms with repetitions so extravagant they incite an answering ecstasy.

(Hirsch, 1999: 95)

Hirsch uses the example of Guittone d'Arezzo's (1230-1294) Sonnet 31 to illustrate the above, and I quote it and Michael Spiller's literal translation, as this remarkable sonnet conveys the very essence of rapturous repetition:

Tuttur ch'eo dirò gioi, gioiva cosa,

Intenderete che di voi favello,
Che gioia sete di beltà gioiosa,
E gioia di piacer gioioso e bello.
E gioia in cui gioioso avenir posa
Gioi d'aornezze e gioi di cor asnello,
Gioia in cui viso è gioi tant'amorosa,
Ched è gioiosa gioi mirare in ello.
Gioi di volere e gioi di pensamento
E gioi di dire e gioi di far gioioso,
E gioi d'ogni gioioso movimento.
Perch'eo, gioiosa gioi, sì disioso
Di voi mi trovo, che mai gioi non sento,
Se'n vostra gioi il meo cor non riposo.

(Whenever I say 'joy', you think of joy, you will understand that I speak of you, for you are a joy of joyful beauty and a joy of joyful fair pleasure. And joy in which a joyful future is, joy from your beauties, joy from your slim body, joy in which so much loving joy is seen that it is a joyful joy to wonder at it. Joy of will and joy of thought, and joy of speech and joy of making joy, and joy of every moment full of joy. So I, my joyful joy, am so unsettled by you that I never feel joy unless my heart is quieted in your joy.)

(in Hirsch, 1999: 96)

Hirsch comments that from the beginning the fourteen line rhyming poem that is the sonnet has been used for romantic pleading and expressing the emotions of love. He notes that here repetition is used to create a wild disturbance within the strict 14 line form. Guittone uses a highly reasonable form, the sonnet, to blot out reason in the name of love. 'Exuberant joy is irrational, and wild excitement creates an incoherence in the poem....The speaking of joy is so loud in this poem, the

sound of the word *joy* (*gioi*) rebounds through the poem with such ecstatic volubility, that the poem gives way to an overmastering emotion' (ibid., 97).

Repetition is not always so extreme or rhapsodic. In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, 'Fear no more the heat of the sun' is sung over the apparently dead body of Imogen by her brothers Arviragus and Guiderius, and it serves both as a lament and as consolation for those who love and have survived her. In this song, each of the first three stanzas start with the same three words and end with a refrain, though only the last word of the penultimate and the last three words of the last line are repeated. The song is:

Fear no more the heat of the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Then thy worldly task has done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages;
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers come to dust.

Fear no more the frown o' the great,
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke:
Care no more to clothe and eat;
To thee the need is as the oak:
The sceptre, learning, physic must
All follow this and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning-flash,
Nor the all-dread thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
Thou hast finished joy and moan;
All lovers young, all lovers must

Chapter Eleven

Consign to thee, and come to dust.

No exorcist harm thee!

Nor no witchcraft charm thee!

Ghost unlaid forbear thee!

Nothing ill come near thee!

Quiet consummation have;

And renowned be thy grave!

(IV.ii.59-82)

In this poem the words 'Fear no more' at the start of the first three stanzas are a form of solace in that Imogen need no longer endure the many hardships mortals must suffer in life. In the first two lines Shakespeare alludes to the ravages of climatic severity which also symbolise the vicissitudes of fortune in our lives. He follows these with the comforting reminder that she has fulfilled her role in life and is now at rest and reaping her reward.

In the second stanza it is people in power who can no longer harm her nor need she strive to ensure that she has the means to procure the physical necessities of life, for nothing earthly is of any consequence to her any more. In the third stanza the reference is to natural disasters, the power of people to hurt others, and worldly things that make for happiness or sadness, none of which can touch her now.

By the end of the third stanza, the repetition of 'Fear no more' has evoked a feeling of utter peace, security and tranquillity so that death has come to appear not as a disaster but as a kind of remission from the troubles and anxieties of life.

The repetition of the last three words of each of these stanzas, and particularly the word 'must' in each penultimate line, emphasises the fact that no matter how

gifted, young, beautiful, powerful, learned, or apparently invincible one is, there is no escape from human mortality and that man's common, inevitable and final lot is death. These two types of repetition in this poem form the main theme – that we must all die but that death need not be seen as fearful or catastrophic.

The final stanza is a departure from the pattern of the first three and comes as a kind of loving though sorrowful benison in the shape of bountiful incantations.

In George Herbert's poem 'Virtue' there is also a kind of refrain at the end of the first three stanzas though this consists of one line only ending with the words 'must die' in each case, and it has in common also with the previous poem the theme of the inevitability of death though the conclusion drawn from this poem differs from that of Shakespeare's:

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright
The bridal of the earth and sky:
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night;
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue angry and brave 5
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye:
Thy root is ever in its grave,
And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie; 10
My musick shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,

Like seasoned timber never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal, 15
Then chiefly lives.

(Herbert, 1974: 103)

In this poem, too, each of the first three stanzas start in exactly the same way, here with only the word 'sweet'. However, whereas 'Fear no more' in Shakespeare's sonnet serves as consolation and reassurance, the word 'Sweet' in this poem, which has nothing to do with the sense of taste, alters subtly with regard to the kind of beauty entailed each time. The repetition of this word stresses the contrast between the loveliness and vitality of many earthly things and the corruption of their unvarying fate, death.

There is a progression in terms of time in this poem for the 'day' of the first stanza lasts only twenty-four hours, the 'rose' of the second a week or so, and 'spring' in the third, which encompasses the day and the rose of the two previous stanzas, one or two months. The purpose of this is to point out that durability is no defence against death.

The last lines of the first three stanzas, although almost the same, vary slightly. At the end of the first stanza the last line begins with the words 'For thou' because it gives a reason for the dew's weeping; in line 8, which is the last line of the second stanza, the 'For' becomes 'And', because it gives death as a consequence of the fact that the source of life for the rose is also in the place of its final rest; and in the first words of the last line of the third stanza, the 'And' is retained but 'thou' becomes 'all'. The word 'all' in line 12, the effect of a multiplicity of things being included created by the repeated 'And', and the repetition of 'must die' as the last

words of each of these three stanzas, hammers home the fact that, however poignantly beautiful, nothing that lives is able to escape death.

Again, as in Shakespeare's, the last stanza of the poem is at variance with the first three. This stanza begins with the word 'Only' rather than 'Sweet' which immediately heralds an exception to what the poet has been saying previously, and the word 'sweet' is now used to define a specific kind of soul which in itself is in contrast with the material or earthly items considered in the previous stanzas. Furthermore, the beauty is now of a spiritual nature. The progression in time, however, is not only continued but enormously extended from relatively short periods to infinity.

What is singled out as the exception here is the human soul which if it is righteous, morally pure, and incorruptible is able not only to survive even if the world comes to an end, but actually comes into its own then. This last stanza, then, seems to overturn the argument of the invincibility of death in the first three stanzas in its conviction of eternal life for the soul of the virtuous, and, in so doing, gives force to the idea of life after death.

