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Exploring Poetry

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We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T. S. ELIOT

PREFACE

1.

THE ART OF poetry is so important and its principles are so widely misunderstood that every effort to explore and define its true position of power and usefulness may reasonably expect a welcome. In this book we have attempted a direct approach to the problem of appreciation through understanding and sympathy, developing as consistently as we can the interrelated motivations—individual, social, and universal—involved both in the creation of poetry and the response to it.

The essence of our approach lies in certain inductively derived principles concerning the nature and function of poetry. We have made an effort to state these principles clearly, to illustrate them convincingly, and to reiterate them variously. Though the teacher and student will find them developed at length in the earlier chapters of the book, it may be useful to state them briefly here. The discussions in the several chapters are intended to demonstrate more specifically their truth and usefulness. The copious anthology of poems for reading and analysis should provide ample material, with room enough for the reader to move around in and variety enough to let him pick and choose, to illustrate in many different ways the universality and value of poetry.

The authors believe that poetry is perhaps the most indispensable of all the humane arts and, if properly approached, much wider in its appeal and effect than is generally realized. Both the practice and the appreciation of poetry are natural activities, connected ultimately with the deepseated rhythms of the body itself. Nearly everyone has written, or attempted to write, verse on some occasion or other; and everyone has read it, or tried to read it, or wanted to read it. If the results have been disappointing, the fault lies, in part at least, with the teaching in elementary and high schools. This has often presented the reading of poetry as a mechanical (and boring) exercise in counting syllables, spotting and defining figures of speech and interpreting "messages"; or else as a kind of self-indulgent plunge into a warm bath of sentiment or tender emotion. Two figures of the poet have, as a result, taken form in the popular imagination. One is the bearded sage (Longfellow, Whittier, Browning), and the other is the sensitive plant (Shelley, Poe, Keats); neither, of course, has any but the remotest connection with the true poet or with the real figures so misunderstandingly revered or despised. The total effect is to stamp into the minds of the vast majority of our citizens, at the one period of their lives when they are most ready to respond to poetry, the notion that it is something removed from the realities of immediate living—something that exists in a rarer, nobler, prettier, sweeter, softer, namby-pamby sort of atmosphere where gentlewomen and sissies can be left to pursue it if they want to.

To overcome this prejudice it is necessary to emphasize the completeness with which the poet concerns himself with *all* aspects of human life, the ugly as well as the beautiful and the homely as well as the exalted. One of the ideas we wish to keep constantly before our readers is that there is no essential distinction between the familiar or homely occasions of poetry and the grand or exalted ones. The limerick, the nursery rhyme, and the popular jazz song may, if well enough written, be considered poems quite as legitimately as the sonnet, ode, and epic—and these more ambitious forms must also be "well enough written" before they can claim to be genuine poetry. We would maintain also that there is no *essential* difference between modern poetry and that of past epochs. Whatever is written in verse effectively enough to touch the heart and mind with its special intensity and thus speak to the universal elements in human nature is modern, no matter when it was written.

In the early chapters of this book, therefore, we have stressed the humanity and naturalness of poetry. We first consider it as an extension of the human voice. Its rhythms have a physical basis, and its occasions, whether public or private, are always human occasions. It has both a personal and a social use. It draws mankind together by extending the powers of feeling, while at the same time it sharpens and intensifies them. Thus poetry performs not merely a useful function but an essential one. It is an instrument of self-awareness. If the proper study of mankind is man, the study of poetry is one of the most important of its divisions. A century of romantic art and thought tended to emphasize the private, personal, subjective aspect of poetry; but much work of the last thirty-five years by psychologists, critics, and poets[1] has reasserted the classical concept of poetry as a public good. It is the art especially which, as R. G. Collingwood said of art in general, "is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness."[2]

If he is to cure that corruption, the poet must *see things* clearly; and he must feel accurately as well as intensely if he is to bring to wholesome consciousness something much more difficult to communicate than facts or ideas: namely, emotions, attitudes, and ways of feeling. That is why it is important near the beginning of our study to consider problems of craftsmanship, particularly those concerning imagery, figurative language, and rhythm, as we do in the middle sections of Chapter I. Our initial emphasis on its universal aspects and on its informal and homely occasions must not be allowed to obscure the fact that poetry is an art and that in various periods of the past there have been local and contemporary conventions governing forms of expression and patterns of verse. What is felt gains in power if its expression is controlled, dammed up, channeled, and then let loose in the right direction and at the right time. This principle of elementary engineering explains why poets use certain formal patterns and have accepted some consciously artificial conventions.[3]

When successfully used these patterns and conventions have become a source of intensified power or at least have saved the poet and the knowledgeable reader a vast amount of energy. For these reasons we must remind the teacher and student that such words as "artificial," "conventional," and "traditional" are used here most often in a neutral, descriptive sense, sometimes in a complimentary sense, and rarely, if at all, in a derogatory sense. To say, for example, that *The Rape of the Lock* or *Lycidas* is an artificial poem is not to suggest that it is unnatural or unoriginal—though the originality in each case is of a peculiar sort that needs to be defined—and certainly not to suggest that the poem is of a secondary sort of excellence. It is merely to name a source of its characteristic elegance and special kind of beauty.

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[1] Pound, Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Hulme, Richards, Leavis, and Auden—to name only a tew of the most influential.

[2] *Principles of Art.*

[3] These conventions are concerned with style, as in the poetic diction of the eighteenth century; with technique, as in the heroic couplet, blank verse, and Petrarchan sonnet; and with a whole background of literary, mythological and historical assumptions, as in the pastoral convention or the school of courtly love.

These are some of the attitudes the authors have expressed and illustrated in this book and some of the assumptions they have started from. It remains to give a brief account of the plan of the book and to make some suggestions for its use by the instructor and the student.

2.

The first two chapters are a general introduction to the study of poetry. The right approach, we suggest in the opening section of Chapter I, is to recognize that every poem is a projection of a human voice. If the student can be brought to appreciate the importance of reading poems aloud one of the major obstacles to his understanding of poetry will to an appreciable extent have been overcome, and he will be ready to enter sympathetically into the argument of the succeeding section and agree that poetry is not merely ornamental or pretty, not a luxury item on the periphery of life, but a vital and normal human activity. In the middle sections of the first chapter we enter into some considerations of craftsmanship, presented as untechnically as possible, in an attempt to give the student some of the essential tools of analysis and to acquaint him with the critical and descriptive terms connected with figurative language, imagery, and metrics. In the final section of the chapter we consider the unifying properties that make a poem *a* poem—a single entity composed by the integration of all the various factors previously dealt with. It should be clear by the end of the first chapter that a poem is the sum of all the elements into which it can be analyzed, and that its meaning, or "complete meaning" in I. A. Richards' phrase, is everything it does—the final total, that is, of its effect upon the most comprehending and sensitive reader. "To have great poets," wrote Whitman, "there must be great audiences too." Whatever the truth of this formula, it is almost as difficult, and quite as important, to be a great reader as to be a great poet.

Chapter II is exposition and argument aimed at showing how poetry is and always has been something that really matters. As emotion-arousing music, it has a social, ritualistic, and religious function that from primitive times to the present it has never ceased to fulfill in one way or another. This function, as the last section of the chapter suggests, is related to the way in which it leads us into the personal, rich, and self-examined life.

Chapters III and IV deal with three main types of poetry: descriptive, narrative, and dramatic. (Lyrical poetry has been considered in the earlier chapters.) The instructor can, if he wishes, vary the order of these chapters without losing the thread of any continuous argument. The main types of poetry are considered both as historically developing forms and in terms of what they are and do—in terms, that is, of esthetic theory and practical usefulness. Chapter V, devoted to the intellectual element in poetry, gives much attention to the uses of wit, ambiguity, and irony in satire and in metaphysical poetry. These considerations lead (both through certain affinities and certain contrasts) to a discussion of allegory and symbolism, which is developed throughout the three sections of Chapter VI.

Chapter VII, finally, is again a general one. It places poetry in its temporal frame of reference, discusses the distinction between classic and romantic art, and shows how some of the great poetic subjects, such as war and love, have been treated by writers from the Middle Ages to modern times. The book concludes with an analysis of some of the great philosophical and religious themes of quest and affirmation as developed in such mature poems as Whitman's *Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,* Yeats's *A Dialogue of Self and Soul,* and Eliot's *Little Gidding.* The close reading of these poems, it is hoped, will leave the student with an aroused awareness of the strong connection between the imaginative and the moral aspects of poetry.

The seven chapters are subdivided into 26 sections, each a single teaching unit extending over several class meetings. The sections are in every case followed by illustrative poems arranged in orderly sequence. After each grouping of poems there are questions and exercises. These follow up the thought of the preceding section, attempt to suggest relevant points about the specific poems, and bring up problems of comparison related to the purposes for which the poems are grouped as they are. Aimed at directing the student's thinking along independent lines—in other words, at stimulating critical thought—they give considerable scope for the exercise of individual judgment. Very few have a single "right" answer. One aspect of a good question, we think, is that it encourages the student to organize his feelings and ideas about a particular poem or poetic problem with more precision and interest than before and to justify his feelings and opinions by concrete references to the text at every point.

There are two other features of the Questions and Exercises which we must call to the attention of the instructor at the start. First, *many of the questions include specific information not only about the particular poem being examined but about poetic problems in general, and thus are to be considered an essential part of the text itself.* The notes included in the questions on Milton's *On the Late Massacre in Piemont* (page 18) and on Wallace Stevens' *Anecdote of the Jar* (pages 45-46) may be cited as two examples among many. And second, we have in general avoided questions, and footnotes, concerning simple dictionary definitions as well as other essential information available in handbooks of mythology or encyclopedias. We have done so because "looking it up" should be considered part of the exercise and under the instructor's guidance will become a valuable part of the student's training. It goes without saying, we think, that readers of literature should cultivate the habit of looking up words and allusions in the standard works of reference. The pleasures of illumination and discovery, if often for the incidental gleanings along the way, are greater when earned.

Among the many poems analyzed in detail in the body of the text we include a few difficult and genuinely complex poems; John Donne's *Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward,* Hart Crane's *Passage,* and T. S. Eliot's *Gerontion* and *Little Gidding* are cases in point. We have also, however, left other poems, equally subtle, without such analysis. They are important examples of poetic art, profitable to contemplate even when they do not lend themselves very readily to complete interpretation. Pound's *Canto XVII* is one example of this nature. A vision of Elysium as the underworld paradise of pagan divinities, artists and craftsmen, and free-wheeling "heroic" spirits such as Renaissance Italy knew, it is not difficult in its primary effects: its tone of pure Dionysian joy whose key is set in the opening imagery of magic transformation; its golden light not of the sun; its marble eternities. The real difficulty lies in discovering all the implied further relationships of imagery, narrative, and allusions. Analyzed or not, there are necessarily only a few of these more complex poems here; the teacher will of course judge for himself the degree to which individual classes and students should deal with them—and at what point in the course.

With respect to the poems themselves that comprise our illustrative anthology as a whole, relevance and significance of achievement have been our chief criteria in making the selection. Careful thought and much regretful elimination have gone into the groupings in an effort to make them rich but not confusing resources of comparison and contrast. We would call the reader's attention to the varied speaking voices of the opening section; to the examples in the first section of Chapter V of explicit argument in poetry—a series of texts for a miniature history of ideas; to the sequence of symbolic poems of history and prophecy at the end of Chapter VI; and to the groups in Chapter VII, Section 1, illustrating the useful distinction between classicism and romanticism. Though most of the poems that have become part of the "standard" reading list are included in the anthology, we have omitted some pieces usually studied in survey courses—such poems, for example, as the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales,* Spenser's marriage poems, and the first book of *Paradise Lost.* Their place has been taken by work of comparable achievement that may have an additional charm in its freshness. Among these are Chaucer's sprightly sketch of the Miller's young wife, Milton's description of the battle in Heaven from the fourth book of *Paradise Lost,* Pope's charming and characteristic *To a Young Lady: On Her Leaving the Town after the Coronation,* Swift's satirical example of the moral tale in *Phillis, or the Progress of Love,* and Browning's great poem *The Englishman in Italy,* which has an immediacy and vitality that anticipates and equals D. H. Lawrence and the Pound of the best *Cantos.* We have sought out, in fact, a large number of poems excellent in various ways that have not, as far as we know, appeared in college texts before. We shall be happy indeed if such "discoveries" as Gerard Manley Hopkins* *Winter with the Gulf Stream,* William Carlos Williams' *Floivers by the Sea* and *At the Ball Game,* the Countess of Winchilsea's *Trail all your pikes,* Robert Bridges' exciting ballad *Screaming Tarn,* and D. H. Lawrence's *Tortoise Shell* add something new and valuable to the poetic consciousness of some of our readers. Along with these striking poems are many others often overlooked or neglected, among them some fine unusual pieces by John Clare, Emily Dickinson, Kenneth Fearing, George Herbert, Marianne Moore, and the Canadian poets Archibald Lampman, Charles G. D. Roberts, and Margaret Avison.

3.

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M. L. R.
A. J. M. S.

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* Starred poems are discussed in the text of the section in which they appear. The discussion is often fairly detailed but sometimes is a rather general comment or an analysis of a single passage only.

It is inconvenient to note here all analyses of brief passages from poems not printed in this book or analytical comments contained in the Questions and Exercises. Together with other references to poems, the most important of these analyses and comments are indicated in the Index of Topics.

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CHAPTER ONE *The Approach to Poetry*

I. THE INDIVIDUAL VOICE

IN A GOOD poem we hear the voice of a person speaking. Sometimes it is the poet's own voice; more often, it is the voice of someone in a dramatic or fictional situation. And though we say "speaking," the voice may sing, whisper, shout, plead, or cry. In a complex poem *several* voices, or many, join in and compete for our attention. In lyrical and reflective poetry the voice may even seem like the inner voice of our own thoughts.

When we open a volume of John Donne and find a poem beginning

> For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love,

we are thrown back violently by the voice of a proud, self-assured, magnificently impatient lover. It comes to us as fresh and clear as if we ourselves were the tedious, moralizing busybodies he is upbraiding, and as if the time were now and not three and a half centuries ago when the poem was written.

We are not often addressed so directly as here. In many poems we listen to a voice that seems hardly aware of us at all, that has its own things to say, and that creates its ideal listener within the dramatic framework of the poem. We are privileged to *overhear*, as in Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*[1] we overhear the bitter consolatory words with which the lover turns to his beloved as a refuge from the emptiness of a world without God:

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[1] See pages 179-180.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
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. . . .

The speaking voice of a poem varies infinitely, as human personality varies, as human moods vary, and as the writer's purpose varies. One poet thunders against religious persecution and a brutal massacre, and his voice is that of an outraged prophet:

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones
Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold. . . .

JOHN MILTON

Another cries out his grief on the death of a son:

Farewell, thou child of my right hand and joy;
My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy. . . .

BEN JONSON

Another revels in the quiet pleasures of a country garden, speaking meditatively to his own solitude:

What wond'rous life is this I lead!
Ripe apples drop about my head;
The luscious clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
The nectarine, and curious peach,
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
Insnar'd with flow'rs, I fall on grass.

ANDREW MARVELL

Poetry catches the idiom of the speaking voice, in all centuries and in all social circumstances.

I cannot eat but little meat,
  My stomach is not good. . . .

14TH CENTURY

Throw away thy rod,
Throw away thy wrath:
  O my God,
Take the gentle path.

17TH CENTURY

Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see
Men not afraid of God, afraid of me.

18TH CENTURY

Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square;
Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

19TH CENTURY

In each of these four passages we hear a unique voice, and in every case the tone is varied to express a particular mood, a particular personality, and a particular situation. The directness and intense seriousness of the two middle passages are in noticeable contrast to the lightness and gossipy casualness of the first and the last. The individual voice of the poem is not, of course, always a speaking voice, nor is the diction always as homely and natural as in these examples. Often it is consciously artificial, elegant, resonant, or grand; and the good poet can make it achieve these qualities without seeming affected — a task which demands both skill and character. We shall see in later pages many examples of song, incantation, prayer, and rhetoric in which the voice is raised or exalted and its tone and pattern ordered by convention and ritual.

From all these considerations it should be clear that poetry is a human and personal activity. It is both expression and communication. It is a form of speech, and while the raw material of poetry is experience, its medium is language. It is an ordering of words.

By an ordering of words we mean that the formal rhetorical structure of a poem is one of the essential means by which the voice of the poem communicates what it has to say. That is, the choice of individual words (the diction), the phrasing, the structure of the sentences, and the pattern of the whole poem all play their part in presenting the complete meaning.

Let us listen now to the development of a voice in all its varied tones throughout a complete poem. Robert Frost's well-known *Mending Wall* is an excellent poem for this purpose. It is short, modern, and conversational; and though it appears simple, it has overtones and implications for any reflective reader.

The poem is idiomatic, easy-going. The turns of phrase and modulations of voice are intimate and direct and local. It is the voice of a Yankee farmer we hear, shrewd, pungent, and reflective, making its point by understatement and suggestion and presenting firmly, almost obstinately, the opposing points of view of the two north-of-Boston neighbors. Their "debate" begins at once:

> Something there is that doesn't love a wall

says the one from whose standpoint the poem is presented and whose voice dominates the whole poem. His is the voice of reason and nature alike—of logic and progress, the poem seems to hint. Opposed to it is the rival voice, atavistic and insistent, stubbornly repeating,

> Good fences make good neighbors.

But here is the poem itself:

ROBERT FROST *Mending Wall*

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"*Why* do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

It is one of Robert Frost's triumphs to be able not only to catch in poetry that is reflective and dramatic at the same time the voice of a locality or region but to differentiate within it the individual voices of his characters. In this poem the New England countryman's manner of seeming to stray from the point as he gossips along and yet of always coming back to it or just never leaving it is a source both of pleasure and instruction to the reader who notices it. For the most part this poem, like so many others by Frost, is colloquial and unhurried, the tone of good talk; but in one or two places, strategically chosen for emphasis or climax, the tone changes. The lines become rhythmically more regular, cease to be talk, and approach music. The sound of

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees

is heightened and intensified. Description, narrative, and exposition have come to an end. Now is the time for reflection and criticism—for implication and judgment. The point of view of the speaker is given weight and dignity, though he modestly and characteristically adds the saving phrase "as it seems to me"—the Yankee has learned it is never safe to commit himself inescapably!

Yet the weight and dignity of these lines would seem to suggest that the poet himself is sympathetic to the speaker's dislike of walls and critical of the other man's refusal to "go behind his father's saying." The climactic and critical force of the two heightened lines quoted above is not due solely to the abandonment of the informal colloquial tone. It comes also from the richness of suggestion in the word *darkness*, with its associations of superstition and ignorance—already perhaps prepared for by the earlier description of the spell to make the stones balance; and from the word *shade*, with its suggestion of death and of ghosts—ideas from the past that still haunt the present like the persistent survival of the one farmer's belief in the necessity of walls.

Two points of view—indeed two attitudes towards life—and two temperaments have been placed before us with the greatest brevity and clarity: the traditionalist and the liberal. The conflict between them dramatizes the irrationally firm hold that inherited, half-forgotten beliefs have over the minds of men. This poem is not therefore as impartial or objective as its balanced contrasts may suggest. But this is only to say that the poem is a dramatic one, with fictional elements and characterization, and not a piece of philosophical or political analysis. If the voice we hear in it is not directly the voice of the author, it is nevertheless an authentic, personal, identifiable voice. Its local idioms and personal turns are used to develop both character and plot, and are dropped or heightened at moments of climax or for reflection, criticism, or implication.

The voice the poet uses, then, is essential to the structure and meaning of his poem. It may be primarily personal expression, as though he were writing a letter to the world, but ordinarily this is not the case. The reader must learn to hear the voice and tone in relation first of all to what goes on—what is being said and thought and worked out—in the poem. From this point of view, let us now examine a deceptively light piece by another contemporary American poet, John Crowe Ransom.

JOHN CROWE RANSOM *Janet Waking*

Beautifully Janet slept
Till it was deeply morning. She woke then
And thought about her dainty-feathered hen,
To see how it had kept.

One kiss she gave her mother,
Only a small one gave she to her daddy
Who would have kissed each curl of his shining baby;
No kiss at all for her brother.

"Old Chucky, Old Chucky!" she cried,
Running on little pink feet upon the grass
To Chucky's house, and listening. But alas,
Her Chucky had died.

It was a transmogrifying bee
Came droning down on Chucky's old bald head
And sat and put the poison. It scarcely bled,
But how exceedingly

And purply did the knot
Swell with the venom and communicate
Its rigor! Now the poor comb stood up straight
But Chucky did not.

So there was Janet
Kneeling on the wet grass, crying her brown hen
(Translated far beyond the daughters of men)
To rise and walk upon it.

And weeping fast as she had breath
Janet implored us, "Wake her from her sleep!"
And would not be instructed in how deep
Was the forgetful kingdom of death.

The rather special effect of this poem derives from the originality of the diction and the skilful variations in tone. It may require a second reading before the inexperienced reader realizes that the voice we hear is that of the little girl's father, though as early as the third line of the second stanza we are given information that no one but he could possess. The whole stanza conveys delightfully the bemused, doting, humorously tender attitude of Janet's daddy.

This mixture of grave and gay, which is the concentrated essence of the speaker's attitude towards the child and towards the child's first bewildering contact with the mystery of life and death, is most strikingly communicated in the curiously subtle uses and seeming misuses of word and idiom in several key lines. Consider, for example, the way certain words have been pressed into the service of the poem. In the first stanza, "beautifully," "deeply," and especially, "kept" are worked into original and slightly unidiomatic phrases which suggest in a rather subtle way the naiveté and innocence of the little girl. She is faced with something outside her experience. In the fourth stanza too there are "transmogrifying"—the horrendous big word, that might amuse and startle a child—the surprising and accurate "Chucky's old bald head," the unexpected and again accurate "sat and put," and the contrastingly sophisticated "But how exceedingly." In the next stanza, the scientific phrase "communicate its rigor" is in ironic contrast to the language used or understood by Janet herself, and then there is the wry joke expressed by the verbal neatness of "the poor comb stood up straight/But Chucky did not."

In the stanza before the last the language begins to take on a flavor derived from the romances of the Middle Ages and thus to prepare for the climactic effect of the last two lines. Janet herself is one of the "daughters of men," and her emotion over her pet's death ("crying her brown hen") is subtly transferred to our fears for the little girl herself in face of the uncertainty of life and the imperturbability of death.

The final stanza deepens this note. A darker and richer tone emanates from the word "forgetful" and from the romantic grandeur of the rhythm and phrasing of the last two lines. The contrast between the magnificence of this close and the intimacy and lightness of the opening stanzas may serve to point to another significant aspect of poetry. In it the unique voice of an individual touches universal chords and speaks to all mankind.[2]

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[2] For a similar deepening of tone in which the fanciful and grotesque are transmuted into romantic grandeur consider Thomas Hardy's poem *Channel Firing* (pages 470-471. The effect of the heightened diction and the "poetic associations of the last two lines is to throw new light over all that has gone before, so that what had been seen as comic or grotesque is suddenly dignified by being placed in relation to the universal stream of historical experience. This too is what the poet accomplishes in *Janet Waking.* From the point of view of narrative technique this device is related to the surprise ending. It makes us see all that has gone before in a new (and in these two poems a richer) light.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

1.

ANONYMOUS *I cannot eat but little meat*

I CANNOT eat but little meat,
My stomach is not good;
But sure I think that I can drink
With him that wears a hood.
Though I go bare, take ye no care,
I nothing am a-cold;
I stuff my skin so full within
Of jolly good ale and old. clouted beer
Back and side go bare, go bare;
Both foot and hand go cold;
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or old.

I love no roast but a nut-brown toast,
And a crab laid in the fire;
A little bread shall do me stead;
Much bread I not desire,
No frost nor snow, no wind, I trow.– think, believe
Can hurt me if I wold;
I am so wrapped and thoroughly lapped
Of jolly good ale and old.
Back and side go bare, go bare, *etc.*

And Tib, my wife, that as her life
Loveth well good ale to seek,
Full oft drinks she till ye may see
The tears run down her cheek:
Then doth she trowl to me the bowl
Even as a maltworm should,

And saith, "Sweetheart, I took my part
  Of this jolly good ale and old."
      Back and side go bare, go bare, *etc.*

Now let them drink till they nod and wink,
  Even as good fellows should do;
They shall not miss to have the bliss
  Good ale doth bring men to;
And all poor souls that have scoured bowls
  Or have them lustily trolled,
God save the lives of them and their wives,
  Whether they be young or old.
      Back and side go bare, go bare;
      Both foot and hand go cold;
      But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,
      Whether it be new or old.

ROBERT BROWNING *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*

GR-R-R—THERE go, my heart's abhorrence!
  Water your damned flower-pots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
  God's blood, would not mine kill you!
What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming?
  Oh, that rose has prior claims—
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
  Hell dry you up with its flames!

At the meal we sit together;
  Salve tibi![1] I must hear
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
  Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely
  Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt;
What's the Latin name for "parsley"?
  What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

---

[1] Hail to thee!

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,
  Laid with care on our own shelf!
With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
  And a goblet for ourself,
Rinsed like something sacrificial
  Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps-
Marked with L for our initial!
  (He-he! There his lily snaps!)

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores
  Squats outside the Convent bank
With Sanchicha, telling stories,
  Steeping tresses in the tank,
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
  —Can't I see his dead eye glow,
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
  (That is, if he'd let it show!)

When he finishes refection,
  Knife and fork he never lays
Cross-wise, to my recollection,
  As do I, in Jesu's praise.
I the Trinity illustrate,
  Drinking watered orange-pulp—
In three sips the Arian[2] frustrate;
  While he drains his at one gulp!

Oh, those melons? If he's able
  We're to have a feast! so nice!
One goes to the Abbot's table,
  All of us get each a slice.
How go on your flowers? None double?
  Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
Strange!—And I, too, at such trouble,
  Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

There's a great text in Galatians,
  Once you trip on it, entails

---

[2] fourth-century heretic who denied the Trinity

Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure, if another fails:
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
Spin him round and send him flying
Off to hell, a Manichee?[3]

Or, my scrofulous French novel
On grey paper with blunt type!
Simply glance at it, you grovel
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe:
If I double down its pages
At the woeful sixteenth print,
When he gathers his greengages,
Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

Or, there's Satan!—one might venture
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
Such a flaw in the indenture
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,
Blasted lay that rose-acacia
We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine....*
'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratia*
Ave, Virgo![4] Gr-r-r—you swine!

JAMES STEPHENS *A Glass of Beer*

THE LANKY hank of a she in the inn over there
Nearly killed me for asking the loan of a glass of beer:
May the devil grip the whey-faced slut by the hair,
And beat bad manners out of her skin for a year.

That parboiled imp, with the hardest jaw you will see
On virtue's path, and a voice that would rasp the dead,
Came roaring and raging the minute she looked at me,
And threw me out of the house on the back of my head!

---

[3] Follower of the heretical teachings of the third-century Persian Manichaeus, involving a different theory of the nature of evil from that of accepted Church doctrine.

[4] Hail, Virgin, full of grace!

If I asked her master he'd give me a cask a day;
But she with the beer at hand, not a gill would arrange!
May she marry a ghost and bear him a kitten and may
The High King of Glory permit her to get the mange.

ALEXANDER POPE *To a Young Lady: On Her Leaving the Town after the Coronation*

As SOME fond Virgin, whom her mother's care
Drags from the Town to wholesome Country air,
Just when she learns to roll a melting eye,
And hear a spark, yet think no danger nigh;
From the dear man unwilling she must sever,
Yet takes one kiss before she parts forever:
Thus from the world fair Zephalinda flew,
Saw others happy, and with sighs withdrew;
Not that their pleasures caus'd her discontent,
She sigh'd not that they stay'd, but that she went.
   She went, to plain-work and to purling brooks,
Old-fashioned halls, dull Aunts, and croaking rooks:
She went from op'ra, park, assembly, play,
To morning walks, and pray'rs three hours a day;
To part her time 'twixt reading and bohea,
To muse, and spill her solitary tea,
Or o'er cold coffee trifle with the spoon,
Count the slow clock, and dine exact at noon;
Divert her eyes with pictures in the fire,
Hum half a tune, tell stories to the squire;
Up to her godly garret after sev'n,
There starve and pray, for that's the way to heav'n.
   Some Squire, perhaps, you take delight to rack;
Whose game is Whisk, whose treat a toast in sack;
Who visits with a gun, presents you birds,
Then gives a smacking buss, and cries,—No words!
Or with his hound comes hollowing from the stable,
Makes love with nods, and knees beneath a table;
Whose laughs are hearty, tho' his jests are coarse,
And loves you best of all things—but his horse.

In some fair ev'ning, on your elbow laid,
You dream of Triumphs in the rural shade;
In pensive thought recall the fancy'd scene,
See Coronations rise on ev'ry green;
Before you pass th' imaginary sights
Of Lords, and Earls, and Dukes, and garter'd Knights,
While the spread fan o'ershades your closing eyes;
Then give one flirt, and all the vision flies.
Thus vanish sceptres, coronets, and balls,
And leave you in lone woods, or empty walls.
So when your Slave, at some dear idle time,
(Not plagu'd with head-aches, or the want of rhyme)
Stands in the streets, abstracted from the crew,
And while he seems to study, thinks of you;
Just when his fancy points your sprightly eyes,
Or sees the blush of Parthenissa rise,
Gay pats my shoulder, and you vanish quite,
Streets, Chairs, and Coxcombs rush upon my sight;
Vex'd to be still in town, I knit my brow,
Look sour, and hum a song—as you may now.

2.

JOHN MILTON *On the Late Massacre in Piemont*[5]

AVENGE, O Lord, thy slaughter'd Saints, whose bones
Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;
Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worship't Stocks and Stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy Sheep, and in their ancient Fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese that roll'd
Mother with Infant down the Rocks. Their moans
The Vales redoubl'd to the Hills, and they

---

[5] The older form of "Piedmont"; here a Potestant sect was persecuted in 1655. (See Question 3, page 18.)

To Heav'n. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow
O'er all th'Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple Tyrant: that from these may grow
A hunder'd-fold, who, having learnt thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

GEORGE HERBERT *Discipline*

THROW AWAY thy rod,
Throw away thy wrath:
O my God,
Take the gentle path.

For my heart's desire
Unto thine is bent:
I aspire
To a full consent.

Not a word or look
I affect to own,
But by book,
And thy book alone.

Though I fail, I weep:
Though I halt in pace,
Yet I creep
To the throne of grace.

Then let wrath remove;
Love will do the deed:
For with love
Stony hearts will bleed.

Love is swift of foot;
Love's a man of war,
And can shoot,
And can hit from far.

Who can scape his bow?
That which wrought on thee,
Brought thee low,
Needs must work on me.

Throw away thy rod;
Though man frailties hath,
Thou art God:
Throw away thy wrath.

BEN JONSON *On My First Son*

FAREWELL, THOU child of my right hand, and joy;
My sin was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy.
Seven years thou wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
O, could I lose all father, now! For why
Will man lament the state he should envy —
To have so soon scap'd world's, and flesh's rage,
And, if no other misery, yet age?
Rest in soft peace, and, ask'd, say here doth lie
BEN. JONSON his best piece of *poetry*.
For whose sake, henceforth, all his vows be such
As what he loves may never like too much.

ROBERT HERRICK *To Daffodils*

FAIR DAFFODILS, we weep to see
You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising Sun
Has not attained his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the evensong;
And, having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
    We have as short a Spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
    As you, or anything.
        We die,
    As your hours do, and dry
        Away,
    Like to the Summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of Morning's dew,
    Ne'er to be found again.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS *Spring and Fall: to a young child*

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:
Sórrow's springs áre 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.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - I

1. The "situation" of a poem involves a speaker whose voice we hear presenting specific feelings, thoughts, descriptive details, or actions. In many poems there is even a fictional "plot," and the voice we hear is that of a personality in circumstances like those of a play or story. Through such means the author can present attitudes and points of view not necessarily his own.

   i. Apply these remarks to Stephens' poem. What sort of person is speaking? Does his language sound natural and realistic for him, or does the author sacrifice a little realism of speech to heighten the comic exuberance of tone?
   ii. What is the dramatic situation in Browning's *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister?* In what respects does it resemble and differ from that in Stephens' poem? By the end, who seems the more naïve—the speaker or Brother Lawrence?

2. Jonson's poem is made up of six elegant, pointed epigrams on his son's death, his own grief, and the meaning of the experience. Is it possible to produce such deliberately witty and polished effects and yet give an impression of strong, sincere emotion?
3. Milton's poem is an indignant Protestant response to the massacre of members of a fellow-Protestant sect in Italy on Easter Day, 1655. What is the effect of the echo, in the first line, of the New Testament (Revelations: 6:10)? Lines 3-4 describe the persecuted sect—the Waldensians—as existing long before the civilizing of Britain. (Founded in the twelfth century, the sect became Protestant during the Reformation.) How does this description strengthen the force of the speaker's indignation? After the appeal to God for vengeance in the opening lines and the recounting of the outrages against the Waldensians in lines 5-10, do the closing lines seem anticlimactic? (Line 12 refers to the Pope's triple crowned tiara; line 14 links Catholic power to the Babylonian captivity of the Jews.)
4. The voice in Pope's poem is that of a sophisticated early eighteenth-century Londoner (the author himself, as we can tell from the reference to his friend and fellow-poet John Gay). How does he feel about country life and the people who live it? What is his attitude toward the "young lady" he is addressing? Is the final mood of the poem the same as that of the earlier part?
5. What is the feeling of the speaker in Hopkins' poem toward Margaret and her sadness? Would a child fully understand what he is saying? Would the tone console, frighten, or have some other specific effect on her even if she did not understand?

   If the remarks are not directly intended for Margaret, is the situation like that in *Janet Waking* (discussed on pages 6-8) ?

   The poet places stress-marks over certain syllables to indicate emphasis where it would not ordinarily come. What effect do these unexpected accentuations of speech have on the tone of the poem?

   Compare the tone of this poem with that of Herrick's.
6. In Herbert's poem, how is the tone of the speaker's voice modified

by the situation in which he finds himself and by the fact that he is addressing God directly? What is the effect of the boldness and familiarity with which he speaks to God?

In what sense is the word "love" used? To what event does the seventh stanza refer?

//. THE UNIVERSAL ELEMENTS IN POETRY

THE MATERIALS, as well as the language, of poetry are found everywhere in daily life. The sense of participation in the same actions and experiences as other people, the feeling of relationship with others that comes through communication, and the delight of vivid new ways of speech that reveals itself whenever a new fad in slang appears—"jive-talk," the lingo of "be-boppers," or whatever—all of these enter into poetry. We find poetry in the baby's lullaby, the games of children, the ritual of the football-stadium with its chants and yells.

There is a simple pleasure in doing and saying things rhythmically that derives as much from the body's rhythms—breathing, the heartbeat, walking, and so on—as from any other source, such as the deep satisfaction human beings feel in doing something, even something painful, in unison. Thus the college yell provides an elementary, yet disciplined outlet for a crowd's energies at a football game. Even a yell as brief and almost comically restrained as

Jack!—
Rah, rah—
PetersonI

releases enough of an emotion to give a group some sense of a common interest and feeling. And when the same crowd appeals to the team to give the opponent "the axe":

Give 'em the axe the axe the axe
Give 'em the axe the axe the axe
Give 'em the axe
Give 'em the axe
Give 'em the axe—*WHERE ?*

Right in the neck the neck the neck
Right in the neck the neck the neck
Right in the neck
Right in the neck
Right in the neck—*THERE !*

its mass-chanting is fulfilling in a playful wish something not altogether different from the blood-lust which its primitive ancestors expressed in war-dance and battle-chant. But though these meanings are present, and worth thinking about, such chants stir us mainly because of the elemental physical satisfaction we take in doing things with a rhythmic beat.

Most of us, again, know the exhilaration of falling into step with the lively music of bugle and drum, of waltzing to *The Beautiful Blue Danube,* of dancing more energetically to the insistent, subtle rhythms of Basie or Ellington. Under tension, we find relief in pacing up and down, perhaps, or drumming our fingers, tapping our feet, or humming a tune. When we are happy or excited we find it hard to keep still. A classic if grotesque instance is the newsreel's recapture of Hitler's spontaneous little jig in the forest of Compiègne when France fell.

Children and young people respond to rhythm easily and express their emotions poetically—in terms of singing and dancing —more freely than do older and staider persons, in whom what the poet Shelley called the contagion of the world's slow stain has dulled the senses. From the very beginning the love of rhythm manifests itself. The baby is rocked to sleep, and when awake he is danced up and down to the tune of "This is the way the ladies ride." Later, he has a swing; he may trot in a toy harness and bells; he becomes fascinated with the ticking of a watch, the feel of his heart's beating under his hand, the slow deceleration of a spinning top. And like the poet, he gives names to things. He imitates sounds and repeats those he likes, and he talks in poem-words: *ma-ma, da-da, bow-wow.*

Poetry which children delight in—such as the Mother Goose rhymes—is not of course the creation of children themselves. It has its source in the rituals, currents of history, and lullaby-making of our more or less remote ancestors. Yet these rhymes have been adapted over the centuries to the child mind. They are popular with young children because we find in them many essential characteristics of poetry of a certain type—poetry which expresses the world of pure sound, wonder, and imagination untrammeled by knowledge or reason.

It is a world of singing-gjimes and dances; so we find, as we might expect, that the first and most obvious characteristic of the nursery rhymes is their pronounced and varying rhythms. Some of these are chants, like *Solomon Grundy born on Monday,* or imitations of action, like *Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man* and *Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross,* while others are as delicate and graceful in their airy music as the songs of a Shakespeare or a Shelley:

I had a little nut-tree,
  Nothing would it bear
But a silver nutmeg
  And a golden pear. . . .

or:

Here we come a-piping,
In Springtime and in May;
Green fruit a-ripening,
And Winter fled away.
The Queen she sits upon the strand,
Fair as lily, white as wand;
Seven billows on the sea,
Horses riding fast and free,
And bells beyond the sand.

Here everything is fresh and innocent. But if we read very widely in the nursery rhymes and in collections of children's singing games we shall find that other aspects too of the world of imagination and desire impinge on the consciousness of children as of the race at large. If left to themselves children are not sentimentalists, and there is a strong streak of self-regarding realism in their make-up, so that you can find in their poetry a natural and universal enthusiasm for disasters that occur to others, an enthusiasm which ranges all the way from the only slightly malicious merriment over the mishap of Jack and Jill and the calamity of Humpty Dumpty to such poems of heartless derision as the writers once heard a group of city children chanting in the wake of a poor old ragpicker:

Old Daddy Witch
Fell in the ditch,
Picked up a penny
And thought he was rich.

Even less restrained is the following bit of satiric dialogue:

"Mother, mother, what is that
Hanging down the lady's back?"
"Sh, sh, you dirty thing—
That's the lady's corset string."

Most of us have heard children chanting such verses in playgrounds and streets. Sometimes the chants make a shrewd kind of sense, such as the very cynical one recited by little girls that goes:

I should worry, I should care,
I should marry a millionaire;
He should die, I should cry,
I should marry another guy.

Sometimes they reveal the insecurity of urban life, or the premature sophistication of city children, or a kind of sniggering curiosity about adult experience. Sometimes they are counting-out rhymes—an essential, innocent, and practical part of a child's activity:

Ibbety bibbety gibbety goat,
Ibbety bibbety canalboat,
Dictionary,
Down goes the ferry,
Out goes YOU.

Always there is the joy of the repeated rhymes and of the recurring" beat of emphasized syllables coming just where they are expected. These chants are games of word and sound, combining fantasy and dramatic impersonation in their simplest forms. They all use rhythmic excitement and repeated sounds to heighten natural expression, and in so doing they illustrate one of the essential characteristics of poetry.

Indeed, the chants just quoted must suggest that the world presented in the anonymous folk poetry of childhood is more complex than one may have realized. It is true that children are comparatively ignorant and innocent, but they are not really carefree. The unknown is frightening, and in it are ogres and witches as well as good fairies. Most of the great fairy tales are shot through with cruelty and a grim, unsentimental humorous justice. Like the Mother Goose songs, they are most probably versions of ancient myths and legends adapted to the interests of the child mind. And so, to set alongside the brighter nursery rhymes, we find among the traditional poems of England many dark and sinister little songs and stories. The child thrills to the bloody horrors of *Fe fi fo fum,* and asks to have the tragic climax of a story presented as accurately as possible—with specific details.

Three little children sitting on the sand,
All, all a-lonely,
Three little children sitting on the sand,
All, all a-lonely,
Down in the green wood shady.

There came an old woman, said Come on with me,
All, all a-lonely,
There came an old woman, said Come on with me,
All, all a-lonely,
Down in the green wood shady.

She stuck her pen-knife through their heart,
All, all a-lonely,
She stuck her pen-knife through their heart,
All, all a-lonely,
Down in the green wood shady.

This grisly poem is more sophisticated than nursery rhymes have a right to be. It carries us forward into the ballad literature of comparatively primitive adults rather than backward into the world of imagination that exists independently of reason—the children's world of nonsense poetry where flowers, birds, and animals talk, and inanimate household objects like clocks, kettles, brooms, and buckets are endowed with a life of their own. But it is also evidence that at no level of understanding can poetry, any more than life, be considered unadulterated sweetness, light, and lighthearted diversion. The universality of poetry lies as much in this characteristic as in its rhythmic excitement and emotional appeal.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

1. Nursery Rhymes

ANONYMOUS *I had a little nut tree*

I HAD a little nut tree,
   Nothing would it bear
But a silver nutmeg
   And a golden pear;

The King of Spain's daughter
   Came to visit me,
And all for the sake
   Of my little nut tree.

ANONYMOUS *How many miles to Babylon*

How MANY miles to Babylon?
Three score miles and ten.
Can I get there by candle-light?
Yes, and back again.
If your heels are nimble and light,
You may get there by candle-light.

ANONYMOUS *Old King Cole*

   OLD KING Cole
   Was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he;
   He called for his pipe,
   And he called for his bowl,
And he called for his fiddlers three.

ANONYMOUS *Fe, fi, fo, fum*

FE, FI, fo, fum,
I smell the blood of an Englishman;
Be he alive or be he dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.

ANONYMOUS *Humpty Dumpty*

HUMPTY DUMPTY sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
  All the king's horses,
  And all the king's men,
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

ANONYMOUS / *had a little husband*

I HAD a little husband,
  No bigger than my thumb;
I put him in a pint-pot
  And there I bade him drum.
I bought a little horse
  That galloped up and down;
I bridled him, and saddled him
  And sent him out of town.
I gave him some garters
  To garter up his hose,
And a little silk handkerchief
  To wipe his pretty nose.

ANONYMOUS *Ride a Cock-horse*

RIDE A cock-horse to Banbury Cross,
To see a fine lady upon a white horse;
Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
And she shall have music wherever she goes.

ANONYMOUS *Here sits the* ***Lord*** *Mayor*

HERE SITS the Lord Mayor,
Here sit his men,
Here sits the cockadoodle,
Here sits the hen,
Here sit the little chickens,
Here they run in,
Chin chopper, chin chopper, chin chopper, chin.

2.

ANONYMOUS *I sing of a maiden*

I SING of a maiden
   that is makeles;[1]
King of all kings
   to her son she ches.[2]

He came al so still
   there his mother was,
As dew in April
   that falleth on the grass.

He came al so still
   to his mother's hour,
As dew in April
   that falleth on the flour.

He came al so still
   there his mother lay,
As dew in April
   that falleth on the spray.[3]

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[1] mateless [2] chose [3] foliage

Mother and maiden
  was never none but she;
Well may such a lady
  Goddes mother be.

ANONYMOUS *I have a yong suster*

I HAVE a yong suster
  fer[4] beyondin the se;
Many be the drouryis[5]
  that sche sente me.

Sche sente me the cherye,
  withoutin ony ston,
And so sche dede[6] the dove,
  withoutin ony bon.

Sche sente me the brere,[7]
  withoutin ony rinde,[8]
Sche bad me love my lemman[9]
  withoutin longing.

How schulde ony cherye
  ben withoute ston?
And how schulde ony dove
  ben withoute bon?

How schulde ony brere
  ben withoute rinde?
How schulde I love my lemman
  withoute longing?

Qwan[10] the cherye was a flowr,
  than hadde it non ston;
Qwan the dove was an ey,[11]
  than hadde it non bon.

[4] far [5] keepsakes [6] did [7] briar [8] bark [9] sweetheart
[10] when [11] egg

Qwan the brere was onbred,[12]
  than hadde it no rind;
Qwan the maiden has that[13] sche lovith,
  sche is without longing.

ROBERT BURNS *Comin' thro' the Rye*

COMIN' THRO' the rye, poor body,
  Comin' thro' the rye,
She draigl't a'[14] her petticoatie
  Comin' thro' the rye.
    Oh Jenny's a' weet,[15] poor body,
      Jenny's seldom dry;
    She draigl't a' her petticoatie
      Comin' thro' the rye.

Gin[16] a body meet a body
  Comin' thro' the rye,
Gin a body kiss a body,
  Need a body cry?
    Oh Jenny's a' weet, poor body,
      Jenny's seldom dry;
    She draigl't a' her petticoatie
      Comin' thro' the rye.

Gin a body meet a body
  Coming' thro' the glen;
Gin a body kiss a body,
  Need the warld ken?
    Oh Jenny's a' weet, poor body,
      Jenny's seldom dry;
    She draigl't a' her petticoatie
      Comin' thro' the rye.

[12] ungrown [13] what [14] bedraggled [15] soaking wet [16] if

ANONYMOUS from *Ezek'l saw de wheel*

EZEK'L SAW de wheel, Ezek'l saw de wheel,
'Way up in de middle of de air.
De big wheel move by faith;
De little wheel move by de grace of God;
A wheel in a wheel,
'Way up in de middle of de air.
A wheel in a wheel, a wheel in a wheel,
Ezek'l saw de wheel,
'Way up in de middle of de air.

3·

WALTER DE LA MARE *The Silver Penny*

"SAILORMAN, I'LL give to you
   My bright silver penny,
If out to sea you'll sail me
   And my dear sister Jenny."

"Get in, young sir, I'll sail ye
   And your dear sister Jenny,
But pay she shall her golden locks
   Instead of your penny."

They sail away, they sail away,
   O fierce the winds blew!
The foam flew in clouds,
   And dark the night grew!

And all the wild sea-water
   Climbed steep into the boat;
Back to the shore again
   Sail will they not.

Drowned is the sailorman,
Drowned is sweet Jenny,
And drowned in the deep sea
A bright silver penny.

JOHN MASEFIELD *An Old Song Re-sung*

I SAW a ship-a-sailing, a-sailing, a-sailing,
With emeralds and rubies and sapphires in her hold;
And a bosun in a blue coat bawling at the railing,
Piping through a silver call that had a chain of gold;
The summer wind was failing and the tall ship rolled.

I saw a ship a-steering, a-steering, a-steering,
With roses in red thread worked upon her sails;
With sacks of purple amethysts, the spoils of buccaneering,
Skins of musky yellow wine, and silks in bales,
Her merry men were cheering, hauling on the brails.

I saw a ship a-sinking, a-sinking, a-sinking,
With glittering sea-water splashing on her decks,
With seamen in her spirit-room singing songs and drinking,
Pulling claret bottles down, and knocking off the necks,
The broken glass was chinking as she sank among the wrecks.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS *Brown Penny*

I WHISPERED, "I am too young,"
And then, "I am old enough";
Wherefore I threw a penny
To find out if I might love.
"Go and love, go and love, young man,
If the lady be young and fair."
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
I am looped in the loops of her hair.
O love is the crooked thing,

There is nobody wise enough
To find out all that is in it,
For he would be thinking of love
Till the stars had run away,
And the shadows eaten the moon.
Ah, penny, brown penny, brown penny,
One cannot begin it too soon.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 2

1. Find examples of contemporary popular poetry—such as college yells, song lyrics, advertising jingles, work songs, and rhyming games—which show some of the qualities of universality discussed in this section.
2. Write a note on the adult appeal of the nursery rhyme.
3. Select any one of the poems in this section that tells a tale or presents a conversation. In what ways does the fact that it is a poem affect your natural interest in listening to stories and to dialogue? If it were written in prose, do you think it would seem more interesting? If so, does this mean it would be better—more memorable and humanly meaningful—as prose? Explain your point of view.
4. Notice how many of the foregoing poems have unexplained details, while others focus on riddles or mysteries. Try to account for the appeal gained thereby. Is it the same in all instances? Do the repeated words and phrases, and other "parallel" effects (such as recurring questions and answers, and refrains) always enhance this appeal?

///. THE CRAFTSMAN'S WORK

The original meaning of the word "poet" as it comes to us from the Greek is *maker*. A poem is something made, a thing shaped and constructed by conscious craftsmanship. Skill has gone into its making, and it is important for the student of poetry to understand something of the technical problems which the poet has met and solved. The analysis of poems into their several elements of conception and technique helps us to discover the secret of their power to illuminate our world. The careful reader will find one of the most remarkable things about a good poem is that its significance is not diminished but increased by analysis and study.

This does not mean that analysis and study are ends in themselves or that such preliminary and essential critical activity can account for all the effects of poetry (though it can, however, save us from the sentimental illusion of finding pleasure in what is not in a poem at all but is misread into it by carelessness, ignorance, or haste). Formulas and explanations cannot account for its emotional power. There are certain memorable lines whose appeal can perhaps never be fully explained by even the most accomplished critic:

Brightness falls from the air. . . .
THOMAS NASHE

In the gloom the gold
Gathers the light about it.
EZRA POUND

To cut across the reflex of a star. ...
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides. . . .
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

In such magical lines as these there is a fusion of music, imagery, and thought which calls forth more than an intellectual response. But the more than rational power to respond to poetry, called "sensibility," must—although it exists potentially in everyone—be stimulated by contact with life and with poems, and if possible by much reading aloud and listening to others read aloud. Owing to a changed emphasis in education and public taste, modern readers often miss this once fairly common experience with verse. Shakespeare's audience, though not very sophisticated in reading, was accustomed to hearing poetry whenever it attended the theater; there was no problem of getting used to it such as faces an audience today. When, at the end of *Hamlet*, the dying hero wants his friend Horatio to let other people know what has happened, he does not turn to him and say,

> Horatio, we've been friends a long time. Don't—don't—bad as the world is—commit suicide yet. Tell the public the real story of what happened, as a final favor to me—won't you?

Hamlet's audience would have had none of such talk. They expected *poetry*, and here is what Shakespeare actually gave them:

[4]
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absént thee from felicity a while
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

These lines follow a scene of great violence. Their calmer, yet sad, earnest, and affectionate music remained in the audience's ears long after most of them had forgotten Hamlet's specific words. The effect was in part derived from the dramatic situation, but mainly it came from the arrangement of images and sounds within the context of that situation.

If we pause for a moment to consider this observation, we may be able to see a few of the reasons why these lines strike us as "pure" poetry. For as Herbert Read tells us, although "we have no rational explanation of the process of imagination"—that is, the power of conceiving the sound-effects, the ideas, and the suggestive implications of a poem and combining them so effectively that they "render emotion exactly" or very nearly so—yet we are able to analyze these several elements created and used by the poet's imagination.[1]

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[1] **Herbert Read, *Phases of English Poetry.***

Thus, the special effect of Hamlet's speech can be, in some degree, "accounted for." The passage contains hardly a single literal statement, hardly a phrase in fact that means just what it says—though each phrase, by straining the truth to just the right extent, contributes to the feeling created by the whole speech. No one can literally hold another person in his heart; even if we overlook the irony of the second line, to die by suicide is not at all, in Christian thinking, automatically to achieve "felicity"—perfect happiness; and no physically healthy person, however "harsh" the world may seem to him, can be said to feel pain at every breath. Each of these phrasings exaggerates just a little, and each serves to stress the emotional state it evokes—a friend's love first, then unwilling self-denial, and finally deep misery. Hamlet recognizes these states of feeling in his friend and, through revealing his sensitiveness to them, makes his appeal a remarkably consoling gesture of sympathy. Simultaneously, our appreciation of Hamlet's own gentleness and nobility is enhanced by this concern for his friend at the moment before his own death.

Meanwhile, the mood, tone, spirit of the situation is communicated also in the music of the verse. The *sounds* are echoing and re-echoing one another. Notice the h's, short *e's*, *l*'s, and r's in the important words *ever, hold, absént, harsh, world, breath,* and *story;* the long *e's* of the secondary syllables that provide a constant background of sound—*me, thee, felicity,* story; and the *th's* and long *i's* in *thou, thy, thee, while, this, my.* But the word that echoes longest is *pain,* though it is linked in sound with the other important words only through the consonant *n* which is also found in *absent. Pain* therefore stands out against the flow of patterned sound like a rock against a current, and *pain* is the one word which gives the passage its deepest emotional coloration.

Observe that the third line, which ends in the word *pain,* actually sounds like what the speaker is talking about, like the speech of a man gasping out strongly felt ideas with great difficulty. Whereas the previous line was lilting and fluent, this one makes us pause over almost every one of its ten monosyllabic words—and especially the fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, and tenth. Tremendous emphasis is gained by this damming-up effect. All speed is gone from the line by the time we have passed *harsh* *world draw,* and after the added barrier of *breath* there is almost a full stop at *pain.* The halting effect continues to the very end of the sentence.

A word of caution is necessary here: Sounds do not in themselves convey a meaning. Liquid sounds are lighter and more graceful than gutturals, and there are many other differences among sound-effects, but this does not mean that every l or r carries a definite idea or feeling with it, or every *k* a harsher idea or feeling. However, in a passage with an unusual number of /'s and *k's* we may find an underlying pattern of pure sound effects balanced against one another—an actual music of sounds. If we want to know the connection between this pure sound-pattern and the feeling and thought of the poem, we must note where the most important words fall. In a good poem, there will be a definite relationship between the points of emphasized thought and emotion and the pattern of sound. Unless we are dealing with nonsense rhymes or pure sound-effects, it is the thought and the emotion that give the sounds their meaning. The words in the *Hamlet* passage which we must emphasize because of their meaning are also the words in which the most important sound-effects are found. The h's, l's, and so on become associated with these words and take their emotional effect from their meaning. Thus, since *hold* and *heart* are strongly stressed, the vowels and consonants in them, when repeated in later words, recall them again. Without these important words, the alliteration alone—the musical effect gained by the repetition of sounds, particularly in stressed syllables—could not ordinarily stir us deeply.

We see, therefore, that although its character and origin have some irrational aspects poetry can certainly be understood and analyzed. To try to *write* poems out of calculation alone would be fruitless, but that is another thing altogether from trying with all our sympathies and intelligence to gain the most accurate perception and the fullest appreciation of them after they are written. Though they may be conceived through "inspiration," they are constructed by craftsmanship. Even the simplest of poems is a gathering and compression of elements, including many assumptions normally shared by writer and reader, which are neither indefinable nor irrelevant to the poem's achievement.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

ROBERT BRIDGES *I love all beauteous things*

I LOVE all beauteous things,
    I seek and adore them;
God hath no better praise,
And man in his hasty days
    Is honored for them.

I too will something make
    And joy in the making;
Although to-morrow it seem
Like the empty words of a dream
    Remembered on waking.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH / *wandered lonely as a cloud*

I WANDERED lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,

In such a jocund company:
I gazed — and gazed — but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *The Solitary Reaper*

BEHOLD HER, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whatever the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

MARIANNE MOORE *Poetry*

I, TOO, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle.
Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in
it after all, a place for the genuine.
Hands that can grasp, eyes
that can dilate, hair that can rise
if it must, these things are important not because a

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are
useful. When they become so derivative as to become unintelligible,
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand: the bat
holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless wolf under
a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse that feels a flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician—
nor is it valid
to discriminate against 'business documents and

school-books'[1]; all these phenomena are important. One
must make a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets,
the result is not poetry,
nor till the poets among us can be
'literalists of
the imagination'[2]—above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them,'[3]
shall we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand
genuine, you are interested in poetry.

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH *Ars Poetica*

A POEM should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit,

Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless
As the flight of birds.

[1] Tolstoy, in his *Diary*, says, "Where the boundary between prose and poetry lies, I shall never be able to understand. . . . Poetry is verse: prose is not verse. Or else poetry is everything with the exception of business documents and school books." (from Miss Moore's notes)

[2] Yeats's essay "William Blake and the Imagination" criticizes the poet Blake as a "too literal realist of the imagination, as others are of nature." (from Miss Moore's notes)

[3] Neither a direct quotation like Tolstoy's nor a modified one like Yeats's, this phrase illustrates that "literalism of imagination" which, in opposition to these famous writers, the poem argues is essential to genuine poetry.

*

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs.

*

A poem should be equal to:
Not true.