In another poem, 'Shantytown', the author of which is anonymous, there is also a complete reversal of tone and sentiment though here the emphasis is secular rather than spiritual and there is no refrain. Again the contrast is highlighted by the poet's use of repetition:

High on the veld above the plain
And far from streets and lights and cars
And bare of trees, and bare of grass,
Jabavu sleeps beneath the stars.

Chapter Eleven

Jabavu sleeps. 5
The children cough.
Cold creeps up, the hard night cold,
The earth is tight within its grasp,
The highveld cold without soft rain,
Dry as the sand, rough as a rasp 10
The frost rimmed night invades the shacks.
Through dusty ground
Through rocky ground
Through freezing ground, the night cold creeps.
In cotton blankets and sacks 15
Beneath the stars Jabavu sleeps.

One day Jabavu will awake
To greet a new and shining day;
The sound of coughing will become
The children's laughter as they play 20
In parks with flowers where dust now swirls
In strong-walled homes with warmth and light.
Jabavu sleeps. The stars are bright.

(Chapman and Dangor, 1982: 61)

This poem was written in 1946; in the light of events that have occurred recently, the last stanza has proven to be prophetic.

In the first stanza most of the words have connotations of bleakness and harsh discomfort, for 'plain' here denotes sparsity and barren aridity. The words 'High' in line 1 and 'far from' in line 2 denote remoteness both in terms of distance and in ease and luxury in its isolation from the trappings of civilization which supply convenience and creature comforts. This is stressed by the repetition of the word

'bare' in line 3 which describes the absence even of the protection of natural phenomena like trees and grass. Moreover, the repetition of 'and' in lines 2 and 3 seems to strip the poet's surroundings of any vestige of softness or ease.

The words 'Jabavu sleeps' in line 4 are repeated in line 5 and then later in line 16 which seems to suggest both that Jabavu represents many people who endure the kind of hardships described and that his sleep is unbroken but stony, the result of deep exhaustion and of his having become inured through long practice to the conditions he endures. This is reinforced by line 16 beginning with 'Beneath the stars', followed by 'Jabavu sleeps'.

The words 'beneath the stars' after 'Jabavu sleeps' in line 4 and at the beginning of line 16, far from implying the pleasure of being out in the open usually associated with these words, stress the lack of protection against the elements this time even of effective roofing, and the stars seem to be cold, hard, and pitiless.

The rigours of winter, which people made vulnerable by inadequate shelter and clothing must suffer, are emphasised by the word 'cold' repeated in lines 7, 9 and 14 and this is reinforced by 'hard' (line 7), 'rough as a rasp' (line 10), 'frost' (line 11) and 'freezing' in line 14. It is this cold which brings the ill-health symbolised by 'The children cough'. The pervasiveness of this biting iciness is conveyed by the word 'Through' in line 12 and 13 which indicates the strength of the cold that penetrates through even the hard, dry roughness of the ground these people sleep on, and suggests their defencelessness against it.

The last stanza, like that of Herbert's 'Virtue', forms a marked contrast to the previous stanzas, being filled with promise, hope and joy. It contains some repetition but strong differences in the place of repetition, for the 'coughing' of line 6 re-

peated in line 19 becomes 'laughter' in line 20, and Jabavu's sleep in line 23 is one of relaxation and refreshment as opposed to the weary unconsciousness suggested in lines 4, 5 and 16. This is conveyed by the full-stop after 'sleeps', and then 'The stars are bright', which replaces 'beneath the stars'. In addition 'sleeps' becomes 'awakes' in line 17, 'night' in line 7 becomes 'day' in line 18, the dark cold becomes 'warmth and light' in line 22 and the stark paucity of the ramshackle homes and cheerless surroundings described in stanzas 1 and 2 become 'shining' and 'new' parks and flowers and 'strong-walled homes'.

This writer has used repetition very adroitly firstly to arouse in the reader pity for and indignation at the plight of people forced to exist in severely insalubrious and comfortless conditions, and then to express his admiration for the tenacity of their unquenchable optimism and the courage of their patient hope which endures in the face of terrible odds.

A poem which has a kind of refrain though it occurs only once and that at the end is Vachel Lindsay's 'The Flower-fed Buffaloes' (Rosenthal, 1987: 819):

The flower-fed buffaloes of the spring
In the days of long ago,
Ranged where the locomotives sing
And the prairie flowers lie low: –
The tossing, blooming, perfumed grass 5
Is swept away by the wheat,
Wheels and wheels and wheels spin by
In the spring that still is sweet.
But the flower-fed buffaloes of the spring
Left us, long ago. 10
They gore no more, they bellow no more,

They trundle around the hills no more: –
With the Blackfeet, lying low,
With the Pawnees, lying low,
Lying low.

15

This poem is a kind of lament in that it mourns the extinction of the buffaloes which once roamed freely and in great numbers over the prairies but have now been replaced by man-made mechanisms. The natural vegetation, too, has disappeared and in the absence of these, the beauty of untamed nature has vanished, it seems, for ever. Even the indigenous population of the area has been driven away from what was once their domain.

The words of the title are repeated twice, in lines 1 and 9, and this initiates and maintains the air of sad nostalgia that prevails throughout the poem. The words 'long ago' in line 2 are repeated in line 10 and this adds to the prevalent feeling of regret in the suggestion both that what was once so lovely, natural, and abundant has almost been forgotten because so much time has elapsed since its departure, and that it is irretrievable. In line 10, the words 'long ago' come after the words 'Left us' and the sense of bereavement is strengthened.

The feeling that the departure of these features is permanent is contradicted in a sense by the implication of the words 'lie low' in line 4 and the repeated 'lying low' in the last three lines even though these last lines impart an echoing dying fall to the end of the poem, somewhat like that of the last lines of Anthony Delius's 'Emerald Dove', as we will see, for the words themselves actually mean that these things have not been eradicated forever but are keeping a low profile until they can come into their own once more.

The word 'spring' in line 1 is repeated in line 8 and serves to increase the feeling of desolation. Though the changing of seasons and the revival of new life in spring remain the same, and though the spring still arouses pleasure and joy, the void created by those things that enhanced its beauty, and which are no longer there, is felt even more strongly at this time.

In line 7, in the words 'wheels and wheels and wheels spin by' the repetition indicates ceaseless, monotonous, mechanical, impersonal and rapid movement and, by implication, the ugliness of the trains that have replaced the majestic and beautiful buffaloes, and razed the grass and flowers that once grew freely and sweetly on the prairies, while the men who made these engines have displaced and decimated the people who once lived there in harmony with nature. The rhythm of this line is smooth, even, hurried and featureless in strong contrast with the irregular, vivid, lively and vigorous rhythm of lines 5, 11 and 12.

Lastly, the words 'no more' are repeated three times in lines 11 and 12 inducing in the reader a feeling of deep grief at the terrible loss the disappearance of these animals represents, animals which are depicted as savage ('gore'), raucous and ungainly in their movements but which are so lovely because of, not despite, this.

Delius's 'Emerald Dove' (Malan, 1970: 132), ends in a similar way to the previous poem, but the conclusion in this case suggests complete finality:

The Xhosa say
When the emerald dove
Sits sobbing in the bush
She is thinking of the terrible wars
And she cries 5
My father is dead

My mother is dead
My sisters are dead
My brothers are all dead
And my heart goes 10

Doem Doem
Doem doem doem doem
doem
doem

This poem tells of the Xhosa belief that the call of a certain bird, the emerald dove, which resembles the sound of human weeping, is a form of lamentation over the devastating results of war.