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean
But be.

w. H. AUDEN *Musée des Beaux Arts*

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;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot

Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS *At the Ball Game*

THE CROWD at the ball game
is moved uniformly

by a spirit of uselessness
which delights them—

all the exciting detail
of the chase

and the escape, the error
the flash of genius—

all to no end save beauty
the eternal—

So in detail they, the crowd,
are beautiful

for this
to be warned against

saluted and defied—
It is alive, venomous

it smiles grimly
its words cut—

The flashy female with her
mother, gets it—

The Jew gets it straight—it
is deadly, terrifying—

It is the Inquisition, the
Revolution

It is beauty itself
that lives

day by day in them
idly—

This is
the power of their faces

It is summer, it is the solstice
the crowd is

cheering, the crowd is laughing
in detail

permanently, seriously
without thought

WALLACE STEVENS *Anecdote of the Jar*

I PLACED a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.

JOHN KEATS *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

THOU STILL unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;

More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm, and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 3

1. What makes a poet write poems? Note the answers given by Bridges and Wordsworth. Can you think of additional motives? Are any of them suggested to you by other poems in this section?
2. What conceptions do you find in the poems by Keats, Williams, and Auden of the relation between art and life? According to each of these poems, how does the artist's (or poet's) skill help establish this relationship?
3. Here are two statements about the theme of Wallace Stevens'

Anecdote of the Jar. With which interpretation do you agree? Give reasons drawn from the text of the poem.

> i. . . . a wild and disorderly landscape is transformed into order by the presence of a symmetrical vase. . . . The jar acts in the imagination like one of the poles of the earth, the imaginary order of the lines of latitude and longitude projecting around the pole. The jar itself—simple and symmetrical, a product of the human consciousness and not of nature—is a very fitting symbol for man's dominion over nature . . .
>
> Howard Baker, "Wallace Stevens and Other Poets,"
> *The Southern Review,* Vol. I, No. 2, Autumn 1935, p. 376.

> ii. The wilderness is slovenly after it has been dominated and not before. . . . The jar is the product of the human mind, as the critics remark, and it dominates the wilderness; but it does not give order to the wilderness—it is vulgar and sterile, and it transforms the wilderness into the semblance of a deserted picnic ground. Its sterility is indicated in the last three lines—— The poem would appear to be primarily an expression of the corrupting effect of the intellect upon natural beauty, and hence a purely romantic performance.
>
> Yvor Winters, *In Defence of Reason,*
> The Swallow Press, 1947, pp. 436-437.

4. The poems by Marianne Moore and Archibald MacLeish both seek to define genuine poetic achievement. Does her description of genuine poems as "imaginary gardens with real toads in them" mean at all the same thing as Mr. MacLeish's assertion that "A poem should not mean/But be"? What would you say is meant by these two ideas?

   If these poems can be considered *arguments* in any sense, with what sort of people and against what sort of ideas is each of them arguing?
5. Does Auden's description of Breughel's painting in any way illustrate the theme of the poem by Stevens? of the poem by Miss Moore?
6. With which of these poems do you find yourself in the closest sympathy? Why? Or if the answer is "With none," why not?
7. Using the discussions of *Mending Wall, Janet Waking,* and the passage from *Hamlet* (pages 3-6, 6-8, and 34 -36) for suggestions, analyze one of the poems in this section for the signs of deliberate craftsmanship you find in it.

IV. POETIC FIGURES AND POETIC MEANING

Here, near the beginning of our study of poetry, it will be helpful to try to put out of our minds any *preconceived* opinions about its nature, purposes, or methods. Let us forget any such arbitrary laws as that poetry is or ought to be emotional, that it must be "elevated" and "beautiful," or that it must deal with "poetic" subjects. Where these assertions are not too hopelessly vague, they have some validity; but their main tendency is to limit and dilute our appreciation of the poet's art. The subject-matter of poetry is much wider in scope, more immediate and less selective in its sources, and more intense and less respectable in its responses and expression than many people have been taught. "Fair and foul are near of kin" cries the speaker in one of Yeats's poems; there may be deep significance and even beauty in what seemed only loathsome.

We do, however, need some test of the genuineness and value of a poem. One such test, though it cannot be applied indiscriminately and will vary in usefulness according to the knowledge and the developed sensibility of the reader, is the intensity with which the poet has entered into an experience and recognized and communicated its implications. *The nature of his original experience, whether it be physical, emotional, or intellectual, does not determine the genuineness or goodness of the poem. What counts is the pressure of the feeling and of the thinking generated by the experience.* There are no "poetic" subjects as such; any subject, no matter how apparently unpromising, can be made poetic when shaped by the poetic imagination. Accuracy of perception and clarity of expression—what might, in its finest manifestation, be called "nakedness of vision"—can make of the humblest and even the vilest object a source of poetry, just as it can, also, bring home to us the purest spiritual truths.

Even in disillusioned and bitter poetry, however, it is delight and love that are at the heart of a poet's vision. The vividness of his writing is a direct result of the delight and love. It comes from a sort of visual thirst that drinks eagerly whatever it lights upon:

Eye, gazelle, delicate wanderer,
Drinker of horizon's fluid line—

as Stephen Spender has expressed it. In the finest poetry the pictures presented to our senses and imagination are not contrived merely as ornament or illustration, but they themselves generate the meaning of the poem. Over three hundred years ago the Elizabethan poet Samuel Daniel spoke of the way this creation of a meaning through the senses takes place:

Glory is most bright and gay
In a flash, and so away.
Feed apace then, greedy eyes,
On the wonder you behold.
Take it sudden as it flies
Though you take it not to hold;
When your eyes have done their part,
Thought must length it in the heart.

But thought cannot ponder fruitfully what our senses have perceived. unless the perceptions are accurate and sharply defined. Accuracy and clarity are marks both of the poet's sincerity and of his craftsmanship. Consider Browning's

The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood

or Whitman's

Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with
blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!

These sense-impressions appeal to the eye. The following lines by Herrick add movement, touch, and sound in their presentation of the rippling glitter and swish of a lady's silks as she walks:

ROBERT HERRICK *Upon Julia's Clothes*

Whenas in silks my Julia goes,
Then, then (methinks), how sweetly flows
The liquefaction of her clothes.

Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
That brave vibration each way free,
O how that glittering taketh me!

Marianne Moore gives us a curiously comparable sound-picture as she describes a ship's boat on the water:

> —the blades of the oars
> moving together like the feet of water-spiders. . . .
> The wrinkles progress upon themselves in a phalanx—beautiful under networks of foam,
> and fade breathlessly while the sea rustles in and out of the seaweed. . . .

And Milton, to suggest the beauty of a woman's singing, and the loveliness and virtue of the singer herself, actually presents one sensation in terms of another:

> At last a soft and solemn breathing sound
> Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,
> And stole upon the air. . . .

In these passages we find direct sense-impressions and pictured comparisons. Such impressions and comparisons are called *images.* It is through images that the threefold nature of poetic experience and expression reveals itself as the accurate and intense perception of objects, the stimulation of feeling, and the operation of the mind. Poetic imagery has a sensuous, an emotional, and an intellectual source, and it communicates on all three of these levels.

Imagery is sometimes the direct concrete expression of vivid sense perceptions, but often—as almost all the foregoing instances reveal—it is figurative rather than literal. Figures of speech are not, of course, confined to poetry; they are a part of all linguistic activity except the most rigorously factual, and are familiar to most of us in slang and other popular, inventive, and indeed poetic adventures with language.

In poetry itself the commonest and most useful figures of speech —*simile, metaphor, personification,* and *conceit*—involve comparison, not a comparison between things that are actually very much alike but a comparison between things which have one often unexpected quality in common. The function of the figure is to direct our attention with special vividness to this particular quality. There is no figure involved in comparing a rose to a carnation, but when a poet compares his girl to a rose (in order to suggest her sweetness, freshness, loveliness, and perhaps also the frailty and impermanence of that loveliness) he is not making a literal factual statement; he is appealing to the imagination. Such poetic statements as Burns's "O my luve is like a red, red rose" or Shakespeare's "My Mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" or the more concentrated "her diamond eyes" (i.e.—her diamond-like eyes) or Campion's "Her brows like bended bows"—statements in which almost always the comparison is explicitly expressed by the use of some such words as *like, as,* and *similar to*—are called similes.

When a figure is presented not as a directly stated comparison but as an identity, then we have not a simile but a metaphor: "My love is a red, red rose," "Her eyes are diamonds," and Tennyson's "The black bat Night" are metaphors. One of the most frequently encountered types of metaphor is personification, well illustrated in such a characteristic image as this from Shelley's *To Night:*

> Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;
> Kiss her until she be wearied out.. . .

or in Milton's address to the spirit of Melancholy:

> Come, pensive nun, devout and pure,
> Sober, steadfast, and demure. . . .

Sometimes personification is combined with simile, as in the exciting virtuosity of T. S. Eliot's

> . . . the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table. . ..

The boldness and originality of this image is characteristic of the conceit—a favorite device of the seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets and their modern followers. The principle behind the conceit is that the greater the gap between the two things compared in a simile or identified in a metaphor—the greater, that is, the imaginative leap the poet's mind achieves—the greater the satisfaction and the sharper the conviction. Many successful images, therefore, are paradoxical; they seem fanciful or out-of-kilter until the reader's own mind makes the leap.

From both the esthetic and the psychological points of view the metaphysical poet's aim is to achieve the *widest* possible gap between the arms of his comparison. If the gap is too narrow, that is, if the things or qualities compared are too much alike, the result is flat and dull. If on the other hand, the comparison is, literally, too far-fetched, the failure is of a different sort, and the result is unconvincing or ridiculous.

Any bold far-fetched figure of comparison, whether successful or not, is called a conceit. (The word is related to *concept,* a mental image.) The description of the evening as an etherised patient is a conceit; so is John Donne's famous comparison of absent lovers to a pair of compasses:

If they be two, they are two so
  As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fix'd 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,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
  And grows erect, as that comes home.

So, too, though a less adventurous one, is Thomas Campion's elaboration of images in *Cherry-ripe.* The poet is telling how the lovely virtuous maiden guards the cherries of her lips:

Her eyes like angels watch them still;
  Her brows like bended bows do stand,
Threatening with piercing frowns to kill
  All that attempt with eye or hand
    Those sacred cherries to come nigh,
    Till "Cherry-ripe" themselves do cry.

From these brief illustrations it should be clear that an effective figure of speech is both a perception of reality and a projection of the imagination. It is a sudden insight into a meaningful relationship between things not often thought to be like.

Perhaps it would be well to examine a short modern poem in order to see the application of some of the principles we have been discussing. In William Carlos Williams' brief poem *Flowers by the Sea* there is a new and surprising, but sharply convincing vision of something we may often have looked at but have never actually seen with the eye of imagination until the poet showed it to us.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS *Flowers by the Sea*

When over the flowery, sharp pasture's
edge, unseen, the salt ocean

lifts its form—chickory and daisies
tied, released, seem hardly flowers alone

but color and the movement—or the shape
perhaps—of restlessness, whereas

the sea is circled and sways
peacefully upon its plantlike stem

Brief and clear as it is, this little poem states, or, rather, illustrates, a paradox—the paradox that the sea and the pasture suggest one another's basic nature rather than their own. But the curious thing about it is that the unexpected reversal of images which makes the point of the poem emerges suddenly, only after we have absorbed the whole dazzling picture of the sunny, windswept seaside pasture and felt the tousled, salt-laden atmosphere of the summer day. The first unexpected identification is that of the restless amalgam of color and movement in the flowers—"the shape perhaps of restlessness"—with the ebb and flow ("tied, released") of the sea waves; and parallel to it, but much richer and grander, is the sudden awareness of the vast blue round of the ocean itself, swaying like an enormous flower. The poem expresses an experience which culminates for poet and reader alike in the intuitive flash at the close: it is not so much that the flowers and the sea are like one another as that the flowers *are* a sea and the sea 15 a flower. The imagination leaves out all but the common elements shared by the flowers and the waves, all but color and movement, that is, or all but the circular shape and the gently swaying motion. Here is the most intense concentration upon what the imagination has isolated for the sake of emphasis. The result is a form of truth, more limited but more precious too than the truth of science and fact, since this is a truth perceived simultaneously by the heart, the imagination, and the mind.

As to the methods by which the poem achieves its effect, the most striking consists in a metaphorical perception—in a seeing of things in terms of other things which emphasizes a hitherto unsuspected identity. Besides this metaphorical structure, we may notice first the simplicity and unaffected Tightness of the diction, and then the easy, natural, exact, and colloquial structure of the clauses—virtues common to good prose and good poetry alike. Then again, if we look and listen we grow aware of the skilful but unobtrusive pattern of repeated sounds that marks the poem's movement. And finally, we notice how the unifying paradox of the poem is matched in the contrast between the short, sharp, variable rhythm of the opening half of the poem and the slow, majestic, peaceful swaying of the close.

But what, the reader may now ask, does the poem *mean?*

We would answer: Two things are involved in the poem's meaning. First, there is the evocation of all the associations of delight gathering around the sunny windswept landscape of flowers by the dancing sea. Second, there is the delight that accompanies the appreciation of a paradox. It is the paradoxical reversal of ordinary experience, when in a flash the flowers are seen as a sea and the sea as a flower, that gives the poem unity and point. The effect of the whole poem—what it does for and to us—*that* is the meaning of the poem. For this reason it is all-important to read the plain sense of the poem correctly. We must submit ourselves to the poem the author wrote, not to a vague approximation that our own intuitions, prejudices, and limitations have substituted for it. And in the poem we have been considering this depends on our recognition of its one tremendous metaphor of the flowers and the sea.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

HILDA CONKLING ***Poems***[1]

SEE THE fur coats go by!
The morning is like the inside of a snow-apple.
I will curl myself cushion-shape
On the window-seat;
I will read poems by snow-light.
If I cannot understand them so,
I will turn them upside down
And read them by the red candles
Of garden brambles.

HILDA CONKLING *Water*[1]

THE WORLD turns softly
Not to spill its lakes and rivers.
The water is held in its arms,
And the sky is held in the water.
What is water,
That pours silver
And can hold the sky?

H. D. *The Pool*

ARE YOU alive?
I touch you.
You quiver like a sea-fish.
I cover you with my net.
What are you—banded one?

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H. D. *Oread*

WHIRL UP, sea—
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON *The Eagle*

HE CLASPS the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

LOUIS MACNEICE *Snow*

THE ROOM was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
Spawning snow and pink roses against it
Soundlessly collateral and incompatible;
World is suddener than we fancy it.

World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.

And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world
Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes—
On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of your hands—
There is more that glass between the snow and the huge roses.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE Songs: *Spring* and *Winter*

(from *Love's Labour's Lost)*

1.

1. WHEN DAISIES pied and violets blue
   And lady-smocks all silver-white
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
   Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he:
                                        "Cuckoo!
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" O, word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!

When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,
   And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,
When turtles tread, and rooks, and daws,
   And maidens bleach their summer smocks,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he:
                                        "Cuckoo!
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" O, word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!

2.

WHEN ICICLES hang by the wall,
   And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
   And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipp'd, and ways be foul,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
                                        "Tu-who!
Tu-whit, tu-who!"—a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

When all aloud the wind doth blow,
   And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow,
   And Marian's nose looks red and raw,

When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
"Tu-whol
Tu-whit, tu-who!"—a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

THOMAS CAMPION *Cherry-ripe*

THERE is a garden in her face
Where roses and white lilies grow;
A heavenly paradise is that place,
Wherein all pleasant fruits do flow.
There cherries grow which none may buy
Till "Cherry-ripe" themselves do cry.

Those cherries fairly do enclose
Of orient pearl a double row,
Which when her lovely laughter shows,
They look like rosebuds filled with snow;
Yet them nor peer nor prince can buy
Till "Cherry-ripe" themselves do cry.

Her eyes like angels watch them still;
Her brows like bended bows do stand,
Threat'ning with piercing frowns to kill
All that attempt with eye or hand
Those sacred cherries to come nigh,
Till "Cherry-ripe" themselves do cry.

BEN JONSON *The Triumph of Charis*

SEE THE Chariot at hand here of Love
Wherein my Lady rideth!
Each that draws is a Swan, or a Dove,
And well the Car Love guideth;
As she goes, all hearts dp duty
Unto her beauty;

And enamour'd, do wish, so they might
But enjoy such a sight,
That they still were, to run by her side,
Through Swords, through Seas, whither she would ride.

Do but look on her eyes, they do light
All that Love's world compriseth!
Do but look on her Hair, it is bright
As Love's star when it riseth!
Do but mark her forehead's smoother
Than words that soothe her!
And from her arched brows, such a grace
Sheds itself through the face,
As alone there triumphs to the life
All the Gain, all the Good, of the Elements' strife.

Have you seen but a bright Lily grow,
Before rude hands have touch'd it?
Have you mark'd but the fall o' the Snow
Before the soil hath smutch'd it?
Ha' you felt the wool of Beaver?
Or Swan's Down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the Briar?
Or the Nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the Bee?
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!

ROBERT HERRICK *To Electra,*

MORE WHITE than whitest lilies far,
Or Snow, or whitest Swans you are;
More white than are the whitest Creams,
Or Moon-light tinseling the streams;
More white than Pearls, or Juno's thigh,
Or Pelops' Arm of Ivory.
True, I confess, such Whites as these
May me delight, not fully please:
Till, like Ixion's Cloud, you be
White, warm, and soft to lie with me.

ROBERT BURNS *O my luve is like a red, red rose*

O MY luve is like a red, red rose,
   That's newly sprung in June:
O my luve is like the melodie
   That's sweetly played in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
   So deep in luve am I;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
   Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
   And the rocks melt wi' the sun:
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
   While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luve!
   And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my luve,
   Though it were ten thousand mile!

ROBERT FROST *The Silken Tent*

SHE Is as in a field a silken tent
At midday when a sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,
So that in guys it gently sways at ease,
And its supporting central cedar pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
And signifies the sureness of the soul,
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,
But strictly held by none, is loosely bound
By countless silken ties of love and thought
To everything on earth the compass round,
And only by one's going slightly taut
In the capriciousness of summer air
Is of the slightest bondage made aware.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY *To Night*

SWIFTLY WALK over the western wave,
Spirit of Night!
Out of the misty eastern cave,
Where, all the long and lone daylight,
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,
Which make thee terrible and dear,—
Swift be thy flight!

Wrap thy form in a mantle gray,
Star-inwrought!
Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;
Kiss her until she be wearied out,
Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land,
Touching all with thine opiate wand—
Come, long-sought!

When I arose and saw the dawn,
I sighed for thee;
When light rode high, and the dew was gone,
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,
And the weary Day turned to his rest,
Lingering like an unloved guest,
I sighed for thee.

Thy brother Death came, and cried,
Wouldst thou me?
Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,
Murmured like a noontide bee,
Shall I nestle near thy side?
Wouldst thou me?—And I replied,
No,... not thee!

Death will come when thou art dead,
Soon, too soon—
Sleep will come when thou art fled;
Of neither would I ask the boon

I ask of thee, beloved Night—
Swift be thine approaching flight,
Come soon, soon!

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON Song: *NOW sleeps the crimson petal, now the white*

Now SLEEPS the crimson petal, now the white;
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font:
The fire-fly wakens; waken thou with me.

Now droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost,
And like a ghost she glimmers on to me.

Now lies the Earth all Danae to the stars,
And all thy heart lies open unto me.

Now slides the silent meteor on, and leaves
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,
And slips into the bosom of the lake:
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip
Into my bosom and be lost in me.

SAMUEL DANIEL *Are they shadows that we see?*

ARE THEY shadows that we see?
And can shadows pleasure give?
Pleasures only shadows be
Cast by bodies we conceive,
And are made the things we deem,
In those figures which {hey seem.
But these pleasures vanish fast,

Which by shadows are exprest:
Pleasures are not, if they last,
In their passing, is their best.
Glory is most bright and gay
In a flash, and so away.
Feed apace then, greedy eyes,
On the wonder you behold.
Take it sudden as it flies
Though you take it not to hold:
When your eyes have done their part,
Thought must length it in the heart.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS *As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame*

As KINGFISHERS catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells;
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

THOMAS HARDY *The Darkling Thrush*

December 1900

I LEANT upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.

The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carollings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

MARIANNE MOORE *A Grave*

MAN LOOKING into the sea,
taking the view from those who have as much right to it as
you have to it yourself,
it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing,

but you cannot stand in the middle of this;
the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave.
The firs stand in a procession, each with an emerald turkey-foot at the top,
reserved as their contours, saying nothing;
repression, however, is not the most obvious characteristic of the sea;
the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look.
There are others besides you who have worn that look— 10
whose expression is no longer a protest; the fish no longer investigate them
for their bones have not lasted:
men lower nets, unconscious of the fact that they are desecrating a grave,
and row quickly away—the blades of the oars
moving together like the feet of water-spiders as if there were no such thing as death.
The wrinkles progress among themselves in a phalanx—"beautiful under networks of foam,
and fade breathlessly while the sea rustles in and out of the seaweed;
the birds swim through the air at top speed, emitting catcalls as heretofore—
the tortoise-shell scourges about the feet of the cliffs, in motion beneath them;
and the ocean, under the pulsation of lighthouses and noise of bell-buoys, 20
advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which dropped things are bound to sink—
in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor consciousness.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 4

1. List the most striking similes in three of the preceding poems. What makes them striking?—accurate and concrete sense-perception? the seeming unlikeness of the things compared? the emphasis thrown on the one factor they have in common? a combination of all these things? something else also?

2. Do you agree that such brief, concrete, and apparently self-contained poems as *Oread, The Pool, Poems,* and *The Eagle* all imply the same,underlying idea: that the faculty of seeing things as nakedly, clearly, and exactly as possible is our most valuable possession? From this suggested point of view, do these poems have a moral as well as an intellectual implication?
3. What is the theme of MacNeice's *Snow?* How are its imagery and its assertions about "world" related to the idea considered in the preceding question?
4. Compare the use of figures in the love poems by Campion, Jonson, Burns, and Frost. Do their differences suggest very different speaking personalities and degrees of emotion?
5. Sometimes a poet can get an intense effect in an especially concentrated way if he can assume a certain kind of knowledge or a maturity of experience in his readers. Greek mythology is one of the bodies of knowledge that (until recently, at least) has been a part of Western culture, and European poets have always taken advantage of this storehouse of the imagination.

   If necessary, find out about the myth of Dana, and then consider the force and effectiveness of the buried sexual implications in Tennyson's line,

   > Now lies the earth all Danaë to the stars. . . .

   Show the relation of this metaphor to the other images in the poem.
6. Analyze the meaning and emotional effect of the personifications in Shelley's poem.
7. In Hopkins' poem a great deal of stress is put on the paradoxical idea that everything is unique and yet part of the "same" general meaning behind everything else. A fundamentally religious meaning is derived from the images. Does the imagery in Hardy's poem suggest a similar attitude?
8. Beside the dominant image of the sea as a grave, what other figures of speech do you find in Marianne Moore's poem? What is their relation to the central one? Do these figures of speech change the meaning and feeling of the poem from what they would be if the first five lines stood alone?

V. RHYTHM AND MOVEMENT

Through its rhythmic movement, poetry that is alive creates a heightened sense of mood and tone. Rhythmic movement has the power to subordinate our conscious thought to the emotional pulsations of the moment. The skilful poet can simulate the gay turns of the waltz, the beat of the war-drum, the running excitement of a mob, the stately monotony of official ceremony. And he applies Alexander Pope's "rule" that "the sound must seem an echo to the sense" to much more than the imitation of such rhythmic events in the real world. The sense of inner harmony, and of its right relation to the feeling behind what is being said, is basic to good poetry. Consequently, there is purposeful rhythmic technique in almost any effective poem, even the simplest.

A favorite children's poem, William Allingham's *The Fairies*, begins in a burst of movement that carries over into an awestruck whisper and then a vivid picture:

Up the airy mountain,
  Down the rushy glen,
We daren't go a-hunting
  For fear of little men;
Wee folk, good folk,
  Trooping all together;
Green jacket, red cap,
  And white owl's feather.

The buoyant words "airy" and "rushy" help the first two lines build up their speed. There are only three stop-sounds in them—sounds which cannot be indefinitely continued. Two of them, the *p* and the *d*, come at the beginnings of their lines and help push them off to a fast start; the third, the *t*, is buried in an unstressed syllable.

Every sound, every syllable contributes to a poem's movement. Sounds and syllables therefore are more than the elements of particular words; they are also elements of the basic rhythmic units called *feet*, units generally made up of two or three syllables. When most of the feet begin as the first two lines of *The Fairies* do—with a stressed syllable followed by one or more unaccented ones—we have a *jailing* meter: emphatic, and immediately suggesting a chant of some kind. When the unaccented syllable precedes the accented one, as in the third and fourth lines, we have a *rising* meter—the type usually considered most natural for English verse. (The accented syllable usually bringing such lines to conclusion is called a *masculine* ending.) When, as in the fifth line, an accented syllable is followed by another of the same kind, the accent is said to be a *hovering* one—it does not rise or fall but slows up or arrests the movement for a moment. And when, as at the close of the third line, there is an extra unaccented syllable speeding up the movement momentarily, we have a *feminine ending.* If we break up the foregoing stanza into feet and indicate their accentual pattern, we can see that the movement "falls" swiftly, "rises" more waveringly, focuses attention emphatically in the fifth line, rides out swiftly again with the "wee folk" as it did at first, pulls up hoveringly again, and at last lets go rapidly in a line which actually combines all three kinds of meter.

UP the/ AIRy/ MOUNtain,/
  DOWN the/ RUSHy/ GLEN,/
We DAR/en't GO/ a-HUNT/ing/
  For FEAR/ of LIT/tle MEN;/
WEE FOLK,/ GOOD FOLK,/
  TROOPing/ ALL to/GETHer;/
GREEN JACKet,/ RED CAP,/
  And WHITE/ OWL'S/ FEATHer./

We may, if we wish, imagine musical rests after "glen" and before "owl's," or tuck the left-over "ing" of the third line into the preceding foot as has been done with the final syllable of "jacket." Such details, however, are of no real importance in themselves. The usefulness of metrical information does not lie in the diagrams it can produce, but in the way it can help us see the relation of rhythmic effects to meaning and feeling. The informed reader of poetry is likely to know enough about it to be able to describe the general movement of a poem or to follow the comments of most critics on it.

The most commonly used types of feet are the iamb, found in the fourth line of Allingham's poem, and the trochee, found in the first line. Since iambic feet are closest to the rhythm of natural speech, any other kind of foot seems to create a special effect. Lines that are predominantly iambic often begin with a trochaic foot for initial emphasis:

/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /
Season mists and mellow fruitfulness
KEATS

Often, too, one finds anapestic feet—consisting of two unaccented syllables followed by an accented one—substituted for iambic ones, to gain variety and speed. In the following line, the first two feet are iambs, the second two anapests:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God
HOPKINS

In the same way, the dactyl—one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed ones—is often substituted for a trochaic foot, with a similar effect of heightened speed. Here is a line in which the two kinds of feet alternate in a truly "rocking" movement:

/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘
Out of the cradle endlessly rocking
WHITMAN

Hovering accents, when the accented syllables that come together are in the same foot, are called spondees. The spondaic foot is used for unusually strong emphasis:

/ / / / / / ˘ /
Black town, beige woods, green frozen creek
WILLIAM GIBSON

In most lines, not every accented syllable is as heavily stressed as every other, nor is every unstressed one as light as every other. Note, for instance, in the lines just quoted, the difference in emphasis of the first and the third syllable of "fruitfulness/' and the special force of the word "charged." Such shadings of stress or lightness make for a richer, more complicated sound-effect than rough scansion will indicate. Sometimes, therefore, it is convenient to speak of secondary stresses, as in the final syllable of

/ ˘ ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ \
Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness

And on the other hand, it is often sufficient for descriptive purposes simply to indicate the number of heavily stressed syllables without regard to such differences. Thus, we may speak of Shakespeare's characteristic five-stress line. In general, however, we can describe a line with some degree at least of precision by referring to the type of foot predominating in it, and to the number of feet and the kind of substitute feet it contains. A one-foot line is called monometer, a two-foot line dimeter, and so on through trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter (or Alexandrine, if predominantly iambic), and heptameter. In using this technical terminology, of course, we must remain aware of its true end: to aid our appreciation of the chiming together of the varied elements in any given poem.

How important *are* such considerations? In *Flowers by the Sea,* we observed, one of the means by which the relation between the movement of the wind-tossed flowers and that of the slowly swaying ocean was called into our minds was a change of rhythm.[1] In Allingham's stanza, we have noted the skilfully varied rhythmic pace and its connection with the sense of the passage. If we now examine briefly a complete poem by A. E. Housman—a more dramatic piece of writing than either of these, with a human figure firmly occupying the center of the stage—we shall see even more readily how metrical technique contributes to poetic meaning and effect.

A. E. HOUSMAN *Eight O'Clock*

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,
He stood and counted them and cursed his luck;
And then the clock collected in the tower
Its strength, and struck.

The impact of this poem is truly terrific. Its force is intensified by the sharpest possible contract in rhythm between the scattered tinkling diversity of the second line and the slow forceful beat of the first half of the third line. This contrast is intensified in the second stanza and is brought to a climax in the deliberate, wave-like build-up of weight in the last two lines. The effect is redoubled by the suspenseful pause after "strength," followed by the final heavy blow at the very end.

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[1] See pages 51-53.

The voice we hear speaking in *Eight O'clock* is that of a narrator who is very closely in sympathy with the psychological state of the doomed man. He feels the pressure of time weighing on him, and is aware of the irony in the fact that the clock itself seems to the doomed man to be the agent of his death. The impact would not be so great were it not that the beat, or rhythm, of the poem goes on in two ways at once. There is the effect of the contrasts, the suspense and gathering, and the final blow built up by the individual, dramatic manner of presentation; and there is also the basic, conventional pattern of the form the poet has chosen—the four-line stanza with alternating rhymes, and with a basic iambic pattern of alternating light and heavy stresses: "He stóod, and heard the stéeple.. . ." Not all the syllables alternate so regularly, but this is the predominant pattern; and when, as in the second, third, and fifth lines, we find other variations, we can feel them pulling against this pattern to create a special emphasis. So also, each stanza begins with a line of three feet; the second and third lines have five feet, and the fourth, after this effect of expansion, contracts sharply to two. Meaningful variation within a pattern, and the use of skilfully contrived forms to suggest the sound of real speech, are signs of poetic craftsmanship.

This poem shows how important to poetic rhythm are its pauses. If a line makes a complete unit of meaning in itself, coming to a halt of some kind at its end, we say it is end-stopped. If its meaning and movement carry over to the succeeding line we call it a run-on line (enjambment). A good poet can control his effects to a high degree by his skill in handling longer and shorter units. He therefore knows how to manage the caesura, a definite pause, usually near the middle of a line, which marks a break both in meaning and metrical pattern.

He stood, and heard the steeple. . . .

Notice how, in the first stanza of *Eight O'Clock*, Housman achieves great variety by placing the caesura early in the first line, then using a long breathsweep without another break until the end of the second line, then giving us three sharp pauses and a long fourth one in his third line, and at last sweeping on again without a pause to the end of the stanza. In the second stanza, he begins with two heavy stresses, each followed by a caesura, brings the first line up short, and then continues without a break until the middle of the last line. Here he pauses weightily, coming down with all the force he can in the concluding foot. Thus, the placing of the pauses has a great deal to do with the pacing and final force of the poem.

A good deal of the music, emotional subtlety, and tempo of a poem derives from such interplay between its "natural" and its "artificial" rhythms. Though the poet may seem to be concentrating all his energies on the ideas, images, and general content of his poem, he organizes and displays them through the underlying conventional pattern of rhythm and stanza-form. The situation is analogous to the working of the human body. We act as though we were perfectly free agents, yet all the time we are profoundly disciplined by mechanical controls of innumerable physiological processes.

This point brings us to what is called free verse, or *vers libre*. Free verse, speaking very generally, is poetry written according to some other pattern than that of regularly recurring conventional feet—poetry composed, to use the words of Ezra Pound, once one of its chief exponents, "in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome."[2] This distinction is not exact, for fine conventional verse always has its special music. But it is the kind of language often used by experimental writers who, wanting to get back to the essentials of a fresh and living poetic technique, strike out against more timid writers whose work is conservative in form. A slavish adherence to a few traditional types of versification, particularly to blank verse—that is, iambic pentameter, or a sequence of five groups of recurring light and heavy stresses in one line—was what Pound meant by the "sequence of the metronome." In the hands of such masters as Shakespeare, Milton, and Tennyson, no form would produce merely the *tock-tock-tock* of the metronome. In the hands of their imitators

[2] Ezra Pound, *Make It New*.

in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, blank verse became mechanical in rhythm and artificial in diction

The same sort of difference exists between the brilliant versification of Dryden and Pope (in the later seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries) and the work of *their* more tepid followers. These two poets, also, were great masters of their craft. They created the most varied effects with their "heroic couplets"—rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter lines that were especially suitable for forceful intellectual statement, wit, or satire, and that in the hands of these masters became also a vehicle for the expression of sensuous richness and powerful emotion. In the late eighteenth century, the imitators of Pope, and of Milton as well, were often sentimental, pompous, or simply dull. Consequently, Wordsworth and other poets turned against the deadened verse-forms which had become predominant by the end of the 1700's and argued for greater freedom of style and rhythm and greater idiomatic freshness of diction. They were the "experimental" poets of their day, though now we think of the great Romantics as a sanctified part of the English verse tradition.

Good free verse, as has often been pointed out, is *not* free in the sense of being unpatterned and uncontrolled. It always has its own formal consistency, employing certain kinds of grammatical parallelism, repeated phrasings with slight variations that do not quite fit the beat of conventional meter, images that provide balance and contrast for one another, questions and answers that reinforce one another in sound as well as in meaning, and other similar devices. All the methods just listed may be found in the following lines from Walt Whitman's *When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd* (pages 526-535):

> O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
> And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that
>   has gone?
> And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?
>
> Sea-winds blown from east and west,
> Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western sea,
>   till there on the prairies meeting,
> These and with these and the breath of my chant,
> I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

Though Whitman wrote before Pound and the other twentieth-century experimentalists, he rediscovered, as other poets before him also had done, the value of *cadenced* rhythms, in which the poet depends on his own ear for sound and on patterns of rhythm determined by the feeling and general content of what he is writing. The translators of the Psalms and the Song of Songs in the King James Bible, the eighteenth-century experimentalists Christopher Smart and William Blake, and others had long preceded Whitman in creating such effects.

The competent free-verse poet may use rhymes if he feels it necessary—or any other combination of effects which might ordinarily be found in more conventional verse. The point is, he is *free* to use any technique, but he will use it in his own unique manner. We may observe how, when he is truly skilful, he achieves patterns of rhythm and sound quite as rich as those of the great masters of conventional forms, by examining another passage from *When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd*—the opening section of the poem:

> When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd
> And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the
>   night,
> I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.
>
> Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
> Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
> And thought of him I love.

These lines from the beginning of Whitman's elegy on Abraham Lincoln show how much patterned arrangement can be found in an unconventional form. We shall simply note a few of the more obvious points: the "internal" rhyming of "spring" and "bring" in the fifth line; the unstressed *-ing* sounds that, in the third, fourth, and fifth lines, give us fainter rhymes with these words, together with the sound of "in," "trinity," and "him"; the repetition of "spring" and "bring" and "ever-returning"; the many l's, d's, r's, *t's* and n's; the fact that in each of these three-line stanzas the second line seems to expand in space and the third line gives a sharp personal turn of feeling to the stanza. Note also how the first two lines give us two pictures that counteract each other, each presented in one-half of a compound clause. This contrast-and-balance is repeated in the two phrases of the fifth line. Only very superficially could we say that these lines are "free"; all the important phrases and effects are associated with the patterns we have just mentioned. Indeed, the *whole* pattern of repeated and related vowels *(assonance)* and consonants *(alliteration)* in any poem is more important than any "regularity" of line-length or of rhyme-scheme could be to its musical effect. If we appreciate this fact, we shall also appreciate the deliberate use poets often make of dissonances which alert the reader through a surprising disharmony of sound that makes key words and phrases stand out in reading.

Looking for deliberate design again, we can say that despite the apparently arbitrary arrangement of such lines as those by Whitman just quoted, the passage actually presents a pattern of balanced impressions typical of many prayers and free-verse poems. Let us, for instance, consider how the two closing lines picture forth the "trinity" which the poet says the spring always recalls to him:

> Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
> And thought of him I love.

Each of these three phrases joined by "and" contains three stressed syllables, each begins emphatically, and each repeats and builds up the significance of language already used in preceding stanzas. Such effects as these, which the skilled poet employs to fix pictures and ideas and feelings in our minds, are essential in creating a sense of a meaningfully patterned work of poetic art.

Fundamentally, then, there is no difference in the essentials of technique between good free verse and good "conventional" poetry. Both depend for their success on the same qualities of imaginative precision of imagery, rightness of diction, and the adaptation of rhythmic form to the effect the poet wishes to produce. Housman's *Eight O'Clock* is a conventional poem, with a regular stanza form. Each stanza has four lines, the corresponding lines in each stanza have the same number of stresses, the pattern of rhymes is parallel in both stanzas, and the basic rhythm is that most commonly found in English verse—the iambic rhythm, sustained with minor variations throughout the poem. The variations are present to achieve maximum emphasis, as in the two spondaic feet beginning the third line—"One, two, | three, four" —or in the trochaic foot that opens the second line: "Sp´rinkle."

But *Eight O'Clock* can hardly be said to have been written "in the sequence of the metronome." Housman has controlled its movement with precisely the kind of sensitivity which Williams, in his *Flowers by the Sea,* displays toward the building up and the sudden release of his splendid perception there. The versification of this latter poem creates a swaying effect partly induced by the slight variation in the number of stressed syllables and the place where they fall from line to line. In each case, success has been achieved through both a strong sense of a basic shaping pattern and a feeling for strategic points at which variations are needed. Housman was a classical scholar, and the disciplined form and the "finish" of his best verse reflects this fact. Williams has been one of our foremost contemporary experimentalists. Yet it would be difficult to say which of the two poems shows the greater consciousness of tight, economical structure or the higher mastery of traditional skills.[3] It is not surprising, in fact, that some of our most successful innovators in free verse have also been among the most careful students of traditional and classical verse-forms, and have done distinguished work in translating and appreciating ancient poetry and in adapting older forms and techniques to modern uses.

A NOTE ON *ed* AND *'d*

Readers of poetry are often puzzled by the fact that, particularly in older poetry, the syllable *ed* is sometimes spelled *ed* and sometimes contracted to *'d*. Originally, as in Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* the *ed* was always sounded as an extra syllable, even though in prose and in ordinary speech it would not be sounded; and when the poet wished to indicate that (for rhythmical reasons) the *ed* was not to be sounded, he would write it *'d.*

The reader's confusion is due to the fact that poets have not been consistent or logical in this practice. Tennyson, for instance, writes in *Morte D'Arthur:*

---

[3] Williams' unrhymed lyric, despite its "modern" qualities of diction and development, is in the same general tradition as Campion's *Rose-Cheek't Laura* (page 131) and Collins' *Ode to Evening* (pages 676-677).

The bare black cliffs clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crags that rang
Sharp-smitten with the din of armed heels—

Here the poet trusts that the heavily pronounced rhythm of the iambic pentameter blank verse will indicate that *armed* is to be sounded *armed* and that the *ed* in *based* is not sounded.

In Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* (pages 524-526), there are a number of instances in which the iambic meter requires the accenting of the *ed* syllable—e.g., "lightwingèd Dryad of the trees," "deep delvèd earth," "purple stained mouth," "embalmed darkness," "musèd rhyme." In some cases the poet uses an apostrophe to indicate where the *ed* syllable is not sounded, but not in all.

In Blake's */ asked a thief* (pages 455-456), in every case but the first two lines, where the *ed* is to be sounded, the poet consistently uses *'d.*

Ordinarily, the reader's sense of rhythm must be his guide.

Modern poets follow the usage of prose and rarely employ the *'d* except for special effects of archaism or irony.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

1.

ANONYMOUS from *Yankee Doodle*

YANKEE DOODLE went to town,
  Riding on a pony,
Stuck a feather in his hat
  And called him macaroni.[1]

Refrain

Yankee doodle, keep it up,
  Yankee doodle dandy;
Mind the music and the step
  And with the girls be handy.

ANONYMOUS *Hey, Betty Martin!*

HEY BETTY Martin, Tip-toe, Tip-toe,
Hey Betty Martin, Tip-toe fine!

Johnny get your hair cut, hair cut, hair cut,
Johnny get your hair cut, hair cut short!

Johnny get your gun and your sword and pistol,
Johnny get your gun and come with me!

Hey Betty Martin, Tip-toe, Tip-toe,
Hey Betty Martin, Tip-toe fine!

---

[1] called himself a fop, or dandy

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS *The Dance*

IN BREUGHEL'S great picture, The Kermess,
the dancers go round, they go round and
around, the squeal and the blare and the
tweedle of bagpipes, a bugle and fiddles
tipping their bellies (round as the thick-
sided glasses whose wash they impound)
their hips and their bellies off balance
to turn them. Kicking and rolling about
the Fair Grounds, swinging their butts, those
shanks must be sound to bear up under such
rollicking measures, prance as they dance
in Breughel's great picture, The Kermess.

OGDEN NASH *The Private Dining Room*

Miss RAFFERTY wore taffeta,
Miss Cavendish wore lavender.
We ate pickerel and mackerel
And other lavish provender.
Miss Cavendish was Lalage,
Miss Rafferty was Barbara.
We gobbled pickled mackerel
And broke the candelabara,
Miss Cavendish in lavender,
In taffeta, Miss Rafferty,
The girls in taffeta lavender,
And we, of course, in mufti.

Miss Rafferty wore taffeta,
The taffeta was lavender,
Was lavend, lavender, lavenderest,
As the wine improved the provender.
Miss Cavendish wore lavender,
The lavender was taffeta.
We boggled mackled pickerel,

And bumpers did we quaffeta.
And Lalage wore lavender,
And lavender wore Barbara,
Rafferta taffeta Cavender lavender
Barbara abracadabra.

Miss Rafferty in taffeta
Grew definitely raffisher.
Miss Cavendish in lavender
Grew less and less stand-offisher.
With Lalage and Barbara
We grew a little pickereled,
We ordered Mumm and Roederer
Because the bubbles tickereled.
But lavender and taffeta
Were gone when we were soberer.
I haven't thought for thirty years
Of Lalage and Barbara.

JOHN BETJEMAN *Trebetherick*

WE USED to picnic where the thrift
  Grew deep and tufted to the edge;
We saw the yellow foam-flakes drift
  In trembling sponges on the ledge
Below us, till the wind would lift
  Them up the cliff and o'er the hedge.
    Sand in the sandwiches, wasps in the tea,
    Sun on our bathing-dresses heavy with the wet,
    Squelch of the bladder-wrack waiting for the sea,
    Fleas round the tamarisk, an early cigarette.

From where the coastguard houses stood
  One used to see, below the hill,
The lichened branches of a wood
  In summer silver-cool and still;
And there the Shade of Evil could
  Stretch out at us from Shilla Mill.

Thick with sloe and blackberry, uneven in the light,
Lonely ran the hedge, the heavy meadow was remote,
The oldest part of Cornwall was the wood as black as night,
And the pheasant and the rabbit lay torn open at the throat.

But when a storm was at its height,
And feathery slate was black in rain,
And tamarisks were hung with light
And golden sand was brown again,
Spring tide and blizzard would unite
And sea came flooding up the lane.
Waves full of treasure then were roaring up the beach,
Ropes round our mackintoshes, waders warm and dry,
We waited for the wreckage to come swirling into reach,
Ralph, Vasey, Alastair, Biddy, John and I.

Then roller into roller curled
And thundered down the rocky bay,
And we were in a water-world
Of rain and blizzard, sea and spray,
And one against the other hurled
We struggled round to Greenaway.
Blessed be St. Enodoc, blessed be the wave,
Blessed be the springy turf, we pray, pray to thee,
Give to our children all the happy days you gave
To Ralph, Vasey, Alastair, Biddy, John and me.

JOHN MASEFIELD *Cargoes*

QUINQUIREME OF Nineveh from distant Ophir,
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,
With a cargo of ivory,
And apés and peacocks,
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the Isthmus,
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green shores,
With a cargo of diamonds,
Emeralds, amethysts,
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.

Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke-stack,
Butting through the Channel in the mad March days,
With a cargo of Tyne coal,
Road-rails, pig-lead,
Firewood, iron-ware, and cheap tin trays.

2.

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON *So, We'll go no more a roving*

So, WE'LL go no more a roving
  So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
  And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
  And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
  And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,
  And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a roving
  By the light of the moon.

VACHEL LINDSAY *The Flower-fed Buffaloes*

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
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.
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.

H. D. *Orchard*

I SAW the first pear
as it fell—
the honey-seeking, golden-banded,
the yellow swarm
was not more fleet than I,
(spare us from loveliness)
and I fell prostrate
crying:
you have flayed us
with your blossoms,
spare us the beauty
of fruit-trees.

The honey-seeking
paused not,
the air thundered their song,
and I alone was prostrate.

0 rough-hewn
god of the orchard,
I bring you an offering—
do you, alone unbeautiful,
son of the god,
spare us from loveliness:

these fallen hazel-nuts,
stripped late of their green sheaths,
grapes, red-purple,
their berries
dripping with wine,
pomegranates already broken,
and shrunken figs
and quinces untouched,
I bring you as offering.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY *Hymn of Pan*

I

FROM THE forests and highlands
  We come, we come;
From the river-girt islands,
  Where loud waves are dumb
    Listening to my sweet pipings.
The wind in the reeds and the rushes,
  The bees on the bells of thyme,
The birds on the myrtle bushes,
  The cicale above in the lime,
And the lizards below in the grass,
Were as silent as ever old Tmolus was
    Listening to my sweet pipings.

II

Liquid Peneus was flowing,
  And all dark Tempe lay
In Pelion's shadow, outgrowing
  The light of the dying day,
    Speeded by my sweet pipings.
The Sileni, and Sylvans, and Fauns,
  And the Nymphs of the woods and the waves,
To the edge of the moist river-lawns,
  And the brink of the dewy caves,
And all that did then attend and follow
Were silent with love, as you now, Apollo,
    With envy of my sweet pipings.

III

I sang of the dancing stars,
  I sang of the daedal Earth,
And of Heaven—and the giant wars,
  And Love, and Death, and Birth,—
    And then I changed my pipings—
Singing how down the vale of Menalus
  I pursued a maiden and clasp'd a reed:
Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!
  It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed:
All wept, as I think both ye now would,
If envy or age had not frozen your blood,
    At the sorrow of my sweet pipings.

WALT WHITMAN *I am he that walks with the tender and growing night*

(from *Song of Myself)*

I AM he that walks with the tender and growing night,
I call to the earth and sea half-held by the night.

Press close bare-bosom'd night—press close magnetic nourishing night!
Night of south winds—night of the large few stars!
Still nodding night—mad naked summer night.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of the departed sunset—earth of the mountains misty-topt!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping elbow'd earth—rich apple-blossom'd earth!
Smile, for your lover comes.

EZRA POUND *The Seafarer*[2]

MAY I for my own self song's truth reckon,
Journey's jargon, how I in harsh days
Hardship endured oft.
Bitter breast-cares have I abided,
Known on my keel many a care's hold,
And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent
Narrow nightwatch nigh the ship's head
While she tossed close to cliffs. Coldly afflicted,
My feet were by frost benumbed.
Chill its chains are; chafing sighs
Hew my heart round and hunger begot
Mere-weary mood. Lest man know not
That he on dry land loveliest liveth,
List how I, care-wretched, on ice-cold sea,
Weathered the winter, wretched outcast
Deprived of my kinsmen;
Hung with hard ice-flakes, where hail-scur flew,
There I heard naught save the harsh sea
And ice-cold wave, at whiles the swan cries,
Did for my games the gannet's clamour,
Sea-fowls' loudness was for me laughter,
The mews' singing all my mead-drink.
Storms, on the stone-cliffs beaten, fell on the stern
In icy feathers; full oft the eagle screamed
With spray on his pinion.
Not any protector
May make merry man faring needy.
This he little believes, who aye in winsome life
Abides 'mid burghers some heavy business,
Wealthy and wine-flushed, how I weary oft
Must bide above brine.
Neareth nightshade, snoweth from north,
Frost froze the land, hail fell on earth then,
Corn of the coldest. Nathless there knocketh now

---

[2] Translated from the Anglo-Saxon.

The heart's thought that I on high streams
The salt-wavy tumult traverse alone.
Moaneth alway my mind's lust
That I fare forth, that I afar hence
Seek out a foreign fastness.
For this there's no mood-lofty man over earth's midst,
Not though he be given his good, but will have in his youth greed;
Nor his deed to the daring, nor his king to the faithful
But shall have his sorrow for sea-fare
Whatever his lord will.
He hath not heart for harping, nor in ring-having
Nor winsomeness to wife, nor world's delight
Nor any whit else save the wave's slash,
Yet longing comes upon him to fare forth on the water.
Bosque taketh blossom, cometh beauty of berries,
Fields to fairness, land fares brisker,
All this admonisheth man eager of mood,
The heart turns to travel so that he then thinks
On flood-ways to be far departing.
Cuckoo calleth with gloomy crying,
He singeth summerward, bodeth sorrow,
The bitter heart's blood. Burgher knows not—
He the prosperous man—what some perform
Where wandering them widest draweth.
So that but now my heart burst from my breast-lock,
My mood 'mid the mere-flood,
Over the whale's acre, would wander wide.
On earth's shelter cometh oft to me,
Eager and ready, the crying lone-flyer,
Whets for the whale-path the heart irresistibly,
O'er tracks of ocean; seeing that anyhow
My lord deems to me this dead life
On loan and on land, I believe not
That any earth-weal eternal standeth
Save there be somewhat calamitous
That, ere a man's tide go, turn it to twain.
Disease or oldness or sword-hate
Beats out the breath from doom-gripped body.

And for this, every earl whatever, for those speaking after-
Laud of the living, boasteth some last word,
That he will work ere he pass onward,
Frame on the fair earth 'gainst foes his malice,
Daring ado, . . .
So that all men shall honour him after
And his laud beyond them remain 'mid the English,
Aye, for ever, a lasting life's-blast,
Delight 'mid the doughty.
Days little durable,
And all arrogance of earthen riches,
There come now no kings nor Caesars
Nor gold-giving lords like those gone.
Howe'er in mirth most magnified,
Whoe'er lived in life most lordliest,
Drear all this excellence, delights undurable!
Waneth the watch, but the world holdeth.
Tomb hideth trouble. The blade is laid low.
Earthly glory ageth and scareth.
No man at all going the earth's gait,
But age fares against him, his face paleth,
Grey-haired he groaneth, knows gone companions,
Lordly men, are to earth o'ergiven,
Nor may he then the flesh-cover, whose life ceaseth,
Nor eat the sweet nor feel the sorry,
Nor stir hand nor think in mid heart,
And though he strew the grave with gold,
His born brothers, their buried bodies
Be an unlikely treasure hoard.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES • 5

1. List some examples of emphatic, curious, and effective rhythms in popular songs, children's games, singing commercials, folk songs, proverbs, college yells, or other such sources in your own experience.

a. Analyze the meter and its relation to the meaning of the following passages:

i. True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense:
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows,
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,
The line too labours, and the words move slow;
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main.

ALEXANDER POPE

ii. Trochee trips from long to short.
From long to long in solemn sort
Slow Spondee stalks; strong foot! yet ill able
Ever to come up with Dactyl trisyllable.
Iambics march from short to long;
With a leap and a bound the swift Anapests throng.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

3. What specific devices do the poems by Nash and Williams employ to build up dizzying effects? Account for the *difference* in the kinds of movement found in these two poems.
4. Reread the lines by Pope quoted in the second question above, and show how in Betjeman's poem the sound does "seem an echo to the sense." How is this especially evident in the contrast between the first six lines and the four concluding ones in each stanza?
5. In Shelley's poem the remarkable effect of the change from the joy and lightness of the first two stanzas to the melancholy of the close is brought about by an unexpected but pronounced change in rhythm following the line "And then I changed my pipings." Read the poem aloud several times to see if you can experience this effect and its emotional consequences.
6. What patterns of rhythm, sound, and phrasing do you find in the free-verse poems by Whitman and H. D.? How do they contribute to the speaking tones and emotional effects of these poems? (See the discussion of free verse on pages 71-74 for suggestions concerning such patterns.)
7. How much do the alliteration and the unusually emphatic meter of Pound's poem help to create its sense of elemental hardship and tone of sorrowful folk-wisdom?

VI. THE POEM AS A WHOLE

In examining *Flowers by the Sea*, we took special note of its imagery; and in examining *Eight O'Clock*, of its rhythmic movement. But we could not ignore the other qualities of these poems, since poetic accomplishment involves thought and feeling as well as sound and imagery. It is the interrelationship of many elements that counts—elements that make for a poem's sense of reality, its intellectual and moral realizations, and its level of emotional intensity. If we may here venture a summarizing definition, we might say: A poem is a form of expression in which an unusual number of the resources of language are concentrated into a patterned, organic unit of significant experience.

In the poems by Williams and Housman, the meaning at the heart of this experience is not specifically stated, but is forcefully implied through the selection of detail and the whole manner of presentation. In other poems, however, the significant meaning holds the center of the stage. As in the following example, it is the climax and culmination of the experience:

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *A slumber did my spirit seal*

A slumber did my spirit seal;
  I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
  The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force;
  She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
  With rocks, and stones, and trees.

These two stanzas make an elementary, pathetic contrast between the speaker's past blind illusion concerning a woman who has died and his present bleak awareness of her physical death. His spirit had been asleep. It had not occurred to him that she might, like more common humanity, be subject to death and decay. But now he is compelled to face this fact—and facing it, he experiences a new and terrible insight that is actually an expansion of his sensibility. He becomes aware as never before of the geographical and astronomical round, impersonal and monotonous, within which we exist. His final helpless vision of the dead woman within the dead globe that carries her endlessly, and meaninglessly, through its daily course is therefore an expression of surrender to the desolate truth.

A simple pattern of sound supports the directness of statement in this poem and its uncomplicated rhymes and stanza-form. The repeated *e's,* r's, and s's weave a definite design into the poem's fabric. In the last two lines, the r's become especially important and we find, in the words "rolled round," the only strong variation from the regular iambic sequence of light and heavy syllables. This variation corresponds with the heightened emotion—the appalled realization that the beloved woman, now passive and impervious with the rest of subhuman nature, is after all completely under "the touch of earthly years."

Like the word "pain" in the passage from *Hamlet* discussed on pages 34-36, these two concluding lines at once sum up and deepen the meaning of the poem. Many poems grow in this way from a simple thought or observation into a fuller realization. All the elements of a poem contribute to this growth, and there is an infinite variety of ways in which it can occur.

It is perhaps easiest to see the emergence of an organic structure in successful poems written in some conventional, simple, and familiar form such as the sonnet. A sonnet is a fourteen-line reflective poem which almost always falls into one of two fairly strictly defined patterns, one known as the English (or sometimes Shakespearean, or Elizabethan) sonnet and the other as the Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnet. The English sonnet is made up of three four-line stanzas, called quatrains, and a final couplet. In each of the quatrains, the first and third lines rhyme with one another, and the second and fourth rhyme with each other also, while the closing couplet adds yet another rhyming unit. (We describe this rhyme-scheme as *abab, cdcd, efef, gg.)* Finally, the sonnet line is ordinarily an iambic pentameter; that is, each line contains five stressed syllables, and if the meter were perfectly regular these stressed syllables would each be preceded by an unstressed syllable.

However, we shall almost always find some variations from the pattern, for mere regularity makes for monotonous and slavish rhythm.

It is interesting to observe how, in the following sonnet by Shakespeare, these quite arbitrary conventional limitations are so used as to make the form of the poem seem both natural and especially suitable for its unique thought and feeling. A simple thought grows into a complex meaning intensely experienced because of the way in which all its formal elements support and affect one another.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE *Sonnet LXXIII*

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the West,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed, whereon it must expire
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

The logical structure of this poem is quite clear: the same thing is said three times (in a different way each time), and then a consequence of it is stated in the concluding couplet. Reduced to its essence, the argument runs as follows: I am growing old and my youth must die. You, beloved, see the signs of this, yet it makes you love me all the more.

But a poem is much more than a mere summary of its argument. Each of the three quatrains making up the main part of the sonnet presents the idea of age and the approach of an ending in terms of a different image: autumn, the ending of the year, in the first; twilight and sunset, the ending of a day, in the second; and the dying of a fire in the third. These images are not, on the surface, original. What strikes us first in them is their appropriateness, their universality, and especially the rich emotional overtones with which the poet's musical language endows them.

The line

> Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang

is particularly rich in its evocations, even though some of the implications it would leave in the mind of an Elizabethan Englishman may need to be pointed out in a note. (The reference, though indirect, is clear: it is to the many cathedrals and churches which with the coming of the Protestant monarchs were stripped of their rich and often beautiful ornaments and hangings.)

The reference to "black night" as "Death's second self," though a commonplace of medieval poetry, serves to suggest, without stating it directly, that it is not only youth which will soon be gone, but life itself, and this is reinforced by the image of the dying fire, and the reference to the "death-bed."

The line

> Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by,

is a good instance of Shakespeare's concentrated accuracy. The key idea is that, as it slowly burns out, an aging man's life must feed on its own accumulated richness. This idea emerges perfectly in the image of a fire choked with ashes because of the very abundance of the fuel—a thought which gains in intensity and clarity because it is presented thus in terms of a concrete image.

The organic growth, as though it were a living thing, of this poem may be seen in this sequence of images. All suggest aging and dying, but each provides a different shade of feeling or thought. Each image, indeed, has a second image lurking within it, and it is this second image that makes each stage of the poem significantly different from the others. The speaker compares himself to trees in late autumn; but almost at once our attention is turned to a second image, of the trees as abandoned choirs where sweet music was once heard. The painful loss of a beautiful, vital youth is what age is shown to mean here, at the beginning of the poem. At the next phase of its growth, the poem gives us another image of the coming of old age—the twilight of the day—but now shifts our attention to the future rather than to the past: Death, of which night is the "second self or twin, is not far in the offing. And in the third stage, the image of the dying fire, at first apparently so simple, is seen as the most complex of all. An aging man is a dying fire, but that fire's own ashes, once its source of nourishment, are also its deathbed. And to this paradoxical picture still another paradox is added: the ashes are actually "consuming" the fire which once fed on *them.*

The third image, it is clear, brings together the connotations of the first (the sense of lost beauty and richness) and of the second (the unavoidable coming on of death). But it also, because of its intricacy and clever suggestion of the ironic and surprising nature of life, prepares us for the speaker's own admiration and delight, at the close of the sonnet, in the character of the beloved person he is addressing.

The poem, therefore, grows into paradox as well as surprise. It has an unexpected, and therefore forceful, happy ending which is nevertheless an integral part of the body of the poem. The strangely intense love granted the poet grows, increases, and does not die. This love becomes an image of glowing life and permanence, and throws back a new, unforeseen, and cheering ray on all that has gone before—all the dark, gloomy images of change and decay. It is as if the birds, the daylight, and the fire were not to be lost forever after all. All this is embodied in the neat concluding couplet, which serves to convey the poet's sense of his own lucky uniqueness. Because of his beloved's devotion, he has been singled out by fortune to triumph over age and death.

Thus we see how a great, original poet used a conventional form for his own purposes. Yet he did have to adapt his art to the demands of that form, and his poem would have been quite different had he employed the so-called Italian rather than the English type of sonnet. Instead of following a pattern of three parallel statements and a striking conclusion, the Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnet falls into two basic movements—an octave (eight-line stanza) and a sestet (six-line stanza). The octave rhymes *abbaabba*, while in the sestet any combination of either two or three rhymes is permitted. (The sonnet below, for example, rhymes *abbaabba, cdcdcd.)* These larger units, with their more demanding rhyme-scheme, present a special problem for the poet who wishes to make them move with conviction and intensity toward an effective conclusion in something of the manner that Shakespeare's sonnet does.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS *God's Grandeur*

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

The movement of this sonnet by a Jesuit priest can be described very simply. In the octave an awestruck outcry of joy at the omnipresent "grandeur of God" is countered by a depressing picture of man's insensitivity to this grandeur; but in the sestet the feeling of joy springs up again and the innate glory of all being and the loving presence of the Holy Ghost are reasserted. This second assertion of pious, joyous faith is quieter (except for the "Oh" and the "ahl" near the end) but even more insistent and powerful than the earlier one, because it is made in the face of the honest recognition that men in general have not responded to the love and beauty implicit in the universe. The octave has been used to present a dilemma, and the sestet to break out of it by the power of its statement of religious belief.

Thus, one of the most important features of the Italian sonnet is the logical and emotional relationship of its two sections.At the break between the octave and the sestet there is a pause in the continuity of the development and a change, or *turn,* in the thought and feeling. The turn may be of various sorts. Perhaps the problem stated in the first part of the poem is solved in the second; a generalization asserted in the octave receives a particular, concrete application in the sestet, or conversely a specific situation is broadened into a consideration of its universal consequences. Sometimes a question, an aspiration, or a doubt presented in the first eight lines is answered, attained to, or resolved in the final six. Along with this logical, dramatic, or narrative development there is also an emotional change: the two .sections of the sonnet are contrasted in feeling and tone as well as in thought.

This, of course, is the strict ideal of formal perfection. Not all sonnets, even by the most accomplished masters, maintain the sharp division precisely at the end of the eighth line, and there is often some variation in the rhyme scheme, particularly in the sestet, where a concluding couplet, with its own special climactic effect, is sometimes introduced. The effect produced by formal perfection in the sonnet can be judged by a careful reading of Keats's *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* (page 107). Many of the most powerful of the sonnets of Milton and Wordsworth vary the position of the break, but they all have the twofold emotional and intellectual structure characteristic of the Italian sonnet.

Looking more closely at *God's Grandeur,* we can see that its twofold structure has nothing mechanical about it, but is suggested at every point along the way. That is, the sense of a glory and hope and beauty waiting to be released in all things, but needing the spur of will and faith so that they can be revealed despite the appearance of unworthiness in men and the experience of despair, is implied in various ways throughout the poem. The very first line, with its delighted picture of a world "charged" with this divine meaning, sets the tone immediately. But there must be a desire in men to discover the meaning, an effort to bring it forth. Foil must be *shook* to manifest its brilliance. (In a letter concerning this poem, Hopkins wrote, "I mean foil in its sense of leaf or tinsel. . . . Shaken goldfoil gives off broad glares like sheet lightning and also ... a sort of fork lightning too.") The essential "oil" of things will not appear of itself; it must be *pressed* out of them. Generations of men, ignoring the miraculous quality of life, have lost touch with and become callous to it. Their efforts have all been *away* from what is most essential to them. Commerce and labor and the belief in man's self-sufficiency (not "recking" God's "rod") have led to the view of nature as meaningless in itself and to man's total immersion in an odious and filthy isolation from God. Lines four to eight[1] make clear the immensity of the effort needed if the grandeur of God is to be rediscovered. Even the sestet, though it directly proclaims that grandeur again, nevertheless similarly shows that the rediscovery will not be easy. The phrase "for all this" recognizes this fact; "the dearest freshness" is said to exist, but only "deep down things"; and then the poet says that even if all light were to disappear at the sunset, even if, in fact, there seemed to be universal death in "the black West," yet morning *would* reappear (as it does in nature, in which sunset and dawn occur simultaneously in different parts of the world). And the final two lines account for this idea in an image at once comforting, devout,and glowing.

We shall not go into detail concerning the technical aspects of this unusual sonnet, which is at once conventional and unorthodox in form. Its author was one of the nineteenth century's most significant experimentalists in verse, and his sonnet vividly illustrates the way in which a good poet takes advantage of the opportunities a "set" form provides for him. In a general way, *God's Grandeur* follows the traditional iambic pentameter pattern of the sonnet, but there are so many variations from this pattern that its melodic effect is most unlike that of Shakespeare's poem. Thus, we often find two or three stressed syllables coming together; in the fourth line, indeed, almost every syllable can be stressed. Four to six stresses per line seems the special pattern here, speaking very broadly. The many monosyllables make the poem heavily emphatic, and words that would not ordinarily be stressed, such as *is* in the first line and *will* in the second, are accented as part of the assertive effort, in the face of man's failure, which the poem is making. The surprising repetition of "have trod," such forceful internal rhymes as "seared," "bleared," and "smeared," and the interjection of the "ah!" already mentioned are similar devices for achieving this assertive effect, as the generally alliterative phrasings ("shining" and "shook," "smudge" and "smell," and so on) are also.

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[1] Since this is an explicitly religious poem, we may take these lines to refer to the state of man since his fall from Eden, just as the rest of the poem refers indirectly to the possibility of grace resulting from the birth and crucifixion of Jesus.

It would be instructive to compare the two sonnets just discussed from many viewpoints. The difference that concerns us here most particularly, though, is that of their structure and their total effect. Both poems describe a disheartening state of affairs and both nevertheless arrive at a strong positive feeling. But the Shakespeare sonnet takes us ever farther downward in a deepening spiral movement toward the speaker's full realization of his own coming death. The praise given to the beloved person at the very end of the sonnet does not stop this movement, but intensifies it by pointing to the paradox of such a love—by its wonder that such feeling should exist for one so inexorably doomed. The Hopkins sonnet, on the other hand, keeps striving toward a vision of perfection despite the limits of human nature. From the generalized "grandeur" to the shining foil to the generalized "dearest freshness" to the protective, brooding, shining Holy Ghost the movement is uneven and difficult, especially during the passage concerning the unworthiness of men. The effect is of an effort through wonder and prayer and faith that does break through the barrier at last, but not without its tragic connotations.

Like the form employed in Wordworth's *A slumber did my spirit seal*—and like all other forms conventional and unconventional—both the English and the Italian sonnet allow for an over-all unity of pattern and for variety or complexity within that unity. Both demand of the poet the ability to write within a given cadence or metrical scheme and yet to create a distinctive and dramatically magnetic voice, a convincingly real speaking personality. Each has been handled successfully by poets writing within the traditional limits of the form, as Shakespeare does; and by experimental poets pushing beyond these limits, as Hopkins does. We do not need to have learned very much about a poem to observe that it is conventional or that it is experimental. But we have made a real test of its success when, having read it sympathetically and made contact with its ideas and its emotional tone, we are left with a sense of a rich meaning embodied in a living form.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

1.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE from the *Sonnets*

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,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimm'd;
But thy eternal Summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st 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.

XXIX

WHEN IN disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possest,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
(Like to the lark at break of day arising)

From sullen earth sings hymns at Heaven's gate,
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with Kings.

XXX

WHEN TO the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear times' waste:
Then can I drown an eye, unus'd to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And moan th' expense of many a vanished sight:
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I new pay, as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor'd, and sorrows end.

LV

NOT MARBLE, nor the gilded monuments
Of Princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme,
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire, shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death, and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth, your praise shall still find room,
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom.
So till the judgement that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

LX

LIKE AS the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end,
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave, doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.
And yet to times in hope, my verse shall stand
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

LXVI

TIR'D WITH all these for restful death I cry,
As to behold Desert a beggar born,
And needy Nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest Faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded Honour shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden Virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right Perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And Strength by limping sway disabled,
And Art made tongue-tied by Authority,
And Folly, doctor-like, controlling Skill,
And simple Truth miscall'd Simplicity,
And captive Good attending captain ill.
Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

CVI

WHEN IN the Chronicle of wasted time,
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme,
In praise of Ladies dead, and lovely Knights,
Then in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have expressed
Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
And, for they look'd but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing:
   For we, which now behold these present days,
   Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

MICHAEL *DRAYTON *Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part*

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,
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,
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 might'st him yet recover.

JOHN MILTON *When I consider how my light is spent*

WHEN I consider how my light is spent,
Ere 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
My true account, lest 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
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."

JOHN MILTON *On the Detraction Which Followed upon My Writing Certain Treatises*

I DID but prompt the age to quit their clogs
By the known rules of ancient liberty,
When straight a barbarous noise environs me
Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs;
As when those hinds that were transformed to frogs
Railed at Latona's twin-born progeny
Which after held the sun and moon in fee.
But this is got by casting pearls to hogs
That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
And still revolt when truth would set them free.
License they mean when they cry Liberty;
For who loves that must first be wise and good.
But from that mark how far they rove we see,
For all this waste of wealth and loss of blood.

JOHN MILTON *How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth*

How SOON hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
  Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
  My hasting days fly on with full career,
  But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth
  That I to manhood am arriv'd so near;
  And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
  That some more timely-happy spirits indu'th.
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
  It shall be still in strictest measure ev'n
  To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n.
  All is, if I have grace to use it so,
  As ever in my great Task-Master's eye.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *London, 1802*

MILTON! THOU shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *Composed upon Westminster Bridge*

EARTH HAS not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *Surprised by joy—impatient as the wind*

SURPRISED BY joy—impatient as the wind—
I turned to share the transport—O! with whom
But Thee, deep buried in the silent tomb,
That spot which no vicissitude can find!
Love, faithful love, recall'd thee to my mind—
But how could I forget thee? Through what power,
Even for the least division of an hour,
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
To my most grievous loss?—That thought's return
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;
That neither present time nor years unborn
Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *Mutability*

FROM LOW to high doth dissolution climb,
And sink from high to low, along a scale
Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail;
A musical but melancholy chime,
Which they can hear who meddle not with crime,
Nor avarice, nor over-anxious care.
Truth fails not; but her outward forms that bear
The longest date do melt like frosty rime
That in the morning whiten'd hill and plain
And is no more; drop like the tower sublime
Of yesterday, which royally did wear
His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain
Some casual shout that broke the silent air,
Or the unimaginable touch of Time.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *The world is too much with us; late and soon*

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;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
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 everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
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 wreathed horn.

JOHN KEATS *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*

MUCH HAVE I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

JOHN KEATS *On the Sea*

IT KEEPS eternal whisperings around
Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
Gluts twice ten thousand Caverns, till the spell
Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.
Often 'tis in such gentle temper found,
That scarcely will the very smallest shell
Be moved for days from where it sometime fell,
When last the winds of Heaven were unbound.
Oh ye! who have your eye-balls vexed and tired,
Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;
Oh ye! whose ears are dinned with uproar rude,
Or fed too much with cloying melody—
Sit ye near some old Cavern's Mouth, and brood
Until ye start, as if the sea-nymphs quired!

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY *Oh, sleep forever in the Latmian cave*

OH, SLEEP forever in the Latmian cave,
Mortal Endymion, darling of the Moon!
Her silver garments by the senseless wave
Shouldered and dropped and on the shingle strewn,
Her fluttering hand against her forehead pressed,
Her scattered looks that trouble all the sky,
Her rapid footsteps running down the west—
Of all her altered state, oblivious liel

Whom earthen you, by deathless lips adored,
Wild-eyed and stammering to the grasses thrust,
And deep into her crystal body poured
The hot and sorrowful sweetness of the dust:
Whereof she wanders mad, being all unfit
For mortal love, that might not die of it.

2.

GEORGE HERBERT *The Collar*

I STRUCK the board, and cry'd, No more.
I will abroad.
What? shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free; free as the road,
Loose as the wind, as large as store.
Shall I be still in suit?
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?
Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did dry it: there was corn
Before my tears did drown it.
Is the year only lost to me?
Have I no bays to crown it?

No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?
All wasted?
Not so, my heart: but there is fruit,
And thou hast hands.
Recover all thy sigh-blown age
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute
Of what is fit, and not. Forsake thy cage,
Thy rope of sands,
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
Good cable, to enforce and draw,
And be thy law,
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
Away; take heed:
I will abroad.
Call in thy death's head there: tie up thy fears.
He that forbears
To suit and serve his need,
Deserves his load.
But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*
And I reply'd, *My Lord.*

GEORGE HERBERT *Sins' Round*

SORRY I am, my God, sorry I am,
That my offences course it in a ring.
My thoughts are working like a busy flame,
Until their cockatrice they hatch and bring:
And when they once have perfected their draughts,
My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts.

My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts,
Which spit it forth like the Sicilian Hill.
They vent the wares, and pass them with their faults,
And by their breathing ventilate the ill.
But words suffice not, where are lewd intentions:
My hands do join to finish the inventions.

My hands do join to finish the inventions:
And so my sins ascend three stories high,
As Babel grew, before there were dissensions.
Yet ill deeds loiter not: for they supply
New thoughts of sinning: wherefore, to my shame,
Sorry I am, my God, sorry I am.

GEORGE HERBERT *Easter WingS*

LORD, WHO createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more
Till he became
Most poor:
*
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 begin:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sin
That I became
Most thin.
*
With thee
Let me combine,
And feel this day thy victory;
For, if I imp my wing on thine,
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

3-

JOHN WEBSTER *All the flowers of the spring*

ALL THE flowers of the spring
Meet to perfume our burying;
These have but their growing prime,
And man doth flourish but his time.
Survey our progress from our birth:
We are set, we grow, we turn to earth.
Courts adieu, and all delights,
All bewitching appetites;
Sweetest breath, and clearest eye,
Like perfumes go out and die;
And consequently this is done
As shadows wait upon the sun.
Vain the ambition of kings,
Who seek by trophies and dead things
To leave a living name behind
And weave but nets to catch the wind.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW *My Lost Youth*

OFTEN I think of the beautiful town
  That is seated by the sea;
Often in thought go up and down
The pleasant streets of that dear old town,
  And my youth comes back to me.
    And a verse of a Lapland song
    Is haunting my memory still:
    "A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

I can see the shadowy lines of its trees,
  And catch, in sudden gleams,
The sheen of the far-surrounding seas,

And islands that were the Hesperides
Of all my boyish dreams.
And the burden of that old song,
It murmurs and whispers still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

I remember the black wharves and the slips,
And the sea-tides tossing free;
And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,
And the beauty and mystery of the ships,
And the magic of the sea.
And the voice of that wayward song
Is singing and saying still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

I remember the bulwarks by the shore,
Andr the fort upon the hill;
The sunrise gun, with its hollow roar,
The drum-beat repeated o'er and o'er,
And the bugle wild and shrill.
And the music of that old song
Throbs in my memory still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

I remember the sea-fight far away,
How it thundered o'er the tide I
And the dead sea-captains, as they lay
In their graves, overlooking the tranquil bay
Where they in battle died.
And the sound of that mournful song
Goes through me with a thrill:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

I can see the breezy dome of groves,
The shadows of Deering's Woods;
And the friendships old and the early loves
Come back with a Sabbath sound, as of doves
In quiet neighborhoods.
And the verse of that sweet old song,
It flutters and murmurs still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

I remember the gleams and glooms that dart
Across the school-boy's brain;
The song and the silence in the heart,
That in part are prophecies, and in part
Are longings wild and vain.
And the voice of that fitful song
Sings on, and is never still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

There are things of which I may not speak;
There are dreams that cannot die;
There are thoughts that make the strong heart weak,
And bring a pallor into the cheek,
And a mist before the eye.
And the words of that fatal song
Come over me like a chill:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

Strange to me now are the forms I meet
When I visit the dear old town;
But the native air is pure and sweet,
And the trees that overshadow each well-known street,
As they balance up and down,
Are singing the beautiful song,
Are sighing and whispering still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

And Dealing's Woods are fresh and fair,
And with joy that is almost pain
My heart goes back to wander there,
And among the dreams of the days that were,
I find my lost youth again.
And the strange and beautiful song,
The groves are repeating it still:
"A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts."

MARIANNE MOORE *The Steeple-Jack*

DURER WOULD have seen a reason for living
in a town like this, with eight stranded whales
to look at; with the sweet sea air coming into your house
on a fine day, from water etched
with, waves as formal as the scales
on a fish.

One by one, in two's, in three's, the seagulls keep
flying back and forth over the town clock,
or sailing around the lighthouse without moving their
wings—
rising steadily with a slight
quiver of the body—or flock
mewing where

a sea the purple of the peacock's neck is
paled to greenish azure as Durer changed
the pine green of the Tyrol to peacock blue and guinea
grey. You can see a twenty-five-
pound lobster and fishnets arranged
to dry. The

whirlwind fife-and-drum of the storm bends the salt
marsh grass, disturbs stars in the sky and the
star on the steeple; it is a privilege to see so
much confusion.

A steeple-jack in red, has let
a rope down as a spider spins a thread;
he might be part of a novel, but on the sidewalk a
signs says C. J. Poole, Steeple-Jack,
in black and white; and one in red
and white says

Danger. The church portico has four fluted
columns, each a single piece of stone, made
modester by white-wash. This would be a fit haven for
waifs, children, animals, prisoners,
and presidents who have repaid
sin-driven

senators by not thinking about them. One
sees a school-house, a post-office in a
store, fish-houses, hen-houses, a three-masted schooner on
the stocks. The hero, the student,
the steeple-jack, each in his way,
is at home.

It scarcely could be dangerous to be living
in a town like this, of simple people
who have a steeple-jack placing danger-signs by the church
when he is gilding the solid-
pointed star, which on a steeple
stands for hope.

THOMAS HARDY *During Wind and Rain*

THEY SING their dearest songs—
He, she, all of them—yea,
Treble and tenor and bass,
And one to play;
With the candles mooning each face. . . .
Ah, no; the years O!
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs 1

They clear the creeping moss—
Elders and juniors—aye,
Making the pathways neat
And the garden gay;
And they build a shady seat. . . .
Ah, no; the years, the years;
See, the white storm-birds wing across!

They are blithely breakfasting all—
Men and maidens—yea,
Under the summer tree,
With a glimpse of the bay,
While pet fowl come to the knee. . . .
Ah, no; the years Ol
And the rotten rose is ript from the wall.

They change to a high new house,
He,she, all of them—aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
On the lawn all day,
And brightest things that are theirs. . . .
Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.

ROBERT FROST *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

WHOSE WOODS these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 6

1. In Shakespeare's sonnets, what is the effect of (i) the sudden "upward" movement in lines 11-12 of *Sonnet XXIX?* (2) the "envelope" character of *Sonnet LXVI* (the beginning and ending parallel one another, and they enclose a separate group of parallel phrasings in lines 2-12)? (3) the absence of a sharp break from the tone of the preceding lines in the concluding couplet of *Sonnet CVH*
2. Compare the sonnets by Milton and Wordsworth which present a mood of dissatisfaction or dejection in their octaves and then resolve the mood through their development after the "turn." What is the main difference, for instance, between the final tone and attitude of *When I consider how my light is spent* and of *The World is too much with us?*
3. Compare the ways in which a mood of wonder and elation is developed in Wordsworth's *Composed upon Westminster Bridge* and in Keats's *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer.* Do Wordsworth's reference to himself in line 11 and his exclamation in line 13 destroy the unity of his poem? Do you think the pair of striking similes with which Keats's poem concludes make too abrupt an ending after his account, in the octave, of how his rich experiences as a reader were climaxed by his reading Chapman's translation of Homer?
4. In *On the Sea*, how does the shift from the indicative to the imperative mood help us feel more strongly the power of the speaker's unorthodox attitude toward the sense of melancholy desolation?
5. What is the myth of the Moon's love for Endymion? Are the details in lines 3-12 of Miss Millay's poem cumulatively convincing enough to win your sympathy with her version of the myth and its meaning? Explain this meaning as it is given at the very end.

6. Compare the roles of the refrains, parallel constructions, and repetitions of lines in the poems by Longfellow, Hardy, and Frost.
7. Defend or attack Herbert's device, in *Easter Wings,* of making the shape of the poem on the printed page play a role in expressing the poem's complete meaning. (You may wish to look up modern examples in the books of E. E. Cummings and Dylan Thomas before deciding on Herbert's success here.)

   Do you find anything unusual in the arrangement of lines *(not* the shape) of *Sins' Round?* From the point of view of expressive form, is this poem more satisfying than *Easter Wings?*
8. Marianne Moore's poem refers to Albrecht Diirer's water-etchings, described by R. P. Blackmur as "formal and 'right* as the scales on a fish." According to Mr. Blackmur, Miss Moore's sea-description has "the same formal effect, the Diirer vision, that sets the continuing tone, . . . bringing us in the end an emotion as clean, as ordered, as startling as the landscape which yields it." *(Language as Gesture)*

   Discuss the accuracy of this observation. Is it contradicted by lines 21-22 and 29-35? What have the words "dangerous," "simple," and "hope" (in the final stanza) to do with the poem as a whole, and with the emotional effect Mr. Blackmur describes? To answer these questions, consider two things the poem is about: (i) the relation of the formal order and integration of art to the disorder and insecurity of life, and (2) the importance in life of faith and disinterested courage—symbolized, in part, by the star and the steeplejack.

CHAPTER TWO *The Life and Truth of Poetry*

I. MUSIC AND EMOTION

I was all ear
And took in strains that might create a soul
Under the ribs of death.

MILTON

AMONG THE MOST popular of all kinds of poetry is the song or lyric—a brief unified expression of emotion in words as melodious as possible. From its beginnings poetry has been associated with dance and song, and though it is by no means always purely lyrical, it always makes some use of the musical effect in the sounds of words. The more skilful the artist and the deeper the excitement with which he writes, the greater will be the harmony between the sound and the sense. The complete meaning of his poem will be communicated by *how* he says what he is saying. It is this aspect of poetry that we think of as ultimately untranslatable. We can—and often must, if we are to understand it—paraphrase any poem. But a paraphrase is no substitute for a poem. You cannot say in any other way what is said by such a line as Shakespeare's

> If music be the food of love, play on.

Change the words or change the order of the words and the effect is gone and something different and less memorable is substituted for it.

The part played by the music of poetry in stirring the senses and entering into the listener's awareness with tenacious power has been suggested (and illustrated) by Shelley in the little song beginning

> Music, when soft voices die,
> Vibrates in the memory

and by Tennyson in the famous *Choric Song of the Lotos Eaters:*

> There is sweet music here that softer falls
> Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
> Or night-dews on still waters between walls
> Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
> Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
> Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes;
> Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.
> Here are cool mosses deep,
> And through the moss the ivies creep,
> And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep.
> And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

Here the sureness with which the poet as hypnotist goes to work on us commands the utmost admiration. The words are the simplest. The sounds are full, open, and resonant. Key sounds and key words are repeated, and they re-echo among themselves. The rhythm wavers, slackens, thickens, and slows up, until at the end we ourselves are under the spell of the lotos. This effect is gained by the intermingling of similar and nearly similar vowel sounds in an intricate pattern of repetition, assonance, and rhyme; by the use of a complex and subtle system of alliterations; and by a progressive slowing up of the rhythm that can be seen at its most striking in the cumulatively increasing length of the last four lines linked together by the one rhyme.

The music of poetry is not often so languid and sweet as this, and its purpose here must be viewed in the dramatic context of the whole poem. Tennyson wants to make us understand the strength of the temptation that the sailors of Ulysses gave in to, and he can do so only by making us feel it, as they did, sensuously and emotionally. The poem as a whole is a moral and philosophical one. Its object is to demonstrate concretely and emotionally the nature of the appeal of an Epicureanism that Tennyson (like Carlyle, Browning, and other serious Victorians) actually abhorred.

Sometimes the music of a poem, and the expression of meaning through sound, depends on even subtler effects than the very elaborate alliteration and cross-alliteration in the passage we have been considering. In Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* we find a reference to the musk-rose, "full of dewy wine/'

> The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

It is clear that the sound of the line itself helps to suggest the subdued humming of the insects, and the line is a straightforward and uncomplex example of what is called onomatopoeia — the formation of words in imitation of natural sounds.

Another line in the same poem illustrates a mpre subtle form of the harmonization of sense and sound, or the utilization of sound to reinforce, emphasize, and make memorable the purely logical meaning of the words. If we read aloud the line

> Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways

green [illegible]
V[illegible]

our lips and tongues must imitate muscularly the sinuous movement of the line and its suggestion of mysterious, almost secret seclusion.

Something of the same effect is to be found in a line of John Donne's fantastic theological poem *Thd Progress of the Soul.* The poet is telling how the largest, though not the brightest, of all beasts, the mighty elephant, was destroyed by a tiny, clever mouse, and he writes:

> His sinewy proboscis did remissly lie.

Taking advantage of this negligence, the rodent climbs the tunnel of the trunk and gnaws at the elephant's brain, bringing the mighty animal crashing to the ground. The effect of the undulating rhythm of the line is partly grotesque, partly comic, and partly realistic. Some of the comic effect no doubt is due to calling the elephant's trunk a proboscis — an elongated and exaggerated one of course it is — and to the use of the pompous word "remissly," but the total effect, that of grotesque incongruity, is due mainly to the sound and rhythm of the line. In *Paradise Lost* Milton mentions the elephant and his characteristic appendage in an equally brilliant and entertaining passage. He is describing how the still tame and obedient animals gamboled around Adam and Eve in the state of innocence. Among them

. . . th' unwieldy Elephant
To make them mirth us'd all his might, and wreath'd
His lithe Proboscis. . . .

Milton, like Donne and Keats, was, of course, an accomplished virtuoso, and many illustrations might be cited of his skill. We must content ourselves with one—a line which, like some of those already quoted, reinforces the sense by an actually muscular effect. It occurs in a passage describing how the fallen angels had tried to allay their thirst with delicious-seeming fruit that turned to ashes in their mouths.

With hatefullest disrelish writh'd their jaws,

writes the poet, and the reader finds that his own lips are forced into a nimble twisting movement that communicates the bitterness of the subject with an almost physical intensity.

Here everything is dry, harsh, and grating. Our own mouths are filled with ashes as we read. The poet can, however,—as Keats does in *The Eve of St. Agnes*—flood our senses with richness and make our mouths water with his soft vocables and luscious vowel sounds as he describes the midnight feast Porphyro prepares for his beloved Madeleine:

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth, and lavendered,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferred
From Fez; and spicM dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon.

Often poetry does not attempt, as in these examples, to offer concrete perceptions or impressions, to imitate, that is, or recreate reality. Instead it may seek through the medium of the artful combinations of sounds and of meanings not very easily definable to approach the quality of pure music. Some of the songs that have their place in setting the mood or tone of a scene in Shakespeare's plays, some of the lyrics of Poe or Shelley or James Joyce illustrate this special and difficult use of language.

Consider, first, *what* it is that is communicated in such songs as the following and then *how* it is communicated.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE *Full fathom five thy father lies*
(from *The Tempest)*

Full fathom five thy father lies;
  Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
  Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
                                        Ding-dong.
Hark! now I hear them,—Ding-dong, bell.

JOHN MILTON *Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen*
(from *Comus)*

Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen
      Within thy airy shell
    By slow Meander's margent green,
And in the violet-embroidered vale
      Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well:
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
    That likest thy Narcissus are?
      O, if thou have
    Hid them in some flowery cave,
      Tell me but where,
  Sweet Queen of Parley, Daughter of the Spherel
  So may'st thou be translated to the skies,
And give resounding grace to all Heav'n's harmonies!

JAMES JOYCE *I hear an army charging upon the land*

I hear an army charging upon the land
  And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about their knees:
Arrogant, in black armour, behind them stand,
  Disdaining the reins, with fluttering whips, the charioteers.

They **cry** unto the night their battle name:
  I moan in sleep when I hear afar their whirling laughter.
They cleave the gloom of dreams, a blinding flame,
  Clanging, clanging upon the heart as upon an anvil.

They come shaking in triumph their long green hair:
  They come out of the sea and run shouting by the shore.
My heart, have you no wisdom thus to despair?
  My love, my love, my love, why have you left me alone?

More than most poetry, such poems elude an exact literal interpretation—or, more precisely, derive their effects from elements having little to do with their literal meaning. Each conveys, through sounds and pictures, and through an elegant and stylized use of language, something that cannot be defined in any other terms but the sounds and pictures themselves and that can only be described as a mood, a tone, or an atmosphere: something emotional rather than rational.

This emotional, irrational element in poetic meaning is its "magic/* Quite literally, the two songs by Shakespeare and Milton do involve magic, both in themselves and in the situations of the plays in which they are found. The song from *The Tempest* is sung by Ariel, the "airy spirit," concerning the supposed drowning of young Ferdinand's father. It makes his death out to be an enchanted "sea-change/' and the nature of the transformation is indeed both "rich and strange/' In the song from *Gomus,* the heroine is praying to the nymph Echo to help her find her two brothers, lost in a forest ruled by a wicked spirit. Like Ariel's song, it has specific meaning, though its imagery, interlaced with mythological allusions, and its rhythmic variations make it a subtler, more intricate incantation.

In Joyce's poem, the magic is psychological—a nightmare imagery of terror, loss, and despair. There are many ways to "interpret" the contemptuous, cruel, green-haired sea-charioteers who threaten the moaning sleeper, but their relation to his frustrated love is made apparent at the very end. The poem, like so much of music itself, is both lucid and elusive—an observation equally true of the other two poems. Music, finally, is the key to the magic of each of them, even providing echoing images to set the tone of each—"Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell"; "And give resounding grace to all Heav'n's harmonies"; and "Clanging, clanging upon the heart as upon an anvil/'

The musical aspects of poetry are its earliest and most striking features. They by no means lead only into a private and somewhat rarefied world of essences, partly untranslatable as the songs we have just been considering may be. It has often been these very untranslatable aspects of poetry—its rhythm and harmony—that have made it function as one kind of social and even religious ritual by which men express their sense of kinship and emotional communion.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

i.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE Songs from the *Plays*

(from *Cymbeline)*

HARK, HARK! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
  And Phoebus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
  On chaliced flowers that lies;
And winking Mary-buds begin
  To ope their golden eyes:
With every thing that pretty is,
  My lady sweet, arise!
    Arise, arise!

(from *Twelfth Night)*

WHEN THAT I was and a little tiny boy,
  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
  For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came to man's estate
  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut the gate,
  For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came, alas! to wive,
  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
By swaggering could I never thrive,
  For the rain it raineth every day.

But when I came unto my beds,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
With toss-pots still had drunken heads,
For the rain it raineth every day.

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
But that's all one, our play is done,
And we'll strive to please you every day. 20

(from *Twelfth Night)*

O MISTRESS mine, where are you roaming?
O, stay and hearl your true love's coming
That can sing both high and low:
Trip no further, pretty sweeting!
Journeys end in lovers meeting,
Every wise man's son doth knowl

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure.
In delay there lies no plenty:
Then come kiss me, Sweet-and-twenty!
Youth's a stuff will not endure!

(from *As You Like It)*

UNDER THE greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat
Come hither! come hither! come hither!
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.

Who doth ambition shun
And loves to live i' the sun,
Seeking the food he eats
And pleased with what he gets,
Come hither! come hither! come hither!
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.

(from *As You Like It)*

IT WAS a lover and his lass,
With a heyl and a ho! and a hey nonino!
That o'er the green corn-field did pass,
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding!
Sweet lovers love the spring.
*

Between the acres of the rye,
With a hey! and a ho! and a hey noninof
These pretty country folk would lie,
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding!
Sweet lovers love the spring.

This carol they began that hour,
With a hey! and a ho! and a hey nonino!
How that a life was but a flower
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding!
Sweet lovers love the spring.

And therefore take the present time,
With a hey! and a ho! and a hey nonino!
For love is crowned with the prime
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding!
Sweet lovers love the spring.

(from *The Winters Tale)*

WHEN DAFFODILS begin to peer,
With height the doxy over the dale!
Why, then comes in the sweet o' the year,
For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale.

The white sheet bleaching on the hedge
With hey! the sweet birds, O how they sing!
Doth set my pugging tooth on edge,
For a quart of ale is a dish for a king!

The lark, that tirra-lirra chants,
With heigh! the thrush and hey! the jay,
Are summer songs for me and my aunts
While we lie tumbling in the hay.

(from *Much Ado About Nothing)*

SIGH NO more, ladies, sigh no more!
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never:
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny!

Sing no more ditties, sing no moe
Of dumps so dull and heavy!
The fraud of men was ever so,
Since summer first was leavy:
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny!

(from *Twelfth Night)*

COME AWAY, come away, Death!
And in sad cypress let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O, prepare itl
My part of death, no one so true
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown
A thousand thousand sighs to save
Lay me, O, where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there!

(from *Measure for Measure)*

TAKE, o! take those lips away
That so sweetly were forsworn,
And those eyes, the break of day,
Lights that do mislead the morn;
But my kisses bring again,
Bring again,
Seals of love, but sealed in vain,
Sealed in vain.

2.

THOMAS CAMPION *Rose-cheekt Laura, come*

ROSE-CHEEKT Laura, come
Sing thou smoothly with thy beauty's
Silent music, either other
Sweetly gracing.

Lovely forms do flow
From concent divinely framed;
Heav'n is music, and thy beauty's
Birth is heavenly.

These dull notes we sing
Discords need for helps to grace them;
Only beauty purely loving
Knows no discord,

But still moves delight,
Like clear springs renew'd by flowing,
Ever perfect, ever in them-
selves eternal.

THOMAS CAMPION *When to her lute Corinna sings*

WHEN TO her lute Corinna sings,
Her voice revives the leaden strings,
And doth in highest notes appear
As any challenged echo clear;
But when she doth of mourning speak,
Ev'n with her sighs the strings do break.

And as her lute doth live or die,
Led by her passion, so must I:
For when of pleasure she doth sing,
My thoughts enjoy a sudden spring,
But if she doth of sorrow speak,
Ev'n from my heart the strings do break.

THOMAS CAMPION *Follow your saint, follow with accents sweet*

FOLLOW YOUR saint, follow with accents sweet;
Haste you, sad notes, fall at her flying feet.
There, wrapped in cloud of sorrow, pity move,
And tell the ravisher of my soul I perish for her love.
But if she scorns my never-ceasing pain,
Then burst with sighing in her sight, and ne'er return again.

All that I sung still to her praise did tend.
Still she was first, still she my songs did end.
Yet she my love and music both doth fly,
The music that her echo is, and beauty's sympathy.
Then let my notes pursue her scornful flight;
It shall suffice that they were breathed, and died for her delight.

ANONYMOUS *Weep you no more, sad fountains*

WEEP YOU no more, sad fountains;
What need you flow so fast?
Look how the snowy mountains
Heaven's sun doth gently waste.
But my sun's heavenly eyes
View not your weeping,
That now lies sleeping
Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.

Sleep is a reconciling,
A rest that peace begets.
Doth not the sun rise smiling
When fair at even he sets?
Rest you then, rest, sad eyes,
Melt not in weeping,
While she lies sleeping,
Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.

BEN JONSON *Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears*

SLOW, SLOW, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears;
Yet slower, yet; o faintly, gentle springs:
List to the heavy part the music bears;
Woe weeps out her division when she sings.
Droop herbs and flowers;
Fall grief in showers;
Our beauties are not ours.
O, I could still,
Like melting snow upon some craggy hill,
Drop, drop, drop, drop,
Since Nature's pride is now a withered daffodil.

ROBERT HERRICK *Upon Julia's Voice*

So SMOOTH, so sweet, so silv'ry is thy voice
As, could they hear, the Damn'd would make no noise,
But listen to thee (walking in thy chamber)
Melting melodious words, to Lutes of Amber.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY *To* ———

Music, WHEN soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory—
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON Song: *The splendour falls on castle walls*

THE SPLENDOUR falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story:
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O hark, O hear; how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river:
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

3

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON *The Lotos-Eaters*

"COURAGE!" HE said, and pointed toward the land,
"This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon."
In the afternoon they came unto a land
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
And like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.

A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some through wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
From the inner land: far off, three mountain-tops,
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
Stood sunset-flushed: and, dewed with showery drops,
Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.

The charmed sunset lingered low adown
In the red West: through mountain clefts the dale
Was seen far inland, and the yellow down
Bordered with palm, and many a winding vale
And meadow, set with slender galingale;
A land where all things always seemed the samel
And round about the keel with faces pale,
Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,
The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came.

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,
Laden with flower and fruit, whereof they gave
To each, but whoso did receive of them,
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave
Far far away did seem to mourn and rave
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;
And deep-asleep he seemed, yet all awake,
And music in his ears his beating heart did make.

They sat them down upon the yellow sand,
Between the sun and moon upon the shore;
And sweet it was to dream of Fatherland,
Of child, and wife, and slave; but evermore
Most weary seemed the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.
Then someone said, "We will return no more";
And all at once they sang, "Our island home
Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam."

CHORIC SONG

I

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.
Here are cool mosses deep,
And through the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

II

Why are we weighed upon with heaviness,
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
While all things else have rest from weariness?
All things have rest: why should we toil alone,
We only toil, who are the first of things,
And make perpetual moan,
Still from one sorrow to another thrown:
Nor ever fold our wings,
And cease from wanderings,
Nor steep our brows in slumber's holy balm;
Nor hearken what the inner spirit sings,
"There is no joy but calm!"—
Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things?

III

Lo! in the middle of the wood,
The folded leaf is wooed from out the bud
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care,
Sun-steeped at noon, and in the moon
Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow
Falls, and floats adown the air.

Lo! sweetened with the summer light,
The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,
Drops in a silent autumn night.
All its allotted length of days,
The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,
Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil.

IV

Hateful is the dark-blue sky,
Vaulted o'er the dark-blue sea.
Death is the end of life; ah, why
Should life all labor be?
Let us alone. Time driveth onward fast;
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave
In silence—ripen, fall and cease:
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.

V

How sweet it were, hearing the downward stream,
With half-shut eyes ever to seem
Falling asleep in a half-dream!
To dream and dream, like yonder amber light,
Which will not leave the myrrh-bush on the height;
To hear each other's whispered speech;
Eating the Lotos day by day,
To watch the crisping ripples on the beach,
And tender curving lines of creamy spray;
To lend our hearts and spirits wholly
To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;
To muse and brood and live again in memory,

With those old faces of our infancy
Heaped over with a mound of grass,
Two handfuls of white dust, shut in an urn of brass!

VI

Dear is the memory of our wedded lives,
And dear the last embraces of our wives
And their warm tears: but all hath suffered change;
For surely now our household hearths are cold:
Our sons inherit us: our looks are strange:
And we should come like ghosts to trouble joy.
Or else the island princes over-bold
Have eat our substance, and the minstrel sings
Before them of the ten-years' war in Troy,
And our great deeds, as half-forgotten things.
Is there confusion in the little isle?
Let what is broken so remain.
The Gods are hard to reconcile:
'Tis Sard to settle order once again.
There *is* confusion worse than death,
Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,
Long labor unto aged breath,
Sore task to hearts worn out with many wars
And eyes grown dim with gazing on the pilot-stars.

VII

But, propt on beds of amaranth and moly,
How sweet (while warm airs lull us, blowing lowly)
With half-dropt eyelids still,
Beneath a heaven dark and holy,
To watch the long bright river drawing slowly
His waters from the purple hill—
To hear the dewy echoes calling
From cave to cave through the thick-twined vine—
To watch the emerald-colored water falling
Through many a woven acanthus-wreath divine!
Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,
Only to hear were sweet, stretched out beneath the pine.

VIII

The Lotos blooms below the barren peak:
The Lotos blows by every winding creek:
All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone:
Through every hollow cave and alley lone
Round and round the spicy downs the yellow Lotos-dust is blown.
We have had enough of action, and of motion we,
Rolled to starboard, rolled to larboard, when the surge was seething free,
Where the wallowing monster spouted his foam-fountains in the sea.
Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,
In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.
For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts are hurled
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curled
Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world:
Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands,
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands.
But they smile, they find a music centered in a doleful song
Steaming up, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,
Like a tale of little meaning though the words are strong;
Chanted from an ill-used race of men that cleave the soil,
Sow the seed, and reap the harvest with enduring toil,
Storing yearly little dues of wheat, and wine and oil;
Till they perish and they suffer—some, 'tis whispered—down in hell
Suffer endless anguish, others in Elysian valleys dwell,
Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel.
Surely, surely, slumber is more sweet than toil, the shore
Than labor in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;
Oh, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE *The Garden of Proserpine*

HERE, WHERE the world is quiet;
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
In doubtful dreams of dreams;
I watch the green field growing
For reaping folk and sowing,
For harvest-time and mowing,
A sleepy world of streams.

I am tired of tears and laughter,
And men that laugh and weep;
Of what may come hereafter
For men that sow to reap:
I am weary of days and hours,
Blown buds of barren flowers,
Desires and dreams and powers
And everything but sleep.

Here life has death for neighbour,
And far from eye or ear
Wan waves and wet winds labour,
Weak ships and spirits steer;
They drive adrift, and whither
They wot not who make thither;
But no such winds blow hither,
And no such things grow here.

No growth of moor or coppice,
No heather-flower or vine,
But bloomless buds of poppies,
Green grapes of Proserpine,
Pale beds of blowing rushes,
Where no leaf blooms or blushes
Save this whereout she crushes
For dead men deadly wine.

Pale, without name or number,
   In fruitless fields of corn,
They bow themselves and slumber
   All night till light is born;
And like a soul belated,
In hell and heaven unmated,
By cloud and mist abated
   Comes out of darkness morn.

Though one were strong as seven,
   He too with death shall dwell,
Nor wake with wings in heaven,
   Nor weep for pains in hell;
Though one were fair as roses,
His beauty clouds and closes;
And well though love reposes,
   In the end it is not well.

Pale, beyond porch and portal,
   Crowned with calm leaves, she stands
Who gathers all things mortal
   With cold immortal hands;
Her languid lips are sweeter
Than love's who fears to greet her,
To men that mix and meet her
   From many times and lands.

She waits for each and other,
   She waits for all men born;
Forgets the earth her mother,
   The life of fruits and corn;
And spring and seed and swallow
Take wing for her and follow
Where summer song rings hollow
   And flowers are put to scorn.

There go the loves that wither,
   The old loves with wearier wings;
And all dead years draw thither,
   And all disastrous things;
Dead dreams of days forsaken,
Blind buds that snows have shaken,
Wild leaves that winds have taken,
   Red strays of ruined springs.

We are not sure of sorrow,
   And joy was never sure;
Today will die tomorrow;
   Time stoops to no man's lure;
And love, grown faint and fretful,
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
   Weeps that no loves endure.

From too much love of living,
   From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
   Whatever gods may be
That no life lives for ever;
That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river
   Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Then star nor sun shall waken,
   Nor any change of light:
Nor sound of waters shaken,
   Nor any sound or sight:
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,
Nor days nor things diurnal;
Only the sleep eternal
   In an eternal night.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE *Chorus from Atalanta in Calydon*

WHEN THE hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
  The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
  With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nightingale amorous
Is half assuaged for Itylus,
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,
  The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with emptying of quivers,
  Maiden most perfect, lady of light,
With a noise of winds and many rivers,
  With a clamour of waters, and with might;
Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,
Over the splendour and speed of thy feet;
For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,
  Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,
  Fold our hands round her knees, and cling?
O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to her,
  Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring!
For the stars and the winds are unto her
As raiment, as songs of the harp-player;
For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,
  And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
  And all the season of snows and sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
  The light that loses, the night that wins;
And time remember'd is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
  Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

The full streams feed on flower of rushes,
  Ripe grasses trammel a travelling foot,
The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
  From leaf to flower and flower to fruit;
And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
And the oat is heard above the lyre,
And the hoofed heel of a satyr crushes
  The chestnut-husk at the chestnut-root.

And Pan by noon and Bacchus by night,
  Fleeter of foot than the fleet-foot kid,
Follows with dancing and fills with delight
  The Maenad and the Bassarid;
And soft as lips that laugh and hide
The laughing leaves of the trees divide,
And screen from seeing and leave in sight
  The god pursuing, the maiden hid.

The ivy falls with the Bacchanal's hair
  Over her eyebrows hiding her eyes;
The wild vine slipping down leaves bare
  Her bright breast shortening into sighs;
The wild vine slips with the weight of its leaves,
But the berried ivy catches and cleaves
To the limbs that glitter, the feet that scare
  The wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.

ROBERT BRIDGES *The hill pines were sighing*

THE HILL pines were sighing,
O'ercast and chill was the day:
A mist in the valley lying
Blotted the pleasant May.

But deep in the glen's bosom
Summer slept in the fire
Of the odorous gorse-blossom
And the hot scent of the brier.

A ribald cuckoo clamoured,
And out of the copse the stroke
Of the iron axe that hammered
The iron heart of the oak.

Anon a sound appalling,
As a hundred years of pride
Crashed, in the silence falling:
And the shadowy pine-trees sighed.

ROBERT BRIDGES *Nightingales*

BEAUTIFUL MUST be the mountains whence ye come,
And bright in the fruitful valleys the streams wherefrom
Ye learn your song:
Where are those starry woods? O might I wander there,
Among the flowers, which in that heavenly air
Bloom the year long!

Nay, barren are those mountains and spent the streams:
Our song is the voice of desire, that haunts our dreams,
A throe of the heart,
Whose pining visions dim, forbidden hopes profound,
No dying cadence nor long sigh can sound,
For all our art.

Alone, aloud in the raptured ear of men
We pour our dark nocturnal secret; and then,
As night is withdrawn
From these sweet-springing meads and bursting boughs of May,
Dream, while the innumerable choir of day
Welcome the dawn.

4.

JOHN MILTON *At a Solemn Music*

BLEST PAIR of Sirens, pledges of Heav'n's joy,
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,
Wed your divine sounds, and mixt power employ,
Dead things with inbreathed sense able to pierce;
And to our high-rais'd phantasy present
That undisturbed song of pure concent,
Aye sung before the sapphire-coloured throne
To him that sits thereon
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee;
Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow,
And the Cherubic host in thousand quires
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,
With those just Spirits that wear victorious palms,
Hymns devout and holy psalms
Singing everlastingly:
That we on Earth, with undiscording voice,
May rightly answer that melodious noise;
As once we did, till disproportion^ sin
Jarr'd against nature's chime, and with harsh din
Broke the fair music that all creatures made
To their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd
In perfect diapason, whilst they stood
In first obedience, and their state of good.
O may we soon again renew that song,
And keep in tune with Heaven, till God ere long
To his celestial consort us unite,
To live with him, and sing in endless morn of light.

JOHN DRYDEN *A Song for St. Cecilia's Day*

FROM HARMONY, from heav'nly harmony,
This universal frame began;
When Nature underneath a heap
Of jarring atoms lay
And could not heave her head,
The tuneful voice was heard from high:
"Arise, ye more than dead/'
Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry
In order to their stations leap
And Music's pow'r obey.
From harmony, from heav'nly harmony,
This universal frame began:
From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in Man.

What passion cannot Music raise and quell 1
When Jubal struck the corded shell,
His list'ning brethren stood around
And, wond'ring, on their faces fell
To worship that celestial sound.
Less than a god they thought there could not dwell
Within the hollow of that shell
That spoke so sweetly and so well.
What passion cannot Music raise and quell!

The Trumpet's loud clangour
Excites us to arms,
With shrill notes of anger,
And mortal alarms.
The double double double beat
Of the thund'ring Drum
Cries: "Hark! the foes come;
Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat."

The soft complaining Flute
In dying notes discovers
The woes of hopeless lovers,
Whose dirge is whisper'd by the warbling Lute.

Sharp Violins proclaim
Their jealous pangs and desperation,
Fury, frantic indignation,
Depth of pains and height of passion,
For the fair, disdainful dame.

But oh, what art can teach,
What human voice can reach
The sacred Organ's praise?
Notes inspiring holy love,
Notes that wing their heav'nly ways
To mend the choirs above.

Orpheus could lead the savage race,
And trees unrooted left their place,
Sequacious of the lyre;
But bright Cecilia rais'd the wonder high'r:
When to her Organ vocal breath was given,
An angel heard, and straight appeared,
Mistaking earth for heav'n.

GRAND CHORUS

As from the pow'r of sacred lays
The spheres began to move,
And sung the great Creator's praise
To all the blest above;
So, when the last and dreadful hour
This crumbling pageant shall devour,
The trumpet shall be heard on high,
The dead shall live, the living die,
And Music shall untune the sky.

WALLACE STEVENS *Peter Quince at the Clavier*

i

JUST AS my fingers on these keys
Make music, so the self-same sounds
On my spirit make a music too.

Music is feeling, then, not sound;
And thus it is that what I feel,
Here in this room, desiring you,

Thinking of your blue-shadowed silk,
Is music. It is like the strain
Waked in the elders by Susanna:

Of a green evening, clear and warm,
She bathed in her still garden, while
The red-eyed elders, watching, felt

The basses of their being throb
In witching chords, and their thin blood
Pulse pizzicati of Hosanna.

ii

In the green water, clear and warm,
Susanna lay.
She searched
The touch of springs,
And found
Concealed imaginings.
She sighed
For so much melody.

Upon the bank she stood
In the cool
Of spent emotions.
She felt, among the leaves,
The dew
Of old devotions. *

She walked upon the grass,
Still quavering.
The winds were like her maids,
On timid feet,
Fetching her woven scarves,
Yet wavering.

A breath upon her hand
Muted the night.
She turned —
A cymbal crashed,
And roaring horns.

in

Soon, with a noise like tambourines,
Came her attendant Byzantines.

They wondered why Susanna cried
Against the elders by her side:

And as they whispered, the refrain
Was like a willow swept by rain.

Anon their lamps' uplifted flame
Revealed Susanna and her shame.

And then the simpering Byzantines
Fled, with a noise like tambourines.

IV

Beauty is momentary in the mind —
The fitful tracing of a portal;
But in the flesh it is immortal.

The body dies; the body's beauty lives.
So evenings die, in their green going,
A wave, interminably flowing.

So gardens die, their meek breath scenting
The cowl of Winter, done repenting.
So maidens die to the auroral
Celebration of a maiden's choral.

Susanna's music touched the bawdy strings
Of those white elders; but, escaping,
Left only Death's ironic scraping.
Now, in its immortality, it plays
On the clear viol of her memory,
And makes a constant sacrament of praise.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 7

1. Why need not the sounds of poetry always, or even usually, be mellifluous or pretty? Find examples of harsh, ugly sounds in poems by Donne, Swift, Browning, or others, and explain the effect of each.
2. What purely melodic qualities do most of Shakespeare's songs have in common? Which of the songs seem most appealing musically and emotionally? Why?
3. What makes Campion's poems intellectually subtler than Shakespeare's songs? Would you say they are less melodic, or melodic in a different way? Explain.
4. Find other examples of lines which, like those quoted on pages 121-122, convey part of their meaning through the movements of the reader's lips.
5. The song of the Chorus in Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* is a hymn of praise to Artemis as the bringer of spring. What qualities of sound and rhythm account for its lighter, faster, more enthusiastic movement as compared with that of *The Garden of Proserpine?*

   Explain the mythological background of the latter poem, and its relevancy to the theme and mood being developed. How do the many alliterations, parallel constructions, and repetitions contribute to the feeling about death the poem seeks to suggest?
6. Where is the emotional climax in each of the two poems by Robert Bridges? How is it led up to and prepared for? What part does skilful manipulation of sound-effects play in this development?
7. Some of the poems in this section are concerned with the nature and significance of music, broadly and philosophically considered. What attitudes on the subject are developed in the pieces by Milton

and Dryden? Notice that they begin with similar premises. Do they then develop along completely unlike lines? To what degree does each poem illustrate its own theme and create its own emotional atmosphere through special "musical" effects?

8. *Peter Quince at the Clavier* is a poem on the relation of music, desire, and beauty. The title suggests that the speaker regards himself ironically: Peter Quince is one of the country bumpkins in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and the use of his name here implies that the speaker thinks of himself as sharing in the crudeness of common humanity at the same time as he pursues artistic activity and experiences romantic love.
    i. What paradoxical idea is presented in the first two sentences?
    ii. Look up the story of Susanna and the Elders in the Old Testament Apocrypha. Why does the speaker say the "music" of his desire is like that waked in the Elders? Is there humor in this comparison, or is it meant seriously—or both?
    iii. In what ways do sound effects throughout the poem correspond with emotion, physical sensation, and general meaning? (Notice, for instance, the different line-lengths, rhyme-schemes, and rates of speed in the four parts of the poem. What was the intention behind these variations?)
    iv. Paraphrase the fourth section. Is it related in idea to the paradoxical title and the two sentences that begin the poem? Are there many echoes in this final section of sound-patterns, images, and evocative language of the earlier part? What is the effect of these on the final meaning of the poem?

II. POETRY AS RITUAL AND INCANTATION

What is it that makes a good poem seem important and valuable? Ultimately—given a right response to its voice, its imagery, its whole movement—we feel that not only have we been afforded a rare sort of pleasure, but that also we have been brought keenly into touch with our own common humanity—its realities, motives, aspirations.

We can understand the satisfaction of such an insight quite easily if we remember that thought and feeling are as real as money, as fateful as war, and as full of social meaning as marriage. In poetry and the other arts our full consciousness of ourselves as individual human beings capable of the widest range of imaginative projection and emotional sympathy goes into action. We forget that the origins of art are in large part practical: Among the first poems were chants to bring rain. Heads were carved on war-clubs to attract enemy heads. Charms were performed to compel love. The poet, even in ages far removed from a literal belief in magic, has never lost touch with his ancient practical functions. Though the poems of more sophisticated times and peoples run less to rain-making than to rendering vivid and concrete the most meaningful aspects of life, they still conjure up with dramatic intensity a valued attitude or a desired state of affairs. Consider, for example, Psalm 137, one significant instance among many in the Old Testament of this social and psychological function of poetry.

Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept,
When we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps
Upon the willows in the midst thereof.
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song,
And they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion."

How shall we sing the Lord's song
In a strange land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee,
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;
If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.
Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem;
Who said, "Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof."
O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed;
Happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.
Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the
stones.

This is a seventeenth-century English translation of an ancient Hebrew song about the sorrows of a people in exile and in bondage. The singer laments the fate of the Jews under Babylonian rule, and we watch his passions as they well up in four brief movements, each more intense than the one before. First there is an almost calm description of the Jews' sense of loss; then an ironic comment on the callousness of the oppressor; then a nostalgic series of lines praising Jerusalem and vowing never to forget her; and finally a bitter, shocking curse directed against the Babylonians.