The words 'is dead' are repeated in lines 6 and 7 and here the pathos lies particularly in the fact that wars make orphans of children by depriving them of both parents. The death of the parents is mentioned separately each in a line of its own and this, together with the repetition of 'is dead' emphasises the melancholy fate of the children who are orphaned by losing both parents, one after the other, so that they are left defenceless and helpless.

This is followed by the lines that tell of the loss of a child's siblings as well and the repetition of 'are dead' at the ends of lines 8 and 9 and particularly the inclusion of the word 'all' before 'dead' in line 9 highlights the desperate plight of people who suffer such comprehensive bereavement through the senseless killing that war entails, as well as focusing on the vast numbers of people killed in war.

The last four lines of this poem consists of one word only: 'Doem'. This word is onomatopoeic in that its sound is like that of a heart beating. In line 11, the capital letter of each 'Doem' enforces a pause which makes for a steady, regular rhythm

Here the word 'Chartered' is used twice in the first two lines to emphasise the fact that citizens should be enjoying rights, privileges and liberty but manifestly are not, and this highlights what the poet sees as inexcusable injustice.

The word 'each' in line 1 is repeated by its synonym 'every' four times in lines 3, 5, 6 and 7. The effect of this is to reveal the poet's horror and indignation at the fact that though no part of London is excluded in his wanderings, everywhere he is assaulted by signs of fear, despair, sorrow and helplessness. Nor does he come across a single human being, regardless of age, who is exempt from this general misery. The word 'cry', too, is repeated in lines 5 and 6, underlining the poet's impression of desolation all around him. This repetition evokes a feeling of scandalized outrage in the poet (and the reader) particularly as the despondency he sees seems to fly in the face of nature as well as what has been promised to man.

The words 'mark' and 'marks' appear in rapid succession in lines 3 and 4. In line 3 'mark' means 'to notice' but in conjunction with 'marks' appearing twice in the next line, the word suggests that the signs of suffering that the poet sees in the faces of the people he encounters are so deeply etched that they obtrude themselves on his notice and become profoundly engraved on his consciousness. This, together with the repetition mentioned above, vividly and unforgettably imprints on the mind of the reader the deeply-ingrained powerlessness, hopelessness and total absence of joy or contentment of a vast section of the general population, for, in this poem, London represents the British people in general. Moreover the cause of this is the formulation of decrees and prohibitions conceived in the minds of men, not a natural, immutable law.

His awareness of this all-embracing tragic state of affairs leads the poet to reflect and then comment on in the next two stanzas the various institutions governing the lives of ordinary men, and these I have discussed in the section dealing with symbolism.

Again, the examples to be found of the way in which repetition enhances meaning in poetry are legion. It is a device which is used with consummate skill by the good poet and it is extremely efficacious both in producing significant sound and rhythm and in calling attention to the theme or specific aspects of a poem. The reader, as a consequence, should not ignore the effect of repetition if he wishes to gain a comprehensive insight into a poem.

Chapter Twelve: Choice of Words

I have left this category to last because the choice of words by the poet is vital to the success or otherwise of all the techniques I have commented on in the previous chapters. It is extremely important to consider carefully every single word in a poem, even such seemingly trivial ones as articles and prepositions, for each word has significance in a good poem. There is, for example, an enormous difference between 'the' and 'a' or 'an' because, when the former is used to precede a common noun, there is the suggestion of some degree of familiarity, however little, with the object or person of the noun, while 'a' or 'an' implies that one is talking about something or someone in much vaguer or more general terms.

English is generally considered to be one of the richest languages in the Western world, if not the whole world, and in the BBC television production of *The Story of English* Robert MacNeil indicates that the English vocabulary is twice as large as the Spanish, French, Italian, and German (MacNeil, 1986: 'The Mother Tongue'). But simple abundance of words is not what makes English so rich; the richness of the language is predicated, rather, on the many subtle differences of nuance in words that appear to have the same meaning. One of the many instances of this is in the use of the words 'small' and 'little', for one may refer to a small girl, say, and the size of the girl is what would be in question. If, however, one talks of a little girl it is age (or youth) one is referring to. Even if the meaning of words is not totally different, the context in which they appear determines their exact connotation. Moreover,

there appear to be many different words that have the same meaning, but this is actually not the case, for depending on the way they are used, they acquire differences that must not be ignored if a full appreciation of the text is to be achieved. In order to ascertain exactly what this is, it is useful to substitute a synonym or another possible word for a word in a poem, and then the reason for the poet's choice of one word rather than another with a similar meaning becomes clear. Thus in 'The Second Coming' by Yeats, while 'does not' could replace 'cannot' in line 2 ('Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ The falcon cannot hear the falconer'), as both words mean the bird does not hear the call of the falconer, 'cannot' has the added implication that even if it tries, it is not able to hear, and so an important aspect of what Yeats is saying in this poem would be lost if 'does not' were used. In the same way Wordsworth in the sonnet previously discussed uses '*This* sea' rather than '*The* sea' (my italics), and this places him in a particular location actually looking at a specific stretch of the sea rather than contemplating the sea in general. This gives the first line of the poem immediacy and force, which permeates the whole sonnet with the vehemence of the poet's feelings.

Even the placing of a word in a line or sentence is important, as I have tried to show in the chapter on form, but it can also alter meaning, and an interesting illustration of this can be seen if we add, in different positions, the word 'only' to the following simple sentence:

John hired an old car yesterday.

If one places 'only' at the beginning of the sentence, the meaning is that John was the only person to hire an old car on that day; if 'only' comes after 'John' the sentence means that he did not buy the car but merely hired it; if 'only' precedes 'an' it means that a car was all that John hired that day, but after 'an', that that was the only old car the company or person he hired it from possessed; between 'old' and 'car' the implication is, again, that the old car was the only car the person or company had; 'only' before 'yesterday' stresses recency, but after 'yesterday' it indicates one single occasion. The factors I have mentioned help explain why English is so difficult for foreigners to learn, but is also the source of the prodigious amount of good English poetry that exists.

English speakers in South Africa commonly use the elision 'I'll' for a future action of the first person singular, 'you'll' for that of the second, and 'he'll', 'she'll' or 'it'll' for the third person singular, while the same is true for their plural forms, but in England the use of 'I shall' or 'we shall' is much more frequent. Because of this elision, however, the full significance of 'I'll' as opposed to 'I shall', for example, is often overlooked. The fact is that 'shall' is used for denoting future action in the first person, plural or singular ('I' and 'we'), and 'will' for the second and third person singular and plural ('you', 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they' respectively). If this usage is inverted, however, purpose or determination is being expressed.