In Psalm 137 we see strong traces of the way a passionate and practical people used (and still use) poetry. In the first place the poem is not just something to sit and read at one's leisure, and then perhaps pass a judgment on. It is something sung or chanted, and experienced as part of a more or less complicated religious ritual. It speaks for the group; or rather the poet makes no real distinction between himself and his people. Like a war-dance or a prayer or a parade it is a vital *gesture* of the group. It is a way of saying things commonly felt or understood, or at least of hinting at them, with style. The style here lies partly in the ordered way in which the emotion becomes more and more savage, until at the end it is almost beyond control. It lies, too, in the skilful parallelisms (the clauses beginning with "we," the others beginning with "they," the repetitions of "if" and "happy"), and in the alternation of the shorter and longer lines. But most of all, doubtless, it lies in the words and phrases arranged in these ways—the expressions of painful memory, such as "we sat down, yea, we wept'[1]; and the expressions of determination, such as "Let my right hand forget her cunning"; and the hot anger of the language of destruction in the concluding lines. All these emotional turns of speech do perform a kind of magic. They make the hated past seem real again; they bring the triumphant, avenging future fiercely to life. It is easy, then, with this particular piece, to see how much the form of poetry has in common with the form of prayer. And indeed, poetry and prayer do have the same origins in sacred ritual; in fact, they are indistinguishable from one another in their earliest known forms.

But we are not so much concerned now with historical origins as with what this early connection with prayer and ritual tells us about the ancient motivations still present in poetry. The most striking of these motivations, quite clearly, is a desire for the *power* to be achieved through incantation. The poet of the Psalm puts himself and others into a half-hypnotized state. In that state they act out a dream of liberation and revenge. Each individual listener becomes part of a rhythmic, ritualized group movement and gains a sense of power through his spiritual unity with the group. He is able to let himself go and purify himself by giving vent to the real emotions which ordinary life forces him to suppress. And this release of his innermost self, which gives him the feeling of power, seems to him a revelation of something divine. In his *Indians of the Americas*, John Collier has described a ceremonial dance of the Pueblos which is similar in effect, though of course much more vivid and immediate (for most people) than even the greatest poem could be:

> How in many Pueblo sacred dances the oblivion of self and the corresponding inrush of power becomes almost terrifying, is known to all who frequent the dances. . . . The occasion as a whole was a summoning by the tribe of spirits of the wild, elements or cosmic kin known from ages gone by; and a summoning from within the breast of capacities and loves which had formed the ancient life and must sustain its present and future. As the hours moved on, a displacement of human and mystical factors seemed to take place. The rejoicing was not only a human rejoicing; and that marvelous ever-renewed, ever-increasing, ever-changing leap and rush of song was not only human song. A threshold had been shifted, forces of the wild and of the universe had

> heard the call and had taken the proffered dominion. That is what the tribe believed; that is how it seemed—physical actuality in a thunderstorm or amid ocean breakers seems no more certain. ... A strange release of energies took place. ... the dynamic potentiality of ancient beliefs was realized, and. . . . there was expressed a rejoicing, passionate and yet almost coldly exalted, and the fleshly raiment appeared to fall away.

Nowadays, except for an occasional madness that sweeps over jazz-lovers and popular dancing, such communal "oblivion of the self" is not associated with the arts. Yet the ritual motivation remains, the identification by an act of wilful imagination with something larger than oneself, as strong if not as obvious as ever. The importance of such an identification is one of the main themes of modern poetry, and has in fact made itself felt throughout the history of the art. A hundred years ago, Walt Whitman in his *Song of Myself* described a moment of mystical identification with the divine meaning which he believed possessed everything in the universe:

> Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that
> pass all the argument of the earth,
> And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
> And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
> And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the
> women my sisters and lovers,
> And that a kelson of the creation is love,
> And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
> And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
> And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein
> and poke-weed.

Even more than this, many poems have the form of actual prayers; many make use of religious and mythological names and incidents; and ritualistic literary forms have retained their appeal for both poet and reader. This ritualism is not always solemn. Magic and religion were so intimate a part of the life of primitive peoples that they could often be used lightly, almost casually, with vivid and even comic irony:

ROBERT GRAVES *The Traveller's Curse After Misdirection*[1]

May they wander stage by stage
Of the same vain pilgrimage,
Stumbling on, age after age,
Night and day, mile after mile,
At each and every step, a stile;
At each and every stile, withal,
May they catch their feet and fall;
At each and every fall they take,
May a bone within them break;
And may the bones that break within
Not be, for variation's sake,
Now rib, now thigh, now arm, now shin,
But always, without fail, THE NECK.

All poetry, in a sense, suggests ritual in that it organizes its subject matter into a ceremonious, patterned dance of sounds, rhythms, and images. Even the briefest poem will illustrate this fact:

EZRA POUND *In a Station of the Metro*

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The first line tells us, like a theatrical program note, what the setting is—or more precisely, what the general problem of description is that the poet has set himself. The second line finds the exact image, or concrete picture-example, for what people in a Parisian subway station look like. It might be more natural to say, "These faces in the crowd look to me like petals on a wet, black bough/' but it would not be as satisfying. The little dance of the introductory line followed by the sharply clear image is both attractive and amusing, and it has the effect of a sudden discovery. The pale faces in the semi-darkness immediately become vivid and meaningful—quite different from the big-city dweller's usual impression of the subway as a dull, uninteresting necessity that one lives through somehow on one's way to somewhere else.

This is the sort of image which Ezra Pound has himself called

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[1] From the Welsh.

"an emotional complex in an instant of time." It opens up to us, suddenly, a world of pathetic meaning through its suggestion of petals which have been blown off flowers in a rainstorm. It implies a criticism of a way of life—the mechanized urban existence in which the individual is tragically "blacked out/* and which can be made to seem bearable only by the metaphor of an "apparition," a ghost of the bright beauty of things that grew freely in the sunlight. It suggests, again pathetically, the frailty, the transience, and the mortality of all natural beauty. The faces, too, are "petals," the brevity of the vision corresponding to that of their potential blooming in actual life. The poem also becomes a poignant gesture of affection toward these other lives glimpsed in darkness and in passing.

Poets have always known the power of incantation, of the hypnotic effect of simple chanting and the repetition of sounds and phrases. Thus, Vachel Lindsay's *The Congo* begins almost as if it were created to illustrate the connection between poetry and ritu^JL

Fat black bucks in a wine-barrel room,
Barrel-house kings, with feet unstable,
Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table,
Pounded on the table,
Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom,
Hard as they were able,
Boom, boom, BOOM.
With a silk umbrella and the handle of a broom,
Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, BOOM.
THEN I had religion, THEN I had a vision.
I could not turn from their revel in derision.
THEN I SAW THE CONGO, CREEPING THROUGH THE BLACK,
CUTTING THROUGH THE FOREST WITH A GOLDEN **TRACK.**

Some poets, Edith Sitwell for instance, have tried to write poems which, like children's songs, are no more important for their meaning than for the kind of rhythmic sound-effects they produce. Often, though the poem may suggest serious emotions too, it seems a kind of word-game in nursery singsong:

Gray as a guinea-fowl is the rain
Squawking down from the boughs again.
"Anne, Anne,
Go fill the pail/'
Said the old witch who sat on the rail.
"Though there is a hole in the bucket,
Anne, Anne,
It will fill my pocket____"[2]

These passages will remind the reader again that poetry is at times a *playful* kind of ritual whose function is mainly to open our minds to the many different relationships (possibilities, similarities, differences) that exist among the varied ideas and objects that come into anyone's experience. The poet takes it for granted that to allow our minds free play among these, relationships is a fine and human thing, and the words that suggest them are his raw materials and his delight. "Poetry," Wallace Stevens tells us, "is a satisfying of the desire for resemblance. … In the act of satisfying the desire it touches the sense of reality, heightens it, intensifies it." And he illustrates one way in which a poet's mind works in this manner:

> Take, for example, a beach extending as far as the eye can reach bordered, on the one hand, by trees and, on the other, by the sea. The sky is cloudless and the sun is red. In what sense do the objects in this scene resemble each other? There is enough green in the sea to relate it to the palms. There is enough of the sky reflected in the water to create a resemblance, in some sense, between them. The sand is yellow between the green and the blue. In short, the light alone creates a unity not only in the recedings of distance, where differences become invisible, but also in the contacts of close sight. So, too, sufficiently generalized, each man resembles all other men, each woman resembles all other women, this year resembles last year. The beginning of time will, no doubt, resemble the end of time. One world is said to resemble another.[3]

William Blake put the matter more concisely almost two centuries ago:

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[2] Edith Sitwell, *Two Kitchen Songs.*
[3] Wallace Stevens, *The Nece&ary Angel.*

To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.

This stanza, though not playful like the passages from Vachel Lindsay and Edith Sitwell, is even closer to the primitive ritual spirit of poetry than they are. William Blake had an amazing ability to put himself into the half-hypnotic state of mind needed to make the projections of his imagination seem real. Primitive man, we are told, had to visualize the success of his harvest or hunt or war-expedition in order to believe in the real meaning of his daily activity. He had, thus, to see the completed harvest implicit in the work of sowing; and therefore the projections of his imagination.had to be made "real" through the tribal ceremonies which were both enactments of his prayer that his plans might be fulfilled and intense games in which it was pretended that they were coming true and finally, at the climax, that they had done so. Children's play, as we have seen, often has the same kind of intensity and function, for the child too is getting in touch with reality through giving his imaginative energies free play; and very often he is projecting himself as an adult—trying on this or that personality or occupation, seeing himself in the role of father or mother, connecting the way he is now with the way he may some day be.

All this activity of the imagination, then, is quite practical, not at all "idle dreaming/' since it—alone of all human activities—is what enables people to give meaning to the routine of their lives. A life without meaning would be one without any projected purpose or value, such a life as absolutely nobody could bring himself to accept. Even the poorest human derelict has his pathetic day-dreams, the last surviving remnants of the fruitful ritual projections of the fulfilled life. He visualizes, it may be—

.... someplace unreal
where everybody goes after something happens,
set up in the air, safe, a room in a hotel.
A brass bed, military hair brushes,
a couple of coats, trousers, maybe a dress
on a chair or draped on the floor.

> This room is not on earth, feel the air,
> warm like heaven and far away.[4]

But Blake's stanza about seeing "a World in a Grain of Sand" and "a Heaven in a Wild Flower" goes beyond the visions of primitive and child, let alone the pipedreams of a lost soul. He is bending our attention, prophetically, to the meaning of all life, to the moral, religious, and philosophical faiths without which existence might seem pointless. Blake's lines must not be read merely as pretty sentiments, but as a revelation of the vast interpenetrating nature of experience on the one hand (the things we see, do, and feel) and the active human imagination on the other.

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[4] Horace Gregory, *Longface Mahoney Discusses Heaven.* (Pages 387-388). Notice how, in these lines, the speaker surrounds himself, in a way, with the atmosphere of safety, comfort, cleanliness, and a woman's companionship. The "heaven" he creates for himself is a kind of "minimum standard" existence—yet there is emotional force in the image of these commonplace objects because they are the projections of unfulfilled need and desire, just as the images in the Hebrew psalm were.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

i. Navajo Incantations[1]

TORLINO *Therefore I Must Tell the Truth*[2]

I AM ashamed before the earth;
I am ashamed before the heavens;
I am ashamed before the dawn;
I am ashamed before the evening twilight;
I am ashamed before the blue sky;
I am ashamed before the darkness;
I am ashamed before the sun.
/ *amjishamed before that standing within me which speaks*
with me.
Some of these things are always looking at me.
I am never out of sight.
Therefore I must tell the truth.
That is why I always tell the truth.
/ *hold my word tight to my breast.*

ANONYMOUS *Incantation for Rain*

THE CORN grows up.
The waters of the dark clouds drop, drop.
The rain descends.
The waters from the corn leaves drop, drop.
The rain descends.
The waters from the plants drop, drop.
The corn grows up.
The waters of the dark mists drop, drop.

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[1] Translated by Washington Matthews.

[2] Torlino's oath to tell the truth was sworn before he recounted the Navajo cosmogony to Professor Matthews.

ANONYMOUS *A Prayer of the Night Chant*[3]

TSÉGIHI.
House made of dawn.
House made of evening light.
House made of the dark cloud.
House made of male rain.
House made of dark mist.
House made of female rain.
House made of pollen.
House made of grasshoppers.
Dark cloud is at the door.
The trail out of it is dark cloud.
The zigzag lightning stands high upon it.
Male deity!
Your offering I make.
I have prepared a smoke for you.
Restore my feet for me.
Restore my legs for me.
Restore my body for me.
Restore my mind for me.
This very day take out your spell for me.
Your spell remove for me.
You have taken it away for me.
Far off it has gone.
Happily I recover.
Happily my interior becomes cool.
Happily I go forth.
My interior feeling cool, may I walk.
No longer sore, may I walk.
Impervious to pain, may I walk.
With lively feelings may I walk.
As it used to be long ago, may I walk.
Happily may I walk.
Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.

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[8] An incantation to dispel sickness and the fear of evil and death. Tségihi is the dwelling-place of the divinities invoked in this prayer.

Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.
Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.
Happily may I walk.
Being as it used to be long ago, may I walk.
May it be beautiful before me.
May it be beautiful behind me.
May it be beautiful below me.
May it be beautiful above me.
May it be beautiful around me.
In beauty it is finished.

2.

ANONYMOUS *The Bailey Beareth the Bell Away*

THE MAIDENS came
When I was in my mother's bower;
I had all that I would.
  The bailey beareth the bell away;
  The lily, the rose, the rose I lay.

The silver is white, red is the gold;
The robes they lay in fold.
  The bailey beareth the bell away;
  The lily, the rose, the rose I lay.

And through the glass window shines the sun.
How should I love, and I so young?
  The bailey beareth the bell away;
  The lily, the rose, the rose I lay.

GEORGE PEELE *The Song at the Well*

(from *The Old Wives' Tale)*

(Enter Zantippa with a pitcher to the well. A head comes up with ears of corn, and she combs them in her lap.)

VOICE

GENTLY DIP, but not too deep,
For fear you make the golden beard to weep.
Fair maiden, white and red,
Comb me smooth, and stroke my head,
And thou shalt have some cockell-bread.

(A second head comes up full of gold, which she combs into her lap.)

SECOND HEAD

Gently dip, but not too deep,
For fear thou make the golden beard to weep.
Fair maiden, white and red,
Comb me smooth and stroke my head,
And every hair a sheaf shall be,
And every sheaf a golden tree.

GEORGE PEELE *Bethsabe Bathing*

(from *David and Bethsabe)*

HOT SUN, cool fire, temper'd with sweet air,
Black shade, fair nurse, shadow my white hair:
Shine, sun; burn, fire; breathe, air, and ease me;
Black shade, fair nurse, shroud me and please me:
Shadow, my sweet nurse, keep me from burning,
Make not my glad cause cause of mourning.
        Let not my beauty's fire
        Inflame unstaid desire,
        Nor pierce any bright eye
        That wand'reth lightly.

JOHN MILTON *On a May Morning*

Now THE bright morning Star, Day's harbinger,
Comes dancing from the East, and leads with her
The flowery May, who from her green lap throws
The yellow Cowslip and the pale Primrose.
Hail, bounteous May, that dost inspire
Mirth and youth and young desire,
Woods and Groves are of thy dressing,
Hill and Dale doth boast thy blessing.
Thus we salute thee with our early Song,
And welcome thee, and wish thee long.

ROBERT HERRICK *Corinna's Going A-Maying*

GET UP, get up for shame! The blooming morn
Upon her wings presents the god unshorn.
See how Aurora throws her fair,
Fresh-quilted colors through the air.
Get up, sweet slug-a-bed, and see
The dew bespangling herb and tree!
Each flower has wept and bowed toward the east
Above an hour since, yet you not drest;
Nay! not so much as out of bed?
When all the birds have matins said
And sung their thankful hymns, 'tis sin,
Nay, profanation, to keep in,
Whenas a thousand virgins on this day
Spring sooner than the lark, to fetch in May.

Rise and put on your foliage, and be seen
To come forth, like the springtime, fresh and green,
And sweet as Flora. Take no care
For jewels for your gown or hair.
Fear not; the leaves will strew
Gems in abundance upon you.

Besides, the childhood of the day has kept
Against you come, some orient pearls unwept.
Come, and receive them while the light
Hangs on the dew-locks of the night;
And Titan on the eastern hill
Retires himself, or else stands still
Till you come forth! Wash, dress, be brief in praying;
Few beads are best when once we go a-Maying.

Come, my Corinna, come; and coming, mark
How each field turns a street, each street a park
Made green and trimmed with trees! see how
Devotion gives each house a bough
Or branch! each porch, each door, ere this,
An ark, a tabernacle is,
Made up of white-thorn neatly interwove,
As if here were those cooler shades of love.
Can such delights be in the street
And open fields, and we not see't?
Come, we'll abroad; and let's obey
The proclamation made for May,
And sin no more, as we have done, by staying;
But, my Corinna, come, let's go a-Maying.

There's not a budding boy or girl this day
But is got up and gone to bring in May.
A deal of youth ere this is come
Back, and with white-thorn laden home.
Some have dispatched their cakes and cream,
Before that we have left to dream;
And some have wept and wooed, and plighted troth,
And chose their priest, ere we can cast off sloth.
Many a green-gown has been given,
Many a kiss, both odd and even;
Many a glance, too, has been sent
From outi the eye, love's firmament;
Many a jest told of the keys betraying
This night, and locks picked; yet we're not a-Maying!

Come, let us go, while we are in our prime,
And take the harmless folly of the time!
  We shall grow old apace, and die
  Before we know our liberty.
  Our life is short, and our days run
  As fast away as does the sun.
And, as a vapor or a drop of rain,
Once lost, can ne'er be found again,
  So when or you or I are made
  A fable, song, or fleeting shade,
  All love, all liking, all delight
  Lies drowned with us in endless night.
Then, while time serves, and we are but decaying,
Come, my Corinna, come, let's go a-Maying.

3.

ANONYMOUS *Dingdong! The castle bell!*

DINGDONG! THE castle bell!
Farewell, my mother!
Bury me in the old churchyard
Beside my eldest brother.
My coffin shall be black,
Six angels at my back,
Two to sing and two to pray
And two to carry my soul away.

JOHN WEBSTER *Call for the robin-redbreast and the wren*

CALL FOR the robin-redbreast and the wren,
Since o'er shady groves they hover,
And with leaves and flowers do cover
The friendless bodies of unburied men.

Call unto his funeral dole
The ant, the fieldmouse, and the mole
To rear him hillocks that shall keep him warm
And (when gay tombs are robb'd) sustain no harm;
But keep the wolf far thence, that's foe to men,
For with his nails he'll dig them up again.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE *Fear no more the heat o' the sun*

(from *Cymbeline)*

FEAR NO more the heat o' the sun,
   Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast 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 reed is as the oak:
The Sceptre, Learning, Physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning-flash,
   Nor th' all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
   Thou hast finished joy and moan:
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust.

No exorciser harm thee!
Nor no witchcraft charm thee!
Ghost unlaid forbear thee!
Nothing ill come near thee!
Quiet consummation have;
And renowned be thy grave!

JAMES SHIRLEY *The glories of our blood and state*

THE GLORIES of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against Fate;
Death lays his icy hand on kings.
        Sceptre and crown
        Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

Some men with swords may reap the field,
And plant fresh laurels where they kill.
But their strong nerves at last must yield;
They tame but one another still.
        Early or late
        They stoop to fate,
And must give up their murmuring breath,
When they, pale captives, creep to death.

The garlands wither on your brow;
Then boast no more your mighty deeds.
Upon Death's purple altar now,
See where the victor-victim bleeds.
        Your heads must come
        To the cold tomb:
Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.

4. From The King James Bible

Psalm 23

THE LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul;
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me,
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

From ECCLESIASTES *Remember also thy Creator*

REMEMBER ALSO thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
Or ever the evil days come,
And the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say,
"*I* have no pleasure in them";
Or ever the sun, and the light,
And the moon, and the stars, be darkened,
And the clouds return after the rain:
In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,
And the strong men shall bow themselves,
And the grinders cease because they are few,
And those that look out of the windows be darkened,
And the doors shall be shut in the street;
When the sound of the grinding is low,
And one shall rise up at the voice of a bird,
And all the daughters of music shall be brought low;
Yea, they shall be afraid of that which is high,
And terrors shall be in the way;
And the almond tree shall blossom,
And the grasshopper shall be a burden,
And the caper-berry shall fail:
Because man goeth to his long home,
And the mourners go about the streets:
Or ever the silver cord be loosed,

Or the golden bowl be broken,
Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,
Or the wheel broken at the cistern;
And the dust return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit return unto God who gave it.

From THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

Blessed are the poor in spirit

BLESSED ARE the poor in spirit:
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn:
For they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek:
For they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:
For they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful:
For they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart:
For they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers:
For they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness* sake:
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

5.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY *Ode to the West Wind*

I

O WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!

ii

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine aery surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!

in

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baia's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

v

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

DYLAN THOMAS *Ceremony after a Fire Raid*

i

MYSELVES
The grievers
Grieve
Among the street burned to tireless death

A child of a few hours
With its kneading mouth
Charred on the black breast of the grave
The mother dug, and its arms full of fires.

Begin
With singing
Sing
Darkness kindled back into beginning
When the caught tongue nodded blind,
A star was broken
Into the centuries of the child
Myselves grieve now, and miracles cannot atone.

Forgive
Us forgive
Us your death that myselves the believers
May hold it in a great flood
Till the"blood shall spurt,
And the dust shall sing like a bird
As the grains blow, as your death grows, through our heart.

Crying
Your dying
Cry,
Child beyond cockcrow, by the fire-dwarfed
Street we chant the flying sea
In the body bereft.
Love is the last light spoken. Oh
Seed of sons in the loin of the black husk left.

ii

I know not whether
Adam or Eve, the adorned holy bullock
Or the white ewe lamb
Or the chosen virgin
Laid in her snow
On the altar of London,

Was the first to die
In the cinder of the little skull,
O bride and bride groom
0 Adam and Eve together
Lying in the lull
Under the sad breast of the head stone
White as the skeleton
Of the garden of Eden.

1 know the legend
Of Adam and Eve is never for a second
Silent in my service
Over the dead infants
Over the one
Child who was priest and servants,
Word, singers, and tongue
In the cinder of the little skull,
Who was the serpent's
Night fall and the fruit like a sun,
Man and woman undone,
Beginning crumbled back to darkness
Bare as the nurseries
Of the garden of wilderness.

in

Into the organpipes and steeples
Of the luminous cathedrals,
Into the weathercocks' molten mouths
Rippling in twelve-winded circles,
Into the dead clock burning the hour
Over the urn of sabbaths
Over the whirling ditch of daybreak
Over the sun's hovel and the slum of fire
And the golden pavements laid in requiems,
Into the bread in a wheatfield of flames,
Into the wine burning like brandy,
The masses of the sea
The masses of the seanmder

The masses of the infant-bearing sea
Erupt, fountain, and enter to utter for ever
Glory glory glory
The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 8

1. Magical rites or religious ceremonies to further the preservation or propagation of life might be a general description of the majority of poems included in Groups i and 2. Show the similarity between some of the primitive poems and simpler songs and the more sophisticated poems (Herrick, Milton) from this point of view. Compare also H. D.'s *Orchard* (pages 82-83).

   On the basis of these comparisons, would you say poetry which seems highly formal and "artificially" elaborate may nevertheless be intense and passionate in its effect? Explain.
2. The poems in Group 3 present ritual expressions to deal with the catastrophe of death. *Ding dong the castle bell* is naive in tone; Webster's poen* sardonically lists the dead man's "friends" and foe; Shakespeare's gives arguments for consolation; Shirley's philosophizes on death's universality. Which poem most successfully leads us to accept the fact of death and see it in the vivid light of the strongest human faith in life? Notice the sharp turn at the end of each poem. What is its effect in each case?
3. In the selections in Groups 4 and 5, discuss the role of the protagonist (the "I" or "we" of the poem) as suppliant, worshipper, or priest. Consider the action of each poem as religious ritual and discuss the effectiveness of the language, the music, and the imagery in contributing to the celebration of a ceremony. To whom, for what, and on behalf of whom is the incantation or prayer offered?

///. POETIC INTEGRITY

We have noted that the basic poetic device—basic because it comes closest to the essential character of poetry as naked vision and intense realization—is the metaphor. The metaphor gives us a flash of perception of relationships that has the kick of experience in it. The price the poet pays for this power of perception is that he must always tell the truth as he sees it. Poetic statement and imagery are often likely to expose unsuspected or hitherto unaccepted realities, perhaps even distasteful realities, through the media of our senses and emotions; and the poet runs the risk of becoming especially concerned with the troublesome matters most of us, most of the time, would like to keep ourselves from thinking about—the meaning of death, for example, or the great cruelties human beings can often inflict upon one another, or the hypocrisies and weaknesses of our own society.

Let us turn, for illustration, to Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*, a poem which, like many other poems of the later nineteenth century, sketches a bleak picture of the universe of modern man. Our universe, Arnold argues, is one in which the old faith in a life securely and eternally guided by a benevolent God has begun to disappear, leaving many people with the feeling that they have nothing to depend on but the affection of beloved individuals.

MATTHEW ARNOLD *Dover Beach*

The sea is calm tonight.
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.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-airl
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
Listenl you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
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
Heard it on the Ægaean, 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.

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,
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
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
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

In this poem the effect of calm beauty in the opening picture of Dover Beach and the sea at night is soon submerged in the melancholy impression of the first stanza's closing lines. The sound of the waves reminds the speaker of the "eternal" recurrence of this impression, for there have always been men who lived near the sea and heard the same melancholy note—the great Greek writer of tragedy, Sophocles, for example. Having struck this philosophical note, the poem can then go on to the allegorical third stanza, which is not about geographical places or historical personalities but about an abstraction—a state of mind which has changed the meaning of life for most people.[1] And finally there is the appeal to a beloved woman that she and the speaker keep their faith in one another, since the calm, beautiful scene outside is mere deception, while in reality terror and confusion lurk everywhere.

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*The "Sea of Faith" is a typically allegorical figure of speech. See pages 541-545 for a fuller discussion of allegory.

Dover Beach is not "against" delight in the world's beauty and in religious faith. On the contrary, the images applied to them make it clear that they have a strong hold on the poet's affections. But he fears life too, because of the challenge to old beliefs that has come from the new scientific developments of the nineteenth century; and between fear and loss of faith, much of the delight seems to have been spoiled for him.

By now we have moved a great distance from the popular conception of poetry as something flowery, vague, and conventional in a "nice" and undisturbing way. If this widespread conception were true, poetry would be without passion, originality, or intelligent direction. Not such easy things to achieve as vagueness and "niceness," but things difficult to achieve—frankness, precision, intensity—are the marks of the genuine in poetry. Looking back at Pound's *In a Station of the Metro,* Housman's *Eight O'Clock,* and Wordsworth's *A slumber did my spirit seal,* we can see that each of these poems places a high value on human life and human sympathy generally at the same time that each of them strikes a darker, bleaker note.

Poetry often expresses ideas and emotions felt by all mankind to be true in the long run to the common experience of humanity. Such poetry is affirmative, traditional, and genuinely popular. It does not make its appeal by its originality or its unexpectedness, or even by its profundity (though it does not necessarily lack these qualities), but by its convincing rightness, by the *felt* truth with which it confirms people in what they have come to feel and believe without ever having been able to put it into memorable words. This is the idea of Pope's Horatian conception of poetry as "What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed," and of Keats's psychological phrasing of the same idea:

> 1 think poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity. It should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance.[2]

---

[2] Letter to John Taylor, February 27, 1818.

Poems and images fitting these descriptions are immediately satisfying; they are accepted at once and never forgotten. Lines whose impressiveness are of this order are the easiest to call to mind:

She walks in beauty like the night
GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON

The day is done and the darkness
Falls from the wings of night
As a feather is wafted downward
From an eagle in his flight.
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

O my luve is like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June
ROBERT BURNS

The uncertain glory of an April day
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*

If we place alongside these beautiful images parallel ones of a more complex kind, we shall discover that the greater complexity is due to the distance between the arms of the comparison—between, for instance, the brightness of God and the depth of darkness in the first quotation below. The things compared or identified are not so easily seen to be alike. The effect is not so much to reassure us of what we already feel as to startle us awake, so that we experience something not experienced before:

There is in God (some say)
A deep but dazzling darkness.
HENRY VAUGHAN

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.
T. S. ELIOT

the fine, fine wind that takes its course
through the chaos of the world
Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade
inserted. . . .
D. H. LAWRENCE

A serpent swam a vertex to the sun
—On unpaced beaches leaned its tongue and drummed.
What fountains did I hear? what icy speeches?
HART CRANE

April is the crudest month. . . .
T. s. ELIOT

The two types of images differ in a more fundamental way than in their relative complexity. The second type peers below the surface of life to its ever-present but often dark and confusing realities. It does not confirm what is established; it affirms new and sometimes terrifying perceptions. As the discoverer of "underground secrets" of the human consciousness, the poet is indeed often, as Louis MacNeice has said, an "informer"—and in the derogatory sense of the word. He "tells on" us, not caring what the telling may do to our self-esteem. There is, for example, another truth about the nature of love than that expressed by Burns in his intensely personal yet universal

O my luve is like a red, red rose,
  That's newly sprung in June:
O my luve is like the melodic
  That's sweetly played in tune.

What this truth is we can discern in some lines by Robert Bridges from his *Eros* (pages 206-207). (Eros was the Greek god of love, to whom the speaker in this poem addresses his thoughts.)

Why hast thou nothing in thy face?
Thou idol oi the human race,
Thou tyrant of the human heart. . . .

  Surely thy body is thy mind,
For in thy face is nought to find,
Only thy soft unchristen'd smile
That shadows neither love nor guile,
But shameless will and power immense,
In secret sensuous innocence.

The paradoxical irony and seeming bitterness of these lines are conveyed particularly in certain double-edged words and phrases: "nothing," "idol," "soft unchristen'd smile," "shameless/* "secret," "innocence." The attitude here is not, as in the Burns poem, that of a lover in the grip of the mindless ecstasy of Eros but that of a philosopher and critic who seeks to know rather than to feel; and the knowledge is the fruit of experience, not experience itself. In the truth it expresses, Bridges' poem is less happy, less pleasant to contemplate, and indeed, one is tempted to say, less respectable than Burns's. Yet both writers are telling the truth. The discrepancy between them lies in the different aspects from which the truth is viewed. Burns is joyously making love; Bridges is analyzing love with mixed feelings.

This is clear if we read a little further in *Eros*. The suggestion of paradox in the lines we have quoted is heightened and takes a sharp new turn in succeeding lines. So far, we have been shown the darker side of love, its instinctive mindless preoccupation with its prey; notice the faint but unmistakable air of moral disapproval in the second stanza: "unchristen'd," "shameless," "secret," Eros is called. But this darker side is not the main truth the poem is "Concerned with presenting. The much richer, more complete truth emerges finally—that the essential, characteristic, and defining quality of love is a luminosity coming not in spite of but because of its very mindlessness:

> 0 king of joy, what is thy thought?
> I dream thou knowest it is nought,
> And wouldst in darkness come, but thou
> Makest the light where'er thou go.
> Ah yet no victim of thy grace,
> None who e'er longed for thy embrace,
> Hath cared to look upon thy face.

The concluding two lines have returned to the animality of love which it is sometimes difficult for the idealist to accept, but the poet can hardly be said to reject the truth of love's luminosity because of this animality. He is not trying deliberately to be obscure or difficult; he 15 trying accurately to suggest the paradoxical nature of love in a manner that will be true to our actual experience.

Dover Beach and *Eros* both reveal the special quality of poetic integrity, which may take many forms but very often, like Bridges' god of love, makes a light of its own in the midst of the acknowledged darkness and complexity of life. Such an assertion of human values despite the knowledge of adversity is behind all ritual and art. The act of erecting a formal ceremony, design, or structural pattern for its own sake as well as for other purposes signifies a faith that human activity is more than worth the effort no matter what the world's condition may be.

This kind of affirmation can sometimes be made even more powerfully in works of pure imagination. Blake's strange poem *The Tyger* is a case in point. In this poem, the problem of evil—the existence of terrible, uncontrolled forces and their relation to the nature of God—is dynamically symbolized with naked directness.

WILLIAM BLAKE *The Tyger*

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

The very thought of the tiger, as he is presented in these six stanzas, excites the speaker here in a curious way. It is possible to look upon tigers as things in the zoo—fierce, striped animals that are worth staring at as they pace about inside their cages. And it is possible, with only slightly superior scientific knowledge, to see them as interesting examples of certain species. But the speaker in the poem can hardly be said to be *amused* by the tiger, nor does he seem to care much about the zoological facts as such. His reaction, rather, resembles the primordial terror of a child, an almost instinctive terror with which we can all sympathize, and he sees in the tiger a mysterious, sinister vision of supernatural power.

In this vision, the tiger looms as a freely moving force in the dark forests of, not Asia or Africa, but "the night." So we are led to think of him as ever-present, ever-dangerous, a "burning bright" symbol of the savagery in every human soul and in all existence; a satanic beast. As we follow the poem through its images of the strength, the dreadfulness, and the wonder of the tiger, we become more and more aware of the speaker's chilled sense of awe when he thinks of the inscrutable purposes and unimaginable power of the creator of such a being. This awe reaches a shocked climax in the fifth stanza, when the speaker, remembering the miraculous events on the night Christ was born, asks the natural but startling question, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" Without rationalizing away this frightening fact, that all we see as gentlest and all that we see as most violently and perilously dynamic proceed from the same vital, daring source, the speaker faces the double nature of the universe with a full awareness of its awful dangers and endless possibilities.

As the poem develops, we can see clearly how its form helps create and sustain the religious-emotional pitch of feeling. The first outcry, together with the simple rhyme, fixes a dynamic picture profoundly in our minds:

> Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
> In the forests of the night. . . .

Immediately afterwards we are drawn into a ceremonial dance of questions. Each question leads to the same answer as to the nature of the Creator, and each associates God with his untamable creation, so that the repeated questions beat their meaning at us like savage drums. God, we are being told, is not to be understood in human terms. There is something about him that matches the tiger: He is "dread"; he responds to the challenge of the "distant deeps or skies" whose dangerous fires he must seize to create this terrible symbol. The rhymes come very fast in an obsessive chant of fascinated horror at the concentrated vision of the meaning of experience which has seized upon the speaker.

At the end the tiger still ranges supreme in his own domain, and we feel that he is "real" in a sense not felt by the zoologist or the casual visitor to the zoo. He has the kind of reality that forces men to examine the meaning of their own lives because they have found a symbol with a truly compelling moral force. The profound questions raised in this poem, together with the stark pictures and the piled-up short phrases, may startle us into a kind of humility rare in our day. What we would ordinarily think of as evil has been shockingly related to what we think of as absolute good. We are sure of the compelling importance of the questions and of the image around which they are gathered. An emotional assertion of meaning has been made so vividly in these questions that it has brought into the open our sense of the terrible reality of evil.

As we shall see again in considering other poems in later chapters, this encompassing of evil without yielding to it, this fusing together of faith and candor, is one of the most important characteristics of serious poetry of a high order.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

i.

WILLIAM BLAKE *Introduction to Songs of Innocence*

PIPING DOWN the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"
So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, ,pipe that song again;"
So I piped: he wept to hear.

"Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;
Sing thy songs of happy cheer!"
So I sung the same again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book that all may read."
So he vanished from my sight;
And I pluck'd a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *My heart leaps up when I behold*

MY HEART leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky;
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man -^
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

W. H. DAVIES *A Great Time*

SWEET CHANCE, that led my steps abroad, *
Beyond the town, where wild flowers grow,
A rainbow and a cuckoo, Lord, *
How rich and great the times are now I
Know, all ye sheep
And cows, that keep
On staring that I stand so long
In grass that's wet from heavy rain—
A rainbow and a cuckoo's song
May never come together again;
May never come
This side the tomb.

WILLIAM BLAKE *The Lamb*

LITTLE LAMB, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life, & bid thee feed
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;

Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb.
He is meek, & he is mild;
He became a little child.
I a child, & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
Little Lamb, God bless thee!

WILLIAM BLAKE *The Shepherd*

How SWEET is the Shepherd's sweet lot;
From the morn to the evening he strays;
He shall follow his sheep all the day,
And his tongue shall be filled with praise,

For he hears the lamb's innocent call,
And he hears the ewe's tender reply;
He is watchful while they are in peace,
For they know when their Shepherd is nigh.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH from *The Prelude, or, Growth of a Poet's Mind*

FAIR SEED-TIME had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:
Much favoured in my birthplace, and no less
In that beloved Vale to which erelong
We were transplanted—there were we let loose
For sports of wider range. Ere I had told

Ten birth-days, when among the mountain-slopes
Frost, and the breath of frosty wind, had snapped
The last autumnal crocus, 'twas my joy
With store of springes o'er my shoulder hung
To range the open heights where woodcocks run
Along the smooth green turf. Through half the night,
Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied
That anxious visitation;—moon and stars
Were shining o'er my head. I was alone,
And seemed to be a trouble to the peace
That dwelt among them. Sometimes it befell
In these night wanderings, that a strong desire
O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird
Which was the captive of another's toil
Became my prey; and when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

Nor less when spring had warmed the cultured Vale,
Moved we as plunderers where the mother-bird
Had in high places built her lodge; though mean
Our object and inglorious, yet the end
Was not ignoble. Ohl when I have hung
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
But ill sustained, and almost (so it seemed)
Suspended by the blast that blew amain,
Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that time
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ear! the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds!

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together

In one society. How strange that all
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself1 Praise to the end!
Thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ;
Whether her fearless visitings, or those
That came with soft alarm, like hurtless light
Opening the peaceful clouds; or she would use
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable, as best might suit her aim.

One summer evening (led by her) I found
A little boat tied to a willow tree
Within a rocky cove, its usual home.
Straight I unloosed her chain, and stepping in
Pushed from the shore. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on;
Leaving behind her still, on either side
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. But now, like one who rows,
Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point
With an unswerving line, I fixed my view
Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,
The horizon's utmost boundary; far above
Was nothing but the stars and the gray sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan;
When, from behind that craggy steep till then
The horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape

Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,—
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought,
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion, not in vain
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul;
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things—
With life and nature—purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.
Nor was this fellowship vouchsafed to me
With stinted kindness. In November days,
When vapours rolling down the valley made
A lonely scene more lonesome, among woods,
At noon and 'mid the calm" of summer nights,

When, by the margin of the trembling lake,
Beneath the gloomy hills homeward I went
In solitude, such intercourse was mine;
Mine was it in the fields both day and night,
And by the waters, all the summer long.

And in the frosty season, when the sun
Was set, and visible for many a mile
The cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom,
I heeded not their summons: happy time
It was indeed for all of us—for me
It was a time of rapture! Clear and loud
The village clock tolled six,—I wheeled about,
Proud and exulting like an untired horse
That cares not for his home. All shod with steel,
We hissed along the polished ice in games
Confederate, imitative of the chase
And woodland pleasures,—the resounding horn,
The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.
So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle; with the din
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron; while far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.
Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the reflex of a star
That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed
Upon the glassy plain; and oftentimes,
When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,

Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round!
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*

The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

I

THERE WAS a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
        To me did seem
      Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
      Turn whereso'er I may,
        By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

ii

      The Rainbow comes and goes,
      And lovely is the Rose,
      The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;
    Waters on a starry night
    Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

III

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound,
To me alone there came a thought of grief:
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong:
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;
No more shall grief of mind the season wrong;
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
And all the earth is gay;
Land and sea
Give themselves up to jollity,
And with the heart of May
Doth every Beast keep holiday;—
Thou Child of Joy,
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy
Shepherd-boy!

IV

Ye blessed Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.
Oh evil day! if I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning,
And the Children are culling
On every side,
In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm:—
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
—But there's a Tree, of many, one,

A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

V

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

VI

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a Mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely Nurse doth all she can
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

VII

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown aside,
And with new joy and pride
The little Actor cons another part;
Filling from time to time his "humorous stage"
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That Life brings with her in her equipage;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

VIII

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul's immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind, —
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality

Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,
A Presence which, is not to be put by;
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

IX

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being

Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never:
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!
Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

X

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young Lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound!
We in thought will join your throng,
Ye that pipe and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts today
Feel the gladness of the May!
What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

XI

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

HENRY VAUGHAN *The Retreat*

HAPPY THOSE early days! when I
Shin'd in my Angel-infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white, Celestial thought,
When yet I had not walkt above
A mile, or two, from my first love,
And looking back (at the short space)
Could see a glimpse of his bright face;
When on some gilded Cloud, or flower
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;
Before I taught my tongue to wound
My Conscience with a sinful sound,

Or had the black art to dispense
A sev'ral sin to ev'ry sense,
But felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.
   O how I long to travel back
And tread again that ancient track!
That I might once more reach that plain,
Where first I left my glorious train,
From whence th' inlightned spirit sees
That shady City of Palm trees;
But (ah!) my soul with too much stay
Is drunk, and staggers in the way.
Some men a forward motion love,
But I by backward steps would move,
And when this dust falls to the urn
In that state I came return.

2.

WILLIAM BLAKE *Introduction to Songs of Experience*

HEAR THE voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might control
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew!

"O Earth, O Earth, return!
"Arise from out the dewy grass;
"Night is worn,
"And the morn
"Rises from the slumberous mass.

"Turn away no more;
"Why wilt thou turn away?
"The starry floor,
"The wat'ry shore,
"Is giv'n thee till the break of day."

SIR WALTER RALEIGH ***The Lie***

Go, SOUL, the body's guest,
Upon a thankless arrant[1]:
Fear not to touch the best;
The truth shall be thy warrant.
Go, since I needs must die,
And give the world the lie.

Say to the court, it glows
And shines like rotten wood;
Say to the church, it shows
What's good, and doth no good:
If church and court reply,
Then give them both the lie.

Tell potentates, they live
Acting by others' action,
Not loved unless they give,
Not strong but by a faction:
If potentates reply,
Give potentates the lie.

Tell men of high condition
That manage the estate,
Their purpose is ambition,
Their practice only hate:
And if they once reply,
Then give them all the lie.

[1] errand

Tell them that brave it most,
  They beg for more by spending,
Who, in their greatest cost,
  Seek nothing but commending:
    And if they make reply,
    Then give them all the lie,

Tell zeal it wants devotion;
  Tell love it is but lust;
Tell time it is but motion;
  Tell flesh it is but dust:
    And wish them not reply,
    For thou must give the lie.

Tell age it daily wasteth;
  Tell honour how it alters;
Tell beauty how she blasteth;
  Tell favour how it falters:
    And as they shall reply,
    Give every one the lie.

Tell wit how much it wrangles
  In tickle points of niceness;
Tell wisdom she entangles
  Herself in over-wiseness:
    And when they do reply,
    Straight give them both the lie.

Tell physic of her boldness;
  Tell skill it is prevention;
Tell charity of coldness;
  Tell law it is contention:
    And as they do reply,
    So give them still the lie.

Tell fortune of her blindness;
  Tell nature of decay;
Tell friendship of unkindness;
  Tell justice of delay:
    And if they will reply,
    Then give them all the lie.

Tell arts they have no soundness,
But vary by esteeming;
Tell schools they want profoundness,
And stand too much on seeming:
If arts and schools reply,
Give arts and schools the lie.

Tell faith it's fled the city;
Tell how the country erreth;
Tell, manhood shakes off pity;
Tell, virtue least preferreth:
And if they do reply
Spare not to give the lie.

So when thou hast, as I
Commanded thee, done blabbing,
Although to give the lie
Deserves no less than stabbing,
Stab at thee he that will,
No stab the soul can kill.

WILLIAM BLAKE *The Garden of Love*

I WENT to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds^
And binding with briars" my joys & desires.

WILLIAM BLAKE *Song: Never seek to tell thy love*

NEVER SEEK to tell thy love
Love that never told can be;
For the gentle wind does move
Silently, invisibly.

I told my love, I told my love,
I told her all my heart,
Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears—
Ah, she doth depart.

Soon as she was gone from me
A traveller came by
Silently, invisibly—
O, was no deny.

ROBERT BRIDGES EpCOS *(Eros)*

WHY HAST thou nothing in thy face?
Thou idol of the human race,
Thou tyrant of the human heart,
The flower of lovely youth that art;
Yea, and that standest in thy youth
An image of eternal Truth,
With thy exuberant flesh so fair,
That only Pheidias might compare,
Ere from his chaste marmoreal form
Time had decayed the colours warm;
Like to his gods in thy proud dress,
Thy starry sheen of nakedness.

Surely thy body is thy mind,
For in thy face is nought to find,
Only thy soft unchristen'd smile,
That shadows neither love nor guile,
But shameless will and power immense,
In secret sensuous innocence.

O king of joy, what is thy thought?
I dream thou knowest it is nought,
And wouldst in darkness come, but thou
Makest the light where'er thou go.
Ah yet no victim of thy grace,
None who e'er long'd for thy embrace,
Hath cared to look upon thy face.

EMILY DICKINSON *'Twas like a maelstrom, with a notch*

TWAS LIKE a maelstrom, with a notch
That nearer every day
Kept narrowing its boiling wheel
Until the agony

Toyed coolly with the final inch
Of your delirious hem,
And you dropped, lost, when something broke
And let you from a dream;

As if a goblin with a gauge
Kept measuring the hours,
Until you felt your second weigh
Helpless in his paws,

And not a sinew, stirred, could help,
And sense was setting numb,
When God remembered, and the fiend
Let go then, overcome;

As if your sentence stood pronounced,
And you were frozen led
From dungeon's luxury of doubt
To gibbets and the dead,

And when the film had stitched your eyes,
A creature gasped "Reprieve!"
Which anguish was the utterest then,
To perish, or to live?

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS *Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop*

I MET the Bishop on the road
And much said he and I.
"Those breasts are flat and fallen now,
Those veins must soon be dry;
Live in a heavenly mansion,
Not in some foul sty."

"Fair and foul are near of kin,
And fair needs foul/' I cried.
"My friends are gone, but that's a truth
Nor grave nor bed denied,
Learned in bodily lowliness
And in the heart's pride.

"A woman can be proud and stiff
When on love intent;
But Love has pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement;
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent."

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 9

1. The poems of this section are separated into two groups—the first generally "affirmative" in their qualities, the second generally "critical."
   - i. In what respects do Blake's *Introductions* (to *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience)* illustrate the differences in these groups?
   - ii. Does one of these poems by Blake seem to you more sincere, intense, and genuinely moving than the other? Explain by discussing the two poems along the lines of the analyses of *The Tyger* and *Eros* on pages 183-187.
2. The selections by Wordsworth are "affirmative," but they become so by recognizing some dark or disturbing truths and then advancing into positive affirmations in spite of, and partly as a result of, the

recognition. How does this "transcending" movement take place in these poems? How convincing is it? Does Wordsworth's description of childhood experiences in *The Prelude* tally with his memories in the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood?*

3. In Yeats's poem, there is a bitter debate between a puritanical priest and an old vagabond woman who has led what he considers a depraved life.
    - i. Which of the speakers do you think is intended to have the better of the argument from a moral standpoint?
    - ii. Both speakers are frank in the language they use about the body, and both use religious terminology. Which one would you say has the keenest sense of the omnipresence of God?
    - iii. Why, in the final stanza, is the word "love" first uncapitalized and then capitalized?
4. In what way can Miss Dickinson's poem be seen as a tragic definition of a life deprived of love? as an attack on prevailing moral standards? Notice that the "it" of the first line is an unnamed experience described in three nightmare-similes: the images of maelstrom, goblin, and death-sentence. "It" has been of such a nature, the final question implies, as to make life at least as unbearable as death, though each simile ends with the idea of last-minute escape. If we see in the maelstrom the pull of natural force, in the "fiend" the fear of eternal damnation, and in the death-sentence the fear of social condemnation, how close is this poem to the spirit of Yeats's *Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop?*

CHAPTER THREE *Poetry as Description and Vision*

I. THE ELEMENTS OF POETIC DESCRIPTION

A POPULAR NARRATIVE poem of the middle nineteenth century[1] begins with the following description:

> Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm;
> And in the chasm are foam and yellow sands;
> Beyond, red roofs about a narrow wharf
> In cluster; then a moulder'd church; and higher
> A long street climbs to one tall tower'd mill;
> And high in heaven behind it a gray down
> With Danish barrows; and a hazelwood,
> By autumn nutters haunted, flourishes
> Green in a cuplike hollow of the down.

This rather prosaic passage exhibits some of the simplest and most characteristic devices of description. It breaks up what the eye sees into a pattern of shapes and colors. It selects, names, enumerates, distributes, and reorganizes a series of sense impressions. These are for the most part presented directly as color (here yellow, red, gray, and green) or shape (long, narrow, tall-tower'd, cuplike); and sometimes—though this, of course, is not description at all but the rejection of description as unnecessary—they are not presented save by the all-inclusive defining name which the mind substitutes for the sum of the sensations. It is the frequency with which things are merely named instead of being shown that is responsible for the lack of intensity and precision here and that makes these lines somewhat mediocre, for too much is taken for granted in them.

---

[1] *Enoch Arden,* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

If we place beside them some lines by William Carlos Williams we shall see how much is gained by the precise, detailed description of specific concrete objects, analyzed minutely and sharply.

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast—a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines. . . .

Here, by severe economy and searching selection, we get a description which, though it has little charm, does have strength, intensity, and a certain dignity. Two points are worth remarking: first, that this is a poetry of direct statement—there are no figures, similes, or metaphors of any kind; and second, that the poet as observer rejects the vagueness that results from a reliance upon names. He does not name the shrubs he places before us; he presents them through their physical qualities alone: "the reddish, purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy *stuff* of bushes and small trees."

This is the most elementary and in a way the most unadventurous and least risky kind of description. Its merit is its accuracy and unpretentiousness; its limitation will become clearer as we consider some more complex types of descriptive verse.

We shall find, however, that severe economy and the searching selection of specific detail is also the method of the most vivid and precise descriptive poets—Chaucer, for example, and Dante, and the modern poet who has most nearly achieved a similar sort of stylistic distinction, Ezra Pound. To make us see how a crowd of the damned in Hell peered at visitors from above, knitting their brows in the dim light, Dante says they "sharpened their vision, like an old tailor peering at the eye of a needle." And again, to make us see how the lost lovers are blown about eternally on the winds of Hell, he uses another simple and very vivid comparison:

And as the cranes in long line streak the sky
  And in procession chant their mournful call,
  So I saw come with sound of wailing by
The shadows fluttering in the tempest's brawl.

Modern poets have read their Dante to good effect, and it is easy to demonstrate how surely the selection of significant detail can convey a sense of immediacy and reality when the presentation is concise, concentrated, and concrete:

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice. . . .
W. B. YEATS

The fire that stirs about her when she stirs. . . .
W. B. YEATS

Her limbs are delicate as an eyelid. . . .
W. B. YEATS

Over roads twisted like sheep's guts. . . .
EZRA POUND

In the turn of the hill; in hard steel
The road like a slow screw's thread. . . .
EZRA POUND

Without, there was a cold moon up,
  Of winter radiance sheer and thin;
  The hollow halo it was in
Was like an icy crystal cup.
D. G. ROSSETTI

What all these passages have in common is concentration upon *simple visual images,* stated nakedly, with the utmost directness. The only figures of speech are similes, the most explicit and clear of all types of figures, and these, for the most part, are concerned with presenting a purely visual comparison.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS *Spring and All*

BY THE road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the
northeast—a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish^ forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines—

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches—

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all
save that they enter. All about them
the cold, familiar wind—

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf
One by one objects are defined—
It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf

But now the stark dignity of
entrance—Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE *A Horse*

(from *Venus and Adonis)*

ROUND-HOOF'D, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,
Broad breast, full eye, small head and nostril wide,
High crest, short ears, straight legs and passing strong,
Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide:
  Look, what a horse should have he did not lack,
  Save a proud rider on so proud a back.

JOHN CLARE *Mouse's Nest*

I FOUND a ball of grass among the hay
And progged it as I passed and went away;
And when I looked I fancied something stirred,
And turned agen and hoped to catch the bird—
When out an old mouse bolted in the wheats
With all her young ones hanging at her teats;
She looked so odd and so grotesque to me,
I ran and wondered what the thing could be,
And pushed the knapweed bunches where I stood;
Then the mouse hurried from the craking brood.
The young ones squeaked, and as I went away
She found her nest again among the hay.
The water o'er the pebbles scarce could run
And broad old cesspools glittered in the sun.

JONATHAN SWIFT *A Description of the Morning*

Now HARDLY here and there a hackney-coach
Appearing, show'd the ruddy morn's approach.
Now Betty from her master's bed had flown,
And softly stole to discompose her own;
The slip-shod 'prentice from his master's door
Had par'd the dirt, and sprinkled round the floor.
Now Moll had whirl'd her mop with dext'rous airs,
Prepar'd to scrub the entry and the stairs.

The youth with broomy stumps began to trace
The kennel-edge where wheels had worn the place.
The small-coal man was heard with cadence deep,
Till drown'd in shriller notes of chimney-sweep:
Duns at his lordship's gate began to meet;
And brick-dust Moll had scream'd through half the street.
The turnkey now his flock returning sees,
Duly let out a-nights to steal for fees:
The watchful bailiffs take their silent stands,
And schoolboys lag with satchels in their hands.

JONATHAN SWIFT *Description of a City Shower*

CAREFUL OBSERVERS may foretell the Hour
(By sure Prognostics) when to dread a Show'r:
While Rain depends, the pensive Cat gives o'er
Her Frolics, and pursues her Tail no more.
Returning Home at Night, you'll find the Sink
Strike your offended Sense with double Stink.
If you be wise, then go not far to Dine;
You'll spend in Coach-hire more than save in Wine.
A coming Show'r your shooting Corns presage,
Old Aches throb, your hollow Tooth will rage.
Saunt'ring in Coffee-house is Dulman seen;
He damns the Climate, and complains of Spleen.

Meanwhile the South, rising with dabbled Wings,
A sable Cloud athwart the Welkin flings,
That swill'd more Liquor than it could contain,
And like a Drunkard gives it up again.
Brisk Susan whips her Linen from the Rope,
While the first drizzling Show'r is born aslope,
Such is that Sprinkling which some careless Quean
Flirts on you from her Mop, but not so clean.
You fly, invoke the Gods; then turning, stop
To rail; she, singing, still twirls on her Mop.
Not yet the Dust had shunn'd th' unequal Strife
But, aided by the Wind, fought still for Life;

And wafted with its Foe by violent Gust.
'Twas doubtful which was Rain, and which was Dust.
Ah! where must needy Poet seek for Aid,
When Dust and Rain at once his Coat invade,
His only Coat, where Dust, confus'd with Rain,
Roughen the Nap and leave a mingled Stain.

Now in contiguous Drops the Flood comes down,
Threat'ning with Deluge this Devoted Town.
To Shops in Crowds the daggled Females fly,
Pretend to cheapen Goods, but nothing buy.
The Templer spruce, while ev'ry Spout's a-broach,
Stays till 'tis fair, yet seems to call a Coach.
The tuck'd-up Sempstress walks with hasty Strides,
While Streams run down her oird Umbrella's Sides.
Here various Kinds by various Fortunes led
Commence Acquaintance underneath a Shed.
Triumphant Tories and desponding Whigs
Forget their Feuds, and join to save their Wigs.

Box'd in a Chair the Beau impatient sits,
While Spouts run clatt'ring o'er the Roof by Fits;
And ever and anon with frightful Din
The Leather sounds; he trembles from within.
So when Troy Chair-men bore the Wooden Steed,
Pregnant with Greeks, impatient to be freed,
(Those Bully Greeks, who, as the Moderns do,
Instead of paying Chair-men, run them thro'.)
Laoco'n struck the Outside with his Spear,
And each imprison'd Hero quak'd for Fear.

Now from all Parts the swelling Kennels flow,
And bear their Trophies with them as they go:
Filth of all Hues and Odours seem to tell
What Street they sail'd from, by their Sight and Smell.
They, as each Torrent drives, with rapid Force
From Smithfield, or St. Pulchre's shape their Course,
And in huge Confluent join at Snow-Hill Ridge,
Fall from the Conduit prone to Holborn-Bridge.

Sweepings from Butchers' Stalls, Dung, Guts, and Blood,
Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drerich'd in Mud,
Dead Cats and Turnip-Tops come tumbling down the
Flood.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER *The Carpenter's Young Wife* (from *The Canterbury Tales)*

WHILOM THER was dwellynge at Oxenford
A riche gnof, that gestes heeld to bord,
And of his craft he was a carpenter. . . .

This carpenter hadde wedded newe a wyf,
Which that he lovede moore than his lyf.
Of eighteteene yeer she was of age.
Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
For she was wylde and yong and he was old,
And defined hymself been lik a cokewold.
He knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude,
That bad man sholde wedden his simylitude.
Men sholde wedden after hire estaat,
For youthe and elde is often at debaat.
But sith that he was fallen in the snare,
He moste endure, as oother folk, his care.
Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
A ceynt[1] she werede, barred al of silk,
A barmclooth[2] eek as whit as morne milk
Upon her lendes,[3] ful of many a goore,
Whit was hir smok, and broyden al bifoore
And eek behynde, on hir coler aboute,
Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.
The tapes of hir white voluper[4]
Were of the same suyte of hir coler;
Hir filet brood of silk, and set ful hye.
And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye;[5]

[1] girdle [2] apron [3] loins [4] cap [5] wanton eye

Ful smale ypulled were hire browes two,
And tho were bent and blake as any sloo.
She was ful moore blisful on to see
Than is the newe pere-jonette[6] tree,
And softer than the wolle is of the wether.
And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether,
Tasseled with silk, and perled with latoun.[7]
In al this world, to seken up and doun,
There nys no man so wys that koude thenche[8]
So gay a popelote or swich a wenche.
Ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe
Than in the tour[9] the noble[10] yforged newe.
But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne[11]
As any swalwe sittynge on a berne.[12]
Therto she koude skippe and make game,
As any kyde or calf folwynge his dame.
Hir mouth was sweete as bragot[13] or the meeth,
Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.[14]
Wynsyngc she was, as is a joly colt,
Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler,
As brood as is the boos of a bokeler.
Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye.
She was a prymerole,[15] a piggesnye,[10]
For any lord to leggen in his bedde,
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.

ALEXANDER POPE *Belinda's Morning*
(from *The Rape of the Lock)*

AND NOW, unveiled, the Toilet stands displayed,
Each silver Vase in mystic order laid.
First, robed in white, the Nymph intent adores,
With head uncovered, the Cosmetic powers.
A heav'nly image in the glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;

---

[6] pear tree [7] studded with brass [8] imagine [9] the Royal Mint in the Tower of London [10] a gold coin [11] eager [12] barn [13] honey and ale [14] heather [15] primrose [16] pig's eye (a term of endearment)

Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,
Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.
Unnumbered treasures ope at once, and here
The various offerings of the world appear;
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil.
This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
The Tortoise here and Elephant unite,
Transformed to combs, the speckled, and the white.
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.
Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms;
The fair each moment rises in her charms,
Repairs her smiles, awakens every grace,
And calls forth all the wonders of her face;
Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes. . ..

^

Not with more glories, in th' etherial plain,
The Sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
Launched on the bosom of the silver Thames.
Fair Nymphs, and well-drest Youths around her shone,
But every eye was fixed on her alone.
On her white breast a sparkling Cross she wore,
Which Jews might kiss, and Infidels adore.
Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and as unfixed as those:
Favors to none, to all she smiles extends;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,
And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.
Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
Might hide her faults, if Belles had faults to hide:
If to her share some female errors fall,
Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.
This Nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
Nourished two Locks, which graceful hung behind

In equal curls, and well conspired to deck
With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck.
Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains,
And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.
With hairy springes we the birds betray,
Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey,
Fair tresses man's imperial race ensnare,
And beauty draws us with a single hair. . . .
But now secure the painted vessel glides,
The sun-beams trembling on the floating tides:
While melting music steals upon the sky,
And softened sounds along the waters die;
Smooth flow the waves, the Zephyrs gently play,
Belinda smiled, and all the world was gay. . . .

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW *A Dutch Picture*

SIMON DANZ has come home again,
From cruising about with his buccaneers;
He has singed the beard of the King of Spain,
And carried away the Dean of Jaen
And sold him in Algiers.

In his house by the Maese, with its roof of tiles,
And weathercocks flying aloft in air,
There are silver tankards of antique styles,
Plunder of convent and castle, and piles
Of carpets rich and rare.

In his tulip-garden there by the town,
Overlooking the sluggish stream,
With his Moorish cap and dressing-gown,
The old sea-captain, hale and brown,
Walks in a waking dream.

A smile in his gray mustachio lurks
Whenever he thinks of the King of Spain,
And the listed tulips look like Turks,
And the silent gardener as he works
Is changed to the Dean of Jaen.

The windmills on the outermost
  Verge of the landscape in the haze,
To him are towers on the Spanish coast,
With whiskered sentinels at their post,
  Though this is the river Maese.

But when the winter rains begin,
  He sits and smokes by the blazing brands,
And old seafaring men come in,
Goat-bearded, gray, and with double chin,
  And rings upon their hands.

They sit in the shadow and shine
  Of the flickering fire of the winter night;
Figures in color and design
Like those by Rembrandt of the Rhine,
  Half darkness and half light.

And they talk of ventures lost or won,
  And their talk is ever and ever the same,
While they drink the red wine of Tarragon,
From the cellars of some Spanish Don,
  Or convent set on flame.

Restless at times with heavy strides
  He paces his parlor to and fro;
He is like a ship that at anchor rides,
And swings with the rising and falling tides,
  And tugs at her anchor-tow.

Voices mysterious far and near,
  Sound of the wind and sound of the sea,
Are calling and whispering in his ear,
"Simon Danz! Why stayest thou here?
  Come forth and follow me!"

So he thinks he shall take to the sea again
  For one more cruise with his buccaneers,
To singe the beard of the King of Spain
And capture another Dean of Jaen
  And sell him in Algiers.

ROBERT BROWNING *The Englishman in Italy (Piano di Sorrento)*

FORTU, FORTU, my beloved one,
Sit here by my side,
On my knees put up both little feet!
I was sure, if I tried,
I could make you laugh spite of Scirocco.
Now, open your eyes,
Let me keep you amused till he vanish
In black from the skies,
With telling my memories over
As you tell your beads;
All the Plain saw me gather, I garland
—The flowers or the weeds.
Time for rain! for your long hot dry Autumn
Had net-worked with brown
The white skin of each grape on the bunches,
Marked like a quail's crown,
Those creatures you make such account of,
Whose heads,—speckled with white
Over brown like a great spider's back,
As I told you last night,—
Your mother bites off for her supper.
Red ripe as could be,
Pomegranates were chapping and splitting
In halves on the tree:
And betwixt the loose walls of great flintstone,
Or in the thick dust
On the path, or straight out of the rockside,
Wherever could thrust
Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower
Its yellow face up,
For the prize were great butterflies fighting,
Some five for one cup.
So, I guessed, ere I got up this morning,
What change was in store,

By the quick rustle-down of the quail-nets
  Which woke me before
I could open my shutter, made fast
  With a bough and a stone,
And look through the twisted dead vine-twigs,
  Sole lattice that's known.
Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net-poles,
  While, busy beneath,
Your priest and his brother tugged at them,
  The rain in their teeth.
And out upon all the flat house-roofs
  Where split figs lay drying,
The girls took the frails under cover:
  Nor use seemed in trying
To get out the boats and go fishing,
  For, under the cliff,
Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind-rock.
  No seeing our skiff
Arrive about noon from Amalfi,
  —Our fisher arrive,
And pitch down his basket before us,
  All trembling alive
With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit;
  You touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
  Of horns and of humps,
Which only the fisher looks grave at,
  While round him like imps
Cling screaming the children as naked
  And brown as his shrimps;
Himself too as bare to the middle
  —You see round his neck
The string and its brass coin suspended,
  That saves him from wreck.
But to-day not a boat reached Salerno,
  So back, to a man,
Came our friends, with whose help in the vineyards
  Grape-harvest began.

In the vat, halfway up in our house-side,
Like blood the juice spins,
While your brother all bare-legged is dancing
Till breathless he grins
Dead-beaten in effort on effort
To keep the grapes under,
Since still when he seems all but master,
In pours the fresh plunder
From girls who keep coming and going
With basket on shoulder,
And eyes shut against the rain's driving;
Your girls that are older,—
For under the hedges of aloe,
And, where, on its bed
Of the orchard's black mould, the love-apple
Lies pulpy and red,
All the young ones are kneeling and filling
Their laps with the snails
Tempted out by this first rainy weather,—
Your best of regales,
As to-night will be proved to my sorrow,
When, supping in state,
We shall feast our grape-gleaners (two dozen,
Three over one plate)
With lasagne so tempting to swallow
In slippery ropes,
And gourds fried in great purple slices,
That colour of popes.
Meantime, see the grape bunch they've brought you:
The rain-water slips
O'er the heavy blue bloom on each globe
Which the wasp to your lips
Still follows with fretful persistence:
Nay, taste, while awake,
This half of a curd-white smooth cheese-ball
That peels, flake by flake,
Like an onion, each smoother and whiter;
Next, sip this weak wine

From the thin green glass flask, with its stopper,
   A leaf of the vine;
And end with the prickly-pear's red flesh
   That leaves thro* its juice
The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth.
   Scirocco is loose!
Hark! the quick, whistling pelt of the olives
   Which, thick in one's track,
Tempt the stranger to pick up and bite them,
   Tho' not yet half black!
How the old twisted olive trunks shudder!
   The medlars let fall
Their hard fruit, and the brittle great fig-trees
   Snap off, figs and all,
For here comes the whole of the tempest!
   For refuge, but creep
Back again to my side and my shoulder,
   And listen or sleep.
O how Will your country show next week,
   When all the vine-boughs
Have been stripped of their foliage to pasture
   The mules and the cows?
Last eve, I rode over the mountains;
   You brother, my guide,
Soon left me, to feast on the myrtles
   That offered, each side,
Their fruit-balls, black, glossy and luscious,—
   Or strip from the sorbs
A treasure, so rosy and wondrous,
   Of hairy gold orbs!
But my mule picked his sure, sober path out,
   Just stopping to neigh
When he recognized down in the valley
   His mates on their way
With the faggots, and barrels of water;
   And soon we emerged
From the plain, where the woods could scarce follow;
   And still as we urged

Our way, the woods wondered, and left us,
  As up still we trudged
Though the wild path grew wilder each instant,
  And place was e'en grudged
'Mid the rock-chasms and piles of loose stones
  Like the loose broken teeth
Of some monster which climbed there to die
  From the ocean beneath—
Place was grudged to the silver-grey fume-weed
  That clung to the path,
And dark rosemary ever a-dying
  That, 'spite the wind's wrath,
So loves the salt rock's face to seaward,
  And lentisks as staunch
To the stone where they root and bear berries,
  And . . . what shows a branch
Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets
  Of pale seagreen leaves:
Over all trod my mule with the caution
  Of gleaners o'er sheaves,
Still, foot after foot like a lady:
  So, round after round,
He climbed to the top of Calvano,
  And God's own profound
Was above me, and round me the mountains,
  And under, the sea,
And within me, my heart to bear witness
  What was and shall be!
Oh, heaven and the terrible crystall
  No rampart excludes
Your eye from the life to be lived
  In the blue solitudesl
Oh, these mountains, their infinite movement!
  Still moving with you:
For, ever some new head and breast of them
  Thrusts into view
To observe the intruder; you see it
  If quickly you turn

And, before they escape you, surprise them:
They grudge you should learn
How the soft plains they look on, lean over
And love (they pretend)
—Cower beneath them, the flat sea-pine crouches,
The wild fruit-trees bend,
E'en the myrtle-leaves curl, shrink and shut,
All is silent and grave,
'Tis a sensual and timorous beauty,
How fair, but a slave!
So, I turned to the sea; and there slumbered
As greenly as ever
Those isles of the siren, your Galli;
No ages can sever
The Three, nor enable their sister
To join them,—halfway
On the voyage, she looked at Ulysses—
No further today,
Tho' *the* small one, just launched in the wave,
Watches breast-high and steady
From under the rock, her bold sister
Swum halfway already.
Fortti, shall we sail there together
And see from the sides
Quite new rocks show their faces, new haunts
Where the siren abides?
Shall we sail round and round them, close over
The rocks, tho' unseen,
That ruffle the grey glassy water
To glorious green?
Then scramble from splinter to splinter,
Reach land and explore,
On the largest, the strange square black turret
With never a door,
Just a loop to admit the quick lizards;
Then, stand there and hear
The birds' quiet singing, that tells us
What life is, so clear?

— The secret they sang to Ulysses
  When ages ago,
He heard and he knew this life's secret
  I hear and I know!

Ah, see! The sun breaks o'er Calvano;
  He strikes the great gloom
And flutters it o'er the mount's summit
  In airy gold fume!
All is over! Look out, see the gipsy,
  Our tinker and smith,
Has arrived, set up bellows and forge,
  And down-squatted forthwith
To his hammering, under the wall there;
  One eye keeps aloof
The urchins that itch to be putting
  His jews'-harps to proof,
While the other, thro' locks of curled wire,
  Is watching how sleek
Shines the hog, come to share in the windfall
  — An abbot's own cheek.
All is over! Wake up and come out now,
  And down let us go,
And see the fine things got in order
  At Church for the show
Of the Sacrament, set forth this evening;
  To-morrow's the Feast
Of the Rosary's Virgin, by no means
  Of Virgins the least,
As you'll hear in the off-hand discourse
  Which (all nature, no art)
The Dominican brother, these three weeks,
  Was getting by heart.

Not a pillar nor post but is dizened
  With red and blue papers;
All the roof waves with ribbons, each altar
  A-blaze with long tapers;

But the great masterpiece is the scaffold
  Rigged glorious to hold
All the fiddlers and fifers and drummers
  And trumpeters bold,
Not afraid of Bellini nor Auber,
  Who, when the priest's hoarse,
Will strike us up something that's brisk
  For the feast's second course.
And then will the flaxen-wigged Image
  Be carried in pomp
Thro' the plain, while in gallant procession
  The priests mean to stomp.
And all round the glad church lie old bottles
  With gunpowder stopped,
Which will be, when the Image re-enters,
  Religiously popped.
And at night from the crest of Calvano
  Great bonfires will hang,
On the plain will the trumpets join chorus,
  And more poppers bang!
At all events, come—to the garden,
  As far as the wall;
See me tap with a hoe on the plaster
  Till out there shall fall
A scorpion with wide angry nippers!

—"Such trifles!" you say?
Fortu, in my England at home,
  Men meet gravely to-day
And debate, if abolishing Corn-laws
  Be righteous and wise
—If 'twere proper, Scirocco should vanish
  In black from the skies!

ELIZABETH BISHOP *The Fish*

I CAUGHT a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wall-paper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wall-paper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
—the frightening gills
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly—
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
I looked into his eyes
which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed

with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.
They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
—It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip—
grim, wet, and weapon-like,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.
A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away.
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels—until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 10

1. The first object of the descriptive writer, whether in prose or verse, is to make you *see.* This is usually done by the selection of specific significant details, by the recording of concrete sense impressions, and by the choice of vivid, dynamic action words — verbs, adverbs, adjectives.

   To what extent are these principles illustrated in the poems by William Carlos Williams, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Swift, and Pope in the preceding section?
2. To what other senses does the vivid descriptive writer most frequently and most effectively appeal? Answer this question in the light of an examination of the images and sense appeals in Browning's poem.
3. What is the significance of the title of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *A Dutch Picture?* Do any of the other poems in this group suggest a conscious effort to emulate the art of the painter? (Consider that the painter imagines his picture in a frame and balances shapes, colors, lights, and shades one against the other in a complete and ordered whole. Can you find any poems in which this principle of structure has been applied?)
4. Except in such small imagistic poems as *The Pool* and *Oread* by H. D. (pages 54-55), description is rarely an end in itself; it is a contribution to the total effect and the total meaning of a poem — a means to an end, in other words.

   What is its purpose in the selections by Pope and Elizabeth Bishop?
5. What advantages, if any, does the writer of description in verse have over the prose writer? Find evidence in prose and verse descriptions to justify your opinion.

II. IMAGES AND IMPRESSIONS

The descriptive passages quoted in the previous section illustrated the importance of certain key words—epithets and action words. Such words concentrate a complex of impressions into one sharp and well fused image. A few brief and striking illustrations of their effectiveness can do more to open the eyes of the uninitiated reader than pages of explanation. Consider in the following passages the sensuous implications, the telescoping of various sense impressions, and the active richness of suggestion in the italicized words.

A cry that *shivered* to the *tingling* stars.
ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

Fade far away, *dissolve,* and quite forget.
JOHN KEATS

*

Melting melodious words to lutes of *amber.*
ROBERT HERRICK

The sun-beams *trembling* on the floating tides.
ALEXANDER POPE

Now more than ever seems it *rich* to die.
JOHN KEATS

A remarkable feature of the method illustrated in some of these lines is the fact that the quality or action singled out for our attention applies at once to the thing being described and to the sensibility that is perceiving the thing. Thus it is not only the cry that shivers and the stars that tingle but the one who hears the cry and sees the stars. It is not only the melodious words that melt in the music of the lute but the charmed listener also.

Another aspect of the effectiveness of such lines is the unexpected and paradoxical juxtaposition of qualities not easily associated together. Sun beams might more conventionally be expected to dance on the floating tides. But if we put Pope's line in its place in the second canto of *The Rape of the Lock,* we will find that the sunbeams' trembling is a subtle foreshadowing, almost a fearful anticipation of the unknown danger awaiting Belinda. And when we read the two lines of Keats in their context in *Ode to a Nightingale* (pages 524-526), we realize how much they contribute to Keats's passionate absorption into the visionary world of the midnight garden. Everything is concentrated in the complex sense image of *dissolve,* and it is the whole conscious being of the poet that loses its identity and mingles with the scents and sounds of the enchanted night. This dissolution is a kind of dying, and its luxurious sweetness is transferred to the act of dying and concentrated in the key word *rich,* which Jiere among its other connotations has the sensuous meaning of rich—as whipped cream is rich.

In each of these lines, too, the suddenness and sharpness with which the effect is gained depends to a great extent on a single significant word, dynamic and sensuous. A striking example of such an effect appears in Emily Dickinson's vivid description of a snake moving through the grass:

I more than once, at morn,

Have passed, I thought, a whip-lash
Unbraiding in the sun,—
When, stooping to secure it,
It wrinkled, and was gone.—

The quickness, the quietness, and the characteristic peculiarity of the movement itself here are concentrated in the one word *wrinkled.* Tennyson, we might note, used the same word to give the suggestion of immense height and distance in his six-line picture of the eagle (page 55):

The *wrinkled* sea beneath him crawls.

The poet who wishes to make us *see* and to make us *feel* selects a few significant details and presents them as sharply as possible, often directly and nakedly, sometimes with the aid of figurative language, and always with the aid of appropriate variations in rhythm and sound. In Thomas Hardy's lyric narrative *The Five Students* (pages 241-242), the seasons of the year and the ages of man's life are presented progressively in a series of carefully selected vivid details. First, summer:

> The sparrow dips in his wheel-rut bath,
> The sun grows passionate-eyed,
> And boils the dew to smoke by the paddock path. . . .

Then,

> Autumn moulds the hard fruit mellow. . ..
>
> The leaf drops: earthworms draw it in
> At night time noiselessly,
> The fingers of birch and beech are skeleton-thin. . . .

And last, winter, age, and death:

> Icicles tag the church-aisle leads,
> The flag-rope gibbers hoarse,
> The home-bound foot-folk wrap their snow-flaked heads. . . .

These vivid sketches are not, of course, presented for their own sake. They are intended to harmonize with and to help express the dramatic movement of the poem—to be a part of its "plot." They could not fulfill this function, however, if they were not accurate, clear, and suggestive, each in its own appropriate key. A similar key to that in which Hardy's autumn picture is presented can be noted in the remarkable evocation of the season's ruins that opens Part III of Eliot's *The Waste Land:*

> The river's tent is broken: The last fingers of leaf
> Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
> Crosses the brown land, unheard.

The image of the streaky, refuse-laden, muddy river as a collapsed tent is of a boldness and imaginative appropriateness that the careless reader who fails to read with his eyes and all his senses alert might fail to recognize. The summer leaves, arched out and nearly meeting from both sides of the river in the shape of a tent roof, are now gone. They have fallen to the wet bank; the wind no longer rustles through them but is unheard. In many of these intensely concentrated lines we have been considering, the effect of a quality is presented simultaneously with the quality itself. We are in the presence here of that heightened kind of psychological realism so often found in art at its best.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

i.

EMILY DICKINSON *A light exists in spring*

A LIGHT exists in spring
Not present in the year
At any other period.
When March is scarcely here

A color stands abroad
On solitary hills
That science cannot overtake,
But human nature feels.

It waits upon the lawn;
It shows the furthest tree
Upon the furthest slope we know;
It almost speaks to me.

Then, as horizons step,
Or noons report away,
Without the formula of sound,
It passes, and we stay;

A quality of loss
Affecting our content,
As trade had suddenly encroached
Upon a sacrament.

EMILY DICKINSON *As imperceptibly as grief*

As IMPERCEPTIBLY as grief
The Summer lapsed away,—
Too imperceptible, at last,
To seem like perfidy.

A quietness distilled,
As twilight long begun,
Or Nature, spending with herself
Sequestered afternoon.

The dusk drew earlier in,
The morning foreign shone,—
A courteous, yet harrowing grace,
As guest who would be gone.

And thus, without a wing,
Or service of a keel,
Our summer made her light escape
Into the beautiful.

EMILY DICKINSON *There's a certain slant of light*

THERE'S \ certain slant of light,
On winter afternoons,
That oppresses, like the weight
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;
We can find no scar,
But internal difference
Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,
'Tis the seal, despair,—
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,
Shadows hold their breath;
When it goes, 'tis like the distance
On the look of death.

2.

EDWARD THOMAS *The Manor Farm*

THE ROCK-like mud unfroze a little and rills
Ran and sparkled down each side of the road
Under the catkins wagging in the hedge.
But earth would have her sleep out, spite of the sun;
Nor did I value that thin gilding beam
More than a pretty February thing
Till I came down to the old Manor Farm,
And church and yew-tree opposite, in age
Its equals and in size. The church and yew
And farmhouse slept in a Sunday silentness.
The air raised not a straw. The steep farm roof,
With tiles duskily glowing, entertained
The mid-day sun; and up and down the roof
White pigeons nestled. There was no sound but one.
Three cart-horses were looking over a gate
Drowsily through their forelocks, swishing their tails
Against a fly, a solitary fly.

The Winter's cheek flushed as if he had drained
Spring, Summer, and Autumn at a draught
And smiled quietly. But 'twas not Winter—
Rather a season of bliss unchangeable
Awakened from farm and church where it had lain
Safe under tile and thatch for ages since
This England, Old already, was called Merry.

ROBERT FROST *A Hillside Thaw*

To THINK to know the country and not know
The hillside on the day the sun lets go
Ten million silver lizards out of snow!
As often as I've seen it done before
I can't pretend to tell the way it's done.
It looks as if some magic of the sun

Lifted the rug that bred them on the floor
And the light breaking on them made them run.
But if I thought to stop the wet stampede,
And caught one silver lizard by the tail,
And put my foot on one without avail,
And threw myself wet-elbowed and wet-kneed
In front of twenty others' wriggling speed,—
In the confusion of them all aglitter,
And birds that joined in the excited fun
By doubling and redoubling song and twitter,
I have no doubt I'd end by holding none.

It takes the moon for this. The sun's a wizard
By all I tell; but so's the moon a witch.
From the high west she makes a gentle cast
And suddenly, without a jerk or twitch,
She has her spell on every single lizard.
I fancied when I looked at six o'clock
The swafm still ran and scuttled just as fast.
The moon was waiting for her chill effect.
I looked at nine: the swarm was turned to rock
In every lifelike posture of the swarm,
Transfixed on mountain slopes almost erect.
Across each other and side by side they lay.
The spell that so could hold them as they were
Was wrought through trees without a breath of storm
To make a leaf, if there had been one, stir.
It was the moon's: she held them until day,
One lizard at the end of every ray.
The thought of my attempting such a stay!

EDMUND BLUNDEN *The Midnight Skaters*

THE Hop-poles stand in cones,
  The icy pond lurks under,
The pole-tops touch the star-gods' thrones
  And sound the gulfs of wonder,

But not the tallest there, 'tis said,
Could fathom to this pond's black bed.

Then is not Death at watch
  Within those secret waters?
What wants he but to catch
  Earth's heedless sons and daughters?
With but a crystal parapet
Between, he has his engines set.

Then on, blood shouts, on, on,
  Twirl, wheel and whip above him,
Dance on this ball-floor thin and wan,
  Use him as though you love him;
Court him, elude him, reel and pass,
And let him hate you through the glass.

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS ***Ice***

WHEN WINTER scourged the meadow and the hill
And in the withered leafage worked his will,
The water shrank, and shuddered, and stood still,—
Then built himself a magic house of glass,
Irised with memories of flowers and grass,
Wherein to sit and watch the fury pass.

THOMAS HARDY *The Five Students*

THE SPARROW dips in his wheel-rut bath,
    The sun grows passionate-eyed,
And boils the dew to smoke by the paddock-path;
    As strenuously we stride,—
Five of us; dark He, fair He, dark She, fair She, I,
        All beating by.

The air is shaken, the high-road hot,
    Shadowless swoons the day,

The greens are sobered and cattle at rest; but not
We on our urgent way,—
Four of us; fair She, dark She, fair He, I are there,
But one—elsewhere.

Autumn moulds the hard fruit mellow,
And forward still we press
Through moors, briar-meshed plantations, clay-pits yellow,
As in the spring hours—yes,
Three of us; fair He, fair She, I, as heretofore,
But—fallen one more.

The leaf drops: earthworms draw it in
At night-time noiselessly,
The fingers of birch and beech are skeleton-thin,
And yet on the beat are we,—
Two of us; fair She, I. But no more left to go
The track we know.

Icicles tag the church-aisle leads,
The flag-rope gibbers hoarse,
The home-bound foot-folk wrap their snow-flaked heads,
Yet I still stalk the course—
One of us. . . . Dark and fair He, dark and fair She, gone.
The rest—anon.

3.

EMILY DICKINSON *A narrow fellow in the grass*

A NARROW fellow in the grass
Occasionally rides;
You may have met him,—did you not?
His notice sudden is.

The grass divides as with a comb,
A spotted shaft is seen;
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on.

He likes a boggy acre,
A floor too cool for corn.
Yet when a child, and barefoot,
I more than once, at morn,

Have passed, I thought, a whip-lash
Unbraiding in the sun,—
When, stooping to secure it,
It wrinkled, and was gone.

Several of nature's people
I know, and they know me;
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality;

But never met this fellow,
Attended or alone,
Without a tighter breathing,
And zero at the bone.

YVOR WINTERS *A Spring Serpent*

THE LITTLE snake now grieves
With whispering pause, and slow,
Uncertain where to go
Among the glassy leaves,
Pale angel that deceives.

With tongue too finely drawn,
Too pure, too tentative,
He needs but move to live,
Yet where he was is gone;
He loves the quiet lawn.

Kin to the petal, cool,
Translucent, veined, firm,
The fundamental worm,
The undefined fool,
Dips to the icy pool.

ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN *Solitude*

How STILL it is here in the woods. The trees
Stand motionless, as if they did not dare
To stir, lest it should break the spell. The air
Hangs quiet as spaces in a marble frieze.
Even this little brook, that runs at ease,
Whispering and gurgling in its knotted bed,
Seems but to deepen, with its curling thread
Of sound, the shadowy sun-pierced silences.
Sometimes a hawk screams or a woodpecker
Startles the stillness from its fixèd mood
With hi^loud careless tap. Sometimes I hear
The dreamy white-throat from some far off tree
Pipe slowly on the listening solitude,
His five pure notes succeeding pensively.

ROBERT FROST *Mowing*

THERE WAS never a sound beside the wood but one,
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.
What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound—
And that was why it whispered and did not speak.
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:
Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak
To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS *The Mowing*

THIS is the voice of high midsummer's heat.
The rasping vibrant clamour soars and shrills
O'er all the meadowy range of shadeless hills,
As if a host of giant cicadae beat
The cymbals of their wings with tireless feet,
Or brazen grasshoppers with triumphing note
From the long swath proclaimed the fate that smote
The clover and timothy-tops and meadowsweet.

The crying knives glide on; the green swath lies.
And all noon long the sun, with chemic ray,
Seals up each cordial essence in its cell,
That in the dusky stalls, some winter's day,
The spirit of June, here prisoned by his spell,
May cheer the herds with pasture memories.

JOHN KEATS *On the Grasshopper and the Cricket*

THE POETRY of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead
In summer luxury,—he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

4.

JOHN KEATS *Ode to Autumn*

SEASON OF mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

JOHN KEATS from *Hyperion*

DEEP IN the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
Sat grey-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair;
Forest on forest hung about his head
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.
A stream went voiceless by, still deaden'd more
By reason of his fallen divinity
Spreading a shade: the Naiad 'mid her reeds
Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips.

Along the margin-sand large foot-marks went,
No further than to where his feet had stray'd,
And slept there since. Upon the sodden ground
His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,
Unsceptred; and his realmless eyes were closed;
While his bow'd head seem'd list'ning to the Earth,
His ancient mother, for some comfort yet. . . .

EZRA POUND from *Canto XVI*

AND BEFORE hell mouth; dry plain
          and two mountains;
On the one mountain, a running form,
          and another
In the turn of the hill; in hard steel
The road like a slow screw's thread,
The angle almost imperceptible,
          so that the circuit seemed hardly to rise;
And the running form, naked, Blake,
Shouting, whirling his arms, the swift limbs,

Howling against the evil,
his eyes rolling,
Whirling like flaming cart-wheels,
and his head held backward to gaze on the evil
As he ran from it,
to be hid by the steel mountain,
And when he showed again from the north side;
his eyes blazing toward hell mouth,
His neck forward. . . .

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - II

1. What psychological use of imagery of *light* is found in each of the poems by Emily Dickinson in Group i of this section?

   Speaking of these three poems, Yvor Winters has said: "They deal with the inexplicable fact of change, of the absolute cleavage between successive states of being, and it is not unnatural that in two of the poems this theme should be related to the theme of death." *(In Defence of*Reason)*

   Comment on this definition of the subject-matter of these poems by examining the emotional effect and precise meaning of the images developed in each of them.
2. Compare the impressions of snakes in Yvor Winters' *A Spring Serpent* and Emily Dickinson's *A narrow fellow in the grass.* Notice that each poem concludes with an explicit, summarizing statement. How well is it prepared for by the preceding imagery in each case?
3. In Edward Thomas' *The Manor Farm,* what is the relation between the second section and the first? How does the descriptive method differ in the two sections?
4. The poems by Frost, Blunden, Lampman, and Roberts each employ a concrete, vivid perception to evoke a specific emotional atmosphere. Which of these poems are dominated by single major figures of speech —and to what effect? Which are content to let the accumulation of detail do the main work of evocation?
5. What is the effect of the use of personification as a descriptive device in Keats's *Ode to Autumn?* Does it contribute to the associations of ripeness, drowsiness, and melancholy beauty in a manner which the sensuous imagery with which the poem abounds could not in itself achieve?
6. The selections from Keats's *Hyperion* and Pound's *Canto XVI* both envision concretely scenes created by the imagination. Keats pic-

tures Saturn, the ancient royal Titan dethroned by the younger gods and now consigned to eternal obscurity; Pound pictures the poet Blake running on the landscape near the mouth of Hell.

i. What atmospheric and psychological impression dominates the lines from *Hyperion?* How large a part does direct description play in the scene? How large a part does figurative language?

ii. Compare the effect of richness and softness in Keats with that of hardness and clarity in Pound. How do the descriptive methods of the two poets differ in order to create these effects?

What conception of Blake's personality is suggested by Pound's picture?

///. COMPLEX DESCRIPTIVE EFFECTS

In modern poetry we often find richly suggestive, visual figures that appeal to an intellectual as well as a sensuous and emotional understanding. Such imagery has contributed to the difficulty and complexity that face the reader but has also contributed much that is rewarding in the subtlety and accuracy with which complex strata of experience can be rendered and examined. Here, to give only one example, is the way in which Marianne Moore describes a snake—not almost invisibly slinking through the grass as in Emily Dickinson, but rearing up out of a snake-charmer's basket.

> Thick, not heavy, it stands up from its travelling-basket,
> the essentially Greek, the plastic animal all of a piece
>   from nose to tail;
> one is compelled to look at it as at the shadows of the alps
> imprisoning in their folds like flies in amber, the rhythms
>   of the skating rink.

This is an impression, recorded in a flash, and by a witty, well-stocked mind. One realizes that it is not the snake which is being described; it is an impression that is being conveyed, an impression of the sinuous flashing unfolding gleam. It is all shine and sparkle. The snake, though curved and moving so that some parts are nearer and others farther away, is all of a piece—like the shadowy mountain range. The glinting, moving light on its folds and scales is conveyed by the distant movement of gleams and lights as if made by skaters imprisoned in the folds of the mountain, and this image is further qualified by another image, "like flies in amber/'

Yet this image of "flies in amber" suggests something deadly in the pattern of swift glittering beauty. And the image of "the shadows of the alps" engulfing the rhythmic flashing movements of the skaters is equally sinister, and suggests all the danger and darkness that surround beauty in life. Even the "thick, not heavy" impression of the asp's body carries a foreboding of power—graceful, not awkward power, certainly, but nevertheless *striking-power,* which can make itself felt only too quickly. This underlying conception of lurking death is the clue to the paradoxical alliance in this poem of impressions of brilliance and sinuous movement with those of sculptural repose ("the essentially Greek, the plastic animal all of a piece"). The snake's serenely Grecian simplicity of form almost belies its potential sudden destructiveness. We are "compelled" by this knowledge to remember that, for all its fascinating resemblance to a classically satisfying work of art, it remains a poisonous reptile.

Unexpected as the images of this passage are—in themselves and in relation to one another—their clarity and Tightness can hardly be questioned, for what they finally portray is the way the sharply alert mind of the poet assimilates and regroups perceptions. An intellectual concept is revealed only indirectly, through the impressions conveyed by imagery, and the technique is therefore subtle and complex. Miss Moore is a contemporary poet, but this technique is not peculiar to our age. Consider from this point of view a few lines by the seventeenth-century poet Robert Herrick. In them Herrick is describing a delightful pagan heaven, a kind of earthly paradise of Epicurean delights. It is no place of disembodied shadows but a site of endless pleasures—a living, breathing landscape where every sense is fed.

> This, that, and ev'ry thicket doth transpire
> More sweet than storax from the hallowed fire;
> Where ev'ry tree a wealthy issue bears
> Of fragrant apples, blushing plums, or pears;
> And all the shrubs, with sparkling spangles shew
> Like morning sunshine, tinselling the dew.
> Here in green meadows sits eternal May,
> Purfling the margents, while perpetual day
> So double gilds the air, as that no night
> Can ever rust th' enamel of the light.[1]

In these lines the shine and sparkle of Elysium and the richness and fragrance of an English country summer are combined and caught with a verve that is communicated to all the senses. The ear is titillated with the prickly crackling vitality of the sharp sounds in "And all the shrubs with sparkling spangles show." There is movement everywhere. The perfumes "transpire"—breathe in and out, come in wafts and gusts; and there is movement too in *blushing* plums and *sparkling* dew and the *purfling* of margents.

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[1] *Storax* is a fragrant balsam used in perfumes. *Purfling the margents* means decorating, or embroidering, the outlines of this perfect and beautiful landscape.

The strangest triumph, however, is the way in which the whole scene is bathed in light and the way in which the light enriches the whole scene. The dew tinseled by the light is transformed to sparkling spangles. The air, golden in itself (because it is the air of paradise), is doubly gilded by the light of eternal day, and night, in the real world of sense and time, is described as the withdrawal of day which *rusts* the *enamel* of the light. Here is a vivid and original visual image, accounted for perhaps by the fact that Herrick was a countryman and had been a jeweler, but based actually on idea. The light of a summer day is golden; in the evening it turns reddish and darkens; its purity is spoiled ore, the gold changes to dark red, the enamel rusts.

There is a further subtle implication in these lines in that when we try to envision a paradise we imagine the world of the senses at its most beautiful, untouched by change, eternally light, most keenly fragrant and young; and yet all we know of the world of the senses is subject to rust, to change, decay and loss. This paradoxical concept is brought out with such brilliant clarity by Herrick's vivid imagery that no abstract generalization could put the matter with anything like the same conviction and freshness of effect.

This method, which depends upon the combining of wit and sensuousness, is one which Marianne Moore and certain other modern poets, particularly Edith Sitwell, have used with good effect. One need only place beside the ending of the Herrick passage such lines as these by Miss Sitwell:

> The morning light creaks down again

or

> The fire was furry as a bear

or

> The light is braying like an ass

to realize that modern experimentation has been anticipated in the past and that what often seems new and startling is actually a return to a clearer and sharper way of dealing with experience.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

ROBERT HERRICK *The Apparition of His Mistress Calling Him to Elysium*

Desunt nonnulla[1]

COME THEN, and like two doves with silv'ry wings,
Let our souls fly to th' shades, where ever springs
Sit smiling in the meads; where balm and oil,
Roses and cassia, crown the untilled soil;
Where no disease reigns, or infection comes
To blast the air, but ambergis and gums.
This, that, and ev'ry thicket doth transpire
More sweet than storax from the hallowed fire;
Where ev'ry tree a wealthy issue bears
Of fragrant apples, blushing plums, or pears;
And all the shrubs, with sparkling spangles, shew
Like morning sunshine, tinselling the dew.
Here in green meadows sits eternal May,
Purfling the margents, while perpetual day
So double gilds the air, as that no night
Can ever rust th' enamel of the light.
Here naked younglings, handsome striplings, run
Their goals for virgins' kisses; which when done,
Then unto dancing forth the learned round
Commixed they meet, with endless roses crowned.
And here we'll sit on primrose-banks, and see
Love's chorus led by Cupid; and we'll be
Two loving followers too unto the grove
Where poets sing the stories of our love.
There thou shalt hear divine Musaeus sing
Of Hero and Leander; then I'll bring
Thee to the stand, where honoured Homer reads
His Odysseys and his high Iliads;

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[1] Some things are missing—that is, the text is fragmentary. We are not to take this phrase literally. It refers to the witty suggestion (lines 65-66) that the "apparition" has not had time to reveal *all* the delights she has to offer in Elysium.

About whose throne the crowd of poets throng
To hear the incantation of his tongue:
To Linus, then to Pindar; and that done,
I'll bring thee, Herrick, to Anacreon,
Quaffing his full-crowned bowls of burning wine,
And in his raptures speaking lines of thine,
Like to his subjects; and as his frantic
Looks show him truly Bacchanalian like,
Besmeared with grapes, welcome he shall thee thither,
Where both may rage, both drink and dance together.
Then stately Virgil, witty Ovid, by
Whom fair Corinna sits, and doth comply
With ivory wrists his laureat head, and steeps
His eye in dew of kisses while he sleeps.
Then soft Catullus, sharp-fanged Martial
And towering Lucan, Horace, Juvenal,
And snaky Persius; these, and those whom rage,
Dropped from the jars of heaven, filled t' engage
All times unto their frenzies; thou shalt there
Behold them in a spacious theatre.
Among which glories, crowned with sacred bays
And flatt'ring ivy, two recite their plays,
Beaumont and Fletcher, swans, to whom all ears
Listen, while they, like sirens in their spheres,
Sing their Evadne: and still more for thee
There yet remains to know than thou canst see
By glimm'ring of a fancy; do but come,
And there I'll show thee that capacious room
In which thy father, Jonson, now is placed,
As in a globe of radiant fire and graced
To be in that orb crowned, that doth include
Those prophets of the former magnitude,
And he one chief. But hark, I hear the cock,
The bellman of the night, proclaim the clock
Of late struck one; and now I see the prime
Of daybreak from the pregnant east, 'tis time
I vanish; more I had to say,
But night determines here, "Away!"

ANDREW MARVELL *Bermudas*

WHERE THE remote Bermudas ride
In th' ocean's bosom unespy'd,
From a small boat that rowed along,
The listening winds received this song:

"What should we do but sing His praise,
That led us through the watery maze,
Unto an isle so long unknown,
And yet far kinder than our own?
Where He the huge sea-monsters wracks,
That lift the deep upon their backs.
He lands us on a grassy stage,
Safe from the storms, and prelate's rage.
He gave us this eternal spring,
Which here enamels everything,
And sends the fowls to us in care,
On daily visits through the air.
He hangs in shades the orange bright,
Like golden lamps in a green night,
And does in the pomegranates close
Jewels more rich than Ormus shows.
He makes the figs our mouths to meet,
And throws the melons at our feet.
But apples plants of such a price,
No tree could ever bear them twice.
With cedars, chosen by His hand,
From Lebanon, he stores the land,
And makes the hollow seas, that roar
Proclaim the ambergris on shore.
He cast (of which we rather boast)
The Gospel's pearl upon our coast
And in these rocks for us did frame
A temple, where to sound His name.
Oh let our voice His praise exalt,
Till it arrive at Heaven's vault,
Which thence (perhaps) rebounding, may
Echo beyond the Mexfque Bay."

Thus sung they, in the English boat,
An holy and a cheerful note;
And all the way, to guide their chime,
With falling oars they kept the time,

EDITH SITWELL *Aubdde*

JANE, JANE,
Tall as a crane,
The morning light creaks down again.

Comb your cockscomb-ragged hair;
Jane, Jane, come down the stair.

Each dull blunt wooden stalactite
Of rain creaks, hardened by the light,

Sounding like an overtone
From some lonely world unknown.

But the creaking empty light
Will never harden into sight,

Will never penetrate your brain
With overtones like the blunt rain.

The light would show (if it could harden)
Eternities of kitchen garden,

Cockscomb flowers that none will pluck,
And wooden flowers that 'gin to cluck.

In the kitchen you must light
Flames as staring, red and white

As carrots or as turnips, shining
Where the cold dawn light lies whining.

Cockscomb hair on the cold wind
Hangs limp, turns the milk's weak mind. . . .

Jane, Jane,
Tall as a crane,
The morning light creaks down again!

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS *Winter with the Gulf Stream*

THE BOUGHS, the boughs are bare enough
But earth has never felt the snow.
Frost-furred our ivies are and rough

With balls of rime the brambles shew.
The hoarse leaves crawl on hissing ground
Because the sighing wind is low.

But if the rain-blasts be unbound
And from dank feathers wring the drops
The clogged brook runs with choking sound

Kneading the mounded mire that stops
His channel under clammy coats
Of foliage fallen in the copse.

A simple passage of weak notes
Is all the winter bird dare try.
The bugle moon by daylight floats

So glassy white about the sky,
So like a berg of hyaline,
And pencilled blue so daintily,

I never saw her so divine.
But through black branches, rarely drest
In scarves of silky shot and shine,

The webbed and the watery west
Where yonder crimson fireball sits
Looks laid for feasting and for rest.

I see long reefs of violets
In beryl-covered fens so dim,
A gold-water Pactolus frets

Its brindled wharves and yellow brim,
The waxen colours weep and run,
And slendering to his burning rim

Into the flat blue mist the sun
Drops out and all our day is done.

HART CRANE *Repose of Rivers*

THE WILLOWS carried a slow sound,
A sarabande the wind mowed on the mead.
I could never remember
That seething, steady leveling of the marshes
Till age had brought me to the sea.

Flags, weeds. And remembrance of steep alcoves
Where cypresses shared the noon's
Tyranny; they drew me into hades almost.
And mammoth turtles climbing sulphur dreams
Yielded, while sun-silt rippled them
Asunder . . .

How much I would have bartered! the black gorge
And all the singular nestings in the hills
Where beavers learn stitch and tooth.
The pond I entered once and quickly fled—
I remember now its singing willow rim.

And finally, in that memory all things nurse;
After the city that I finally passed

With scalding unguents spread and smoking darts
The monsoon cut across the delta
At gulf gates . . . There, beyond the dykes

I heard wind flaking sapphire, like this summer,
And willows could not hold more steady sound.

HART CRANE *Voyages II*

AND YET this great wink of eternity,
Of rimless floods, unfettered leewardings,
Samite sheeted and processioned where
Her undinal vast belly moonward bends,
Laughing the wrapt inflections of our love;

Take this Sea, whose diapason knells
On scrolls of silver snowy sentences,
The sceptred terror of whose sessions rends
As her demeanors motion well or ill,
All but the pieties of lovers' hands.

And onward, as bells off San Salvador
Salute the crocus lustres of the stars,
In these poinsettia meadows of her tides,—
Adagios of islands, O my Prodigal,
Complete the dark confessions her veins spell.

Mark how her turning shoulders wind the hours,
And hasten while her penniless rich palms
Pass superscription of bent foam and wave,—
Hasten, while they are true,—sleep, death, desire,
Close round one instant in one floating flower.

Bind us in time, O Seasons clear, and awe.
O minstrel galleons of Carib fire,
Bequeath us to no earthly shore until
Is answered in the vortex of our grave
The seal's wide spindrift gaze toward paradise.

MARIANNE MOORE *Snakes, Mongooses, Snake-Charmers and the Like*

I HAVE a friend who would give a price for those long fingers
all of one length—
those hideous bird's claws, for that exotic asp and the
mongoose—
products of the country in which everything is hard work, the
country of the grass-getter,
the torch-bearer, the dog-servant, the messenger-bearer, the
holy-man.
Engrossed in this distinguished worm nearly as wild and as
fierce as the day it was caught,
he gazes as if incapable of looking at anything with a view
to analysis.
'The slight snake rippling quickly through the grass,
the leisurgly tortoise with its pied back,
the chameleon passing from twig to stone, from stone to
straw',
lit his imagination at one time; his admiration now converges
upon this.
Thick, not heavy, it stands up from its travelling-basket,
the essentially Greek, the plastic animal all of a piece from
nose to tail;
one is compelled to look at it as at the shadows of the alps
imprisoning in their folds like flies in amber, the rhythms of
the skating rink.
This animal to which from the earliest times, importance
has attached,
fine as its worshippers have said—for what was it invented?
To show that when intelligence in its pure form
has embarked on a train of thought which is unproductive,
it will come back?
We do not know; the only positive thing about it is its shape;
but why protest?
The passion for setting people right is in itself an afflictive
disease.
Distaste which takes no credit to itself is best.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 12

1. How does Marvell's *Bermudas* employ sensuous imagery to illuminate certain ideas? For example, what ideas are embodied in Marvell's picture of the past hardships and present joys of seventeenth-century Puritan refugees in the Bermudas?
2. An important unifying principle in poems seeking to catch an elusive subjective or psychological insight is the over-all atmospheric effect.
    i. Consider, for instance, the way in which Hopkins' poem gives the sense of cold northern winter and at the same time suggests something unstable, temporary, and fragile about it. The warm Gulf Stream keeps the British land near it from being snow-covered, and prevents the freezing of brooks. What other suggestions of warmth, fluidity, and fire do you find? Does the description develop into an implied idea about the way imagination works in the midst of reality?

    ii. In the same way, note the suggestions of sultry summer heat in a southern climate in Crane's *Repose of Rivers.* The meaning of the poem depends on a special group of associations touched off in the poet's memory by the sea. He had forgotten the deep, calm, primitive pleasures of childhood experience—pleasures derived from being in unconscious harmony with nature. Coming to the sea after his adult immersion in the busy life of the city, he has rediscovered something long forgotten. Why does the sea have this effect, and why is the blue sky associated with it? What is the poet saying about the source of all true value and meaning in his life? What has this to do with the underlying atmospheric effect of summer, heat, and southern climate?

    What is the reason for, and the impact of, the originality of language and syntax in this poem—for example, in lines 14, 17, and 22?

    iii. In *Voyages II* the sea is described in a number of ways and images —it is a "wink of eternity," an erotic female, a death-dealing judge, a meadow on which islands dance, the paradoxical center (timeless yet marking the time with *its* tides; "penniless" yet "rich"; the embodiment of "sleep, death, desire"—though these are irreconcilable) of the poet's thoughts. What quality of human nature and human dreams do all these aspects of the sea symbolize? (Note the importance of the phrase "sleep, death, desire" and of the fact that the final stanza has the form of a prayer that dreams be fulfilled.)
3. One of the complex descriptive effects in some poems of this section

is the "telescoping of sense impressions" or presentation of appeals to one of the senses in terms of another. An example is line 3 of Edith Sitwell's .poem: "The morning light creaks down again." What is the effect of this technique and of the repetition of the same idea in Miss Sitwell's poem? Do you find other examples of such telescoping in the poem? Does the wit of the supposed speaker, and the dullness of Jane, have anything to do with the effect of these images? Explain.

Can you find examples of this method or approximations to it in other poems in this section? Explain its effect in these poems.

IV. POETRY AS PURE VISION

It is not always something familiar or, indeed, actually possible that a poet places before our eyes. Puck, the King of Brobdignag, Cerberus, Caliban, the Garden of Adonis, and the Great Rock-Candy Mountain—the strange, the unknown, and the ineffable—can all be given a body, shown to us, and be made real. As Shakespeare expressed it,

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven*
> And, as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

That is, the envisioned sight itself is described with all the concrete attributes of an object, and with the bright colors and the jagged edges of things in dreams, and in this way is made convincing and believable, for we can always believe our eyes. This is how Dante tells us he saw the shade of the great Ulysses in Hell:

> The greater horn of the ancient flame was stirred
>   To shudder and make a murmur, like a fire
>   When in the wind it struggles and is blurred,
> Then tossed upon a flickering crest yet higher,
>   As it had been a tongue that spoke, it cast
>   A voice forth from the strength of its desire. . . .

Dante's greatest triumph, however, in the realization of vision is properly kept for the climax of the whole great *Divine Comedy,* the vision of God and eternity vouchsafed to the poet at the end of his long pilgrimage through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. (See pages 267-268.) As the poet looked into the heart of light, he tells us,

> I beheld leaves within the unfathomed blaze
>   Into one volume bound by love, the same
>   That the universe holds scattered through its maze.

Substance and accidents, and their modes, became
As if together fused, all in such wise
That what I speak of is one simple flame. . . .
One moment more oblivion has amassed
Than five-and-twenty centuries have wrought
Since Argo's shadow o'er wondering Neptune passed.[1]

"Nowhere in poetry/' says T. S. Eliot of this passage, "has experience so remote from ordinary experience been expressed so concretely. . . . One can feel only awe at the power of the master who could thus at every moment realize the inapprehensible in visual images. And I do not know anywhere in poetry a more authentic sign of greatness than the power of association which could in the last line, when the poet is speaking of the divine vision, yet introduce the Argo passing over the head of wondering Neptune."

It is with images of light and shadow especially that poets and visionaries have tried to convey their intuition of God and eternity. One of the most famous of such images is that with which Henry"Vaughan, the seventeenth-century religious poet and Platonist, began his poem *The World.*

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright;
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years,
Driv'n by the spheres,
Like a vast shadow mov'd. . . .

The homeliness, familiarity, and almost casualness of "the other night" places the vision in the center of the world of commonplace events and thus adds immeasurably to its convincingness and reality. Like the characteristic imagery of Dante, Vaughan's magnificent picture carries conviction because in it familiar knowledge is unexpectedly linked to an abstract conception in the figure in which time and eternity are seen astronomically. Dante, for example, wants to make us see, and hence believe in, the concourses of blessed spirits that flocked about him in Paradise. He writes:

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[1] The sense of the third sentence in this passage, very generally, is that once the poet's vision of God is over, it is harder for him to recall its profoundly meaningful reality than it is for men to remember the first sea-voyage of tradition—that of the Argo—which struck wonder into the god of the sea.

As in a fishpond which is still and clear
 The fishes draw to what comes from outside
 In such sort that they think their food is there,
So thousand splendors, ay, and more beside,
 I saw drawn toward us; and from each was heard
 "Lo one, by whom our loves are magnified."

(It is interesting that, just as in the Williams poem describing the road to the contagious hospital, the poet used no name but "stuff" and sought out instead vivid specific qualities, so here the poet makes us see the *action* of the thousand unnamed splendors by the vivid and concrete comparison with the fishes.)

There is one great image in modern poetry that recalls and equals the method of Dante. It has the concreteness, the vividness, and the element of surprise we have been noting, and a magnificence that almost equals the image of the shadow of the *Argo.* It occurs in the poem *All Souls' Night,* written as an epilogue to W. B. Yeats's *A Vision.* Yeats is telling of a friend whose love for a woman who had died had the clarity and spiritual ardor of Dante's love for Beatrice:

Two thoughts were so mixed up I could not tell
Whether of her or God he thought the most,
But think that his mind's eye,
When upward turned, on one sole image fell;
And that a slight companionable ghost,
Wild with divinity,
Had so lit up the whole
Immense miraculous house
The Bible promised us,
It seemed a gold fish swimming in a bowl.

The image of the friend's dead love (the "slight companionable ghost") lights up the concept of Heaven and makes it as lucid and brilliant as the homely image that closes the passage suggests—clear, comprehensible, and believable.

Heaven and Hell, the two great visionary concepts of popular religion, have been made concrete and real in the two most elaborate and successful poems of the Christian world: Dante's

Divine Comedy and Milton's *Paradise Lost.* Both these works are vast efforts of pure imagination, attempts to visualize supernatural beings in non-material realms. Dante gives us "pictures" of souls eternally, and in each case appropriately, tormented in Hell and seeking out their proper punishments in Purgatory, as well as of absolute innocence and joy in Eden and in Paradise. Milton gives us dazzling pictures of the glory of Heaven, the beauty of angels, the gentle loveliness of Eden; and he projects gloomy landscapes and vast arenas of suffering and reverberating debate by Satan and his followers in Hell. Here is the way he imagines that Hell first appeared to Satan; notice the image of a flame that throws "no light, but rather darkness visible" (for light is assumed to be characteristic of God)—a paradoxical picture which suggests less to the senses than to the emotions; or rather, by suggesting the utter frustration of the senses, convinces us of the unchangeable hopelessness of Satan's condition:

> At once as far as Angels ken he views
> The dismal Situation waste and wild,
> A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
> As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames
> No light, but rather darkness visible
> Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,
> Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
> And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
> That comes to all; but torture without end
> Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed
> With ever-burning Sulphur unconsumed. . . .

Just as the best poetry of description re-presents familiar reality to us more vividly, sharply, and newly than we have ever seen it before, so the poetry of pure vision exploits the senses to stir our imaginations beyond actual experience.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

DANTE ALIGHIERI *The Vision of God*[1]

(from *Paradiso:* Canto XXXIII)

O SUPREME Light, who dost thy glory assert
High over our imagining, lend again
Memory a little of what to me thou wert.
Vouchsafe unto my tongue such power to attain
That but one sparkle it may leave behind
Of thy magnificence to future men.
For by returning somewhat to my mind
And by a little sounding in this verse
More of thy triumph shall be thence divined.
So keenly did the living radiance pierce
Into me, that I think I had been undone
Had mine eyes faltered, from the light averse.
And I recall that with the more passion
I clove to it, till my gaze, thereat illumed,
With the Infinite Good tasted communion.
O Grace abounding, whereby I presumed
To fix upon the eternal light my gaze
So deep, that in it I my sight consumed!
I beheld leaves within the unfathomed blaze
Into one volume bound by love, the same
That the universe holds scattered through its maze.
Substance and accidents, and their modes, became
As if together fused, all in such wise
That what I speak of is one simple flame.
Verily I think I saw with mine own eyes
The form that knits the whole world, since I taste,
In telling of it, more abounding bliss.
One moment more oblivion has amassed
Than five-and-twenty centuries have wrought

---

[1] Translated by Laurence Binyon.

Since Argo's shadow o'er wondering Neptune passed.
Thus did my mind in the suspense of thought
Gaze fixedly, all immovable and intent,
And ever fresh fire from its gazing caught.

HENRY VAUGHAN *The World*

I SAW Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright,
And round beneath it, Time in hours, days, years
Driv'n by the spheres
Like a vast shadow mov'd, in which the world
And all her train were hurl'd.
The doting Lover in his quaintest strain
Did there complain;
Near him, his Lute, his fancy, and his flights,
Wit's sour delights,
With gloves, and knots the silly snares of pleasure.
Yet his dear Treasure
All scattered lay, while he his eye did pour
Upon a flow'r.

The darksome Statesman hung with weights and woe
Like a thick midnight-fog mov'd there so slow
He did nor stay, nor go;
Condemning thoughts (like sad Eclipses) scowl
Upon his soul,
And clouds of crying witnesses without
Pursu'd him with one shout.
Yet dig'd the Mole, and lest his ways be found
Workt under ground,
Where he did clutch his prey; but one did see
That policy,
Churches and altars fed him; Perjuries
Were gnats and flies;
It rain'd about him blood and tears, but he
Drank them as free.

The fearful miser on a heap of rust
Sate pining all his life there, did scarce trust
His own hands with the dust,
Yet would not place one piece above, but lives
In fear of thieves.
Thousands there were as frantic as himself
And hugg'd each one his pelf;
The down-right Epicure plac'd heav'n in sense
And scorn'd pretence,
While others, slipt into a wide Excess,
Said little less;
The weaker sort slight, trivial wares enslave
Who think them brave,
And poor, despised truth sate Counting by
Their victory.

Yet some, who all this while did weep and sing,
And sing, and weep, soar'd up into the Ring,
But most would use no wing.
O fools (said I) thus to prefer dark night
Before true light,
To live in grots, and caves, and hate the day
Because it shews the way,
The way which from this dead and dark abode
Leads up to God,
A way where you might tread the Sun, and be
More bright than he.
But as I did their madness so discuss
One whisper'd thus,
This Ring the Bridegroom did for none provide
But for his bride.