This may sound very trivial but an illustration of how this can effect meaning and event in the central theme of a poem can be found in Shakespeare's sonnet XVIII:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, 5
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st, 10
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

(Vendler, 1997: 119)

The casual reader may well at first conclude that the theme of this poem is that, though everything and everyone that is beautiful must eventually fade and die, the beauty of the person the speaker is addressing is immortal and will be remembered even after he or she is dead. He would of course be right, but it is my contention that the theme extends even beyond this, if one does not ignore the way Shakespeare uses the word 'shall' in this poem. In the first line the word 'shall' simply forms part of the question that indicates Shakespeare's difficulty in deciding on what he will find that is lovely enough to compare with the beauty of the person he is describing. In line 9, however, 'thy eternal summer' (or 'it') is the subject of the verb 'shall not fade', and for the ordinary use of the future tense 'shall' would be 'will', and this would be

appropriate if Shakespeare wanted only to comment on something like the fact that the beauty concerned is so tremendous that it will live on in people's memory. When he uses the auxiliary verb 'shall', though, he is saying that it is his purpose and determination to ensure that this beauty is never forgotten.

In conjunction with the last two lines, these words then mean that as long as men exist and are able to see and read, the speaker will make certain that, through this poem, they will always remember the beloved's beauty. If one follows this to its logical conclusion one must realize that the theme of the poem extends beyond that mentioned above, and leads to the speaker's conviction that art outlives man, and *this* is what I believe the central theme of this poem is.

Something similar happens in George Herbert's 'Love', in which line 8 reads, 'Love said, you shall be he'. Here the subject of the verb 'to be' in the future tense is 'you' which is the second person and which takes 'will' to express ordinary future tense. The inversion to 'shall' here denotes that it is omnipotent Love's (or God's) purpose to *make* Herbert the guest worthy of being there.

In Herbert's poem 'The Collar', though, something like the reverse takes place. The first four lines of this poem are:

I struck the board and cried, No more,
I will abroad.
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free; free as the road

The word 'will' in the second line here rather than 'shall' for the first person future denotes not simple intention but strong determination to abjure the life he is living, and this in graphic opposition to the weaker 'shall' in the following line. The many questions and arguments that follow arouse the suspicion that this resolution is not quite as strong as he is trying to convince himself it is and this is confirmed by the ending of the poem.

Andrew Marvell does the same kind of thing in the last two lines of 'To His Coy Mistress':

Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Here the word 'will', the subject of which is 'we' (that is, first person plural), rather than 'shall' is used to express the poet's determination to enjoy to the full what they have while they have it and thus time will pass very quickly for them.

I should like to comment now on one word that is used in an unusual way in two very different poems: 'The Flower-fed Buffaloes' by Vachel Lindsay, and 'No worst there is none' by Hopkins. The word 'sing' is defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as meaning to utter words in tuneful succession especially in accordance with a set tune, to produce vocal melody or to make articulate melodious sounds, to compose poetry or to celebrate in verse. The association with this word is thus usually joy and happiness but 'sing' can also mean to call out loudly or to shout. This last is clearly the reason for Hopkins's choice of the word 'sing' in the words 'on an age-old anvil wince and sing' in

his sonnet for it conveys, especially together with 'wince', the intensity of the pain and suffering he is being subjected to.

Vachel Lindsay uses the word in line 3 of his poem which is:

Ranged where the locomotives sing—

The word 'sing' in this poem does not have the same connotation as it does in Hopkins's poem. The word is also not associated with joy and happiness, for the locomotives have taken the place of the buffaloes which gave the poet so much pleasure and which he feels are intrusive and ugly. He uses 'sing' to impart the high-pitched, lingering note of the trains on their rails, which contrasts with the silence or the intermittent sounds of the buffaloes. The irritating noise, which amounts almost to a scream, made by the mechanical trains is one of man's desecrations of nature lamented by the poet. In neither of these cases, however, is there a suggestion of anything of a tuneful or melodious nature.

It would be laborious to extract words from many different poems in order to illustrate the importance of gauging their exact shade of meaning in each particular poem, and so I have decided to use only one poem and to look at various words in it, not in connection with the other techniques but in connection with how they contribute to the mood, atmosphere, feeling and meaning of the poem in general. The poem I have chosen for this purpose is 'Neutral Tones', by Thomas Hardy (Hardy, 1970: 159):

Chapter Twelve

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
—They had fallen from an ash, and were grey.

Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove 5
Over tedious riddles of years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro
On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die; 10
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing....

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree, 15
And a pond edged with greyish leaves.

Not all poems have titles but if they do they must be taken into consideration though their full significance is not always apparent at first. In this title the word 'Neutral' can mean colour that is not distinctly marked, or indifference or apathy. 'Tones' can refer to the tenor of musical notes or the voice as well as different shades of colour.

In the first stanza the words 'white', 'winter' and 'ash' all suggest pale, weak shades of colour and the stanza ends with the word 'grey' which is also a colour that is not strong or vibrant. These words all contribute to the

colourless, dreary, bleak atmosphere in the stanza and relate to the first meaning of 'neutral' and last of 'tones' that I gave above.

The first word of the poem, 'We', at once announces that what follows must centre on a personal experience which the poet shares with one or more people but the words 'between us' in line 7 make it clear that there are only two people involved.

The second word 'stood' in line 1 suggests that the pose of these people is a very static and also rather uncomfortable one in its lack of relaxation and repose, which a word such as 'sat', 'strolled' or even 'walked' would convey. Together with the emphasis on this word the reader is made aware of an air of uneasiness, rigidity and even formality in their attitude.

The next word 'by' is an indeterminate one so that their position in relation to and proximity to the pond is vague which words such as 'near' or 'beside' would give a far clearer indication of. This is followed by the words 'a pond' of which 'a' denotes that the pond is not one the poet knows or has any particular feeling for or even remembers clearly the position of. A 'pond' has neither the beauty nor depth of a lake, dam, or pool, but is more closely related to a large puddle and is insignificant and featureless so that even the stretch of water the poet remembers is unremarkable.

The last phrase of this line 'that winter's day' is indefinite in terms of the exact date or day of the week, but the word 'that' is very strong in its connotation that the particular day stands out very clearly in his memory, as does the cold of the winter, because of the events he is to describe to us. This first line then indicates at once to the reader that this express day is

memorable to the poet though the memories are not happy ones and his depressed spirits are reflected in his surroundings.

The word 'And' repeated at the beginning of the next two lines has the effect of adding one detail after another, step by step, to a picture being painted until it is complete. The rays of the sun, because it is winter, are 'white' or thin and bloodless, and therefore they bestow little warmth or radiance, and the sun is compared with a child that has been rebuked by a parent and is therefore downcast, chastened and pale so that all its natural vitality and vigour is in abeyance. This image suggests strongly that there is some kind of wrongdoing present and what this is becomes explicit towards the end of the poem.

To this picture of destitution and coldness is added the detail of the leaves on the ground, where the words 'a few' denote that even of these there is a scarcity. These leaves simply 'lay', which word suggests inertia and lifelessness, and their resting-place is hard, dry and barren. The poet uses the word 'starving' rather than, say, 'frozen', because he wants to convey the idea that even the ground they stand on is deprived of sustenance and nourishment. The word 'sod' as opposed to 'ground' or 'earth' gives the impression of a stony, impenetrable surface and this augments the scene of chilly aridity that the preceding words have painted.