John, Cap. 2. ver. 16, 17.

All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the Eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the father, but is of the world.

And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever.

JOHN MILTON *Hail Holy Light*

(from *Paradise Lost:* Book III)

HAIL HOLY light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,
Or of th' Eternal Coeternal beam
May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from Eternity, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
Or hearest thou rather pure Ethereal stream,
Whose Fountain who shall tell? before the Sun,
Before the Heavens thou wert, and at the voice
Of God, as with a Mantle didst invest
The rising world of water dark and deep,
Won from the void and formless infinite.
Thee I re-visit now with bolder wing,
Escaped the *Stygian Pool,* though long detained
In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight
Through utter and through middle darkness borne
With other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre
I sung of *Chaos* and *Eternal Night,*
Taught by the heavenly Muse to venture down
The dark descent, and up to reascend
Though hard and rare: thee I revisit safe,
And feel thy sovereign vital Lamp; but thou
Revisitest not these eyes, that roll in vain
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
So thick a drop serene hath quenched their Orbs,
Or dim suffusion veiled. Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
Clear Spring, or shady Grove, or Sunny Hill,
Smit with the love of sacred song; but chief
Thee *Zion* and the flowery Brooks beneath
That wash thy hallowed feet, and warbling flow,
Nightly I visit: nor sometimes forget
Those other two equalled with me in Fate,
So were I equalled with them in renown,
Blind *Thamyris* and blind *Maeonides,*

And *Tiresias* and *Phineus* Prophets old.
Then feed on thoughts, that voluntary move
Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful Bird
Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid
Tunes her nocturnal Note. Thus with the Year
Seasons return, but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of Even or Morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summer's Rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
Cut off, and for the Book of knowledge fair
Presented with a Universal blank
Of Nature's works to me expung'd and rased,
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

JOHN MILTON *Satan Discovers Eden*

(from *Paradise Lost:* Book IV)

So on he[2] fares, and to the border comes
Of *Eden,* where delicious Paradise,
Now nearer, crowns with her enclosure green,
As with a rural mound the champaign head
Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,
Access deni'd; and overhead up grew
Insuperable height of loftiest shade,
Cedar, and Pine, and Fir, and branching Palm,
A Sylvan Scene, and as the ranks ascend
Shade above shade, a woody Theatre
Of stateliest view. Yet higher than their tops
The verdurous wall of Paradise upsprung,

[2] Satan, journeying to Earth to see mankind for the first time

Which to our general Sire gave prospect large
Into his nether Empire neighbouring round.
And higher than that Wall a circling row
Of goodliest Trees loaden with fairest Fruit,
Blossoms and Fruits at once of golden hue
Appear'd, with gay enamel'd colours mixt:
On which the Sun more glad impressed his beams
Than in fair Evening Cloud, or humid Bow,
When God hath show'rd the earth; so lovely seem'd
That Landscape: And of pure now purer air
Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires
Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
All sadness but despair. . . .

Now to th' ascent of that steep savage Hill
Satan had journey'd on, pensive and slow,
But further way found none, so thick entwin'd,
As one continued brake, the undergrowth
Of shrubs^and tangling bushes had perplext
All path of Man or Beast that passed that way.
One Gate there only was, and that look'd East
On th' other side; which, when th' arch-felon saw,
Due entrance he disdained, and in contempt,
At one slight bound high overleap'd all bound
Of Hill or highest Wall, and sheer within
Lights on his feet. As when a prowling Wolf,
Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey,
Watching where Shepherds pen their Flocks at eve
In hurdl'd Cotes amid the field secure,
Leaps o'er the fence with ease into the Fold;
Or as a Thief bent to unhoard the cash
Of some rich Burgher, whose substantial doors,
Cross-barr'd and bolted fast, fear no assault,
In at the window climbs, or o'er the tiles;
So clomb this first grand Thief into God's Fold:
So since into his Church lewd Hirelings climb.
Thence up he flew, and on the Tree of Life,
The middle Tree and highest there that grew,
Sat like a Cormorant. ...

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE *Kubld Khan*

IN XANADU did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree,
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But ohl that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced,
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying warl

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the^mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.

It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

EZRA POUND *Canto XVII*

So THAT the vines burst from my fingers
And the bees weighted with pollen
Move heavily in the vine-shoots:
chirr—chirr—chirr-rikk—a purring sound,
And the birds sleepily in the branches.
ZAGREUs![3] Io[4] ZAGREUS!
With the first pale-clear of the heaven
And the cities set in their hills,
And the goddess of the fair knees
Moving there, with the oak-wood behind her,
The green slope, with white hounds
leaping about her;

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[3] See comment on page 278.
[4] Hail

And thence down to the creek's mouth, until evening,
Flat water before me,
                    and the trees growing in water,
Marble trunks out of stillness,
On past the palazzi,
                                in the stillness,
The light now, not of the sun.
                                Chrysophrase,
And the water green clear, and blue clear;
On, to the great cliffs of amber,
                                    Between them,
Cave of Nerea,
            she like a great shell curved,
And the boat drawn without sound,
Without odour of ship-work,
Nor bird-cry, nor any noise of wave moving,
Nor splash of porpoise, nor any noise of wave moving,
Within her cave, Nerea,
                                she like a great shell curved
In the suavity of the rock,
                                cliff green-gray in the far,
In the near, the gate-cliffs of amber,
And the wave
                        green clear, and blue clear,
And the cave salt-white, and glare-purple,
                    cool, porphyry smooth,
                    the rock sea-worn.
No gull-cry, no sound of porpoise,
Sand as of malachite, and no cold there,
            the light not of the sun.

Zagreus, feeding his panthers,
            the turf clear as on hills under light.
And under the almond-trees, gods,
            with them, *choros nympharum*[5] Gods,
Hermes and Athene,
                                As shaft of compass,
Between them, trembled—

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[5] chorus of nymphs

To the left is the place of fauns
sylva nympharum;[6]
The low wood, moor-scrub,
the doe, the young spotted deer,
leap up through the broom-plants,
as dry leaf amid yellow.
And by one cut of the hills,
the great alley of Memnons.
Beyond, sea, crests seen over dune,
Night sea churning shingle,
To the left, the alley of cypress.
A boat came,
One man holding her sail,
Guiding her with oar caught over gunwale, saying:
“ There, in the forest of marble,
" the stone trees—out of water—
" the arbours of stone—
" marble leaf, over leaf,
“ silver, steel over steel,
" silver beaks rising and crossing,
" prow set against prow,
" stone, ply over ply,
“ the gilt beams flare of an evening."
Borso, Carmagnola, the men of craft, *i vitrei,*
Thither, at one time, time after time,
And the waters richer than glass,
Bronze gold, the blaze over the silver,
Dye-pots in the torch-light,
The flash of wave under prows,
And the silver beaks rising and crossing.
Stone trees, white and rose-white in the darkness,
Cypress there by the towers,
Drift under hulls in the night.

"In the gloom the gold
Gathers the light about it.'* . . .

Now supine in burrow, half over-arched bramble,
One eye for the sea, through that peek-hole,

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[6] wood of the nymphs

Gray light, with Athene.
Zothar and her elephants, the gold loin-cloth,
The sistrum, shaken, shaken,
the cohorts of her dancers.
And Aletha, by bend of the shore,
with her eyes seaward,
and in her hands sea-wrack
Salt-bright with the foam,
Kore* through the bright meadow,
with green-gray dust in the grass:
"Tor this hour, brother of Circe."
Arm laid over my shoulder,
Saw the sun for three days, the sun fulvid,
As a lion lift over sand-plain;
and that day,
And for three days, and none after,
Splendour, as the splendour of Hermes,
And shipped thence
to the stone place,
Pale white, over water,
known water,
And the white forest of marble, bent bough over bough,
The pleached arbour of stone,
Thither Borso, when they shot the barbed arrow at him,
And Carmagnola, between the two columns,
Sigismundo, after that wreck in Dalmatia.
Sunset like the grasshopper flying.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 13

1. Light, which is the condition and vehicle of vision, has been used by the poets to express the great abstract ideas of eternity and universal harmony in human and theological terms. What other symbols, joined with that of light, do Henry Vaughan and Dante utilize to give a visible form and emotional relevance to the concept of eternity and of God?
2. Compare Shelley's image:

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity
> Until Death tramples it to fragments.

with Vaughan's image of Eternity as a ring of pure and endless light. Upon what does the special excellence of each depend? Which seems to you the more vivid, accurate, and effective? Why?

3. Milton's *Hail Holy Light,* which is an invocation and prayer introducing Book III of *Paradise Lost,* is built on the paradox that out of the darkness of his blindness the poet, looking inward, can find a more powerful light than that of eyesight, an.inner light in which, with God's grace, he "may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight."

To which of the poems in this section do you think this applies as a statement of its purpose and effect? Explain. Are there some poems here to which it does not apply?

4. *Satan Discovers Eden* is taken from the fourth book of Milton's *Paradise Lost.* Here Satan, seeking to corrupt God's handiwork—the newly created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden—is startled at the vision of innocent blissful beauty he discovers in the earthly paradise. His future success in tempting man to disobey God is foreshadowed in the ease with which he penetrates the Garden. What images particularly establish the vision of untarnished innocence threatened try absolute evil in this passage? What is the function of concrete sensuous description here?

Compare Pound's re-creation, in *Canto XVII,* of the earthly paradise of classical myth. Notice that we see it through the eyes of the artists of the Italian Renaissance, and that the vision is concluded by a brief celebration of the defeated heroes whose courage and gaiety grew out of a love of the senses and the earth. (Zagreus is Dionysus-Bacchus, god of ecstatic fertility and wine.) Can you account for the scarcity here of similes, metaphors, and other figures of speech?

5. According to Coleridge, *Kubla Khan* is a poem of pure vision in a special sense. The present version, he said, is only a fragment of the version that "rose up" in a dream. Do you agree that the poem is, in its present form, only a fragment? In answering this question, consider the following ones also:

What effect is created in the first two stanzas by the vision of the "stately pleasure dome," with its beautiful surroundings, in close juxtaposition to the violent, terrifying, and mysterious vision of chasm, cave, river and fountain and ocean, and "ancestral voices prophesying war"? What is the relation of the fourth stanza, with its reference to yet another vision, to this idea? Does the ending place the whole poem in clear perspective?

(The student especially interested in the psychological analysis of the creative process is advised to read the account of the genesis of this poem in John Livingston Lowes's *The Road to Xanadu,* Chapters XIX and XX. If he does, he will probably want to follow it up by reading the first two sections of Chapter III in Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry.)*

CHAPTER FOUR *Narrative and Dramatic Poetry*

I. PLOT STRUCTURE AND POETIC OBJECTIVITY

> *He fought his way through his foemen like a wild boar in the forest through the hounds—bolder he could not have been. His path was ever wet anew with hot blood. When did single knight withstand foemen better?*
>
> * from *The Nibelungenlied*

Men, brother men, that after us yet live,
Let not your hearts too hard against us be;
For if some pity of us poor men ye give,
The sooner God shall take of you pity.
Here are we five or six strung up, you see,
And here the flesh that all too well we fed
Bit by bit eaten and rotten, rent and shred,
And we the bones grow dust and ash withal;
Let no man laugh at us discomforted,
And pray to God that he forgive us all.

from FRANCOIS VILLON,
The Epitaph, or Ballade of the Hanged[1]

We too, we too, descending once again
The hills of our own land, we too have heard
Far off—Ah, que ce cor a longue haleine[2]—
The horn of Roland in the passages of Spain,
The first, the second blast, the failing third,
And with the third turned back and climbed once more

---

[1] Translated by A. C. Swinburne.
[2] Ah, how far that horn's sound echoes.

The steep road southward, and heard faint the sound
Of swords, of horses, the disastrous war,
And crossed the dark defile at last, and found
At Roncevaux upon the darkening plain
The dead against the dead and on the silent ground
The silent slain—

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH *The Silent Slain*

WE CANNOT, in a book of this kind, pay much attention to the more technical side of narrative and dramatic writing as such—for instance, to the way an author sets up his scene, characters, and basic situation (the *exposition);* or to the methods by which the basic situation can be developed toward some crisis, complication, or climax; or, finally, to the manner in which the action is at last unraveled or completed (the *denouement).* These aspects of plot-construction have as much to do with the kindred crafts of fiction and playwriting as with poetry—though it must be granted that the distinction cannot always be sustained, for everything in a successful poem contributes to its central effect. For our present purposes, however, we may see the essence of plot as the *plan* of a literary work whenever that work can be seen as involving a *change* of some sort, as of the status or situation of a character, for example, or of the relation among characters, or of the speaker's attitude toward some idea or belief or object of emotion. When the change is described to us, the method is that of narration; when it is acted out—presented—it is dramatic.

Thus, in the three quotations given at the beginning of this chapter we may find three different kinds of change presented. From the medieval German epic *The Nibelungenlied* we have a typical passage in which the action and conflict are purely physical. The man who is fighting must either triumph or perish. *(The Nibelungenlied* as a whole is fairly complicated, depicting various sorts of character-conflict and of struggle among representatives of different types of early European society, and mingling history and mythology in its own special way. But the kind of changes from which it takes form are changes in the relative power of various groups—the simplest kind being those that are the result of combat.) The emotional effect derives from the attempt to suggest the actual hot anger and ruthlessness of the clash of swords. As a small poetic unit the composition will be complete when we know the outcome of the fight—though it is only a tiny portion of a narrative conceived on a grand scale.

The second passage, by a fifteenth-century French poet, is less narrative than dramatic in form; and both these qualities are subordinated to the pretense of logic. The speaker, one of a group sentenced to be hanged, is extremely bitter, but the poem makes no attempt to create suspense. Rather, the speaker *argues,* trying to persuade the more fortunate readers to pity him and his fellows for the sake of their own souls. The dramatic element is not an obvious one, because ordinarily we expect in drama a struggle among personalities or by people against a predicament in which they find themselves. But the relationship here is one of acquiescence, not struggle. The speaker has accepted the fact that he will die, and now he concerns himself with how otherar will regard him and with what will become of his body. He projects his imagination forward, into the future, foreseeing the corruption of his and all other men's bodies and hoping for God's mercy on men's souls. The self-characterization is certainly dramatic: through it a clearly defined character faces an agonizing situation. And the macabre projection into the future is a *story,* in its way, disguised as a prediction. In a poem of this sort we can see how narrative and dramatic devices, even when subordinated to other purposes than the pure telling of a story, are still very important.

The third example given at the head of this chapter is a complete poem by a modern writer. There is no immediately physical struggle or situation described in this piece, and there is no pressing circumstance forcing the speaker to face up to it and thus reveal his character. Yet the poem has a definite narrative structure in three parts. It moves toward a moral shock, not a physical one. "We" moderns, the poet is saying—and particularly we modern Americans—have heard the chivalric call of ancient heroic achievement, symbolized by the romance of Roland, France's medieval-epic hero. But, like Charlemagne and his army, who responded to Roland's signal-blasts on his horn only when neither the hero nor the men he commanded could be saved from death, we have failed. For us there is none of the glory that made even defeat a kind of immortal triumph, but only the awareness of death and more death. The romantic speaker has been compelled by reality to shift his focus of attention from the glory of Roland to the vast armies of "the silent slain." He is like a character in a play who has been made aware of his tragic failure—but, ironically, "too late." The poem is a retrospective adventure of the imagination, self-recriminatory and pessimistic.

Of these three passages, the *Nibelungenlied* excerpt comes closest to being what we may call "pure narrative." One way to define such writing would be to say that it reduces the details of a story to the facts of the case as much as possible, that it tends to be "objective"—that is, to present these facts with relatively little, if any, comment and to depend for its effects less on symbolism or traditional associations than other forms do. But pure narrative differs, too, from the *Nibelungenlied* passage and other popular narrative forms (such as the ballad, discussed on pages 307-317), in its fullness of detail and in its avoidance of stock phrases. An example would be the following poem by John Clare:

JOHN CLARE *Badger*

When midnight comes a host of dogs and men
Go out and track the badger to his den,
And put a sack within the hole, and lie
Till the old grunting badger passes by.
He comes and hears—they let the strongest loose.
The old fox hears the noise and drops the goose.
The poacher shoots and hurries from the cry,
And the old hare half wounded buzzes by.
They get a forked stick to bear him down
And clap the dogs and take him to the town,
And bait him all the day with many dogs,
And laugh and shout and fright the scampering hogs.
He runs along and bites at all he meets:
They shout and hollo down the noisy streets.

He turns about to face the loud uproar
And drives the rebels to their very door.
The frequent stone is hurled where'er they go;
When badgers fight, then everyone's a foe.
The dogs are clapt and urged to join the fray;
The badger turns and drives them all away.
Though scarcely half as big, demure and small,
He fights with dogs for hours and beats them all.
The heavy mastiff, savage in the fray,
Lies down and licks his feet and turns away.
The bulldog knows his match and waxes cold,
The badger grins and never leaves his hold.
He drives the crowd and follows at their heels
And bites them through—the drunkard swears and reels.

The frightened women take the boys away,
The blackguard laughs and hurries on the fray.
He tries to reach the woods, an awkward race,
But sticks and cudgels quickly stop the chase.
He turns age^n and drives the noisy crowd
And beats the dogs in noises loud.
He drives away and beats them every one,
And then they loose them all and set them on.
He falls as dead and kicked by boys and men,
Then starts and grins and drives the crowd again;
Till kicked and torn and beaten out he lies
And leaves his hold and cackles, groans, and dies.

This picture taken from English village life of the last century is very close to bare reporting. We may feel the cruelty of the "sport," but that is the result of the facts and not of the poet's expressed feelings. Against the savagery, and implied cowardice, of men and dogs the badger resists with strength, endurance and cunning; he is vigorous and dangerous until at last he is beaten, harassed, bitten to death. The poem reduces the meaning of physical perseverance and the struggle for existence to its unpleasant essence: a grim, torturous competition in bestiality which men share with subhuman species and in which there is no room for any compensating beauty. But as a story it relies on the establishment of the situation—the beginning of the badger-baiting expedition at midnight—and the subsequent events throughout the next day. As a criticism of the desperate boredom of the townspeople's existence and of their fundamental inhumanity, however, the account is ruthless, since the badger is much closer, after all, to being a "hero[1]*—grotesque as the term is in this setting—than are the people.

We cannot, ever, escape meanings such as this, meanings which grow out of what the concrete details inevitably suggest rather than out of what the poet expressly tells us. But while certain kinds of details are so forceful that they "speak for themselves/' in other cases the author must manipulate his presentation with greater care to give it the impression of "saying" what he feels it should say. Whereas John Clare could count on a direct narrative to convey his sense of the importance of his subject, the author of the following almost equally simple narrative has had to resort to other devices too:

MURIEL RUKEYSER *Boy with His Hair Cut Short*

Sunday shuts down on a twentieth-century evening.
The El passes. Twilight and bulb define
the brown room, the overstuffed plum sofa,
the boy, and the girl's thin hands above his head.
A neighbor radio sings stocks, news, serenade.

He sits at the table, head down, the young clear neck exposed,
watching the drugstore sign from the tail of his eye;
tattoo, neon, until the eye blears, while his
solicitous tall sister, simple in blue, bending
behind him, cuts his hair with her cheap shears.

The arrow's electric red always reaches its mark,
successful neon! He coughs, impressed with that precision.
His child's forehead, forever protected by his cap,
is bleached against the lamplight as he turns head
and steadies to let the snippets drop.

Erasing the failure of weeks with level fingers,
she sleeks the fine hair, combing: "You'll look fine tomorrow!
You'll surely find something, they can't keep turning you down;
the finest gentleman's not so trim as you!" Smiling, he raises
the adolescent forehead wrinkling ironic now.

He sees his decent suit laid out, new-pressed,
his carfare on the shelf. He lets his head fall, meeting
her earnest hopeless look, seeing the sharp blades splitting,
the darkened room, the impersonal sign, her motion,
the blue vein, bright on her temple, pitifully beating.

In place of the fierce, brutal account of Clare, held at a single pitch throughout its duration despite the accumulation of varied details of the scene, we now have a picture and an *implied* story which require the poet's active aid if they are to be understood in the intended way. The picture is of a brother and sister, apparently living on their own, who are very poor—so poor that the girl has to give the boy a home-made haircut; the time, we must assume, is during the Depression, since it appears to be impossible for the boy to find work. Unlike the wealth of sheer action in *Badger,* we find only a few moments that could possibly have this term applied to them: the girl cuts the hair of her sitting brother, he coughs, he turns and then steadies his head, she encourages him, but he looks down despairingly. That is the story—that, plus the whole background, not given, of their present situation.

To point up the pathos of the scene and to indicate the human meanings she wishes it to represent, the poet adds a series of half-comments in the form of descriptive phrases and general indications of the circumstances. Thus our attention is first focused on the homely environment: the meagerly furnished room near the El. The initial glimpse of the girl is by way of her "thin hands"; later she is "solicitous," uses "cheap shears," has an "earnest hopeless look," has a vein on her temple that is "pitifully beating" —all of which details (notice that the poem concludes with the last of them) are arranged to arouse our sympathy. Similar details highlight the pathos of the boy's life. The social meaning is suggested from the start: "Sunday shuts down on a twentieth-century evening." It is rung in again ironically at the end of the first stanza: "A neighbor radio sings stocks, news, serenade." And the "successful" neon arrow is, of course, an obvious pointer to their failure, despite the fact that they are neat, decent, earnest people of the sort that, according to all proper teachings, are entitled to some measure of success. This too is a picture of cruel suffering, undoubtedly, yet it is not "pure" in the sense of Clare's poem; and emotionally appealing though it is, it does not have, inherent in its presentation, the same quality of shocked conviction. But this difference may be due less to our awareness of the deliberate pathos than to the fact that the actions are inherently less violent and also more familiar in *Boy with His Hair Cut Short.*

Thus, in these five passages and poems we see a hint at least of the wide range of the narrative and dramatic structure of poetry. A poem may plot its changes in situation and define its characters in terms of physical struggle and personal strength and prowess alone. It may present merely one stage of an action —its beginning, its most complicated phase, or its outcome— and perhaps show a speaker of a certain type expressing his relation to the situation in which he has become involved. Again, it may dramatize the moral, intellectual, or emotional development of a character or a group of people for whom he speaks. Seen in this light, the terms "narrative** and "dramatic" become very broad in their application and cannot be restricted to just a few special types of writing.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

DANTE ALIGHIERI *Paolo and Francesco*[1]

(from *Inferno:* Canto V)

Now BEGIN wailing notes; the flesh is thrilled
To hear them and to feel them. I am come
Where thronging lamentations hold me chilled.
I came into a place of all light dumb
That bellows like a storm in the sea-deep
When the thwart winds that strike it roar and hum.
The abysmal tempest that can never sleep
Snatches the spirits and headlong hurries them,
Beats and besets them with its whirling sweep.
When they arrive before the ruin, stream
The cries up; there the wail is and the moan,
There the divine perfection they blaspheme.
I learnt that in such restless violence blown
This punishment the carnal sinners share
Who let Desire pull Reason from her throne.
And as their beating wings the starlings bear
At the cold season, in broad flocking flight,
So those corrupted spirits were rapt in air
To and fro, down, up, driven in helpless flight,
Comforted by no hope ever to lie
At rest, nor even to bear a pain more light.
And as the cranes in long line streak the sky
And in procession chant their mournful call,
So I saw come with sound of wailing by
The shadows fluttering in the tempest's brawl.
Whereat, "O Master,[2] who are these", I said,

---

[1] Translated by Laurence Binyon.

[2] The shade of Virgil, the great Roman poet, guides Dante in his symbolic journey through Hell. Virgil names many famous lovers (such as Tristan and Isolde, Helen of Troy, and others) whose unrepented carnality has led to eternal damnation.

"On whom the black winds with their scourges fall?"_____
After that I had heard my Teacher name
Each lady of old, lost with her lovely knight,
My thoughts were mazed, such pity upon me came.
I began: "Poet, I fain would, if I might,
Speak with those two that hand in hand appear
And, as they move, seem to the wind so light."
And he to me: "When they approach more near,
Thou shalt see. By the love which is their guide
Do thou entreat them then, and they will hear."
Soon as the wind's whirl made them nearer glide,
I raised my voice up: "O tired spirits, come
And speak with us, if that be not denied."
Eagerly as a pair of pigeons, whom
Desire calls, and their will bears, down the sky
On wide unfaltering wings to their sweet home,
So swerved those spirits from out the company
Where Dido is, flying toward us underneath
The ghast mirk; such a power had my fond cry.
"O kind and gracious creature that hast breath
And comest journeying through the black air
To us who made the earth bloody with our death,
Were but the world's Lord friend to us, a prayer
Should from us both implore Him for thy peace
Because thou has taken pity on our despair.
Whether to speak or listen better please,
We will speak with you, and hear and understand,
Now while the lull'd wind spares a little ease.
The place where I was born sits on the strand
Where Po descends to his peace, and with him takes
All the other streams that follow him down the land.
Love, that in gentle heart so soon awakes,
Took him with this fair body, which from me
Was torn: the way and wound of it yet aches.
Love, that to no loved one remits his fee,
Took me with joy of him, so deep in-wrought,
Even now it hath not left me, as thou dost see.
Love led us both to one death. He that sought

And spilt our life—Cain's place awaits him now/"[3]
These words to us upon the wind were brought.
When I had heard those wounded spirits, my brow
Sank downward, and I held it where it was,
Until the Poet spoke: "What musest thou?"
And when I answered, I began: "Alas!
How many sweet thoughts and what longings fain
Led them into the lamentable pass!"
I turned, and I began to speak again:
"Francesca, the tears prick into mine eyes
For sorrow, and for pity of thy pain.
But tell me: in the time of the sweet sighs
How did Love vouchsafe proof of what he is,
And of the obscure yearnings make you wise?"
And she to me: "No grief surpasses this
(And that thy Teacher also knows full well)—
In the midst of misery to remember bliss.
But if thou so desire to know how fell
The se^cl whose first root in our bosoms fed,
I'll tell, as one who can but weep and tell.
One day together, for pastime, we read
Of Launcelot, and how Love held him in thrall.
We were alone, and without any dread.
Sometimes our eyes, at the word's secret call,
Met, and our cheeks a changing colour wore.
But it was one page only that did all.
When we read how that smile, so thirsted for,
Was kissed by such a lover, he that may
Never from me be separated more
All trembling kissed my mouth. The book I say
Was a Galahalt[4] to us, and he beside
That wrote the book. We read no more that day."
While the one spirit spoke thus, the other cried
So lamentably, that the whole life fled
For pity out of me, as if I died;
And I fell, like a body falling dead.

---

[8] Francesca's husband murdered her before she could repent. His place is to be in the lowest depths of Hell.

[4] a go-between

WILLIAM MORRIS *The Haystack in the Floods*

HAD SHE come all the way for this,
To part at last without a kiss?
Yea, had she borne the dirt and rain
That her own eyes might see him slain
Beside the haystack in the floods?

Along the dripping leafless woods,
The stirrup touching either shoe,
She rode astride as troopers do;
With kirtle kilted to her knee,
To which the mud splash'd wretchedly;
And the wet dripp'd from every tree
Upon her head and heavy hair,
And on her eyelids broad and fair;
The tears and rain ran down her face.
By fits and starts they rode apace,
And very often was his place
Far off from her; he had to ride
Ahead, to see what might betide
When the roads cross'd; and sometimes, when
There rose a murmuring from his men,
Had to turn back with promises;
Ah me! she had but little ease;
And often for pure doubt and dread
She sobb'd, made giddy in the head
By the swift riding; while, for cold,
Her slender fingers scarce could hold
The wet reins; yea, and scarcely, too,
She felt the foot within her shoe,
Against the stirrup: all for this,
To part at last without a kiss
Beside the haystack in the floods.

For when they near'd that old soak'd hay,
They saw across the only way
That Judas, Godmar, and the three
Red running lions dismally

Grinn'd from his pennon, under which,
In one straight line along the ditch,
They counted thirty heads.
                                        So then,
While Robert turn'd round to his men,
She saw at once the wretched end,
And, stooping down, tried hard to rend
Her coif the wrong way from her head,
And hid her eyes; while Robert said:
"Nay, love, 'tis scarcely two to one,
At Poictiers where we made them run
So fast — why, sweet my love, good cheer.
The Gascon frontier is so near,
Nought after this."
                                        But, "O," she said,
"My God! my God! I have to tread
The long way back without you; then
The court at Paris; those six men;
The gratings of the Chatelet;
The swift Seine on some rainy day
Like this, and people standing by,
And laughing, while my weak hands try
To recollect how strong men swim,
All this, or else a life with him,
For which I should be damned at last,
Would God that this next hour were past!"

He answer'd not, but cried his cry,
"St. George for Marny!" cheerily;
And laid his hand upon her rein.
Alas! no man of all his train
Gave back that cheery cry again;
And, while for rage his thumb beat fast
Upon his sword-hilts, some one cast
About his neck a kerchief long,
And bound him.
                                        Then they went along
To Godmar; who said: "Now Jehane,
Your lover's life is on the wane

So fast, that, if this very hour
You yield not as my paramour,
He will not see the rain leave off—
Nay, keep your tongue from gibe and scoff,
Sir Robert, or I slay you now."

She laid her hand upon her brow,
Then gazed upon the palm, as though
She thought her forehead bled, and—"No,"
She said, and turn'd her head away,
As there were nothing else to say,
And everything were settled: red
Grew Godmar's face from chin to head:
"Jehane, on yonder hill there stands
My castle, guarding well my lands:
What hinders me from taking you,
And doing that I list to do
To your fair wilful body, while
Your knight lies dead?"
                    A wicked smile
Wrinkled her face, her lips grew thin,
A long way out she thrust her chin:
"You know that I should strangle you
While you were sleeping; or bite through
Your throat, by God's help—ah!" she said,
"Lord Jesus, pity your poor maid!
For in such wise they hem me in,
I cannot choose but sin and sin,
Whatever happens: yet I think
They could not make me eat or drink,
And so should I just reach my rest."
"Nay, if you do not my behest,
O Jehane! though I love you well,"
Said Godmar, "would I fail to tell
All that I know?" "Foul lies," she said.
"Eh? lies my Jehane? by God's head,
At Paris folks would deem them true!
Do you know, Jehane, they cry for you,

'Jehane the brown! Jehane the brownl
Give us Jehane to burn or drown!'—
Eh—gag me Robert!—sweet my friend,
This were indeed a piteous end
For those long fingers, and long feet,
And long neck, and smooth shoulders sweet;
An end that few men would forget
That saw it—So, an hour yet:
Consider, Jehane, which to take
Of life or death!"
So scarce awake,
Dismounting, did she leave that place,
And totter some yards: with her face
Turn'd upward to the sky she lay,
Her head on a wet heap of hay,
And fell asleep: and while she slept,
And did not dream, the minutes crept
Round to twelve again; but she,
Being waited at last, sigh'd quietly,
And strangely childlike came, and said:
"I will not." Straightway Godmar's head,
As though it hung on strong wires, turn'd
Most sharply round, and his face burn'd.

For Robert—both his eyes were dry,
He could not weep, but gloomily
He seem'd to watch the rain; yea, too,
His lips were firm; he tried once more
To touch her lips; she reach'd out, sore
And vain desire so tortured them,
The poor grey lips, and now the hem
Of his sleeve brush'd them.
With a start
Up Godmar rose, thrust them apart;
From Robert's throat he loosed the bands
Of silk and mail; with empty hands
Held out, she stood and gazed, and saw,
The long bright blade without a flaw

Glide out from Godmar's sheath, his hand
In Robert's hair; she saw him bend
Back Robert's head; she saw him send
The thin steel down; the blow told well,
Right backward the knight Robert fell,
And moan'd as dogs do, being half dead,
Unwitting, as I deem: so then
Godmar turn'd grinning to his men,
Who ran, some five or six, and beat
His head to pieces at their feet.

Then Godmar turn'd again, and said:
"So, Jehane, the first fitte is read!
Take note, my lady, that your way
Lies backward to the Chatelet!"
She shook her head and gazed awhile
At her cold hands with a rueful smile,
As though this thing had made her mad.

This was the parting that they had
Beside the haystack in the floods.

JONATHAN SWIFT *Phillis, or, the Progress of Love*

DESPONDING PHILLIS was endu'd
With ev'ry Talent of a Prude,
She trembled when a Man drew near;
Salute her, and she turn'd her Ear:
If o'er against her you were plac't
She durst not look above your Waist;
She'd rather take you to her Bed
Than let you see her dress her Head;
In Church you heard her through the Crowd
Repeat the Absolution loud;
In Church, secure behind her Fan,
She durst behold that Monster, Man:
There practic'd how to place her Head,
And bit her Lips to make them red:

Or on the Mat devoutly kneeling
Would lift her Eyes up to the Ceiling,
And heave her Bosom unaware
For neighboring Beaux to see it bare.
At length a lucky Lover came,
And found Admittance from the Dame.
Suppose all Parties now agreed,
The Writings drawn, the Lawyer fee'd,
The Vicar and the Ring bespoke:
Guess how could such a Match be broke.
See then what Mortals place their bliss in!
Next morn betimes the Bride was missing,
The Mother scream'd, the Father chid:
Where can this idle Wench be hid?
No news of Phil. The Bridegroom came,
And thought his Bride had sculk't for shame,
Because her Father us'd to say
The Girl laad such a Bashful way.
Now, John the Butler must be sent
To learn the Way that Phillis went;
The Groom was wisht to saddle Crop,
For John must neither light nor stop;
But find her where so'er she fled,
And bring her back, alive or dead.
See here again the Dev'l to do;
For truly John was missing too:
The Horse and Pillion both were gone;
Phillis, it seems, was fled with John.
Old Madam who went up to find
What papers Phil had left behind,
A Letter on the Toilet sees
To my much honor'd Father, These:
('Tis always done, Romances tell us,
When Daughters run away with Fellows)
Fiird with the choicest commonplaces,
By others us'd in the like Cases.
That, long ago a Fortune-teller
Exactly said what now befell her,

And in a Glass had made her see
A serving-Man of low Degree.
It was her Fate; must be forgiven,
For Marriages are made in Heaven;
His Pardon begg'd, but to be plain,
She'd do't if 'twere to do again.
Thank God, 'twas neither Shame nor Sin,
For John was come of honest Kin.
Love never thinks of Rich and Poor;
She'd beg with John from Door to Door.
Forgive her; if it be a Crime,
She'll never do't another Time,
She ne'r before in all her Life
Once disobey'd him, Maid nor Wife.
One Argument she summ'd up all in,
The Thing was done and past recalling;
And therefore hop'd she would recover
His Favor, when his Passion's over.
She valued not what others thought her;
And was—His most obedient Daughter.
  Fair Maidens, all attend the Muse
Who now the wand'ring Pair pursues:
Away they rode in homely Sort,
Their Journey long, their Money short;
The loving Couple well bemir'd,
The Horse and both the Riders tir'd;
Their Vittles bad, their Lodgings worse,
Phil cry'd, and John began to curse
Phil wish't, that she had strained a Limb
When first she ventur'd out with him.
John wish't, that he had broke a Leg
When first for her he quitted Peg.
  But what Adventures more befell 'um
The Muse has now not time to tell 'um.
How Johnny wheedled, threat'n'd, fawn'd,
Till Phillis all her Trinkets pawn'd;
How oft she broke her marriage Vows
In kindness to maintain her Spouse,
Till Swains unwholesome spoil'd the Trade,
For now the Surgeon must be paid;

To whom those Perquisites are gone
In Christian Justice due to John.
When Food and Raiment now grew scarce
Fate put a Period to the Farce;
And with exact Poetic Justice:
For John is Landlord, Phillis Hostess;
They keep at Stains the old blue Boar,
Are Cat and Dog, and Rogue and Whore.

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON *Richard Cory*

WHENEVER RICHARD CORY went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king,
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI *My Sister's Sleep*

SHE FELL asleep on Christmas Eve:
At length the long-ungranted shade
Of weary eyelids overweigh'd
The pain nought else might yet relieve.

Our mother, who had leaned all day
Over the bed from chime to chime,
Then raised herself for the first time,
And as she sat her down, did pray.

Her little work-table was spread
With work to finish. For the glare
Made by her candle, she had care
To work some distance from the bed.

Without, there was a cold moon up,
Of winter radiance sheer and thin;
The hollow halo it was in
Was like an icy crystal cup.

Through the small room, with subtle sound
Of flame, by vents the fireshine drove
And reddened. In its dim alcove
The mirror shed a clearness round.

I had been sitting up some nights,
And my tired mind felt weak and blank;
Like a sharp strengthening wine it drank
The stillness and the broken lights.

Twelve struck. That sound, by dwindling years
Heard in each hour, crept off; and then
The ruffled silence spread again,
Like water that a pebble stirs.

Our mother rose from where she sat:
Her needles, as she laid them down,
Met lightly, and her silken gown
Settled: no other noise than that.

"Glory unto the Newly Born!"
So, as said angels, she did say;
Because we were in Christmas Day,
Though it would still be long till morn.

Just then in the room over us
  There was a pushing back of chairs,
  As some who had sat unawares
So late, now heard the hour, and rose.

With anxious softly-stepping haste
  Our mother went where Margaret lay,
  Fearing the sounds overhead—should they
Have broken her long watched-for rest!

She stopped an instant, calm, and turned;
  But suddenly turned back again;
  And all her features seemed in pain
With woe, and her eyes gazed and yearned.

For my part, I but hid my face,
  And held my breath, and spoke no word:
  There was none spoken; but I heard
The silence for a little space.

Our mother bowed herself and wept:
  And both my arms fell, and I said,
  "God knows I knew that she was dead."
And there, all white, my sister slept.

Then kneeling, upon Christmas morn
  A little after twelve o'clock,
  We said, ere the first quarter struck,
"Christ's blessing on the newly born!"

EMILY DICKINSON *The last night that she lived*

THE LAST night that she lived,
It was a common night,
Except the dying; this to us
Made nature different.

We noticed smallest things,—
Things overlooked before,
By this great light upon our minds
Italicized, as 'twere.

That others could exist
While she must finish quite,
A jealousy for her arose
So nearly infinite.

We waited while she passed;
It was a narrow time,
Too jostled were our souls to speak,
At length the notice came.

She mentioned, and forgot;
Then lightly as a reed
Bent to the water, shivered scarce,
Consented, and was dead.

And we, we placed the hair,
And drew the head erect;
And then an awful leisure was,
Our faith to regulate.

EMILY DICKINSON *'Twas warm at first, like us*

'TWAS WARM at first, like us,
Until there crept thereon
A chill, like frost upon a glass,
Till all the scene be gone.

The forehead copied stone,
The fingers grew too cold
To ache, and like a skater's brook
The busy eyes congealed.

It straightened—that was all—
It crowded cold to cold—
It multiplied indifference
As Pride were all it could.

And even when with cords
'Twas lowered like a freight,
It made no signal, nor demurred,
But dropped like adamant.

EMILY DICKINSON / *heard a fly buzz when I died*

I HEARD a fly buzz when I died;
The stillness in the room
Was like the stillness in the air
Between the heaves of storm.

The eyes ground had wrung them dry,
And breaths were gathering firm
For that last onset when the king
Be witnessed in the room.

I willed my keepsakes, signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable—and then it was
There interposed a fly,

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz
Between the light and me;
And then the windows failed, and then
I could not see to see.

EMILY DICKINSON / *felt a funeral in my brain*

I FELT a funeral in my brain,
   And mourners, to and fro,
Kept treading, treading, till it seemed
   That sense was breaking through.

And when they all were seated,
A service like a drum
Kept beating, beating, till I thought
My mind was going numb.

And then I heard them lift a box,
And creak across my soul
With those same boots of lead, again.
Then space began to toll

As all the heavens were a bell,
And Being but an ear,
And I and silence some strange race,
Wrecked, solitary, here.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 14

1. *The Haystack in the Floods* is generally considered an admirable example of poetic narrative. Why?
    - i. Examine the technical skill with which the poet in *The Haystack in the Floods* reveals the past causes and the future consequences of the single action so realistically presented,
    - ii. Note the economy with which everything unconnected with the present situation has been left unmentioned (a device caught from the popular ballad),
    - iii. Describe the characters of Jehane, Robert, Godmar. Observe that only those aspects of character that affect or are affected by the present action are revealed to us.
2. In Dante's story, sinners in Hell win our sympathy through appealing to basic emotions which are as powerfully active in most readers as in the tellers. What are these emotions? Is the tale of these sinners rendered the more effective by the fact that they are, from the poet's point of view, justifiably condemned to eternal suffering?

    Compare the concreteness of detail in this tale with that in Swift's poem. Are the *kinds* of detail different? Do the personalities of the tellers as manifested in the poems make a great difference in the relative seriousness and power of the impressions the tales make? Which of these poems is more objective in the sense of Clare's *Badger*, discussed on pages 283-285?

3. From what point of view is the story told in *Richard Cory?* Observe the full effect of the surprise ending, which revises the meaning of all that has preceded it and provides a kind of sardonic comment on the insight, or lack of insight, of those from whose point of view the story is presented.
4. The four poems by Emily Dickinson are concerned with the same theme—the imaginative contemplation or dramatization of death or the act of dying. Note the varying effects, in terms of intensity, of the point of view of the speaker in each of the poems. Compare them in this respect with Rossetti's poem.

   What other factors contribute to the effectiveness of each poem? Note, for example, the accuracy and specificity of the concrete physical perceptions.
5. Discuss the special effect created by any one of these narratives because it is a poem rather than a story in prose.

II. THREE TRADITIONAL NARRATIVE FORMS: EPIC, METRICAL ROMANCE, AND BALLAD

The student of poetry will wish eventually to familiarize himself with at least three forms of verse-narrative which are not only sanctified by age and by the reverence that has been paid them, but which continue to have a vital influence on poets and their methods. These are the epic, the metrical romance, and the ballad.

We do not represent fully either the epic poem or the true metrical romance in this book, the first because of the length of such a poem, the second because of both its length and its inaccessibility in modern English. The great epics of the past, however—those by Homer, Virgil, and Milton especially—have provided an immense amount of subject matter for later writers, who have also studied them for training in metrics, diction, and grandeur of outlook. For the epic poem is constructed "on the grand scale." Its mythological hero is set an enormous task or given a tremendously significant moral choice to make. Gods, angels, the spirits of the dead in Hell, all men and all women are concerned in what happens to him as he sets out to resist the hostile forces arrayed to prevent his success. In him are combined the highest social ideals of the world in which his creator lived and thought. Many elements—battle-descriptions, ringing debates, long descriptive or rhetorical or philosophical digressions—are put into meaningful relation with one another by the end of the poem.[1] Through the hero, who is both a real person with real feelings and a superhuman performer of extraordinary deeds, we come to see the vast scope and moral significance of man's struggle, under the pressures of time and fate, to change reality in accordance with his dream-aspirations.

Metrical romances too are comparatively long poems, though seldom as long as epics, or as serious. The favorite verse-form of a special social group, the great courts of the Middle Ages in which skilled minstrels sang or chanted to the élite, they strove to create an air of gaiety, excitement, and elegance: the adventures of knights and ladies, the perfection of chivalry and pride, the torments and disasters of adulterous love. Sometimes the tragic seriousness of the love-affairs, or the seriousness of a knight's mission, will suggest the profundities of the epic. But most of all, perhaps, the metrical romance is the forerunner of the modern adventure story and also of the modern novel of high social life. The minstrel-poet was careful to show, for instance, how accomplished in table-manners, conversation, and dress his hero was, and sometimes to strive for real wit in dialogue and characterization. He was often a great virtuoso in the handling of rhyme, sound-effects, and stanza-forms, too.

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[1] The many-sidedness of the epic is to some extent illustrated by the fact that passages from Milton's *Paradise Lost* are used in this book to exemplify not only heroic narrative (pages 363-369), but also poetry as pure vision (pages 270-272), brilliance in conveying impressions through sound-effects (pages 121-122), and skilful intellectual exposition (pages 420-422).

Later poets have often assumed a reading-acquaintance by their audiences with the figures and events of the great epics and the most famous of the metrical romances. Thus, George Meredith's sonnet *Lucifer in Starlight* depends on our knowledge of Milton's description of Satan and his eternal exile from Heaven.

GEORGE MEREDITH *Lucifer in Starlight*

On a starred night Prince Lucifer uprose.
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screened,
Where sinners hugged their specter of repose.
Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.
And now upon his western wing he leaned,
Now his huge bulk o'er Afric's sands careened.
Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows.
Soaring through wider zones that pricked his scars
With memory of the old revolt from Awe,
He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.

The poem takes for granted our knowing how, in Milton's poem, Lucifer (or Satan) was hurled into hell and plotted to frustrate God by corrupting mankind. We are expected to understand that Meredith, in describing Lucifer's movements, is paralleling a similar journey in *Paradise Lost,* to recall the bitter futility of Lucifer's efforts in Milton's work, and to recognize the old "scars" of his memory of defeat and consignment to eternal punishment. We can understand the poem without this knowledge, but the precise emotional effect of our having it will be lost, as will the specific associations of the phrases—"hot fit of pride," "Afric's sands," "the old revolt from Awe"—that bring to mind Milton's style.

In a more general way, we may say that a good many poems, such as Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes,* Morris' *The Haystack in the Floods,* and Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel,* tell stories which have their setting in the Middle Ages or take their tone from the romance and religiosity of medieval literature. These are obvious examples of the continuing force of the metrical romance, with its highly sensuous descriptions and its vision of a life rich with mystical ardor, extreme peril, extreme desire—an "argent revelry," as Keats wrote, "with plume, tiara, and all rich array."

We come closer to the bare bones of narrative when we turn from these more sophisticated forms to the folk-ballads. There is no wide gap between the anonymous nursery rhymes of our first chapter and these songs. Both have their creative origin, like other folk-poetry, in association with music and dance—and in both the musical elements of refrain and varied repetition, as well as the pleasure of a simple rhyme and meter, are actively important in the dramatic and narrative presentation. In both, too, specific pictures and actions are presented without comment, and their meaning left to make itself felt without connective explanations.

Ballads are usually lively and direct, and charged with feeling despite the unknown author's reluctance to comment on what is happening. *The Hangman's Tree,* an American version of an old ballad known throughout Europe, well illustrates their stark, dramatic directness:

ANONYMOUS *The Hangman's Tree*

"Slack your rope, hangs-a-man,
0 slack it for a while.
1 think I see my father coming,
Riding many a mile."

"O father, have you brought me gold?
Or have you paid my fee?
Or have you come to see me hanging
On the gallows tree?"
"I have not brought you gold.
I have not paid your fee.
But I have come to see you hanging
On the gallows tree."

"Slack your rope, hangs-a-man,
0 slack it for a while.
1 think I see my mother coming,
Riding many a mile."

"O mother have you brought me gold?
Or have you paid my fee?"
Or have you come to see me hanging
On the gallows tree?"
"I have not brought you gold.
I have npt paid your fee.
But I have come to see you hanging
On the gallows tree."

"Slack your rope, hangs-a-man,
0 slack it for a while,
1 think I see my true love coming,
Riding many a mile,"

"O true love, have you brought me gold?
Or have you paid my fee?
Or have you come to see me hanging
On the gallows tree?"
"Yes, I have brought you gold.
Yes, I have paid your fee.
Nor have I come to see you hanging
On the gallows tree."

Why the speaker has been condemned to death—and a host of other questions—we cannot answer from this version of the song. Nor do the questions matter. The agonized, growing suspense, and then the suddenly relaxed tension, of the sentenced man does matter, however. We have certainly got down to the "bare bones" of plot in this series of alternating appeals, always in very nearly the same words, to the hangman and exchanges with father, mother, and sweetheart. The essence of danger, suspense, and release is dramatized in the simple idiomatic repetitions. The "hangs-a-man" is waiting there, silent and ready; the words "rope," "hangs-a-man," "hanging," "gallows tree" make it impossible for us to forget him at any point in the story, and that unassuming little rhyme of "while" and "mile" stresses the speaker's complete dependence on the luck of time and space. The back-and-forth movement of appeal and question-and-answer carries both the story and the dramatic charge of the story, and the music of the poem lies largely in the echoing of the same poignant colloquial phrases from beginning to end.

Many ballads come to us from the late Middle Ages, usually in several differing versions. Sometimes when we speak of ballads we think especially of a group of Scottish and English songs mostly collected since the eighteenth century, songs derived perhaps from the common folk's preliterate days, the products of anonymous authorship in a ceremonial setting, transmitted by memory until, often centuries later, interested students set them down for the first time. Their elemental simplicity, plus the fact that they deal with themes common to all folklore, doubtless accounts for their durability. A few stanzas selected at random may suggest better than a detailed explanation why they have haunted the imaginations of later writers.

The wind doth blow today, my love
  And a few small drops of rain;
I never had but one true love,
  In cold grave she was lain.
The Unquiet Grave

I dreamed I saw a battle fought
  Beyond the Isle o' Sky,
When lo, a dead man won the field,
  And I thought that man was I.
The Battle of Otterburn

And fair Margret, and rare Margret,
  And Margret o* veritie,
Gin e'er ye love another man,
  Ne'er love him as ye did me.
Clerk Saunders

And here are some stanzas from poems by modern authors who have employed the ballad form to get the same starkly suggestive effects:

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.
COLERIDGE, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Down came the storm, and smote amain
  The vessel in its strength;
She shuddered and paused, like a frightened steed,
  Then leaped her cable's length.
LONGFELLOW, *The Wreck of the Hesperus*

He touched not gold, it was not cold,
  It was not hard, it felt like flesh.
He drew out by the curling hair
  A young man's head, and murder'd fresh. . . .
BRIDGES, *Screaming Tarn*

One of the more striking medieval ballads is *The Three Ravens,* which is printed below for extended analysis since, though it is characteristic of the type, it is unusual in the number of elements which it combines.[2]

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[2] Notice that each of the stanzas follows the pattern of the first one. That is, the first line is repeated three times and the second sung only once; also, the "down a down" refrain arrangement is the same for each stanza. In the final three stanzas, "lake" means pit; "prime" is the first hour of the morning and "evensong" is evening—both terms referring to church-services as well as to times of day; and "leman" means sweetheart.

ANONYMOUS *The Three Ravens*

There were three ravens sat on a tree—
Down a down, hay down, hay down
There were three ravens sat on a tree—
With a down
There were three ravens sat on a tree—
They were as black as they might be.
With a down, deny, derry, derry, down, down.

The one of them said to his mate,
"Where shall we our breakfast take?"

"Down in yonder green field
There lies a knight slain under his shield.

"His hounds they lie down at his feet;
So well they can their master keep.

"His hawks they fly so eagerly
There's no fowl dare him come nigh."

Down there comes a fallow doe
As great with young as she might go.

She lift up his bloody head
And kissed his wounds that were so red.

She got him up upon her back
And carried him to earthen lake.

She buried him before the prime;
She was dead herself ere evensong time.

God send every gentleman
Such hawks, such hounds, and such a leman.

In this ballad, the unexplained elements excite our curiosity, But such questions as how did the knight die? and why and how did the doe move him to the burial pit? are comparatively insignificant. Because there is much here that would ordinarily demand explanation, what *is* given—and the way it is arranged—takes on an enhanced importance. It is the consequences of what has happened, not the cause, that the ballad emphasizes. This touching only on the high spots and skipping of transitional and explanatory details is typical of the ballads and, with the give and take of dialogue, is largely responsible for their dramatic power. It is a psychological strategy that keeps the reader in suspense and ready for new developments, a way of limiting the drama to its significant consequences.

The five beginning stanzas move more quickly and complexly than may at once be apparent. First we have the black ravens conversing, with that grisly understatement of a question about "breakfast." Then we stop looking at them, but through *their* eyes we turn our attention to a second point of concentration, the slain knight in the green fields.

Because these ominous scavenger birds literally live off death, there is a fierce and unsentimental logic in their use by the poet to set the mood of the song and to direct our thoughts toward the knight. (Tfre "logic" is like that of the motion-picture camera pointing up the most important related elements of a scene.) Meanwhile, the greenness of the field is in sharp contrast with the atmosphere of death, and so is the lively refrain with its three variations in every stanza. The net result of these effects set side by side—the black ravens, the gay refrain, the grotesquely comic reference to breakfast, the picture of the dead body in the midst of growing life (a theme repeated in another way later, when the pregnant doe enters the scene)—is a clear yet many-sided view of the relatedness of all experience: of life with death, tragedy with comedy, cruelty with sympathy. After the casual but morbid beginning there has been a startling closeup of a tragic end. The ravens remain consistently frivolous, horrible, antihuman; they complain that the knight's faithful hounds and hawks are keeping them from breakfast. But the other animals, with their pure devotion, provide a counterbalancing sort of ferocity.

So we have had several movements of focus in these five stanzas. Now the poem drops the ravens altogether, moving into straight narrative. In fqur stages, the effect of which is precisely opposite to that of the stanzas on the ravens, we see the gentle, loving, self-sacrificing movements of the doe. The hounds and hawks, it is true, were also self-sacrificing and loving; but they, like the knight himself, are in their own ways deadly fighters too. The doe, however, swings us to the extreme of absolute gentleness and suffering.

Left this way, the ballad would be complete and suggestive enough, but the last two lines give yet one more turn. In them the story-teller himself comments, expressing his admiration of the animals' loyalty; furthermore, he suggests that by "doe" he really means the knight's sweetheart, doubtless bearing his child. He is hinting too, it may be, that by hounds and hawks are symbolized faithful friends. We do not care whether the poem deals with some actual occurrence—a murder by ambush on a dark night, occasioned perhaps by a forbidden love-affair—that took place in the locality of the ballad's origin, or whether it is a product of pure imagination. But it does affect us that the final observation, though perhaps added at a later date than the original ballad, implies a chivalric ideal of loyalty and love. The speaker even seems to consider the dead knight fortunate, as though life itself were less important than the earning of such devotion.

There are other implications too. For instance, the ravens, in one sense at least, symbolize the brute evil, indifferent and destructive, against which man constructs his systems of value:

God send every gentleman
Such hawks, such hounds, and such a leman.

The values in which we believe are felt to be capable of surviving the death of individuals, whether we see them in a religious or in some other light. Serious lyric, dramatic, and narrative poetry ordinarily presents images, or pictures, which can be understood as ways of viewing the world and deriving values from it. (Remember Blake's vision of the tiger, or Arnold's picture of the lovers looking from their window at a world of darkness and deceptive beauty, or the picture in *The Hangman's Tree* of the lover arriving to change the fate of the condemned person.) To understand this fact is not necessarily to understand why a poem is or is not effective, though it does deepen our perception. There are mystical and religious associations in *The Three Ravens:* in the human speech and behavior of bird and beast, in the corpse in the living grass, and in the self-sacrifice which may bear a relation to the sacrifice of Christ or analogous sacrifices in primitive religions. But nothing is explained; all is *presented,* as in most ballads, mainly through vivid conversation and pictures which the reader himself must explore for the implied meanings. And always there is the refrain, dancing in and out among the lines of narrative and helping to make of the whole song a self-contained pattern of repeated sounds, parallel constructions, clear pictures, and ironic and tragic moments of concentration.

The importance of the refrain as a musical counterpoint and as a dividing mark between stanzas should remind us that, while important, the *story* in a ballad or any other narrative poem, is hardly what makes the poem. It is at best the skeleton underlying the living form. It is easy to see that in *The Three Ravens* the final effect is more influenced by the shifting of attention from ravens to knight to hounds and hawks to doe to the final comment than by the order of events in time. Ballads, like other poems, consist of many elements clashing and harmonizing until a point of equilibrium and over-all inclusiveness is reached. The time-sequence arrangement is probably the simplest method of organizing pictures, thoughts, and emotions, as well as sound-effects, into an organic whole that sings, dances, and implies a world of meaning and feeling.

Because of this great advantage of narrative form, there are many fine "literary ballads," imitations and variations of the folk-ballad form by professional poets. A great proportion of English verse, indeed, has some element or other of the ballad in it. Of the more obvious examples, the best known is undoubtedly Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (pages 343-363). This long poem has a number of sensational and supernatural incidents and is also a moral allegory dealing with sin and punishment at several levels, some obvious and some very subtle. But unlike the typical folk-ballad, Coleridge's poem has no gaps in explanation and is full of psychological self-examination, though a great deal of it is symbolic much as *The Three Ravens* is. The poem is a very sophisticated, elaborate construction; Coleridge wanted not only to write a modern ballad but to steep it in medieval religious atmosphere, complete with a literal belief in spirits, occult scholarship, and immersion in the problem of soul-salvation. At the same time, he attempted to visualize concretely just what an experience like the "ancient mariner's" would actually feel like. In spite of the involved problem he set himself, he often achieved the vigor and directness of the folk ballad.