After a pause in which the poet seems to ponder over the source of these leaves and then look up to see where they have come from, we learn that the tree they have been part of is an ash. In this line 'fallen' rather than a word such as 'came' suggests a kind of decline or even conquest, and the sort of

tree the poet chooses is an ash rather than an oak, yew, elm or any of the many he could have elected to use. Ash is the grey, powdery substance that remains when something has been burned out until nothing beautiful, useful or pleasurable is left, and once again the idea of eradication is present. The leaves themselves are not a warm colour like red, brown or gold, but are grey; nor are they crisp, but lack all vestiges of freshness, and so the last touch is added to a representation of utter desolation and dismal, gaunt dreariness.

The first word in the next stanza, 'Your', signals the diversion of the poet's attention from his surroundings to the person he is with and the phrase 'Your eyes on me' indicates the nature of the attention she pays to the poet. If one substituted this phrase with 'You looked at me' one would get the feeling of at least a modicum of interest in her gaze but the words here suggest the way her look rests on him fleetingly and without curiosity or interest and she seems not really to see him as a person at all. This is confirmed by the word 'rove' in the simile that follows for it suggests restlessness and a search for something new, different and exciting which would not be the case if the poet had used 'move' or 'rest' for this word. It also suggests that his companion does not look *squarely at him as though she is uneasy and on edge.*

The rest of the simile in line 6 confirms in the word 'tedious' the impression created in the previous line and compares her attitude with that of a person contemplating a riddle or puzzle that has long ago been 'solved'. The word 'riddles' is indicative of intriguing enigmas the solving of which provides enjoyment, diversion and excitement. The pleasure of a riddle, though, lies in the thought required to find an answer or the surprise the solution offers but

once this has been arrived at, there is little object in engaging with it, and these words make her boredom with him apparent. The words 'years ago' rather than 'long ago' lend intimacy to the image since they imply something that has happened within the life-span of their relationship and so suggest that the image is relevant to them personally.

The comparison in this simile is between the intense interest in the solving of a riddle and that which lovers have in one another and their search for the innermost nature, feelings and thoughts of their partners, which becomes seriously blunted if one or both cease to hold consequence for the other or each other, so that what was once fascinating and piquing becomes dull and banal. The image of the solving of riddles is a particularly vivid one but the way the death of a relationship is presented would lose its originality and power if other words had been used. For example, one could use words such as 'Over boring scenes seen often before', but these would lose poignancy and lack the cluster of associations that Hardy's words have.

The idea of tedium is further advanced in line 7, which implies the inconsequence of their conversation. The word 'some' is a very imprecise term and conveys the triviality of what is said so that the poet can no longer remember at all what it was about. The word 'played' is also very effective in that when there is play in something that should be taut, the resultant slackness makes it feeble and inefficacious and this, together with the lack of purpose and significance that 'play' implies, indicates how devoid of all real meaning what they say is, so that it becomes a kind of social chit-chat which is used when silence becomes intolerable. Substitute 'a few' for 'some' and

'passed' for 'played' and the image is incomparably weakened. Added to the first part of the line the words 'to and fro' transmit the idea of each partner looking for something to say and seizing on something in the words of the other to comment on without anything important ever passing between them, and the notion of a game like tennis in which the ball is sent backwards and forwards, rounds out the image which the word 'played' first initiated.

The last line of this stanza, line 8, means that because once the couple meant so much to each other and everything these two people did or said was of such great interest and importance to one another, the kind of cold, meaningless talk they now engage in is much harder to cope with than would be the case if they had been mere acquaintances. The word 'lost' in this line increases the melancholy of the situation with its association with bereavement and deprivation.

In the first line of the third stanza the words 'on your mouth' rather than 'on your face' depict very clearly the way in which the 'smile' is an arrangement of the muscles around the mouth but which never reaches the eyes so that it is devoid of any sign of affection, pleasure or happiness and is merely a kind of *polite rictus*. Moreover, Hardy calls it a 'thing' which suggests an absence of identity, a travesty of the real thing, and that it is in reality a word to use for want of a more suitable one. The word 'deadest' to describe it is very highly charged and it recalls Antony's words in *Julius Caesar* when he describes Brutus's stabbing of Caesar as being '...the most unkindest cut of all' (II.iii.185). Both Hardy and Shakespeare are being deliberately ungrammatical to express the intensity of the quality in question and the fact that it is

incomparable. Consider how this would be enfeebled here by words such as 'coldest' or 'most lifeless'.

'Deadeast' is immediately contradicted at the beginning of the next line by the word 'Alive' which, however, is qualified by the word 'enough'. The suggestion here is that the smile has enough of a trace of the way she once smiled at the poet to remind him of what once was, so that 'the strength to die' suggests its power to arouse in Hardy a terrible feeling of loss, and it makes the coldness of the smile even more difficult for him to endure.

In the third line of this stanza the smile has become a 'grin' which not only evokes the leer of a skull but also has overtones of jeering and derision. It is a kind of grimace that mocks the warmth of a smile but a word like 'smirk' would not convey much of the above. More than this, however, is the impression of bitterness it leaves, and though 'bitterness' is the only word for an emotion that the poet has used so far, it strongly conveys the feeling that permeates the whole poem.

The word 'swept' with its connotations of a rapid, fleeting but wholesale action together with 'thereby' seems to suggest that the bitterness, which both the poet and his lover seem to harbour, is momentary only but in the next line the poet voices qualms both about the duration of his feelings and the future. In this line there is a comparison between the swift flight past of a bird of ill-omen like a crow or a rook and the ephemeral nature of the 'grin of bitterness', but the word 'ominous' belies the idea of the transience of the poet's resentment for it implies a premonition on the part of the poet that this is not to

be a unique moment of desolation or of experiencing the kind of death that the first three stanzas of this poem have so tellingly portrayed.

In the last stanza Hardy reveals that his foreboding has not been ill-founded. 'Since then' in the first line of the stanza encompasses much more than something like 'later' or 'subsequently' would, for the phrase pinpoints the day of these events in time and the way in which it has become fixed in the poet's mind, but it also implies that this is his first experience of the death of something he considered immortal. This last is enlarged upon and vividly articulated in what follows.

The word 'keen' in this line denotes sharp pain but also a finely-honed and fierce emotional anguish. Moreover, it seems to personify love as being sadistic and eager to inflict pain. The tragedy lies in the word 'lessons' which means something that must be learned but the plural of the word 'lesson' conveys that what is being taught is not finally mastered and that the poet falls into the same trap again more than once. What the poet is forced to re-experience with great pain is that it is love itself that is deceptive in that what promises to be permanent and enduring can fade and pass away leaving only *the dregs and memory of a very powerful emotion*. There is, moreover, the suggestion that this belief in the permanence of the emotion is a condition of falling in love and that the thought that the feeling is mutable is impossible to envisage.

The words 'wrings with wrong' in the next line could be substituted with a phrase such as 'hurts badly', even 'wounds grievously' or a similar phrase, but in that case the wealth of meaning in the words Hardy uses would be lost. The

word 'wrings' is usually associated with the removal of moisture from an item that has been washed or become soaked, which is achieved by twisting it very forcefully in opposite directions until every drop of liquid has been squeezed out. This is a very graphic evocation of the savage draining of strength, hope and joy that the poet undergoes again on similar occasions and an expression of the prodigious unhappiness he feels here. The word 'wrong' reveals that the poet's bitterness is occasioned by the egregious sense of injustice and betrayal he feels now and on subsequent occasions when his belief in the durability of love is shattered.