In our own day, a number of poets have worked with the literary ballad—among them John Masefield, Rudyard Kipling, A. E. Housman, W. B. Yeats, and W. H. Auden. Here is an example of a fine modern ballad:

w. H. AUDEN *O what is that sound which so thrills the ear*

O what is that sound which so thrills the ear
   Down in the valley drumming, drumming?
Only the scarlet soldiers, dear,
   The soldiers coming.

O what is that light I see flashing so clear
   Over the distance brightly, brightly?
Only the sun on their weapons, dear,
   As they step lightly.

O what are they doing with all that gear,
   What are they doing this morning, this morning?
Only their usual manoeuvres, dear,
   Or perhaps a warning.

O why have they left the road down there,
   Why are they suddenly wheeling, wheeling?
Perhaps a change in their orders, dear.
   Why are you kneeling?

O haven't they stopped for the doctor's care,
   Haven't they reined their horses, their horses?
Why, they are none of them wounded, dear,
   None of these forces.

Or is it the parson they want, with white hair,
   Is it the parson, is it, is it?
No, they are passing his gateway, dear,
   Without a visit.

O it must be the farmer who lives so near.
  It must be the farmer so cunning, so cunning?
They have passed the farmyard already, dear,
  And now they are running.

O where are you going? Stay with me here!
  Were the vows you swore deceiving, deceiving?
No, I promised to love you, dear,
  But I must be leaving.

O it's broken the lock and splintered the door,
  O it's the gate where they're turning, turning;
Their boots are heavy on the floor
  And their eyes are burning.

In its dramatic, colloquial phrasing and "incremental repetitions" (repetitions of form—such as question and answer—with the content changing in each stanza), this ballad by a contemporary writfer is certainly very like a traditional ballad. Another similarity lies in its omissions. Just who the soldiers are and what the exact circumstances of the two speakers may be we cannot tell, but we do know that the coming of the troops has a terrible inevitability and will leave the destruction of the lovers' relationship in its wake.

One important difference can be observed. In a ballad like *The Three Ravens* the final situation is always fairly clear; such poetry is close enough to simple story-telling to have it important that the story *get* somewhere, as a story. In Auden's poem, though, the sense of terror is more important than the actual pictures of the narrative. Whether the soldiers are coming to conscript or arrest or murder the lover, or represent some other purpose still, would be hard to say finally. Nor do we know whether or not the poet feels completely sympathetic with the girl who is being abandoned. Auden's poem is as impersonal (that is, he hides his emotional sympathies to a certain extent) as most other ballads are, for they too present dynamic situations rather than private feelings or interpretation. But his poem ends not after a completed action or relationship but at the moment when crisis actually breaks in on his characters. Along with Coleridge, he is more consciously interested in exploring the emotions associated with a moral problem or predicament than the ballad-makers were. Like Coleridge he has sacrificed true simplicity for this conscious purpose, but like him too he has borrowed strength from the poetry of folk-tradition.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

i. English and Scottish Popular Ballads

ANONYMOUS *Sir Patrick Spens*

THE KING sits in Dunfermline town
Drinking the blude-red wine:
"O whar will I get guid sailor,
To sail this ship of mine?"

Up and spake an eldern knight,
Sat at the king's right knee;
"Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor
That sails upon the sea."

The King has written a braid letter,
And sign'd it wi' his hand,
And sent it to Sir Patrick Spens,
Was walking on the sand.

The first line that Sir Patrick read,
A loud laugh laughed he;
The next line that Sir Patrick read,
The tear blinded his e'e.

"O wha is this has done this deed,
This ill deed done to me,
To send me out this time o' the year,
To sail upon the sea!

"Make haste, make haste, my merry men all,
Our guid ship sails the morn":
"O say na sae, my master dear,
For I fear a deadly storm.

"Late late yestre'en I saw the new moon,
  Wi' the auld moon in her arm,
And I fear, I fear, my dear master,
  That we will come to harm."

O our Scots nobles were right laith
  To wet their cork-heel'd schoon;
But lang ere a' the play were play'd,
  Their hats they swam aboon.[1]

O lang, lang may their ladies sit,
  Wi' their fans into their hand,
Or e'er they see Sir Patrick Spens
  Come sailing to the land.

O lang, lang may the ladies stand,
  Wi' their golden kames[2] in their hair,
Waiting for their ain dear lords
  For they'll see them na mair.

Ha'f o'er, ha'f o'er to Aberdour,
  It's fifty fathom deep,
And there lies guid Sir Patrick Spens,
  Wi' the Scots lords at his feet.

ANONYMOUS *The Wife of Usher's Well*

THERE LIVED a wife at Usher's Well,
  And a wealthy wife was she;
She had three stout and stalwart sons,
  And sent them o'er the sea.

They hadna been a week from her,
  A week but barely one,
When word came to the carline wife[3]
  That her three sons were gone.

---

[1] above
[2] combs
[3] old woman

They hadna been a week from her,
A week but barely three,
When came word to the carline wife
That her sons she'd never see.

"I wish the wind may never cease,
Nor fashes[4] in the flood,
Till my three sons come hame to me,
In earthly flesh and blood."

It fell about the Martinmass,
When nights are lang and mirk,
The carline wife's three sons came hame,
And their hats were o' the birk.[5]

It neither grew in syke[6] nor ditch,
Nor yet in any sheugh[7]
But at the gates o' Paradise,
That birfc grew fair enough.

* * * *

"Blow up the fire, my maidens,
Bring water from the well;
For a' my house shall feast this night,
Since my three sons are well."

And she has made to them a bed,
She's made it large and wide,
And she's ta'en her mantle her about,
Sat down at the bed-side.

* * * *

Up then crew the red, red cock,
And up and crew the gray;
The eldest to the youngest said,
" 'Tis time we were away."

---

[4] troubles
[5] birch
[6] marsh
[7] furrow

The cock he hadna craw'd but once,
  And clapp'd his wings at a',
When the youngest to the eldest said,
  "Brother, we must awaV

"The cock doth craw, the day doth daw:
  The channerin'[8] worm doth chide;
Gin[9] we be miss'd out o' our place,
  A sair pain we maun bide.

"Fare ye well, my mother dear!
  Farewell to barn and byre!
And fare ye well, the bonny lass
  That kindles my mother's fire!"

ANONYMOUS *Edward, Edward*

I

"WHY DOES your brand[10] sae drop wi' blude,
    Edward, Edward?
Why does your brand sae drop wi' blude,
  And why sae sad gang[11] ye, O?"—
"O I hae kill'd my hawk sae gude,
    Mither, mither;
O I hae kill'd my hawk sae gude,
  And I had nae mair but he, O."

II

"Your hawk's blude was never sae red,
    Edward, Edward;
Your hawk's blude was never sae red,
  My dear son, I tell thee, O."—
"O I hae kill'd my red-roan steed,
    Mither, mither;
O I hae kill'd my red-roan steed,
  That erst was sae fair and free, O."

---

[8] fretting [9] if [10] sword [11] go

III

"Your steed was auld, and ye hae got mair,
Edward, Edward;
Your steed was auld, and ye hae got mair;
Some other dule ye dree,[12] O."
"Oh I hae kill'd my father dear,
Mither, mither;
O I hae kill'd my father dear,
Alas, and wae is me, O!"

IV

"And whatten penance will ye dree[12] for that,
Edward, Edward?
Whatten penance will ye dree for that?
My dear son, now tell me, O."—
"I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
Mithgr, mither;
I'll set my feet in yonder boat,
And I'll fare over the sea, O."

V

"And what will ye do wi' your tow'rs and your ha',
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye do wi' your tow'rs and your ha',
That were sae fair to see, O?"—
"I'll let them stand till they doun fa',
Mither, mither;
I'll let them stand till they doun fa',
For here never mair maun I be, O."

VI

"And what will ye leave to your bairns and your wife,
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye leave to your bairns and your wife,
When ye gang owre the sea, O?"—

---

[12] grief ("dule") you suffer ("dree")

"The warld's room: let them beg through life,
Mither, mither;
The warld's room: let them beg through life;
For them never mair will I see, O."

vn

"And what will ye leave to your ain mither dear,
Edward, Edward?
And what will ye leave to your ain mither dear,
My dear son, now tell me, O?"—
"The curse of hell frae me sail ye bear,
Mither, mither;
The curse of hell frae me sail ye bear:
Sic counsels ye gave to me, O!"

ANONYMOUS *The Two, Corbies*™

As I WAS walking all alane,
I heard twa corbies making a mane;[14]
The tane unto the t' other say,
"Where sail we gang and dine today?"

"In behint yon auld fail dyke,[15]
I wot there lies a new-slain knight;
And naebody kens that he lies there,
But his hawk, his hound, and lady fair.

"His hound is to the hunting gane,
His hawk to fetch the wild-fowl hame,
His lady's ta'en another mate,
So we may mak our dinner sweet.

"Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,[16]
And I'll pick out his bonny blue een;
Wi' ae lock o' his gowden hair
We'll theek[17] our nest when it grows bare.

---

[18] two ravens [14] moan \[5] turf thrown up from a ditch
[16] neck bone [17] thatch

"Mony a one for him makes mane,
But nane sail ken where he is gane;
O'er his white banes when they are bare,
The wind sail blaw for evermair."

ANONYMOUS *The Unquiet Grave*

"THE WIND doth blow today, my love,
And a few small drops of rain;
I never had but one true-love,
In cold grave she was lain.

'Til do as much for my true-love
As any young man may;
I'll sit and mourn all at her grave
For a twelvemonth and a day."

The twelvemonth and a day being up,
The dead began to speak:
"Oh who sits weeping on my grave,
And will not let me sleep?"

" 'Tis I, my love, sits on your grave,
And will not let you sleep;
For I crave one kiss of your clay-cold lips,
And that is all I seek."

"You crave one kiss of my clay-cold lips;
But my breath smells earthy strong;
If you have one kiss of my clay-cold lips,
Your time will not be long.

" 'Tis down in yonder garden green,
Love, where we used to walk,
The finest flower that e'er was seen
Is withered to a stalk.

"The stalk is withered dry, my love,
So will our hearts decay;
So make yourself content, my love,
Till God calls you away."

2. Tales and Literary Ballads

ROBERT BRIDGES *Screaming Tarn*

THE SADDEST place that e'er I saw
Is the deep tarn above the inn
That crowns the mountain-road, whereby
One southward bound his way must win.

Sunk on the table of the ridge
From its deep shores is nought to see:
The unresting wind lashes and chills
Its shivering ripples ceaselessly.

Three sides 'tis banked with stones aslant,
And down the fourth the rushes grow,
And yellow sedge fringing the edge
With lengthen'd image all arow.

'Tis square and black, and on its face
When noon is still, the mirror'd sky
Looks dark and further from the earth
Than when you gaze at it on high.

At mid of night, if one be there,
—So say the people of the hill—
A fearful shriek of death is heard,
One sudden scream both loud and shrill.

And some have seen on stilly nights,
And when the moon was clear and round,
Bubbles which to the surface swam
And burst as if they held the sound.—

'Twas in the days ere hapless Charles
Losing his crown had lost his head,
This tale is told of him who kept
The inn upon the watershed:

He was a lowbred ruin'd man
Whom lawless times set free from fear:
One evening to his house there rode
A young and gentle cavalier.

With curling hair and linen fair
And jewel-hiked sword he went;
The horse he rode he had ridden far,
And he was with his journey spent.

He asked a lodging for the night,
His valise from his steed unbound,
He let none bear it but himself
And set it by him on the ground.

"Here's gold or jewels," thought the host,
"That's carrying south to find the king."
He chattered many a loyal word,
And scraps of royal airs gan sing.

His guest thereat grew more at ease
And o'er his wine he gave a toast,
But little ate, and to his room
Carried his sack behind the host.

"Now rest you well," the host he said,
But of his wish the word fell wide;
Nor did he now forget his son
Who fell in fight by Cromwell's side.

Revenge and poverty have brought
Full gentler heart than his to crime;
And he was one by nature rude,
Born to foul deeds at any time.

With unshod feet at dead of night
In stealth he to the guest-room crept,
Lantern and dagger in his hand,
And stabbed his victim while he slept.

But as he struck a scream there came,
A fearful scream so loud and shrill:
He whelm'd the face with pillows o'er,
And lean'd till all had long been still.

Then to the face the flame he held
To see there should no life remain:—
When lo! his brutal heart was quell'd:
'Twas a fair woman he had slain.

The tan upon her face was paint,
The manly hair was torn away,
Soft was the breast that he had pierced;
Beautiful in her death she lay.

His was no heart to faint at crime,
Tho' half he wished the deed undone.
He pulled the valise from the bed
To find what booty he had won.

He cut the straps, and pushed within
His murderous fingers to their theft.
A deathly sweat came o'er his brow,
He had no sense nor meaning left.

He touched not gold, it was not cold,
It was not hard, it felt like flesh.
He drew out by the curling hair
A young man's head, and murder'd fresh;

A young man's head, cut by the neck.
But what was dreader still to see,
Her whom he had slain he saw again,
The twain were like aslike can be.

Brother and sister if they were,
  Both in one shroud they now were wound.—
Across his back and down the stair,
  Out of the house without a sound.

He made his way unto the tarn,
  The night was dark and still and dank;
The ripple chuckling neath the boat
  Laughed as he drew it to the bank.

Upon the bottom of the boat
  He laid his burden flat and low,
And on them laid the square sandstones
  That round about the margin go.

Stone upon stone he weighed them down,
  Until the boat would hold no more;
The freeboard now was scarce an inch:
  He stripped his clothes and push'd from shore.

All naked to the middle pool
  He swam behind in the dark night;
And there he let the water in
  And sank his terror out of sight.

He swam ashore, and donn'd his dress,
  And scraped his bloody fingers clean;
Ran home and on his victim's steed
  Mounted, and never more was seen.

But to a comrade ere he died
  He told his story guess'd of none:
So from his lips the crime returned
  To haunt the spot where it was done.

RUDYARD KIPLING *Danny Deever*

"WHAT ARE the bugles blowin' for?" said Files-on-Parade.
"To turn you out, to turn you out/' the Color-Sergeant said.
"What makes you look so white, so white?" said Files-on-Parade.
"I'm dreadin' what I've got to watch," the Color-Sergeant said.
For they're hangin' Danny Deever, you can 'ear the Dead March play,
The regiment's in 'ollow square — they're hangin' him today;
They've taken of his buttons off an' cut his stripes away,
An' they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

"What makes the rear-rank breathe so 'ardl" said Files-on-Parade.
"It's bitter cold, it's bitter cold," the Color-Sergeant said.
"What makes the front-rank man fall down?" says Files-on-Parade.
"A touch of sun, a touch of sun," the Color-Sergeant said.
They are hangin' Danny Deever, they are marchin' of 'im round.
They 'ave 'alted Danny Deever by 'is coffin on the ground:
An' 'e'll swing in 'arf a minute for a sneakin' shootin' hound—
O they're hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'I

" 'Is cot was right-'and cot to mine," said Files-on-Parade.
" 'E's sleepin' out an' far tonight," the Color-Sergeant said.
"I've drunk 'is beer a score o' times," said Files-on-Parade.
" 'E's drinkin' bitter beer alone," the Color-Sergeant said.
They are hangin' Danny Deever, you must mark 'im to 'is place,
For 'e shot a comrade sleepin' — you must look 'im in the face;
Nine 'undred of 'is county an' the regiment's disgrace,
While they're hangin' Efanny Deever in the mornin'.

"What's that so black agin the sun?" said Files-on-Parade.
"It's Danny fightin' 'ard for life," the Color-Sergeant said.
"What's that that whimpers over'ead?" said Files-on-Parade.
"It's Danny's soul that's passin' now," the Color-Sergeant said.
For they're done with Danny Deever, you can 'ear the quickstep play,
The regiment's in column, an' they're marchin' us away;
Ho! the young recruits are shakin', an' they'll want their beer today,
After hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

JOHN KEATS *The Eve of St. Agnes*

I

ST. AGNES' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seemed taking flight for Heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

ii

His prayer he saith, this patient, holy man;
Then takes his lamp, and riseth from his knees,
And back returneth, meagre, barefoot, wan,
Along the chapel aisle by slow degrees:
The sculptured dead on each side seem to freeze,
Imprisoned in black, purgatorial rails:
Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,
He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails
To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

III

Northward he turneth through a little door,
And scarce three steps, ere Music's golden tongue
Flattered to tears this aged man and poor;
But no—already had his deathbell rung:
The joys of all his life were said and sung.
His was harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve:
Another way he went, and soon among
Rough ashes sat he for his soul's reprieve,
And all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve.

IV

That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft;
And so it chanced, for many a door was wide,
From hurry to and fro. Soon, up aloft,
The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide:
The level chambers, ready with their pride,
Were glowing to receive a thousand guests:
The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,
Stared, where upon their heads the cornice rests,
With hair blown back, and wings put crosswise on their breasts.

V

At length burst in the argent revelry,
With plume, tiara, and all rich array,
Numerous as shadows haunting faerily
The brain, new stuffed, in youth, with triumphs gay
Of old romance. These let us wish away,
And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there,
Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,
On love, and winged St. Agnes' saintly care,
As she had heard old dames full many times declare.

VI

They told her how, upon St. Agnes' Eve,
Young virgins might have visions of delight,

And soft adorings from their loves receive
Upon the honeyed middle of the night,
If ceremonies due they did aright;
As, supperless to bed they must retire,
And couch supine their beauties, lily white;
Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require
Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.

VII

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline:
The music, yearning like a God in pain,
She scarcely heard: her maiden eyes divine,
Fixed on the floor, saw many a sweeping train
Pass by—she heeded not at all: in vain
Came many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier,
And back retired; not cooled by high disdain,
But she saw not: her heart was otherwhere:
She sighed for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

VIII

She danced along with vague, regardless eyes,
Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short:
The hallowed hour was near at hand: she sighs
Amid the timbrels, and the thronged resort
Of whisperers in anger, or in sport;
'Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,
Hoodwinked with faery fancy; all amort,
Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,
And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.

IX

So, purposing each moment to retire,
She lingered still. Meantime, across the moors,
Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire
For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,
Buttressed from moonlight, stands he, and implores
All saints to give him sight of Madeline,

But for one moment in the tedious hours,
That he might gaze and worship all unseen;
Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss — in sooth such things have been.

X

He ventures in: let no buzzed whisper tell:
All eyes be muffled, or a hundred swords
Will storm his heart, Love's fev'rous citadel:
For him, those chambers held barbarian hordes,
Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords,
Whose very dogs would execrations howl
Against his lineage: not one breast affords
Him any mercy, in that mansion foul,
Save one old beldame, weak in body and in soul.

XI

Ah, happy chancel the aged creature came,
Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand,
To where he stood, hid from the torch's flame,
Behind a broad hall-pillar, far beyond
The sound of merriment and chorus bland:
He startled her; but soon she knew his face,
And grasped his fingers in her palsied hand,
Saying, "Mercy, Porphyro! hie thee from this place:
They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race!

XII

"Get hence! get hence! there's dwarfish Hildebrand;
He had a fever late, and in the fit
He cursèd thee and thine, both house and land:
Then there's that old Lord Maurice, not a whit
More tame for his gray hairs—Alas me! flit!
Flit like a ghost away."—"Ah, Gossip dear,
We're safe enough; here in this arm chair sit,
And tell me how"—"Good saints! not here, not here;
Follow me, child, or else these stones will be thy bier."

XIII

He followed through a lowly arched way,
Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume,
And as she muttered "Well-a—well-a-day!"
He found him in a little moonlight room,
Pale, latticed, chill, and silent as a tomb.
"Now tell me where is Madeline," said he,
"Oh tell me Angela, by the holy loom
Which none but secret sisterhood may see,
When they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously."

XIV

"St. Agnes! Ah! it is St. Agnes' Eve—
Yet men will murder upon holy days:
Thou must hold water in a witch's sieve,
And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays,
To venture so: it fills me with amaze
To see thee, Porphyro!—St. Agnes' Eve!
God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays
This very night: good angels her deceive!
But let me laugh awhile, I've mickle time to grieve."

XV

Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon
While Porphyro upon her face doth look,
Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone
Who keepeth closed a wond'rous riddle-book,
As spectacled she sits in chimney nook.
But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told
His lady's purpose; and he scarce could brook
Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold,
And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.

XVI

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart
Made purple riot: then doth he propose

A stratagem, that makes the beldame start:
"A cruel man and impious thou art:
Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
Alone with her good angels, far apart
From wicked men like thee. Go, go!—I deem
Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem."

XVII

"I will not harm her, by all saints I swear,"
Quoth Porphyro: "O may I ne'er find grace
When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer,
If one of her soft ringlets I displace,
Or look with ruffian passion in her face:
Good Angela, believe me by these tears;
Or I will, even in a moment's space,
Awake, with horrid shout, my foemen's ears,
And beard them, though they be more fanged than wolves and bears/'

XVIII

"Ah! why wilt thou affright a feeble soul?
A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing,
Whose passing-bell may ere the midnight toll;
Whose prayers for thee, each morn and evening,
Were never missed."—Thus plaining, doth she bring
A gentler speech from burning Porphyro;
So woful, and of such deep sorrowing,
That Angela gives promise she will do
Whatever he shall wish, betide her weal or woe.

XIX

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,
Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide
Him in a closet, of such privacy
That he might see her beauty unespied,
And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,
While legioned faeries paced the coverlet,

And pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed.
Never on such a night have lovers met,
Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.

XX

"It shall be as thou wishest," said the Dame:
"All cates and dainties shall be stored there
Quickly on this feast-night: by the tambour frame
Her own lute thou wilt see: no time to spare,
For I am slow and feeble, and scarce dare
On such a catering trust my dizzy head.
Wait here, my child, with patience; kneel in prayer
The while: Ah! thou must needs the lady wed,
Or may I never leave my grave among the dead."

XXI

So saying she hobbled off with busy fear,
The lover's endless minutes slowly passed;
The dame returned, and whispered in his ear
To follow her; with aged eyes aghast
From fright of dim espial. Safe at last,
Through many a dusky gallery, they gain
The maiden's chamber, silken, hushed, and chaste;
Where Porphyro took covert, pleased amain.
His poor guide hurried back with agues in her brain.

XXII

Her faltering hand upon the balustrade,
Old Angela was feeling for the stair,
When Madeline, St. Agnes' charmed maid,
Rose, like a missioned spirit, unaware:
With silver taper's light, and pious care,
She turned, and down the aged gossip led
To a safe level matting. Now prepare,
Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed;
She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove frayed and fled.

XXIII

Out went the taper as she hurried in;
Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died:
She closed the door, she panted, all akin
To spirits of the air, and visions wide:
No uttered syllable, or, woe betide!
But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side;
As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

XXIV

A casement high and triple-arched there was,
All garlanded with carven imageries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damasked wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and kings.

XXV

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seemed a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

XXVI

Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;

Loosens her fragrant bodice; by degrees
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
Half-hidden like a mermaid in sea-weed,
Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

XXVII

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplexed she lay,
Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppressed
Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away;
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;
Blissfully havened both from joy and pain;
Clasped like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.

XXVIII

Stolen to this paradise, and so entranced,
Porphyro gazed upon her empty dress,
And listened to her breathing, if it chanced
To wake into a slumberous tenderness;
Which when he heard, that minute did he bless,
And breathed himself: then from the closet crept,
Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness,
And over the hushed carpet, silent stept,
And 'tween the curtains peeped, where lo!—how fast she slept.

XXIX

Then by the bedside, where the faded moon
Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set
A table, and, half anguished, threw thereon
A cloth of woven crimson, gold, and jet:—
O for some drowsy Morphean amulet!
The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,

The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarinet,
Affray his ears, though but in dying tone:—
The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

XXX

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanchèd linen, smooth, and lavendered,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferred
From Fez; and spicèd dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon.

XXXI

These delicates he heaped with glowing hand
On golden dishes and in baskets bright
Of wreathed silver: sumptuous they stand
In the retired quiet of the night,
Filling the chilly room with perfume light.—
"And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!
Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite:
Open thine eyes for meek St. Agnes' sake,
Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache."

xxxii

Thus whispering, his warm, unnervèd arm
Sank in her pillow. Shaded was her dream
By the dusk curtains:—'twas a midnight charm
Impossible to melt as iced stream:
The lustrous salvers in the moonlight gleam;
Broad golden fringe upon the carpet lies:
It seemed he never, never could redeem
From such a stedfast spell his lady's eyes;
So mused awhile, entoiled in woofèd phantasies.

XXXIII

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute,—
Tumultuous,—and, in chords that tenderest be,
He played an ancient ditty, long since mute,
In Provence called, "La belle dame sans mercy":
Close to her ear touching the melody;—
Wherewith disturbed, she uttered a soft moan:
He ceased—she panted quick—and suddenly
Her blue affrayèd eyes wide open shone:
Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.

XXXIV

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,
Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep:
There was a painful change, that nigh expelled
The blisses of her dream so pure and deep;
At which fair Madeline began to weep,
And moan forth witless words with many a sigh;
While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep;
Who knelt, with joinèd hands and piteous eye,
Fearing to move or speak, she looked so dreamingly.

XXXV

"Ah, Porphyro!" said she, "but even now
Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,
Made tuneable with every sweetest vow;
And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:
How changed thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!
Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!
Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,
For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go."

XXXVI

Beyond a mortal man impassioned far
At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
Ethereal, flushed, and like a throbbing star

Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet,—
Solution sweet: meantime the frost-wind blows
Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

XXXVII

'Tis dark: quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet:
"This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!"
'Tis dark: the icèd gusts still rave and beat:
"No dream, alasl alasl and woe is mine!
Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.—
Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring?
I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,
Though thou forsakest a deceived thing;—
A dove forlorn and lost with sick unprunfcd wing."

XXXVIII

"My Madeline! sweet dreamer! lovely bride!
Say, may I be for ay thy vassal blest?
Thy beauty's shield, heart-shaped and vermeil dyed?
Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest
After so many hours of toil and quest,
A famished pilgrim,—saved by miracle.
Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest
Saving of thy sweet self; if thou think'st well
To trust, fair Madeline, to no rude infidel.

XXXIX

"Hark! 'tis an elfin-storm from faery land,
Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed:
Arise—arise! the morning is at hand;—
The bloated wassaillers will never heed:—
Let us away, my love, with happy speed;
There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see,—
Drowned all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead:
Awake! arise! my love, and fearless be,
For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee."

XL

She hurried at his words, beset with fears,
For there were sleeping dragons all around,
At glaring watch, perhaps, with ready spears—
Down the wide stairs a darkling way they found.—
In all the house was heard no human sound.
A chain-drooped lamp was flickering by each door;
The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,
Fluttered in the besieging wind's uproar;
And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

XLI

They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall;
Like phantoms, to the iron porch they glide;
Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,
With a huge empty flagon by his side:
The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,
But his sagacious eye an inmate owns:
By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:—
The chains lie silent on the footworn stones;—
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans.

XLII

And they are gone: aye, ages long ago
These lovers fled away into the storm.
That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,
And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form
Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm
Were long be-nightmared. Angela the old
Died palsy-twitched, with meagre face deform;
The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,
For ay unsought for slept among his ashes cold.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

PART THE FIRST

IT is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
"By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

An ancient Mariner meeteth three Gallants bidden to a wedding-feast, and detaineth one.

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din."

He holds him with his skinny hand,
"There was a ship," quoth he.
"Hold off, unhand me, greybeard loon!"
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three-years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest is spell-bound by the eye of the old sea-faring man, and constrained to hear his tale.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

"The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.

The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

The Mariner tells how the ship sailed southward with a good wind and fair weather, till it reached the line.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon—"
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The Wedding-Guest heareth the bridal music; but the Mariner continueth his tale.

The Bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

"And now the storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his overtaking wings,
And chased us south along.

The ship driven by a storm toward the South Pole.

With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The land of ice, and of fearful sounds, where no living thing was to be seen.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and
howled,
Like noises in a swoundl

At length did cross an Albatross:
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God's name.

Till a great sea-bird, called the Albatross, came through the snow-fog, and was received with great joy and hospitality.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through!

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariners' hollo!

And lo! the Albatross proveth a bird of good omen, and followeth the ship as it returned northward through fog and floating ice.

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke
white,
Glimmered the white moonshine."

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?"—"With my crossbow
I shot the Albatross."

The ancient Mariner inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen.

PART THE SECOND

"The Sun now rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariners' hollo!

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

His shipmates cry out against the ancient Mariner for killing the bird of good luck.

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.

But when the fog cleared off, they justify the same, and thus make themselves accomplices in the crime.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

The fair breeze continues; the ship enters the Pacific Ocean and sails northward, even till it reaches the Line.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

The ship hath been suddenly becalmed.

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

And the Albatross begins to be avenged.

The very deep did rot; O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue, and white.

And some in dreams assured were
Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the land of mist and snow.

A Spirit had followed them; one of the invisible inhabitants of this planet, neither departed souls nor angels; concerning whom the learned Jew, Josephus, and the Platonic Constantinopolitan, Michael Psellus, may be consulted. They are very numerous, and there is no climate or element without one or more.

And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well-a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

The shipmates, in their sore distress, would fain throw the whole guilt on the ancient Mariner: in sign whereof they hang the dead sea-bird round his neck.

PART THE THIRD

"There passed a weary time. Each throat
Was parched, and glazed each eye.
A weary time! a weary time!
How glazed each weary eye!
When looking westward, I beheld
A something in the sky.

The ancient Mariner beholdeth a sign in the element afar off.

At first it seemed a little speck,
And then it seemed a mist;
It moved and moved, and took at last
A certain shape, I wist.

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
And still it neared and neared:
As if it dodged a watersprite,
It plunged and tacked and veered.

With throats unslaked, with black lips
baked,
We could not laugh nor wail;
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,
And cried, A sail! a sail!

At its nearer approach it seemeth him to be a ship; and at a dear ransom he freeth his speech from the bonds of thirst.

With throats unslaked, with black lips
baked,
Agape they heard me call:
Gramercy! they for joy did grin,
And all at once their breath drew in,
As they were drinking all.

A flash of joy;

See! See! (I cried) she tacks no more!
Hither to work us weal;
Without a breeze, without a tide,
She steadies with upright keel!

And horror follows. For can it be a ship that comes onward without wind or tide?

The western wave was all a-flame.
The day was well-nigh done!
Almost upon the western wave
Rested the broad bright Sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,
(Heaven's Mother send us grace!)
As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face.

It seemeth him but the skeleton of a ship.

Alasl (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she nears and nears!
Are those her sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres!

And its ribs are seen as bars on the face of the setting Sun.

The Spectre-Woman and her Death-mate, and no other on board the skeleton ship.

Are those her ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that woman's mate?

Like vessel, like crew!

Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

Death and Life-in-Death have diced for the ship's crew, and she (the latter) winneth the ancient Mariner.

The naked hulk alongside came
And the twain were casting dice;
'The game is donel I've won, I've won!'
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

No twilight within the courts of the Sun.

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre-bark.

We listened and looked sideways up!
Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
My life-blood seemed to sip!
The stars,were dim, and thick the night,
The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed
white;
From the sails the dew did drip—
Till clomb above the eastern bar
The horn&d Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip.

At the rising of the Moon,

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,
Too quick for groan or sigh,
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye.

One after another,

Four times fifty living men,
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

His shipmates drop down dead;

The souls did from their bodies fly,—
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my cross-bowl"

But Life-in-Death begins her work on the ancient Mariner.

PART THE FOURTH

"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribbed sea-sand.

The Wedding-Guest feareth that a spirit is talking to him;

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand, so brown/'—
"Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!
This body dropt not down.

But the ancient Mariner assureth him of his bodily life, and proceedeth to relate his horrible penance.

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

He despiseth the creatures of the calm.

I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

And envieth that they should live, and so many lie dead.

I looked to Heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky,
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they;
The look with which they looked on me
Had never passed away.

But the curse liveth for him in the eye of the dead men.

An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is a curse in a dead man's eye!
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—

In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying Moon, and the Stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and everywhere the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.

Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt alway
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.

Their beauty and their happiness.

He blesseth them in his heart.

The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

The spell begins to break.

PART THE FIFTH

"Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary Queen the praise be given!
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remained,
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;
And when I awoke, it rained.

By grace of the holy Mother, the ancient Mariner is refreshed with rain.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
I was so light—almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blessed ghost.

He heareth sounds and seeth strange sights and commotions in the sky and the element.

And soon I saw a roaring wind:
It did not come anear;
But with its sound it shook the sails,
That were so thin and sere.

The upper air burst into life!
And a hundred fire-flags sheen,
To and fro they were hurried about!
And to and fro, and in and out,
The wan stars danced between.

And the coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge;
And the rain poured down from one black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge.

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
The Moon was at its side:
Like waters shot from some high crag,
The lightning fell with never a jag,
A river steep and wide.

The bodies of the ship's crew are inspired, and the ship moves on;

The loud wind never reached the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on!
Beneath the lightning and the Moon
The dead men gave a groan.

They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;
Yet never a breeze up blew;
The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,
Where they were wont to do;
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—
We were a ghastly crew.

The body of my brother's son
Stood by me, knee to knee:
The body and I pulled at one rope,
But he said nought to me."

"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!"
"Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest!
'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,
Which to their corses came again,
But a troop of spirits blest:

but not by the souls of the men, nor by daemons of earth or middle air, but by a blessed troop of angelic spirits, sent down by the invocation of the guardian saint.

For when it dawned—they dropt their arms,
And clustered round the mast;
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their
mouths,
And from their bodies passed.

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
Then darted to the Sun;
Slowly the sounds came back again,
Now mixed, now one by one.

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky
I heard the skylark sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoningl

And now 'twas like all instruments,
Now like a lonely flute;
And now it is an angel's song,
That makes the Heavens be mute.

It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

Till noon we quietly sailed on,
Yet never a breeze did breathe:
Slowly and smoothly went the ship,
Moved onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep,
From the land of mist and snow,
The Spirit slid: and it was he
That made the ship to go.
The sails at noon left off their tune,
And the ship stood still also.

The lonesome Spirit from the South Pole carries on the ship as far as the Line, in obedience to the angelic troop, but still requireth vengeance.

The Sun, right up above the mast,
Had fixed her to the ocean:
But in a minute she 'gan stir,
With a short uneasy motion—
Backwards and forwards half her length
With a short uneasy motion.

Then, like a pawing horse let go,
She made a sudden bound:
It flung the blood into my head,
And I fell down in a swound.

How long in that same fit I lay,
I have not to declare;
But ere my living life returned,
I heard and in my soul discerned
Two voices in the air.

The Polar Spirit's fellow daemons, the invisible inhabitants of the element, take part in his wrong; and two of them relate, one to the other, that penance long and heavy for the ancient Mariner hath been accorded to the Polar Spirit, who returneth southward.

'Is it he?' quoth one, 'Is this the man?
By Him who died on cross,
With his cruel bow he laid full low
The harmless Albatross.

The Spirit who bideth by himself
In the land of mist and snow,
He loved the bird that loved the man
Who shot him with his bow.'

The other was a softer voice,
As soft as honeydew:
Quoth he, 'The man hath penance done,
And penance more will do/

PART THE SIXTH

First Voice

'But tell me, tell me! speak again,
Thy soft response renewing—
What makes that ship drive on so fast?
What is the ocean doing?'

Second Voice

'Still as a slave before his lord,
The Ocean hath no blast;
His great bright eye most silently
Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;
For she guides him smooth or grim.
See, brother, see! how graciously
She looketh down on him.'

First Voice

'But why drives on that ship so fast,
Without or wave or wind?'

Second Voice

'The air is cut away before,
And closes from behind.

The Mariner hath been cast into a trance; for the angelic power causeth the vessel to drive northward faster than human life could endure.

Fly, brother, flyl more high, more high!
Or we shall be belated:
For slow and slow that ship will go,
When the Mariner's trance is abated/

I woke, and we were sailing on
As in a gentle weather:
'Twas night, calm night, the Moon was high;
The dead men stood together.

The supernatural motion is retarded; the Mariner awakes, and his penance begins anew.

All stood together on the deck,
For a charnel-dungeon fitter:
All fixed on me their stony eyes,
That in the Moon did glitter.

The pang, the curse, with which they died,
Had never passed away:
I could not draw my eyes from theirs
Nor turn them up to pray.

And now this spell was snapt: once more
I viewed the ocean green,
And looked far forth, yet little saw
Of what had else been seen—

The curse is finally expiated.

Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.

But soon there breathed a wind on me,
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my tears,
Yet it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sailed softly too:
Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—
On me alone it blew.

And the ancient Mariner beholdeth his native country.

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The lighthouse top I see?
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,
And I with sobs did pray—
O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep alway.

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,
So smoothly was it strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the Moon.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steeped in silentness
The steady weathercock.

And the bay was white with silent light,
Till rising from the same,

Full many shapes, that shadows were,
In crimson colours came.

The angelic
Kbodies! aid
appear in their
own forms of
light.

A little distance from the prow
Those crimson shadows were:
I turned my eyes upon the deck—
O, Christ! what saw I there!

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
And, by the holy rood!
A man all light, a seraph-man,
On every corse there stood.

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:
It was a heavenly sight!
They stood as signals to the land,
Each one a lovely light;

This seraph-band, each waved his hand,
No voice did they impart—
No voice; but oh! the silence sank
Like music on my heart.

But soon I heard the dash of oars,
I heard the Pilot's cheer;
My head was turned perforce away,
And I saw a boat appear.

The Pilot and the Pilot's boy,
I heard them coming fast:
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy
The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third—I heard his voice:
It is the Hermit good!
He singeth loud his godly hymns
That he makes in the wood.
He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.

PART THE SEVENTH

The Hermit of
e wood

"This Hermit good lives in that wood
Which slopes down to the sea.
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!
He loves to talk with the marineres
That come from a far countree.

He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve—
He hath a cushion plump:
It is the moss that wholly hides
The rotted old oak-stump.

The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,
'Why this is strange, I trow!
Where are those lights so many and fair,
That signal made but now?'

approacheth
wonder;

'Strange, by my faith!' the Hermit said—
And they answered not our cheer!
The planks look warped! and see those sails,
How thin they are and sere!
I never saw aught like to them,
Unless perchance it were
Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
My forest-brook along;
When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
That eats the she-wolf's young.'

'Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look—'
(The Pilot made reply)
'I am a-feared'—Tush on, push on!'
Said the Hermit cheerily.

The boat came closer to the ship,
But I nor spake nor stirred;
The boat came close beneath the ship,
And straight a sound was heard.

Under the water it rumbled on,
Still louder and more dread:
It reached the ship, it split the bay;
The ship went down like lead.

The ship suddenly sinketh.

Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound,
Which sky and ocean smote,
Like one that hath been seven days drowned
My body lay afloat;
But swift as dreams, myself I found
Within the Pilot's boat.

The ancient H^Sner is saved e Pilot's boat.

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
The boat spun round and round;
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.

I moved my lips — the Pilot shrieked
And fell down in a fit;
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,
And prayed where he did sit.

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laughed loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro.
'Hal ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see,
The Devil knows how to row/

And now, all in my own countree,
I stood on the firm landl
The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,
And scarcely he could stand.

'O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!'
The Hermit crossed his brow.
'Say quick,' quoth he, 1 bid thee say —
What manner of man art thou?

The ancient Mariner earnestly entreateth the Hermit to shrive Him; and the penance of life falls on him.

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it left me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And till my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.

And till my ghastly tale is told, life an a g o. n

And ever and out his feature life an agony him to travel from land to land,

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.

What loud uproar bursts from that door!
The wedding-guests are there:
But in the garden-bower the Bride
And Bride-maids singing are:
And hark the little vesper bell,
Which biddeth me to prayer

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas, that God Himself
Scarce seemed there to be.

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company!—

To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay!

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

and to teach, by
ample love" and
reverence to all
made and God
loveth.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest
Turned from the Bridegroom's door.

He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man,
He rose the morrow morn.

3. The Epic

JOHN MILTON *War in Heaven (The First Battle)*
(from *Paradise Lost:* Book VI)

Go MICHAEL, of Celestial Armies Prince,
And thou in Military prowess next,
Gabriel, lead forth to Battle these my Sons
Invincible, lead forth my armed Saints
By Thousands and by Millions rang'd for fight:
Equal in number to that Godless crew
Rebellious, them with Fire and hostile Arms
Fearless assault, and to the brow of Heav'n
Pursuing drive them out from God and bliss,
Into their place of punishment, the Gulf

Of *Tartarus*, which ready opens wide
His fiery *Chaos* to receive their fall.
So spake the Sovran voice, and Clouds began
To darken all the Hill, and smoke to roll
In dusky wreaths, reluctant flames, the sign
Of wrath awak't; nor with less dread the loud
Ethereal Trumpet from on high gan blow:
At which command the Powers Militant,
That stood for Heav'n, in mighty Quadrate joyn'd
Of union irresistible, mov'd on
In silence their bright Legions, to the sound
Of instrumental Harmony that breath'd
Heroic Ardor to adventurous deeds
Under their God-like Leaders, in the Cause
Of God and his *Messiah.* On they move
Indissolubly firm; nor obvious Hill,
Nor streit'ning Vale, nor Wood, nor Stream divides
Their perfect^ranks; for high above the ground
Their march was, and the passive Air upbore
Their nimble tread; as when the total kind
Of Birds in orderly array on wing
Came summon'd over *Eden* to receive
Their names of thee[18]; so over many a tract
Of Heav'n they march'd, and many a Province wide
Tenfold the length of this terrene. At last
Far in th* Horizon to the North appeared
From skirt to skirt a fiery Region, stretcht
In battailous aspect, and nearer view
Bristl'd with upright beams innumerable
Of rigid Spears, and Helmets throng'd, and Shields
Various, with boastful Argument portray'd,
The banded Powers of *Satan* hasting on
With furious expedition; for they ween'd
That self same day by fight or by surprize
To win the Mount of God, and on his Throne
To set the envier of his state, the proud
Aspirer; but their thoughts prov'd fond and vain

---

[18] Adam (the angel Raphael is describing these events to Adam in the Garden of Eden).

In the mid way, though strange to us it seem'd
At first, that Angel should with Angel war,
And in fierce hosting meet, who wont to meet
So oft in Festivals of joy and love
Unanimous, as sons of one great Sire
Hymning th' Eternal Father. But the shout
Of Battle now began, and rushing sound
Of onset ended soon each milder thought.
High in the midst exalted as a God
Th' Apostate in his Sun-bright Chariot sate
Idol of Majesty Divine, enclosed
With Flaming Cherubim, and golden Shields;
Then lighted from his gorgeous Throne, for now
'Twixt Host and Host but narrow space was left,
A dreadful interval, and Front to Front
Presented stood in terrible array
Of hideous length. Before the cloudie Van,
On the rough edge of battle ere it join'd,
Satan with vast and haughty strides advanc't,
Came tow'ring, arm'd in Adamant and Gold;
Abdiel that sight endur'd not, where he stood
Among the mightiest, bent on highest deeds. . . .

. . . . A noble stroke he lifted high,
Which hung not, but so swift with tempest fell
On the proud Crest of *Satan,* that no sight,
Nor motion of swift thought, less could his Shield
Such ruin intercept; ten paces huge
He back recoil'd; the tenth on bended knee,
His massy Spear upstay'd, as if on Earth
Winds under ground or waters forcing way
Sidelong, had push't a Mountain from his seat
Half sunk with all his Pines. Amazement seiz'd
The Rebel Thrones, but greater rage to see
Thus foird their mightiest, ours joy fill'd, and shout,
Presage of Victory and fierce desire
Of Battle: whereat *Michael* bid sound
Th' Arch-angel trumpet; throygh the vast of Heav'n
It sounded, and the faithful Armies rung

Hosanna to the Highest: nor stood at gaze
Th' adverse Legions, nor less hideous joyn'd
The horrid shock: now storming fury rose,
And clamour such as heard in Heav'n till now
Was never, Arms on Armour clashing bray'd
Horrible discord, and the madding Wheels
Of brazen Chariots rag'd; dire was the noise
Of conflict; overhead the dismal hiss
Of fiery Darts in flaming volleys flew,
And flying vaulted either Host with fire.
So under fiery Cope together rush'd
Both Battles main, with ruinous assault
And inextinguishable rage; all Heav'n
Resounded, and had Earth been then, all Earth
Had to her Center shook. What wonder? when
Millions of fierce encountering Angels fought
On either side, the least of whom could wield
These Elements, and arm him with the force
Of all their Regions, how much more of Power
Army against Army numberless to raise,
Dreadful combustion warring, and disturb,
Though not destroy, their happy Native seat,
Had not th' Eternal King Omnipotent
From his strong hold of Heav'n high over-rul'd
And limited their might; though numbered such
As each divided Legion might have seem'd
A numerous Host, in strength each armed hand
A Legion. Led in fight, yet Leader seem'd
Each Warrior single as in Chief, expert
When to advance, or stand, or turn the sway
Of Battle, open when, and when to close
The ridges of grim War; no thought of flight,
None of retreat, no unbecoming deed
That argu'd fear; each on himself reli'd,
As only in his arm the moment lay
Of victory. Deeds of eternal fame
Were done, but infinite, for wide was spread
That War, and various: sometimes on firm ground
A standing fight, then soaring on main wing

Tormented all the Air; all Air seem'd then
Conflicting Fire. Long time in even scale
The Battle hung; till *Satan*, who that day
Prodigious power had shewn, and met in Arms
No equal, ranging through the dire attack
Of fighting Seraphim confus'd, at length
Saw where the Sword of *Michael* smote, and fell'd
Squadrons at once; with huge two-handed sway
Brandisht aloft the horrid edge came down
Wide wasting; such destruction to withstand
He hasted, and oppos'd the rockie Orb
Of tenfold Adamant, his ample Shield
A vast circumference. . ..

Now wav'd their fierie Swords, and in the Air
Made horrid Circles; two broad Suns their Shields
Blaz'd opposite, while expectation stood
In horror. From each hand with speed retir'd
Where erst was thickest fight, th' Angelic throng,
And left large field, unsafe within the wind
Of such commotion, such as, to set forth
Great things by small, if Nature's concord broke,
Among* the Constellations war were sprung,
Two Planets rushing from aspect malign
Of fiercest opposition in mid Sky,
Should combat, and their jarring Spheres confound.
Together both with next to Almighty Arm,
Uplifted imminent one stroke they aim'd
That might determine, and not need repeat,
As not of power, at once; nor odds appeared
In might or swift prevention; but the sword
Of *Michael* from the Armory of God
Was giv'n him tempered so, that neither keen
Nor solid might resist that edge: it met
The sword of *Satan* with steep force to smite
Descending, and in half cut sheer, nor stay'd,
But with swift wheel reverse, deep ent'ring shar'd
All his right side. Then *Satan* first knew pain,
And writh'd him to and fro convolved; so sore

The griding sword with discontinuous wound
Pass'd through him, but th' Ethereal substance clos'd
Not long divisible, and from the gash
A stream of Nectarous humor issuing flow'd
Sanguine, such as Celestial Spirits may bleed,
And all his Armour stain'd erewhile so bright.
Forthwith on all sides to his aid was run
By Angels many and strong, who interposed
Defence, while others bore him on their Shields
Back to his Chariot; where it stood retir'd
From off the files of war; there they him laid
Gnashing for anguish and despite and shame
To find himself not matchless, and his pride
Humbl'd by such rebuke, so far beneath
His confidence to equal God in power.
Yet soon he heal'd; for Spirits that live throughout
Vital in every part, not as frail man
In Entrails, Heart or Head, Liver or Reins,
Cannot bufr by annihilating die;
Nor in their liquid texture mortal wound
Receive, no more than can the fluid Air:
All Heart they live, all Head, All Eye, All Ear,
All Intellect, all Sense, and as they please
They Limb themselves, and colour, shape or size
Assume, as likes them best, condense or rare.
   Meanwhile in other parts like deeds deserv'd
Memorial, where the might of *Gabriel* fought,
And with fierce Ensigns pierc'd the deep array
Of *Moloch,* furious King, who him defi'd,
And at his Chariot wheels to drag him bound
Threaten'd, nor from the Holy One of Heav'n
Retrained his tongue blasphemous; but anon
Down clov'n to the waist, with shattered Arms
And uncouth pain fled bellowing.. ..
I might relate of thousands, and their names
Eternize here on Earth; but those elect
Angels, contented with their fame in Heav'n,
Seek not the praise of men; the other sort
In might though wond'rous and in Acts of War,

Nor of Renown less eager, yet by doom
Canceled from Heav'n and sacred memory,
Nameless in dark oblivion let them dwell.
For strength from Truth divided and from Just,
Illaudable, naught merits but dispraise
And ignominy, yet to glory aspires
Vainglorious, and through infamie seeks fame:
Therefore Eternal silence be their doom.
And now, their mightiest quell'd, the battle swerv'd,
With many an inroad gor'd; deformed rout 211
Enter'd, and foul disorder; all the ground
With shiver'd armour strow'n, and on a heap
Chariot and Charioter lay overturned
And fiery foaming Steeds. What stood, recoil'd
O'erwearied, through the faint Satanic Host
Defensive scarce, or with pale fear surprised;
Then first with fear surpris'd and sense of pain
Fled ignominious, to such evil brought
By sin of disobedience, till that hour 220
Not liable to fear or flight or pain.
Far otherwise th' inviolable Saints
In Cubic Phalanx firm advanc't entire,
Invulnerable, impenitrably arm'd:
Such high advantages their innocence
Gave them above their foes, not to have sinn'd,
Not to have disobey'd; in fight they stood
Unwearied, unobnoxious to be pain'd
By wound, though from their place by violence mov'd.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 15

1. Among the characteristics of the folk ballad, Herbert Read has noted "a certain fierce realism/' He has defended it in these terms: "A squeamish age will balk at this, and call it callous. It is, of course, nothing of the sort. If you want to be callous you should be pathological; you should work on the nerves of the reader. But slick slaughter-house butchery, such as delights children in the tale of *Jack the Giant Killer* or *Bluebeard*, has the effect of fantasy. It may thrill, but does not sicken." *(Phases of English Poetry)*

Examine the effect of this quality in an old ballad such as *The Twa Corbies* or a literary ballad such as *Screaming Tarn.*

2. Evaluate the success of the following poems in evoking a sense (or thrill) of horror through the use of ghosts or other elements of superstitious folklore: *The Wife of Usher's Well, The Unquiet Grave,* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.*
3. The plot of *Sir Patrick Spens* depends on a complete reversal of the hero's relation to his masters. Analyze the poem to test the truth of this judgment and its relation to the spirit in which the ballad was composed.
4. Account for the cumulative dramatic effect of *Edward, Edward,* and compare its impact with that of *Danny Deever.*
5. Write an essay analyzing the structure and outstanding stylistic features of the poem by Coleridge or the poem by Keats. In so doing, consider the truth of the statement below applicable to the poem you select:
    i. Coleridge wishes to infuse a traditional supernatural tale with moral significance, and to symbolize the moral meaning with many incidents realistic and unrealistic so that it will unfold gradually but vividly.
    ii. Keats wishes to re-create the atmosphere of medieval romantic adventure and therefore, as he himself would have put it, "loads every rift with ore"—fills every line with rich, sensuous detail and imagery.
6. The passage from Milton's *Paradise Lost* describes the first battle between the rebel angels under Satan and the forces of God under Michael and Gabriel.
    i. The opening speech of God sets a task at once grimly difficult and inevitable in its outcome. How is this double, and apparently self-contradictory, impression repeated in each stage of the action? How is suspense achieved at each stage?
    ii. Read lines 18-35 aloud. How do the music and rhetoric of these lines contribute to the effect of brilliant, irresistible, and sacred power? Compare the sound-pattern and tone of the next thirteen lines.
7. Pope's *Rape of the Lock* is a mock-heroic epic. It is the most brilliant example in English literature of the achievement of comedy and satire by deliberately applying characteristic devices of epic poetry to trivial and familiar instead of to lofty and heroic subjects. In the passage from this poem on pages 219-221, a fashionable young lady's morning is described in the language and imagery Homer and Milton used for the actions of heroes and angels.

Find some striking examples of this usage that can be compared with lines in the selection from Milton. Does Pope's use of the mock-heroic imply disrespect for the themes and methods of epic poetry? If not, how much of the passage is comedy for its own sake and how much of it ridicules social foibles and evils?

///. *DRAMATIC POETRY*

The main quality distinguishing dramatic poetry from narrative poetry is that in the former everything is presented as if directly from the minds and hearts of the personalities involved. Hence the dramatic poet is as impersonal as the anonymous ballad-maker, for he need never express himself in his own right. Of shorter dramatic poems, the most easily defined type is the dramatic monologue. This sort of poem is closely related to the soliloquy, a speech by a character in a play who appears alone on the stage and, by a sort of unspoken compact between the dramatist and his audience, is permitted to utter his thoughts and describe the impressions passing in his mind.

My Last Duchess (pages 380-381), by Robert Browning, is a brief, subtle, and almost perfect example of the type. The reader should consider the originality of the poet's method—which is a method of gradually revealing a dramatic situation by artfully presenting a series of details in such a way as to make drama out of our acquirement of information. Our curiosity is quickly aroused and with such speed and over such a wide area of material that the progressive satisfaction of our curiosity and the allaying of our suspense proceeds much more slowly, only overtaking the mystification at the very end of the poem.

One of the conventions of the dramatic monologue that helps to make this effect possible is that nothing may be presented in the way of explanation or comment from the outside. Everything must be given in the direct words of a speaker upon whom, as it were, we suddenly begin to eavesdrop in the middle of a dramatic situation. Furthermore, the speaker must be imagined as totally unaware of our listening, and while he says a great deal to intrigue he may say nothing directly to enlighten us.

The following dramatic monologue appears in Herman Melville's novel *Billy Budd.* It gives us the hero's thoughts on the eve of his execution aboard ship for the crime of killing one of the ship's officers. The crime had been an unintentional one, and it has done no discredit to the much-loved young sailor who committed it. The sympathetic quality of Billy's character can be seen in the humble way he has of putting things, in his affectionate tone when speaking of his messmates, and in his inability to visualize his own death as being of any great importance. At the same time, there is a saintly quality to his thoughts, as though he had long ago agreed that he was dying in a good cause. In itself, the poem is a little like *The Hangman's Tree;* it is more introspective, but gives no fuller explanation of the speaker's predicament. Notice how the slight touch of humor deepens the pathos of Melville's effect here, and how Billy's resignation to his destiny makes the pathos a minor aspect of his essentially heroic character—in which there is not a trace of whining or self-pitying bitterness. ("Darbies" are manacles. The Dansker and Taff are shipmates of Billy's; Taff is now dead.)

HERMAN MELVILLE *Billy in the Darbies*

Good of the Chaplain to enter Lone Bay
And down on his marrow-bones here and pray
For the likes just o' me, Billy Budd.—But look:
Through the port comes the moon-shine astray!
It tips the guard's cutlass and silvers this nook;
But 'twill die in the dawning of Billy's last day.
A jewel-block they'll make of me to-morrow,
Pendent pearl from the yard-arm-end
Like the ear-drop I gave to Bristol Molly—
O, 'tis me, not the sentence they'll suspend.
Ay, ay, all is up; and I must up too
Early in the morning, aloft from alow.
On an empty stomach, now, never it would do.
They'll give me a nibble-bit o' biscuit ere I go.
Sure, a messmate will reach me the last parting cup;
But, turning heads away from the hoist and the belay,
Heaven knows who will have the running of me up!
No pipe to those halyards—but aren't it all sham?
A blur's in my eyes; it is dreaming that I am.
A hatchet to my hawser? all adrift to go?
The drum roll to grog, and Billy never know?
But the Dansker he has promised to stand by the plank;
So, I'll shake a friendly hand ere I sink.
But—no! It is dead then I'll be, come to think.—
I remember Taff the Welshman when he sank.
And his cheek it was like the budding pink.

But me they'll lash me in hammock, drop me deep.
Fathoms down, fathoms down, how I'll dream fast asleep.
I feel it stealing now. Sentry, are you there?
Just ease these darbies at the wrist,
And roll me over fair.
I am sleepy, and the oozy weeds about me twist.

This monologue, in addition to what it tells us of Billy's character, becomes, indirectly, something more—a humble, loving but fatalistic view of the world. Through the doomed sailor's thoughts, first of all, we receive a picture of the good life as one in which a few creature-comforts would be available and in which men would judge each other's motives genially and affectionately. Even if he has some "bad" thoughts, Billy's mind does not rest with them. It passes sadly over to details of his coming execution, halts momentarily with the all-too-answerable question "But aren't it all sham?"—but finally moves to calm acceptance of his lot. He knows, as a matter of fact, that it *is* "all sham," that the laws of society have arbitrarily made him the scapegoat in a ritual-travesty of justice which he does not quite understand. But although he could not at first imagine his own death, he at last comes to see himself as already, literally, dead: "I am sleepy, and the oozy weeds about me twist."

As so often happens, in the dramatic monologue and in other kinds of poetry as well, the "story" here involves a projection into the future: first a recognition that a change must come about and a parallel tension at the prospect (as in Billy's inability to get his imagination fastened on the precise fact of his own physical death), then the realization of its full meaning, and finally the crystallization of an attitude or insight (in this case, Billy's complete acceptance of his future condition).