After the comma in this line, the poet uses the word 'shaped' rather than something such as 'shown' or 'recalled' because this word is extremely effective in conveying the way that memory works. There is an implicit comparison here between the way in which a picture is filled out detail by detail and the way in which the memory of a particular scene forms in the mind. This scene corresponds closely with that which he has described in the preceding stanzas, and again the word 'and' is used frequently in a short space (it appears three times in two lines) each time after a pause suggested by a comma. This conveys the way the memory seizes on an item and then gradually another until the whole picture, though not exactly the same as the original, is clear in the mind. The words 'to me' suggest that the memory comes to Hardy unbidden and perhaps against his own inclination.

The same scene appears to the poet but this time the various elements emerge in a different order, one which seems to imply the depth of the impression each one makes on him in descending order, but the whole is

imbued with the same dreary, grey lifelessness and the hollow emptiness of the neutral tones or lack of emotion as the original experience was. The first thing that comes to mind is the face of the woman he once loved and the two short words 'Your face' in line 15 reveal clearly the horror of the change of her feelings betrayed by her expression and looks which Hardy describes in the second and third stanzas. This economy of words in its starkness is infinitely more telling than a repetition of detail would be.

The sun, which in the first stanza was merely 'white as though *chidden* by God' is now '*God-curs'd*' (my italics) as though divine vengeance consigning it to destruction without the possibility of recovery were being wreaked on it, and this has the implication that this experiences with love have further embittered rather than mellowed the poet.

The next item the poet mentions is the tree the exact nature of which has faded in his memory so that it has lost its identity and become simple a tree, and the pond is now 'edged with greyish leaves'. The 'few' leaves of the first stanza seem to have increased in his mind and form a kind of border around the pond, while their colour is no longer so definite, as the word 'greyish' implies.

The central thought in this poem of the way in which one is deceived and disillusioned by love forms the basis on which what I believe to be the main theme rests. This is that when one feels a very powerful emotion, the details surrounding the events that cause it become so deeply etched into the memory that whenever something similar occurs evoking similar emotions, the

circumstances and the scene of the first time it happened spring to mind although the minutiae involved may vary.

This perhaps sounds prosaic or even self-evident, but the words (and the other devices) Hardy chooses to use in this poem to convey this truth make it immeasurably meaningful and eminently unforgettable so that its impact remains with one always but especially when one undergoes precisely this kind of experience.

I have already said that I consider the poet's choice of words to be the most important device of all and I have given many reasons for this, but I cannot emphasise enough how vital it is for the full understanding of a poem to look with the utmost care at each word in the poem.

For me, the best way to approach a new poem is to read it two or three times and make absolutely certain that I am aware of *all* the meanings of the words used. A failure to do so can make an image or even a whole section of a poem obscure or incomprehensible. (A glaring example of this involves a poem I commented on in a previous chapter. When I presented students with Emily Dickinson's 'There came a wind like a bugle', they simply assumed that 'moccasin' is a kind of shoe, and were consequently very puzzled by this image and its place in the sequence of events being described.) Having done this, I like to think about the poem over a period of time before analysing it in detail, to plumb the full depth of meaning inherent in it.

The content of the poem is often fairly clear from the beginning but the theme may emerge only after close analysis and the theme is most probably the poet's reason for writing the poem at all. This usually involves a fundamental issue the poet has had to confront and come to terms with and which is germane to mankind in general, or an aspect of life he feels an urgent need to communicate. Frequently the writing of the poem may have a cathartic effect for the poet, as is the case, I believe, in 'Brooding Grief'.

I intend to analyse this poem line by line, though I am very conscious of the fact that this is not the only way to approach the analysis of a poem, that no line can be absolutely divorced from the others, and that this cannot be done mechanically nor always rigidly adhered to, as I hope to show in what follows. The subject of this particular poem is clearly the death of the poet's mother, the effect it has on him, the coming to terms with his feelings about this, and the conclusion he comes to, and this constitutes the content of the poem.

I mentioned in the last chapter that it is unwise to ignore the title of a poem if it has one but its full significance may not be immediately apparent and so in this case I shall not comment on it at once. The first word of the poem is the indefinite article 'A' which straight away introduces an element, even if only a small frisson, of surprise, for it implies that this is not a leaf the poet has been watching but one that appears suddenly to him. The leaf is described as being yellow and the association of this word with illness, age, decay and death inevitably springs to mind, especially in this poem which is about a death. There are, however, contradictory associations with this word, namely, light, brightness, warmth and therefore life, and the question is which of these is appropriate here. To decide on this the reader should look at the immediate context of the word, that is, the line in which it appears rather than in the poem as a whole.

The word that provides the answer for the reader is the humble preposition 'from' which the poet uses rather than something like 'in', because 'from' implies a contrast between the leaf and the 'darkness' which is the reason for the poet's seeing it at all. What makes the leaf stand out from the blanket of darkness behind it is the brightness of the colour. The chances are that had it been red or brown the poet might not have noticed it. The association with 'yellow' in this case, then, is lightness or brightness which is indicative of life rather than death. This is reinforced in lines 2 and 8 and is vital in determining the theme of the poem. The word 'from', moreover, confirms the idea of surprise initiated by 'A' at the beginning of the line since it suggests that the leaf

quite unexpectedly springs out from the darkness and obtrudes itself on the notice of the poet.

In the simile in line 2 the comparison is only between the *movement* of the leaf and that of a frog, for in size, shape, colour and texture they are quite dissimilar. When one considers that a frog can jump several times its own height, that it leaps in unpredictable directions, and that it is often invisible until it does so but that when it does it is startling and impressive in the vigour and energy it displays, the aptness of the simile becomes apparent. This liveliness and strength of movement is quite incompatible with what might have been the reader's first association with 'yellow', and it also conveys the idea of the astonishment of the observer already imparted by 'A' and 'from' in line 1.

The word 'Hops' at the beginning of line 2 rather than something like 'jumps' or 'springs' gives this line a jerky rhythm because it places the emphasis in an unusual position and enforces a slight pause after it, and this rhythm reflects the movement of the leaf. This, together with the aspirate at the beginning of this word which has the effect almost of a gasp, is another indication of the poet's startled reaction to what he sees. The words 'before me' rather than, say, 'in front of me' convey the poet's inability to ignore the leaf, so close is its focal range and so suddenly vigorous is its action.

The dashes at the end of line 2 and before line 3 indicate a very long pause in which at first there is a complete abeyance of thought and feeling in the poet, so taken aback is he, and then the resumption of these, the nature of which is expressed in line 3. This line is in the form of a question which is a reflection of the poet's bewilderment at his reaction to the sight of the leaf. The

word 'start' is the final endorsement of the idea of the poet's being startled which has already been suggested in the first two lines and conveys a sudden sharp movement or even a flinching in reaction to a shock.

The words 'stand still', however, give rise to two differing opinions with regard to the location and activity of the poet when he sees the leaf and exactly when this takes place. Some people see the poet as walking somewhere out in the open after his mother has died and then literally coming to a standstill, while others see him standing in his mother's sick-room, probably by a window, and for these people the words 'stand still' are figurative and relate to the poet's thought processes. I incline to the latter view particularly because of the tense in 'was watching', but this difference of opinion is unimportant in terms of the interpretation of the poem as a whole, and I mention it because it constitutes an example of the way details in a poem may vary according to personal predilection and preference. The fact is that 'stand still' must be figurative too even if one takes the first view, and to substantiate this I now want to look at the title of the poem. There can be no problem about the word 'Grief' but 'Brooding' needs examination. To brood over something is not the same as to think about, contemplate, or meditate on it, for these are very often productive, while brooding (usually over a slight, injury or some kind of unhappiness) is unhealthy in that one's thought tends to go round and round over the same points and feelings without proper proportion or perspective and a consequent failure to arrive at a balanced view of what has happened. The result is that whatever has disturbed one is exacerbated rather than resolved, and this is what is happening in the poet as he agonises over his pain and deep

sense of loss in the death, or imminent death, of his mother. It is the unexpected appearance of the leaf that forces this kind of mental activity in the poet to cease.

His feelings about this are clearly indicated by the tone of this line which is determined by the word 'should' rather than a word like 'do' or 'did'. Consider the tone of 'Why should I?' in reply to a request, expectation or command. What is being expressed is resentment, indignation, reluctance and even truculence, and these feelings are caused here by the moving leaf which has forced the poet to notice it and jolted him out of what can, after all, be the quite comfortable and comforting rut of his preoccupation with his own misery, and which prevents and arguably absolves him from dealing with the often irritating and troublesome issues we all have to cope with on a daily basis.

The space between lines 3 and 4 indicates a pause even longer than that enforced by the dashes between lines 2 and 3 and here the poet reflects on the effect the leaf has had on him and gathers his wits in an attempt to answer the question he has posed to himself in line 3. In line 4 the tone changes to one of bitter desolation and perhaps even defensiveness as the poet explains the reason and perhaps attempts to justify his feelings. There is also, however, a change of Tense from the Present to the Imperfect Past in 'was watching' which for some readers is evidence of a kind of flash-back, and the rest of the poem is in the Past Tense until by the end of the poem the resolution of the crisis has been reached.

The words 'was watching' have another and even more significant effect than this though, because, among other things, they denote that the process

of the poet's mother's dying was a long, drawn-out affair. This is achieved not only by the alliteration and assonance of those words but also by one's recognition of the fact that 'watching' something happen is a much more protracted business than 'seeing' it do so. The poet's anguish is immeasurably increased by his having to be a witness to the slow deterioration and constant pain of the mother he so loves. Had she died quickly the poet would undoubtedly still have felt deep grief and perhaps shock but the experience would have been less harrowing and agonising, and easier to overcome.

The words 'the woman that bore me' rather than 'my mother' also have deep impact. Apart from considerations of rhythm and rhyme, these words imply a much stronger bond than 'my mother'. It is possible, after all, to call a foster- or step-mother 'mother' but only one woman conceives and carries one within her own body for nine months (physically tied to her), so that the closeness of flesh and blood and bone as well as of love is emphasised here. These words, then, convey the depth of the attachment the poet feels for his mother.

I should like now briefly to examine one of the images in this poem in some detail—that in line 5 and half of 6, namely

Stretched in the brindled darkness
Of the sick-room

The visual imagery for every reader in these lines must be at least a room, a bed ('sick-room'), a certain quality of light, and a woman on or in the bed. Details with regard to size or shape of the room, furniture, and windows will differ

from person to person but the quality of light is not in doubt. The word 'brindled' means patchy or irregularly striped but in conjunction with 'darkness' the conclusion must be drawn that there is very little light and that the room is very dim. Though one knows there is a woman in the bed, her appearance remains hazy, for nowhere in the poem is there a reference to what she looks like and in any case, the semi-darkness prevents a clear picture of her being formed.

The profusion of s's in these lines suggest a silent hush, while the olfactory imagery may be that of antiseptics or medicines associated with the care of an invalid, or the sickly, musty odour of long illness, and it is possible that for some readers what they smell also excites the sense of taste. The tactile imagery is evoked by the word 'Stretched' which denotes the stiffness or rigidity of the woman in the bed.

This sensory imagery is accompanied by very strong emotional imagery. The word 'Stretched', particularly when accompanied by 'out' can indicate luxurious relaxation but here the word stands alone, is heavily stressed by its position at the beginning of the line, and in this context is a long, slow word. What is conveyed here, then, is the contraction of the muscles when one is in acute pain so that the intensity of the woman's suffering is made very clear. The reader feels enormous pity and compassion for the woman who is enduring such affliction, but even more for the poet who must stand by helplessly watching the torment of one he loves so dearly without being able to assuage it in any way.

The word 'sick-room' adds to the horror of the situation for it tells us that the poet's mother is not in a hospital for then the word 'ward' might have been used. She is at home but since there is rarely if ever a room in a private house that is designated a sick-room, this word tells us that she must have been ill for a long time already, and this again conveys the idea of a long, drawn-out illness evoked by 'was watching' in line 4.

The intellectual component of this image is very strong. Firstly, there is the idea that it is worse to watch a person one loves suffer than to suffer oneself for it is common to feel that one would be better able to endure the pain than the sufferer, and this is compounded when one cannot help in any meaningful way. Secondly, in the word 'brindled' is the evocation of a contrast between light and darkness, life and death which is present already in the first two lines of the poem, and here in this image, the struggle between life and death is suggested, one in which death or darkness is clearly in the ascendancy. This image occurs again in the last lines and is integral to the theme of the poem as a whole.

After the comma in line 6, 'rigid' seems to confirm the stiffness of 'stretched' but the words 'with will' quickly apprise the reader of the fact that it is a concerted *mental* effort that is being referred to here and that this is voluntary rather than involuntary as in 'Stretched'. These words arouse the expectation of a fight for survival, of a dogged determination, a gathering of the faculties and an adamant refusal to relax in order to achieve this aim. 'To die' in line 7 thus comes as a terrible shock to the reader, especially since the expectation of the opposite of 'die' is aroused when the poet does not end line 6 with

these words, for the reader's intellectual faculties are subconsciously suspended at the end of a line. This shock is then compounded by the knowledge that this woman is fighting against man's strongest instinct, that of survival, in her striving for release from the agony she is enduring. The stark brevity of line 7 emphasises the torment of both the poet and his mother, for the former is clearly aware of his mother's state of mind, and the reader cannot but be appalled by the pathos, tragedy and horror of the situation.

Another effect of the shortness of this line is that it portrays the cutting off of a life before the natural expectancy which, together with the fact that an old woman would not have to fight so hard to die nor would a severe illness last so long, leads to the conclusion that the poet's mother is relatively young nor can the poet be very old, and this aggravates the grief of the poet. The rhythm of these two words is slow and heavy, almost like a death-knell, and the full-stop after 'die' gives a sense of finality, the closing of a chapter, or in this case the final cessation of a life.

The shortness of line 7 makes for a pause in which the poet seems to struggle with the emotion that threatens to overwhelm him while the reader, too, needs time to recover from the jolt he has received from this line. Having regained equanimity, Lawrence begins the next line with the word 'And' which is indicative of the poet's return to the first lines about the leaf and its effect on him. The tone changes in this line, being much calmer and quieter at first, but by the time we come to 'tore me' it again contains resentment, reluctance, anger and distress. The word 'quick' in this line refers not only to the rapidity of movement of the leaf, but also to its liveliness for 'quick' also means 'alive' or

'living', as in 'the quick and the dead'. This fact is again incompatible with the association of 'yellow' with illness and death.

The words 'tore me' in this line rhyme with 'bore me' in line 4 and the word 'tore' has connotations of pain and violence as well as reluctance, as in the case of being torn away from something pleasurable and engrossing. The implication is that the sight of the leaf has wrenched the poet from his self-absorbed brooding, something he is unwilling to do and which causes him unpleasantness and no little annoyance at first. The words 'bore me' refer to child-bearing and thus child-birth which involves pain and acute discomfort not only for the mother but also for the child which must leave a comfortable environment of constant temperature, weightlessness, security and untouchability to emerge into hostile surroundings where it encounters some pain and discomfort. This is why child-birth involves a struggle, for the child is reluctant to leave the womb and feels distress, fear and pain, even anger. The poet, too, while he has certainly not been happy, has been protected from the often harsh and irksome exigencies that normal life imposes, and he therefore feels the emotions suggested by 'should' in line 3 as well as wretchedness.

This rhyme, then, is very effective not only in its allusion to the poet's feelings about the leaf but in its suggestion of a kind of rebirth which the word 'Back' at the beginning of line 9 strengthens. The brooding over his mother's plight represents almost a state of suspended animation of his spiritual and emotional being, certainly a self-imposed isolation from the main-stream of life, which the sight of the leaf forces him to abandon and to confront again. Life as we know it he describes as a 'rainy swill' and 'swill' is actually pig's

food, a mushy mess which the rotting, disintegrating, wet, dead leaves present. The word 'swill' rhymes with 'will' in line 6 so that the connection between the dismal dreariness of the decaying leaves and his mother's insupportable situation is apparent. The word 'this' in this line gives a feeling of immediacy and a definitive sense of a common existence.

What the poet portrays life as being at the end of line 9 is hardly inviting, but again he confounds our presuppositions in the next line, in which he depicts life as a compound of bad, good and indifferent elements. The 'rainy swill/ Of leaves' is distinctly unpleasant. 'Lamps' are the opposite in that they provide light, a certain warmth, and security, and 'traffic' can be either or both at the same time, depending on circumstances and the particular interpretation of the word. The word 'mingled' makes it clear that he now accepts that life is a mixture, that no life is always happy and enjoyable or vice versa, but consists of experiences of all kinds, and that sometimes contrary emotions even exist simultaneously. This what Juliet means when, in *Romeo and Juliet* she uses the oxymoron:

...Parting is such sweet sorrow.

(II.ii.184)

At the end of the final line of the poem the words 'before me' are a repetition of these words in line 2 but while in line 2 they referred to something right in front of the poet, they now imply something stretching endlessly ahead of him. The poet achieves this last effect by the length of this line, by the appar-

ently unlimited listing of items like leaves and lamps with 'and' between each one, and by the rhythm which is slow, halting and monotonous. There is a note of tired acquiescence in what he knows he must confront in his realisation of what lies ahead of him and in his knowledge that one cannot ignore or deny life, and this is emphasised by the repetition of 'before me'.

In its length this line is in very strong contrast to line 7, which I have said depicts the unnatural shortness of a life. Line 10, however, reaffirms the notion that the poet is not very old and that, all things being equal, he still has a long life ahead of him which he must live as best he can. This poem does not end on a joyous or triumphant note but there is resignation and a kind of weary acceptance in his tone in his acknowledgement that even for him there will be a time when he may be happy again and will be able to take pleasure in some things in life.

By this time the theme of the poem has become clear. It is true that it has to do with life and death but it is not enough to say only this, for the theme of a poem makes a statement about a truth of life. In this poem, Lawrence describes the way in which he arrives at this truth, which is that, however grief-stricken, desolate and bereft we may feel over the death of a loved one, we are alive and must go on living. Furthermore, he implies that people seldom remain constantly and permanently unhappy but that with time they will experience other more agreeable emotions as well.

Though there is more that could be said about this poem, this fairly comprehensive analysis will, I hope, achieve the aim stated at the beginning of this chapter.

Conclusion

I wrote at the outset of this work that I did not intend to become involved with different theories of poetry, the many varying critical approaches that are current today, fashionable critical idiom, or what is and what is not politically correct, because my aim was to present one way of approaching poetry in order to understand as fully as possible what the poet wishes to convey. Moreover, I continue to believe that each work of literature should be regarded as an entity in its own right, and that unless the writer's words are able to speak to all men in all places and at all times, their value will be only transitory. Wellek and Warren's 'generational' observation (originally made in 1942) still holds true today:

The aesthetic structures of [Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and Wordsworth] seem so complex and rich that they can satisfy the sensibility of successive ages.

(Wellek, R. and A. Warren, 1956: 247)

I have also mentioned the fact that very many people have no idea at all of how to set about analysing a poem, because they have never really been taught how to do so, and this fact continues to be borne in on me, together with their genuine expressions of regret that this is the case.

What I have said in this thesis is no doubt of no benefit to people who either instinctively grasp much of what the poet is saying, who have constructed their own method or adopted different methods of looking at

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poetry, or who work with or constantly read poetry. There are doubtless academics who will think that I am saying nothing new. Nor do I lay claim to doing so, if one has in mind novel approaches and sophisticated theories. I simply put forward one way of looking at poetry, but it is one which has worked for me both personally and in my teaching, and this emphasis seems to me particularly important today in South Africa, when so much stress is being placed on the acquisition of specific skills through outcomes-based approaches to learning. My thesis aims at a development of basic skills of analysis, and to do so it is necessary to return to practical fundamentals, as I have done.

Poetry is an endless source of pleasure from which many people are excluded because it represents an unfathomable mystery to them; the most they can hope to achieve is to understand the content of a poem and perhaps to glimpse in a very superficial way what the theme might be, though there are also many who are ignorant even of the difference between theme and content. If what I have said can help even a few people to appreciate, evaluate and assess poetry, then I feel that I will have achieved what I set out to do.

What I hope will have emerged from what I have written is the importance of knowing what questions we need to ask ourselves in reading a poem, and, if we are educators, what questions we need to ask students to help them to see the significance of a poet's work. One may not simply accept or ignore, for example, that the rhythm of a poem has changed, or that one line in it is very much longer or shorter than the others, or that the poet has used a semi-colon

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when he might have used a comma. One must examine every aspect of a poem and ponder over the reason for the poet's use of a particular device or word-usage, and when one finds an answer to these questions then one begins to come to an understanding of the poem and of the poet's intentions. Of course it goes without saying that a person with no sensitivity to language at all will never have success with poetry, but it is also true that such a person is *hardly likely* to want to.

The writing of this thesis has been for me not simply an arduous task, but a real labour of love too, for I believe very strongly indeed in the approach I have advocated, and though I could never say that all the students I taught benefited from this approach, many did, and that alone showed me that it has practical educational and cultural value.

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