We too must "accept." We must accept the truth of this projection of imagination. We shall do so if we feel that we know the speaker's essential character, if the progression of his thoughts and feelings is credible, and if the external objects he observes and the way they enter his consciousness are acutely enough conceived. In such case, the "meanings" the monologue carries along with it will be seen as having their own truth and life and will exercise a certain power over us whether we are prepared to believe in them generally or not. Artifice and realism move together in

Melville's poem to bring this conviction about in us. Every reader separately will have come to his own conclusion, of course, about the degree of psychological realism present in Billy's thinking. But realism is not in any case the only consideration, for the phrasing and the balanced movements of the poem are not always of the kind one would expect in a simple, untutored person like Billy. There are humble picturings—"down on his marrow-bones," "a nibble-bit o' biscuit," and "a blur's in my eyes." And there are others with the poet's own trademark on them—"the moon-shine astray," "a jewel-block they'll make of me," "pendent pearl from the yard-arm-end," "his cheek . . . like the budding pink." There is a rough correspondence between the alternation of the two kinds of language and the swinging, up-down movements of the physical visualization in this poem. The chaplain goes *down* on his knees; the moon comes *up* and then, in forecast, *down;* Billy imagines himself *up* in the air, then *down* to the moment before he is *raised* to be hanged; and so on until the movement is quieted in his vision of himself *sinking* and, finally, rocking slowly at the *bottom* of the sea. Through much of the monologue, the sense of emotional depression grows deeper the more clearly Billy visualizes his coming death. Yet the closing lines, with their steadily downward movement until they reach a point of final rest at the ocean-bottom, actually represent a heightening of his morale as his agitation of spirit subsides and he moves into total acceptance. The poet behind the scenes—somewhat like a theatrical director—has been experimentally manipulating basic dramatic feeling toward this final impression. To do so, he has had to distort nature and add something to it. Without such distortions and additions, however, poetry and the other arts would lose their inner truthfulness to the felt meaning of experience.

In our own century, some poets have become deeply interested in the esthetic and psychological problems of creating and communicating emotional states. In their work the over-all psychological effect often becomes the key to the poem's design, and thus the thread of continuous thought and story, though actually present, is less significant than the arrangement of images and dramatic moments that at first seem disconnected. A characteristic example of the dramatic monologue written in this fashion is T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of /. Alfred Prufrock* (pages 388-393).

This poem presents the thoughts of a sensitive, genteel, middle-aged man who is paralyzed with timidity when he thinks of himself in relation to any of the more physical and passionate demands of life. There is a story "hidden" in the poem, a story of a woman whom the man has desired and wanted to marry although he has not dared to make love to her. Prufrock is secretly ashamed of his own lack of virile aggressiveness or romantic appeal; he sees himself as neurotic, indulges in daydreams of beauty, pleasure, and heroic endeavor, but wakes himself abruptly from these dreams with the whiplash of his scorn for himself.

Critics have seen in Eliot's poem a conception of modern culture as without vitality, full of echoes of a past which no longer has living significance, dying of emptiness. But the poem itself presents Prufrock (his very name suggests stuffiness and effeminacy) talking apparently without coherence. First he seems to be proposing a walk on a dreary evening through some rather sinister streets. Then he tells us that

> In the room the women come and go
> Talking of Michelangelo.

Then he talks about the fog, makes a digression on time, goes on about his self-consciousness and hesitations, discusses the voices, eyes, and arms of women, and so through a number of other moods and topics and observations until the poem ends with a vision of loveliness suddenly jolted into despair in the very last line. Three stanzas in the middle part—lines 63-74—illustrate the poem's method.

Each image in these three stanzas (pages 390-391) is a picture colored or even distorted by the feelings of Mr. Prufrock. A sense of despondency rises from the images even though there is nothing about fashionable women, about men looking out of windows, or about crabs or lobsters that would *necessarily* sadden anyone. But accompanying the pictures are words and rhythms that point up the mood. Among these are the repetition of "known" and "arms" in the first two lines of the passage under discussion, the uncertain tone of the two lines closing the first stanza, the word "lonely" in the next stanza, and the word "silent" in the third. We recognize the men in shirt-sleeves looking out of windows as a symbol of the loneliness Prufrock fears, and knows, will be his own future. In his abject sense of failure as a man, he despairingly cries out that he "should have been a pair of ragged claws"—that is, a mere instinctive organism. He suffers from an inability to make a choice or come to a decision. A regression to elemental instinct would set him free from human responsibility. The deeper irony here is that though he really ought to allow his natural human instincts to have their way he suppresses and perverts them by too scrupulous introspection.

These images throw us back to Prufrock's relationship to women, and to the one woman he has dreamed might be the loving companion he needs. He has been allured by womanly beauty, yet startled and frightened too by the sudden realization that love makes strong physical demands, calls for animal vitality; seeing women's arms in lamplight he has seen also that they are "downed with light brown hair." After these lines we understand his alienation, his sense of fear and loneliness. And as we read on through the poem, the pattern brings itself into focus. We have a man speculating on what, if he had the courage, he would say to a woman to whom he cannot even *suggest* his thoughts for fear she will think him impossibly absurd. Everything contributes to his fear of life. The streets are insidious. The women, though superficial, are confident. The city is sordid. Time and nature are indifferent or contemptuous. He dreams of what he would like to be if he dared and confesses himself no tragic hero or sainted martyr. He is only a hanger-on, a second-rate character, a ridiculous buffoon. Despising himself for all his fussy concern about appearance and dress, he sees himself at last a figure in a spoiled romantic dream:

> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
> By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
> Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

The dramatic monologue, because it always gives us a particular person in a particular situation, presenting aloud to himself or some other person both the physical details and the emotional character of that situation, is one of the poetic forms most rewarding for study. Through such study the reader can perfect himself in that indispensable essential of critical understanding —identification with the supposed speaker in a poem: his personality, his moral and intellectual outlook, his whole manner of life. Every poem demands identification with the speaking voice, but the dramatic monologue does so most openly and directly.

In general, dramatic verse—because it presents living figures that move, converse, affect one another—is more readily available to our sympathies than most other poetry. It can set up a vivid illusion of familiar reality and then link that illusion with profoundly imaginative motifs. The great power of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry is the best possible illustration of this principle. His *Hamlet,* for instance, takes us, before we know where we are going, from a most prosaic situation to the most poetically suggestive exploration of supernatural and psychological themes. The changing of the guard at the very beginning, the idiomatic gossip and political talk, and the practical arrangements are all quite normal and commonplace. They lower our resistance to the really vital portions of the early scenes—the appearance of the Ghost, his effect on the men standing watch, and then Hamlet's conversation with and reaction to him. The opening lines of *Hamlet,* T. S. Eliot points out, are "built of the simplest words in the most homely idiom"—"short, brusque ejaculations."[1] Then, subtly, the tone and rhythm are adapted to mood-effects of a different nature. There are "solemn and sonorous" effects at the Ghost's appearance, and a lyrical, exalted expression in the description of morning. By the end of the first scene, the audience has been carried by the poet's skilful maneuvering into a realm where it no longer seems unnatural for a man to say:

> But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill. . . .

Another critic, Kenneth Burke, discusses the similar development in the fourth scene of the first act. Hamlet and his friends are awaiting the Ghost. It is midnight.

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[1] T. S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama" *(Selected Essays).*

> It is time for the ghost. Sounds off-stage, and of course it is not the ghost. It is, rather, the sound of the king's carousal. ... A tricky, and effective detail. We have been waiting for the ghost, and get, startlingly, a blare of trumpets. And again, once the trumpets are silent, we feel all the more just how desolate are these three men waiting for a ghost, on a bare "platform," feel it by this sudden juxtaposition of an imagined scene of lights and merriment. But the trumpets announcing a carousal have suggested a subject of conversation. In the darkness Hamlet discusses the excessive drinking of his countrymen. . . . Indeed, there in the gloom he is talking very intelligently on these matters, and Horatio answers, "Look, my Lord, it comes." All this time we had been waiting for a ghost, and it comes at the one moment which was not pointing towards it. This ghost, so assiduously prepared for, is yet a surprise. And now that the ghost has come, we are waiting for something further. . . . Hamlet must confront the ghost. Here again Shakespeare can feed well upon the use of contrast for his effects. Hamlet has just been talking in a sober, rather argumentative manner—but now the flood-gates are unloosed:
>
> Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
> Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,
> Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell. . . .
>
> and the transition from the matter-of-fact to the grandiose, the full-throated and full-vowelled, is a second burst of trumpets, perhaps even more effective than the first, since it is the rich fulfillment of a promise.[2]

In *Hamlet,* almost without realizing it, we are drawn into the deeper reality of psychological vision. Reality has become as wide as the poet's ability to use his imaginative power can make it. Thus, the ghost becomes a more convincing spokesman for Hamlet's feelings than Hamlet himself. No words of his own could more powerfully convey Hamlet's horror at his mother's behavior than the Ghost's disgusted picture of lust "to a radiant angel link't." And nothing, again, that Hamlet himself could say would betray his secret fear of death and purgatory half so startlingly as the Ghost's reference to unspeakable "secrets of my prison-house" which he is forbidden to tell. A major function of poetry in drama, we see, is to lead us to hear the language of imaginative association as natural speech and to see pure vision as concrete experience.

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[2] Reprinted from *Counter-Statement,* by Kenneth Burke; new, augmented edition, 1953; Hermes Publications, **Los** Altos, California. Copyright 1953 by Kenneth Burke.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

i.

ROBERT BROWNING ***My Last DucheSS***

FERRARA

THAT'S MY last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fr£ Pandolfs hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fr£ Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed: she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Glaus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

ROBERT BROWNING *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church*

ROME, 15—

VANITY, SAITH the preacher, vanity!
Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
Nephews—sons mine … ah God, I know not! Well—
She, men would have to be your mother once,

Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask,
"Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
—Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk:
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
—Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!
Draw close: that conflagration of my church
—What then? So much was saved if aught were missed!
My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, II ...
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli,*
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,

Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black—
'Twas ever antique-black I meant! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Savior at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's moldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then!
'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
My bath must needs be left behind, alas!
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
—That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
And then how I shall lie through centuries,
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,

And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good, strong, thick, stupefying incense-smoke!
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work:
And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
—Aha, ELUCESCEBAT[1] quoth our friend?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
With grapes, and add a visor and a Term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask,
"Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone—
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—

---

[1] HE WAS FAMOUS. This inscription on Gandolf's tombstone is not in the pure classical Latin of Cicero (Tully) but in the less elegant language of Ulpian, a Roman jurist. The worldly, sensual, unconsciously blaspheming Renaissance bishop, with his illegitimate sons gathered about his death-bed, is knowledgeable in all matters but spiritual ones.

And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
But in a row: and, going, turn your backs
—Aye, like departing altar-ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
Old Gandolf—at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was!

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON *UlySSCS*

IT LITTLE profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: all times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro* scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honoured of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,

A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro* soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'

We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

HORACE GREGORY *Longface Mahoney Discusses Heaven*

IF SOMEONE said, *Escape.*
Let's get away from here,
you'd see snow mountains thrown
against the sky,
cold, and you'd draw your breath and feel
air like cold water going through your veins,
but you'd be free, up so high,
or you'd see a row of girls dancing on a beach
with tropic trees and a warm moon
and warm air floating under your clothes
and through your hair.
Then you'd think of heaven
where there's peace, away from here
and you'd go someplace unreal
where everybody goes after something happens,
set up in the air, safe, a room in a hotel.
A brass bed, military hair brushes,
a couple of coats, trousers, maybe a dress
on a chair or draped on the floor.
This room is not on earth, feel the air,
warm like heaven and far away.

This is a place
where marriage nights are kept
and sometimes here you say Hello
to a neat girl with you
and sometimes she laughs
because she thinks it's funny to be sitting here
for no reason at all, except, perhaps,
she likes to see how strong you are

and the color of your eyes.
Maybe this isn't heaven but near
to something like it,
more like love coming up in elevators
and nothing to think about, except, O God,
you love her now and it makes no difference
if it isn't spring. All seasons are warm
in the warm air
and the brass bed is always there.

If you've done something
and the cops get you afterwards, you
can't remember the place again,
away from cops and streets—
it's all unreal—
the warm air, a dream
that couldn't save you now.
No one would care
to hear about it,
it would be heaven
far away, dark and no music,
not even a girl there.

T. s. ELIOT *The Love Song of]. Alfred Prufrock*

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mat tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Nan torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondos

LET us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etheri/cd upon a table;

---

[2] If I believed my answer might be heard by anyone who could return to the world, this flame would leap no more. But since no one ever returned alive from these depths, as far as I know, then I answer without fear of infamy. (Dante, *Inferno:* Canto XXVII, lines 61-66.)

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreat^
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question. ...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
[They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"]
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
[They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!"]
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
[But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

. . .

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of
    windows? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

. . .

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired ... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald]
    brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and
    snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
    Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.
    That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth-while,

After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled
streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that
trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns
on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

. . .

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old. ... I grow old. ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the
beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

2.

ROBERT FROST *The Witch of Cods*

I STAYED the night for shelter at a farm
Behind the mountain, with a mother and son,
Two old-believers. They did all the talking.

MOTHER. Folks think a witch who has familiar spirits
She could call up to pass a winter evening,
But won't, should be burned at the stake or something.
Summoning spirits isn't "Button, button,
Who's got the button," I would have them know.

SON. Mother can make a common table rear
And kick with two legs like an army mule.

MOTHER. And when I've done it, what good have I done?
Rather than tip a table for you, let me
Tell you what Ralle the Sioux Control once told me.
He said the dead had souls, but when I asked him
How could that be—I thought the dead were souls,
He broke my trance. Don't that make you suspicious
That there's something the dead are keeping back?
Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back.

SON. You wouldn't want to tell him what we have
Up attic, mother?

MOTHER. Bones—a skeleton.

SON. But the headboard of mother's bed is pushed
Against the attic door: the door is nailed.

It's harmless. Mother hears it in the night
Halting perplexed behind the barrier
Of door and headboard. Where it wants to get
Is back into the cellar where it came from.

MOTHER. We'll never let them, will we, son! We'll never!

SON. It left the cellar forty years ago
And carried itself like a pile of dishes
Up one flight from the cellar to the kitchen,
Another from the kitchen to the bedroom,
Another from the bedroom to the attic,
Right past both father and mother, and neither stopped it.
Father had gone upstairs; mother was downstairs.
I was a baby: I don't know where I was.

MOTHER. The only fault my husband found with me—
I went to sleep before I went to bed,
Especially in winter when the bed
Might just as well be ice and the clothes snow.
The night the bones came up the cellar-stairs
Toffile had gone to bed alone and left me,
But left an open door to cool the room off
So as to sort of turn me out of it.
I was just coming to myself enough
To wonder where the cold was coming from,
When I heard Toffile upstairs in the bedroom
And thought I heard him downstairs in the cellar.
The board we had laid down to walk dry-shod on
When there was water in the cellar in spring
Struck the hard cellar bottom. And then someone
Began the stairs, two footsteps for each step,
The way a man with one leg and a crutch,
Or a little child, comes up. It wasn't Toffile:
It wasn't anyone who could be there.
The bulkhead double-doors were double-locked
And swollen tight and buried under snow.
The cellar windows were banked up with sawdust

And swollen tight and buried under snow.
It was the bones. I knew them—and good reason,
My first impulse was to get to the knob
And hold the door. But the bones didn't try
The door; they halted helpless on the landing,
Waiting for things to happen in their favor.
The faintest restless rustling ran all through them.
I never could have done the thing I did
If the wish hadn't been too strong in me
To see how they were mounted for this walk.
I had a vision of them put together
Not like a man, but like a chandelier.
So suddenly I flung the door wide on him.
A moment he stood balancing with emotion,
And all but lost himself. (A tongue of fire
Flashed out and licked along his upper teeth.
Smoke rolled inside the sockets of his eyes.)
Then he came at me with one hand outstretched,
The way he did in life once; but this time
I struck the hand off brittle on the floor,
And fell back from him on the floor myself.
The finger-pieces slid in all directions.
(Where did I see one of those pieces lately?
Hand me my button-box—it must be there.)
I sat up on the floor and shouted, "Toffile,
It's coming up to you." It had its choice
Of the door to the cellar or the hall.
It took the hall door for the novelty,
And set off briskly for so slow a thing,
Still going every which way in the joints, though,
So that it looked like lightning or a scribble,
From the slap I had just now given its hand.
I listened till it almost climbed the stairs
From the hall to the only finished bedroom,
Before I got up to do anything;
Then ran and shouted, "Shut the bedroom door,
Toffile, for my sake!" "Company?" he said,
"Don't make me get up; I'm too warm in bed."
So lying forward weakly on the handrail

I pushed myself upstairs, and in the light
(The kitchen had been dark) I had to own
I could see nothing. "Toffile, I don't see it.
It's with us in the room though. It's the bones."
"What bones?" "The cellar bones—out of the grave."
That made him throw his bare legs out of bed
And sit up by me and take hold of me.
I wanted to put out the light and see
If I could see it, or else mow the room,
With our arms at the level of our knees,
And bring the chalk-pile down. "I'll tell you what—
It's looking for another door to try.
The uncommonly deep snow has made him think
Of his old song, *The Wild Colonial Boy,*
He always used to sing along the tote-road.
He's after an open door to get out-doors.
Let's trap him with an open door up attic."
Toffile agreed to that, and sure enough,
Almost the moment he was given an opening,
The steps began to climb the attic stairs.
I heard them. Toffile didn't seem to hear them.
"Quick!" I slammed to the door and held the knob.
"Toffile, get nails." I made him nail the door shut,
And push the headboard of the bed against it.
Then we asked was there anything
Up attic that we'd ever want again.
The attic was less to us than the cellar.
If the bones liked the attic, let them have it.
Let them stay in the attic. When they sometimes
Come down the stairs at night and stand perplexed
Behind the door and headboard of the bed,
Brushing their chalky skull with chalky fingers,
With sounds like the dry rattling of a shutter,
That's what I sit up in the dark to say—
To no one any more since Toffile died.
Let them stay in the attic since they went there.
I promised Toffile to be cruel to them
For helping them be cruel once to him.

SON. We think they had a grave down in the cellar.

MOTHER. We know they had a grave down in the cellar.

SON. We never could find out whose bones they were.

MOTHER. Yes, we could too, son. Tell the truth for once
They were a man's his father killed for me.
I mean a man he killed instead of me.
The least I could do was to help dig their grave.
We were about it one night in the cellar.
Son knows the story: but 'twas not for him
To tell the truth, suppose the time had come.
Son looks surprised to see me end a lie
We'd kept all these years between ourselves
So as to have it ready for outsiders.
But tonight I don't care enough to lie—
I don't remember why I ever cared.
Toffile, if he were here, I don't believe
Could tell you why he ever cared himself . ..

She hadn't found the finger-bone she wanted
Among the buttons poured out in her lap.
I verified the name next morning: Toffile.
The rural letter-box said Toffile Lajway.

3.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE from *Hamlet*

Act I, Scenes i, iv, and v.

SCENE I. ELSINORE. *A platform before the castle.*

[FRANCISCO *at his post. Enter to him* BERNARDO.]
BERNARDO. Who's there?
FRANCISCO. Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.
BERNARDO. Long live the king!

FRANCISCO. Bernardo?
BERNARDO. He.
FRANCISCO. You come most carefully upon your hour.
BERNARDO. 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.
FRANCISCO. For this relief much thanks: 'tis bitter cold,
And I am sick at heart.
BERNARDO. Have you had quiet guard?
FRANCISCO. Not a mouse stirring.
BERNARDO. Well, good night.
If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,
The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.
FRANCISCO. I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who is there?
[Enter HORATIO *and* MARCELLUS.]
HORATIO. Friends to this ground.
MARCELLUS. And liegemen to the Dane.
FRANCISCO. Give you good night.
MARCELLUS O, farewell, honest soldier:
Who hath relieved you?
FRANCISCO. Bernardo hath my place.
Give you good night. *[Exit.*
MARCELLUS. Holla! Bernardo!
BERNARDO. Say,
What, is Horatio there?
HORATIO. A piece of him.
BERNARDO. Welcome, Horatio; welcome, good Marcellus.
MARCELLUS. What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?
BERNARDO. I have seen nothing.
MARCELLUS. Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him
Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us:
Therefore I have entreated him along
With us to watch the minutes of this night,
That if again this apparition come,
He may approve our eyes and speak to it.
HORATIO. Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.
BERNARDO. Sit down a while;
And let us once again assail your ears,
That are so fortified against our story
What we have two nights seen.

HORATIO. Well, sit we down,
And let us hear Bernardo speak of this.
BERNARDO. Last night of all,
When yond same star that's westward from the pole
Had made his course to illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one,—
Enter GHOST.]
MARCELLUS. Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!
BERNARDO. In the same figure, like the king that's dead.
MARCELLUS. Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.
BERNARDO. Looks it not like the king? mark it, Horatio.
HORATIO. Most like; it harrows me with fear and wonder.
BERNARDO. It would be spoke to.
MARCELLUS. Question it, Horatio.
HORATIO. What art thou, that usurp'st this time of night,
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark[3]
Did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee, speak!
MARCELLUS. It is offended.
BERNARDO. See, it stalks away!
HORATIO. Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!
[Exit GHOST.
MARCELLUS. 'Tis gone, and will not answer.
BERNARDO. How now, Horatio! you tremble and look pale:
Is not this something more than fantasy?
What think you on't?
HORATIO. Before my God, I might not this believe
Without the sensible and true avouch
Of mine own eyes.
MARCELLUS. Is it not like the king?
HORATIO. As thou art to thyself:
Such was the very armor he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated;
So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
'Tis strange.

[8] **the late king Hamlet—Prince Hamlet's father**

MARCELLUS. Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour,
With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.
HORATIO. In what particular thought to work I know not;
But, in the gross and scope of my opinion,
This bodes some strange eruption to our state.
MARCELLUS. Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows,
Why this same strict and most observant watch
So nightly toils the subject of the land,
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
And foreign mart for implements of war;
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week;
What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint-laborer with the day:
Who is't that can inform me?
HORATIO. That can I;
At least the whisper goes so. Our last king,
Whose image even but now appeared to us,
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,
Thereto prick'd on by a most emulate pride,
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet—
For so this side of our known world esteem'd him—
Did slay this Fortinbras; who by a seal'd compact
Well ratified by law and heraldry,
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
Which he stood seized of, to the conqueror:
Against the which, a moiety competent
Was gaged by our king; which had returned
To the inheritance of Fortinbras,
Had he been vanquisher; as, by the same covenant
And carriage of the article designed,
His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
Of unimproved metal hot and full,
Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
Shark'd up a list of lawless resolutes,
For food and diet, to some enterprise
That hath a stomach in't: which is no other—
As it doth well appear unto our state—
But to recover of us, by strong hand

And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands
So by his father lost: and this, I take it,
Is the main motive of our preparations,
The source of this our watch and the chief head
Of this post-haste and romage in the land.
BERNARDO. I think it be no other but e'en so:
Well may it sort, that this portentous figure
Comes armed through our watch, so like the king
That was and is the question of these wars.
HORATIO. A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.
In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets:
As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
Disasters in the sun; and the moist star,[4]
Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands,
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse:
And even the like precurse of fierce events,
As harbingers preceding still the fates
And prologue to the omen coming on,
Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
Unto our climatures and countrymen.
Re-enter GHOST.]
But soft, behold! lo, where it comes again!
I'll cross it, though it blast me. Stay, illusion!
If thou hast any sound, or use of voice,
Speak to me:
If there be any good thing to be done,
That may to thee do ease and grace to me,
Speak to me:
If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid,
O, speak!
Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,

---

[4] the moon

Speak of it: stay, and speak! *[The cock crows.]* Stop it,
Marcellus.
MARCELLUS. Shall I strike at it with my partisan?
HORATIO. Do, if it will not stand.
BERNARDO. 'Tis here!
HORATIO. 'Tis here!
MARCELLUS. 'Tis gone! *[Exit* GHOST.
We do it wrong, being so majestical,
To offer it the show of violence;
For it is, as the air, invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.
BERNARDO. It was about to speak, when the cock crew.
HORATIO. And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day, and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine: and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.
MARCELLUS. It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,[5]
No fairy takes nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.
HORATIO. So have I heard and do in part believe it.
But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill:
Break we our watch up; and by my advice,
Let us impart what we have seen to-night
Unto young Hamlet; for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him:
Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,
As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

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[8] exert evil influence

MARCELLUS. Let's do't, I pray; and I this morning know
Where we shall find him most conveniently. *[Exeunt.*

SCENE IV—*The platform.*

Enter HAMLET, HORATIO, *and* MARCELLUS.]
HAMLET. The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold.
HORATIO. It is a nipping and an eager air.
HAMLET. What hour now?
HORATIO. I think it lacks of twelve.
MARCELLUS. No, it is struck.
HORATIO. Indeed? I heard it not: it then draws near the season
Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.
[A flourish of trumpets, and ordnance shot off within.
What doth this mean, my lord?
HAMLET. The king doth wake to-night, and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels;
And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.
HORATIO. Is it a custom?
HAMLET. Aye, marry, is't:
But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honor'd in the breach than the observance.
This heavy-headed revel east and west
Makes us traduced and tax'd of other nations:
They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase
Soil our addition; and indeed it takes
From our achievements, though performed at height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute.
So, oft it chances in particular men,
That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As, in their birth,—wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin,—
By the overgrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o'er-leavens
The form of plausive mariners, that these men,—

Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
Being nature's livery, or fortune's star,—
Their virtues else—be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo—
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault: the dram of e'il
Doth all the noble substance often dout[6]
To his own scandal.
Enter GHOST.]
HORATIO. Look, my lord it comes!
HAMLET. Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou comest in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee: I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane: O, answer me!
Let me ngt burst in ignorance; but tell
Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre,
Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd,
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws,
To cast thee up again. What may this mean,
That thou, dead corse, again, in complete steel,
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous; and we fools of nature
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
Say, why is this? wherefore? what should we do?
[GHOST *beckons* HAMLET.
HORATIO. It beckons you to go away with it,
As if it some impartment did desire
To you alone.
MARCELLUS. Look, with what courteous action
It waves you to a more removed ground:
But do not go with it.
HORATIO. No, by no means.
HAMLET. It will not speak; then I will follow it.

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[6] A touch of evil often nullifies a man's essential nobility.

HORATIO. Do not, my lord.
HAMLET. Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life at a pin's fee;
And for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?
It waves me forth again: I'll follow it.
HORATIO. What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness? think of it:
The very place puts toys of desperation,
Without more motive, into every brain
That looks so many fathoms to the sea
And hears it roar beneath.
HAMLET. It waves me still.
Go on; I'll follow thee.
MARCELLUS. You shall not go, my lord.
HAMLET. Hold off your hands.
HORATIO. Be ruled; you shall not go.
HAMLET. My fate cries out,
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.
Still am I call'd, unhand me, gentlemen;
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me:
I say, away! Go on; I'll follow thee.
[Exeunt GHOST *and* HAMLET.
HORATIO. He waxes desperate with imagination.
MARCELLUS. Let's follow; 'tis not fit thus to obey him.
HORATIO. Have after. To what issue will this come?
MARCELLUS. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.
HORATIO. Heaven will direct it.
MARCELLUS. Nay, let's follow him. *[Exeunt.*

SCENE V — *Another part of the platform.*

Enter GHOST *and* HAMLET.]
HAMLET. Whither wilt thou lead me? speak; I'll go no further.
GHOST. Mark me.

HAMLET. I Will.
GHOST. My hour is almost come,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.
HAMLET. Alas, poor ghost!
GHOST. Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold.
HAMLET. Speak; I am bound to hear.
GHOST. So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.
HAMLET. What?
GHOST. I am thy father's spirit;
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine:
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love—
HAMLET. O God!
GHOST. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.
HAMLET. Murder!
GHOST. Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.
HAMLET. Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.
GHOST. I find thee apt;
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,
Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear:
'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark

Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abused: but know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.
HAMLET. O my prophetic soul!
My uncle!
GHOST. Aye, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,—
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen:
0 Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!
From me, whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
1 made to her in marriage; and to decline
Upon a wretch, whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine!
Bujt virtue, as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage.
But, soft! methinks I scent the morning air;
Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leperous distilment; whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body;
And with a sudden vigor it doth posset
And curd, like eager[7] droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine;
And a most instant tetter bark'd about,
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,
All my smooth body.

---

[7] sour

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatched:
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd;[8]
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head:
O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven,
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once!
The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire:
Adieu, adieu, adieu! remember me. *[Exit.*
HAMLET. O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!
Aye, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee!
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter; yes, by heaven!
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My tables,—meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark. *[Writing.*
So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word;

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[8] without receiving last rites

It is "Adieu, adieu! remember me."
I have sworn't.
MARCEULUS.
HORATIO. *[Within]* My lord, my lord!
Enter HORATIO *and* MARCELLUS.]
MARCELLUS. Lord Hamletl
HORATIO. Heaven secure him!
HAMLET. So be it!
MARGELLUS. Illo, ho, ho, my lord!
HAMLET. Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come, bird, come.
MARCELLUS. How is't, my noble lord?
HORATIO. What news, my lord?
HAMLET. O, wonderful!
HORATIO. Good my lord, tell it.
HAMLET. No; you will reveal it.
HORATIO. Not I, my lord, by heaven.
MARGELLUS Nor I, my lord.
HAMLET. How say you, then; would heart of man once think it?
But you'll be secret?
HORATIO.
MARCELLUS. Aye, by heaven, my lord.
HAMLET. There's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark
But he's an arrant knave.
HORATIO. There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave
To tell us this.
HAMLET. Why, right; you are i' the right;
And so, without more circumstance at all,
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part:
You, as your business and desire shall point you;
For every man hath business and desire,
Such as it is; and for my own poor part,
Look you, I'll go pray.
HORATIO. These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.
HAMLET. I'm sorry they offend you, heartily;
Yes, faith, heartily.
HORATIO. There's no offense, my lord.
HAMLET. Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio.
And much offense too. Touching this vision here,

It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you:
For your desire to know what is between us,
O'ermaster't as you may. And now, good friends,
As you are friends, scholars and soldiers,
Give me one poor request.
HORATIO. What is't, my lord? we will.
HAMLET. Never make known what you have seen tonight.
MARCELLUS.
HORATIO. My lord, we will not.
HAMLET. Nay, but swear't.
HORATIO. In faith,
My lord, not I.
MARCELLUS. Nor I, my lord, in faith.
HAMLET. Upon my sword.
MARCELLUS. We have sworn, my lord, already.
HAMLET. Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.
GHOST. *[Beneath}* Swear.
HAMLET. Ah, ha, boyl say'st thou so? art thou there, truepenny?
Come on: you hear this fellow in the cellarage:
Consent to swear.
HORATIO. Propose the oath, my lord.
HAMLET. Never to speak of this that you have seen,
Swear by my sword.
GHOST. *[Beneath]* Swear.
HAMLET. *Hie et ubiquef** then we'll shift our ground.
Come hither, gentlemen,
And lay your hands again upon my sword:
Never to speak of this that you have heard,
Swear by my sword.
GHOST. *[Beneath]* Swear.
HAMLET. Well said, old molel canst work i' the earth so fast?
A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends.
HORATIO. O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!
HAMLET. And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
But come;

[9] Here and everywhere?

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on,
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,
With arms encumbered thus, or this head-shake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,
As "Well, well, we know," or "We could, an if we would,"
Or "If we list to speak/' or "There be, an if they might,"
Or such ambiguous giving out, to note
That you know aught of me: this not to do,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you,
Swear.
GHOST. *[Beneath]* Swear.
HAMLET. Rest, rest, perturbed spirit! *[They swear.]*
So, gentlemen,
With all my love I do commend me to you:
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do, to express his love and friending to you,
God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together;
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.
The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it rightl
Nay, come, let's go together. *[Exeunt.*

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 16

1. In the dramatic monologue we are presented with a state of affairs in unstable equilibrium, and through the words of a person involved in that situation we learn what it is and how it resolves itself. To read such a poem effectively, we need to focus our attention on the relation between what the speaker at any point is saying and what we know of his character and of the plot as a whole.

   In *My Last Duchess* and *Ulysses,* who are the speakers? Under what circumstances are they speaking, and to whom and *why?* What hints and suggestions show us their characters and the characters of other people involved with them? Where does the climax of each poem come? Is the speaker's tone different at this point from what it was at the beginning and will be at the end?
2. Dramatic irony is a quality of character, situation, or plot structure.

When the speech or behavior of a character is inappropriate to his position, an element of irony is present. It is present, too, when a character is ignorant of the true state of affairs, or of his own nature, or of the logical outcome of what he says or does. And there is another kind of dramatic irony in the situation of a character who knows the truth but can do nothing about it. Thus irony is to be found in the most ludicrous situations and also in tragic ones,

  i. Compare the uses of irony in *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church* and *Longface Mahoney Discusses Heaven.*
  ii. Note the ironic effects in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, some of which are discussed on pages 376-377. Are they essential to the characterization of the speaker and the unfolding of his problem?

3. Apply the comments on suspenseful unfolding and dramatic irony in the foregoing questions to Robert Frost's poem. Is this poem, in your opinion, serious or comic?
4. Test the critical observations on pages 378-379 concerning the opening scenes of *Hamlet.*
   i. Trace the gradual intensification of speech from the beginning of Scene i to the Ghost's first exit. Is there a similar pattern between his first and his second exit? Does it recur in Scenes iv and v? If so, mark out the limits of each such movement from a relatively calm and natural kind of speech to a poetically more intense level. Is there a general increase in the poetic intensity of the language in the later stages?
   ii. Are there other passages like the one closing Scene i in which dramatic immediacy is subordinated to lyrical and descriptive language? What relation to the rest of the selection do such intervals bear?
5. As a longer exercise, apply the critical observations on *Hamlet* made in the text and in your reply to the preceding questions to any other of Shakespeare's plays. Select one scene for particularly close analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE *Intellect and Wit*

I. EXPLICIT ARGUMENT

EVERY POEM, no matter how obliquely, presents ideas and in some sense argues for them. The argument may be revealed through a sequence of emotions or the workings of a narrative, or it may be directly and logically stated. In each case, the reader must try to grasp it and follow its thread—indeed, he cannot avoid doing so if he wishes his understanding of the poet's accomplishment to meet the poet's purpose.

Most readers will recognize the difficulty of writing poetry that is explicit in its argument, yet triumphant in its art. Those poets who have done so have proved their skill twice over. Thus, the eighteenth-century masters of intellectual verse (Pope, Prior, Goldsmith, Swift, and others) strove for logical precision as well as brilliance, and succeeded because of their wit, their polished analytical conciseness, and their socially sophisticated mastery of idiom. The neat couplets, each so sharply pointed, of Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* illustrate their methods:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A Being darkly wise, and rudely great;
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason ^such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:

Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused, or disabused;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurled:
The glory, jest and riddle of the world!

Behind the half-scornful satirical tone of this passage is a basic earnestness of thought. A series of parallel assertions and balanced contrasts supports the poet's conception of man's place in the universe wittily, piously, and with confident reiteration. It consists mainly of a number of paradoxical observations to establish the inadequacy of man's nature: He is "darkly wise" and "rudely great"; and though too enlightened by religion to be a skeptic, yet he is weak before temptation. He falls midway between god and beast. The reader might consider any one of Pope's ideas questionable, but together these propositions do make for a consistent, clearly articulated argument. The language itself is intellectual in its philosophic, religious and moral terminology, and the thoughts have been memorably phrased. Whether or not "the proper study of Mankind is Man" may be debated indefinitely, and the paradox interpreted many ways, but the precision, the deft punning, and the air of shrewd wisdom give the couplets the sound of proverbs. These are characteristic virtues of neo-Classic poetry.

The presentation of ideas in verse by Romantic poets, as one might expect, is generally less urbane and more emotional.[1] In the following passage from Wordsworth's *The Prelude,* there is a piety equal to that of Pope; and though the speaker may seem to be living in an altogether different world from Pope's, he too is bending all his talents to the precise, controlled formulation of an idea. Yet the lines are much more weighted with emotion than is the *Essay on Man:*

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
In one society. How strange that all

---

[1] See pages 601-607 for a more thorough discussion of Classical and Romantic poetry.

The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself1 Praise to the end!
Thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ. . . .

This passage too, it is interesting to note, speaks with some humility of the limitations of man's understanding. Both passages, in fact, use forms of the word "dark" to suggest these limitations. But Pope's phrase is one element of a clear-cut antithesis (a balancing of opposed ideas emphasized by the way the words are placed) in a series of antitheses. His main concern has been to appeal to our minds by the force and charm of this series as it rocks the argument back and forth, and to intrigue us by the variety which he so skilfully achieves within this pattern. Wordsworth, on the other hand, uses "dark" to suggest the *mystery* rather than the logical absurdity of the human condition. He follows it up with "inscrutable workmanship," "strange," and then a series of words denoting emotional suffering and confusion. Pope's lines close with a pithy intellectual summary: Man is "the glory, jest, and riddle of the world!" Wordsworth's, beginning with a musical simile for the divine element in our natures, move through impressions of awe and sadness to an outburst of joyous praise at the end. The argument is clear and logical enough, but its movement is emotional and its tone subjective.

In Metaphysical poetry—to look backwards two centuries before Wordsworth—we have writing more abstractly intellectualized than most Romantic poetry, yet more warmly familiar in tone than the elegantly finished Classical mode will ordinarily allow.[2] Although the following poem of George Herbert's lacks the complexity of many other Metaphysical verse-arguments, its four tiny prophecies each shift our attention to a new phase of Herbert's theme, exemplifying perfectly the characteristic Metaphysical technique. That is, the imagery, though intellectually demanding, is combined with the language of emotion to give the feeling-tone of the poet's ideas.

[2] See pages 476-483 for a more thorough discussion of Metaphysical poetry.

GEORGE HERBERT *Virtue*

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
  The bridal of the earth and sky,
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;
  For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue angry and brave
  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,
My music 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,
  Then chiefly lives.

What is especially interesting in Herbert's figures of speech here is their developing relation to one another. The day, "bridal of the earth and sky/' makes visible the beautiful sights of mortal life. In its calm brightness it seems merely passive, but the rose makes a more defiant show against death. Yet the rose's partial burial, even in life, is a sign that the defiance will be quite futile. Nor is the spring, which includes many days and roses and as it were tries to transcend death by multiplying their mortalities within itself, more successful. But the soul unites earth and sky differently from the day, for it joins spirit to flesh; and it defies death more truly though less rashly than the "angry rose." And like "seasoned timber," it compresses within it all the values of its nature: undying ones, however, rather than dying ones of the earth.

The process of elimination in this poem, incidentally, is characteristic of the emotional way poetic thought often operates: "Try this, and reject it; then this; then this; but accept this last meaning, which has been growing out of all the preceding rejections." In *Virtue*, we "reject" (by mourning for them) the day, the rose, and the spring as impermanent, despite their beauty and sweetness which we love. But we "accept" the soul, whose own beauty and sweetness, though imperishable, has actually been defined for us in the images of the other lovely things mourned.

Poetic argument always leads past the reasoning itself to the vital personality behind it. How elegant and worldly Pope's lines seem, despite their seriousness; how wondering and humbly elated are Wordsworth's; and what a gay, delicate spirit appears, despite the grave theme, in Herbert. His pleasure, gourmet-like, in the spring as "a box where sweets compacted lie" is as attractive as his quiet punning to leaven his lament that spring must end: "My music shows ye have your closes." The poetry of thought does certainly take seriously the arguments it presents, but it cannot reach us and move us unless the speaking personality it embodies does so at the same time. It is for this reason that some of the most effective verse-arguments ever written appear in narrative and dramatic poetry—in the debates and discussions, for instance, of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in the soliloquies of Shakespearean tragedy, in the satires of Chaucer and Dryden, and in the best contemplative passages of Wordsworth's *The Prelude.* Such poetry is intellectual and sometimes argumentative, but the development is not always logical, sometimes not logical at all, and never only logical. There is always an emotional fire about the lines, usually perhaps only a faint glow but sometimes a flash or a crackling flame, and there is always the individual voice of the poet.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE *On Degree*

(from *Troilus and Cressida)*

THE HEAVENS themselves, the planets and this centre
Observe degree, priority and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office and custom, in all line of order;
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthroned and sphered
Amidst the other; whose medicinable eye
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,
And posts, like the commandment of a king,
Sans check to good and bad: but when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents! what mutinyl
What raging of the seal shaking of earth!
Commotion in the winds! frights, changes, horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture! O, when degree is shaked,
Which is the ladder of all high designs,
The enterprise is sick! How could communities,
Degrees in schools and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And, hark, what discord follows! each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores
And make a sop of all this solid globe:
Strength should be lord of imbecility,

And the rude son should strike his father dead:
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides,
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then every thing includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And last eat up himself. . . .

JOHN DONNE *The New Philosophy*

(from *The First Anniversary)*

AND NEW Philosophy calls all in doubt,
The Element of fire is quite put out;
The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world's spent,
When in the Planets, and the Firmament
They seek so many new; then see that this
Is crumbled out again to his Atomies.
'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;
All just supply, and all Relation:
Prince, Subject, Father, Son, are things forgot,
For every man alone thinks he hath got
To be a Phoenix, and that then can be
None of that kind, of which he is, but he.
This is the world's condition now, and now
She that should all parts to reunion bow,
She that had all Magnetic force alone,
To draw, and fasten sund'red parts in one;
She whom wise nature had invented then
When she observed that every sort of men
Did in their voyage in this world's Sea stray,
And needed a new compass for their way;

She that was best, and first original
Of all faire copies, and the general
Steward to Fate; she whose rich eyes and breast
Gilt the West Indies, and perfum'd the East;
Whose having breath'd in this world, did bestow
Spice on those Isles, and bade them still smell so,
And that rich Indie which doth gold inter,
Is but as single money, coin'd from her:
She to whom this world must itself refer,
As Suburbs, or the Microcosm of her,
She, she is dead; she's dead: when thou knowst this
Thou knowst how lame a cripple this world is.
And learn'st thus much of our Anatomy.
That this world's general sickness doth not lie
In any humour, or one certain part;
But as thou sawest it rotten at the heart,
Thou seest a Hectic fever hath got hold
Of the whole substance, not to be controll'd,
And that thou hast but one way, not t'admit
The world's infection, to be none of it.
For the world's subtil'st immaterial parts
Feel this consuming wound, and age's darts.
For the world's beauty is decay'd, or gone,
Beauty, that's colour, and proportion.

JOHN MILTON *Free Will and God's Foreknowledge*

(from *Paradise Lost)*

ONLY BEGOTTEN Son,[1] seest thou what rage
Transports our adversary, whom no bounds
Prescrib'd, no bars of Hell, nor all the chains
Heapt on him there, nor yet the main Abyss
Wide interrupt can hold; so bent he seems
On desperate revenge, that shall redound

---

*In this passage God explains to Messiah, His son, why although He has foreknowledge of the future, His creatures are free to make their own moral choices. The explanation is occasioned by the sight of Satan on his way to Eden, where he plans to tempt Adam and Eve to disobey God. See pages 271-272.

Upon his own rebellious head. And now
Through all restraint broke loose he wings his way
Not far off Heav'n, in the Precincts of light,
Directly towards the new created World,
And Man there plac't, with purpose to assay
If him by force he can destroy, or worse,
By some false guile pervert; and shall pervert,
For man will heark'n to his glozing lies,
And easily transgress the sole Command,
Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall
He and his faithless Progeny: whose fault?
Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of me
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who fail'd;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere
Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
Where only what they needs must do, appear'd,
Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd,
Made passive both, had serv'd necessitie,
Not me. They therefore as to right belonged,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Their maker, or their making, or their Fate;
As if Predestination over-rul'd
Their will, dispos'd by absolute Decree
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.
So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I form'd them free, and free they must remain

Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Their nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
Their freedom; they themselves ordain'd their fall.
The first sort by their own suggestion fell,
Self-tempted, self-deprav'd; Man falls deceived
By the other first; Man therefore shall find grace,
The other none: in Mercy and Justice both,
Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine.

ALEXANDER POPE *The Great Chain of Being* (from *Essay on Man)*

FAR AS Creation's ample range extends,
The scale of sensual,[2] mental powers ascends:
Mark how it mounts, to Man's imperial race,
From the green myriads in the peopled grass:
What modes of sight betwixt each wide extreme,
The mole's dim curtain and the lynx's beam:
Of smell, the headlong lioness between,
And hound sagacious on the tainted green:
Of hearing, from the life that fills the flood,
To that which warbles through the vernal wood:
The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine!
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line:
In the nice bee, what sense so subtly true
From poisonous herbs extracts the healing dew?
How Instinct varies in the grovelling swine,
Compared, half-reasoning elephant, with thine!
'Twixt that, and Reason, what a nice barrier,
Forever separate, yet forever near!
Remembrance and Reflection how allied;
What thin partitions Sense from Thought divide:
And Middle natures, how they long to join,
Yet never pass the insuperable linel

---

[2] sensory

Without this just gradation, could they be
Subjected, these to those, or all to thee?
The powers of all subdued by thee alone,
Is not thy reason all these powers in one?
See, through this air, this ocean, and this earth,
All matter quick,[3] and bursting into birth.
Above, how high progressive life may go!
Around, how wide! how deep extend below!
Vast chain of Being! which from God began,
Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,
No glass can reach; from Infinite to thee,
From thee to Nothing.—On superior powers
Were we to press, inferior might on ours:
Or in the full creation leave a void,
Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroyed:
From Nature's chain whatever link you strike,
Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.
And, if each system in gradation roll
Alike essential to the amazing Whole,
The least confusion but in one, not all
That system only, but the Whole must fall.
Let Earth unbalanced from her orbit fly,
Planets and Suns run lawless through the sky;
Let ruling angels from their spheres be hurled,
Being on Being wrecked, and world on world;
Heaven's whole foundations to their centre nod,
And Nature tremble to the throne of God.
All this dread Order break—for whom? for thee?
Vile worm!—Oh Madness! Pride! Impiety!
What if the foot, ordained the dust to tread,
Or hand, to toil, aspired to be the head?
What if the head, the eye, or ear repined
To serve mere engines to the ruling Mind?
Just as absurd for any part to claim
To be another, in this general frame:
Just as absurd, to mourn the tasks or pains
The great directing Mind of All ordains.

[8] alive

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
That, changed through all, and yet in all the same,
Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame,
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent;
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart:
As full, as perfect, in vile Man that mourns,
As the rapt Seraph that adores and burns:
To him no high, no low, no great, no small;
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.
Cease then, nor Order imperfection name;
Our proper bliss depends on what we blame.
Know thy own point: this kind, this due degree
Of blindness, weakness, Heaven bestows on thee.
Submit.—In this, or any other sphere,
Secure to be as blessed as thou canst bear:
Safe in the hand of one disposing Power,
Or in the natal or the mortal hour.
All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;
All Discord, Harmony not understood;
All partial Evil, universal Good:
And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
One truth is clear, WHATEVER is, is RIGHT.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A Being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;

Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused, or disabused;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurled:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!
   Go, wondrous creature! mount where Science guides;
Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides;
Instruct the planets in what orbs to run,
Correct old Time, and regulate the Sun;
Go, soar with Plato to the empyreal sphere,
To the first good, first perfect, and first fair;
Or tread the mazy round his followers trod,
And quitting sense call imitating God;
As Eastern priests in giddy circles run,
And turn their heads to imitate the Sun.
Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule—
Then drop into thyself, and be a fool!

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON *Oh jet We trust*
that somehow good

(from *In Memoriam:* LIV-LVI)

LIV

OH YET we trust that somehow good
  Will be the final goal of ill,
  To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
  That not one life shall be destroyed,
  Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;

That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shriveled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.

LV

The wish, that of the living whole
No life may fail beyond the grave,
Derives it not from what we have
The likest God within the soul?

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro* darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

LVI

"So careful of the type?" but no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries, "A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing, all shall go.

"Thou makest thine appeal to me:
I bring to life, I bring to death:
The spirit does but mean the breath:
I know no more." And he, shall he,

Man, her last work, who seem'd so fair,
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,
Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,

Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation's final law—
Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed—

Who loved, who suffered countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,
Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal'd within the iron hills?

No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime,
That tare each other in their slime,
Were mellow music match'd with him*

O life as futile, then, as frail!
O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer, or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil.

w. H. AUDEN *September i, 1939*

I SIT in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god[4]:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

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* Hitler spent part of his childhood in Linz, Austria; presumably study of this period in his life can help account for his personality and appeal.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or good.

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.[5]

From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life

---

[5] In his *Diary,* the great ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky thus characterizes the impresario Sergei Diaghilev.

The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow;
"I *will* be true to the wife,
I'll concentrate more on my work/'
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

Defenseless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 77

i. Paraphrase the argument in the passage from Shakespeare. How important are figures of speech, emotional or colorful language, and sound-effects in this argument?

2. Analyze Milton's conception of the "personality" of God, who is shown here addressing the Messiah in Heaven. Does the definition of free will God presents seem harmonious with this conception?
3. The "she" referred to in Donne's *The New Philosophy* is a girl whose recent death the poem from which the passage is taken laments. In it, Donne's sub-title says, "by occasion of the untimely death of Mistress Elizabeth Drury, the frailty and the decay of this whole world is represented." Elizabeth Drury died in 1610, at the age of fifteen. The "new philosophy" is Copernican astronomy (and modern science generally). What does Donne say has been its effect? Is he against scientific thought? If so—or if not—what has the death of this girl, who Donne once said represented "the *idea* of a woman," to do with his attitude? What is the effect of the exaggerated statements and the many concrete images in the passage?
4. Compare the styles (the relative concreteness, subtlety, wit, idiomatic flavor, and abstractness of diction; the qualities of sound and rhythmic movement; the dramatic tone) of the passages by Pope and Tennyson. Which has the more immediate appeal for a general audience? Which is intellectually more impressive? Are these authors primarily concerned to present specific ideas clearly and effectively, or do you find in them other objects—for instance, to express an emotional attitude toward a problem or accepted truth, or to treat a serious subject in a worldly and engaging manner, or to suggest a frame of mind (such as deliberate self-restraint or cold impersonality) in which such matters should be approached?
5. Trace the line of argument in W. H. Auden's *September 1, 1939*, written at the beginning of the second World War. What relation to its familiar Christian thesis and its closing prayer does its characterization of modern American society bear? Is the argument strengthened or weakened by the special allusions to Greek history, the rise of Protestantism, radical social criticism, and Freudian psychology?

   Compare the speaking personality in this poem with that in the selection by Donne, the selection by Milton, and the selection by Tennyson. In what respects does Auden's argument resemble that in each of these other poems? What difference does the tone and general quality of the "voice" make in each case?
6. Select any poem or passage in this section and point out the effect of its specifically poetic qualities in supporting and deepening the argument.

II. WIT AND SATIRE

O sacred weapon! left for truth's defence,
Sole dread of folly, vice, and insolence!
POPE

In examining the intellectual aspect of poetry, we must consider the role of *wit.* Though in general usage this term is often felt to be synonymous with *sense of humor,* in literary criticism it is a technical term of some exactness. It is more than a heightened perceptiveness and mastery of language such as all good poets possess. Originally it meant intellectual power; gradually the meaning changed to something nearer intellectual *alertness,* with an ability to see unfamiliar connections between words and ideas in a manner often surprising and amusing. The surprise need not be stunning, the humor need not be hilarious; in fact, either or both may be almost invisible, hidden in the felicitous phrasing a writer employs. As Dr. Johnson put it toward the end of the eighteenth century, wit strikes us as "at once natural and new," and "though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just."

How varied the surprising justness of witty writing may be we have observed in the poetry of Pope and of Herbert, two writers at once very clever and very unlike one another. It was the speaking personality, we saw, that made the great difference in the effect of their work. Wit may be found in qualities not usually seen in either of these poets, however. In A. E. Housman's *To an Athlete Dying Young* (pages 614-615), it is discovered in the wry turn by which the poet finds consolation in praising the dead youth for his *ingenuity,* as though he had *decided* to die young to avoid disillusionment:

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay. . . .

Even more striking for its wryness, because one does not ordinarily think of Death as a courteous visitor, is Emily Dickinson's

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me. . . .[1]

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[1] See page 518.

And wit can show itself through an image that, through its grotesqueness, startles us by revealing a frank, unconventional, unexpected directness of thought, as in Emerson's

> My avarice cooled
> Like lust in the chill of the grave.

This last image, with its daring leap of association, recalls another definition of wit, also by Dr. Johnson. In writing about the seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets, he noted that wit could be considered "a kind of *discordia concors:* a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." In Metaphysical verse, he wrote, "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises. . . ." Dr. Johnson was not altogether pleased with this quality, thinking it made for writing too labored, or special, and more extravagant than his typically neo-Classical theory that "great thoughts are always general" allowed for. Nevertheless, he granted that the Metaphysical conceit[2] has its values: "If their greatness seldom elevates, their acuteness often surprises." Indeed, the successful conceit, with its intellectual daring, its concise aptness, and its disconcerting suddenness, brings the essence of wit into the poetic image.

It is in satirical writing, as we might expect, that wit comes most openly and fully into its own. It may manifest itself here quite gently, almost fondly, as in Lord Byron's lines on the dissembling of women:

> The charming creatures lie with such a grace,
> There's nothing so becoming to the face.

But how cruelly accurate a weapon wit can be in showing up human vice or folly, the following passage from Pope's *Moral Essays*, with its contemptuous yet tragic picture of London's fashionable elderly dowagers in the early eighteenth century, will reveal:

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[2] See pages 50-51 for a discussion of the conceit. Donne's image, discussed there, of separated lovers in the figure of the legs of a compass, is an excellent example. So is his picture, in *The Ecstasy*, of two lovers gazing at one another:

> Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
> Our eyes, upon one double string. ...

As hags hold sabbaths, not for joy but spite,
So these their merry miserable night;
So round and round the ghosts of beauty glide,
And haunt the places where their honour died.
  See how the world its veterans rewards:
A youth of frolics, an old age of cards;
Fair to no purpose, artful to no end,
Young without lovers, old without a friend;
A fop her passion, and her prize a sot;
Alive ridiculous, and dead forgot.

Pope compares the frivolous social rounds of these aged beauties to the Witches' Sabbaths of medieval tradition in which witches, sorcerers, and demons were believed to gather in unholy, orgiastic, and blasphemous communion. Calling these ladies "ghosts of beauty" in one of the most biting satirical couplets in English verse, he then describes them as unrewarded "veterans" (of the campaigns of society), and goes on to picture the emptiness of their memories of the past and the pointlessness of their pathetic, absurd lives now that they are old. If we observe how the passage builds up its impressions, we then see that the poet's unsentimental ridicule of these old "hags," "ghosts," "veterans," whose lives were cheated of meaning from the start, is not without sardonic pity. And we realize that a whole way of life is under attack, that there is hatred and disgust for the attitudes toward life represented by the targets of Pope's wit. As one critic, William Empson, has accurately put it, "An impression of febrile and uncontrollable hatred is given to the terrible climax of this passage by the flat, indifferent little words, *fop, sot,* which . . . must be hurled at a person conceived as in front of you, to whom you know they are intolerable."

We may compare this passage with a gentler one by Pope, still unmincingly critical of a social class—the country gentry—but more lighthearted and mocking. In this poem (pages 13-14), Pope teases a young lady who must return home after an exciting visit to London by picturing the "delights" of country life and the kind of "romantic" wooing to which she may look forward there.

Some Squire, perhaps, you take delight to rack;
Whose game is Whisk, whose treat a toast in sack;
Who visits with a gun, presents you birds,
Then gives a smacking buss, and cries,—No words!
Or with his hound comes hallowing from the stable,
Makes love with nods, and knees beneath a table;
Whose laughs are hearty, tho' his jests are coarse,
And loves you best of all things—but his horse.

Social types are not the only object of the satirist's wit. Certain aspects of human nature, and foolish or wicked ideas, can be made to look ridiculous by the same sort of surprising comparisons and contrasts and by the same emphasis on extravagant manner and behavior, ignorance, and thoughtlessness. In the seventeenth century, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, employed these methods in his bitterly sarcastic *A Satire Against Mankind:*

Were I, who to my Cost already am
One of those strange, prodigious Creatures *Man,*
A spirit free, to chuse for my own share,
What sort of Flesh and Blood I pleas'd to wear,
I'd be a Dog, a Monkey, or a Bear,
Or any thing, but that vain Animal
Who is so proud of being Rational.
The Senses are too gross; and he'll contrive
A sixth, to contradict the other Five:
And before certain Instinct, will prefer
Reason, which Fifty times for One does err.
Reason, an *Ignis Fatuus* of the Mind,
Which leaves the Light of Nature, Sense, behind.
Pathless, and dang'rous, wand'ring ways it takes,
Through Error's fenny Bogs, and thorny Brakes. . . ,

Rochester's great contemporary, John Dryden, used satire to destroy the reputation of a dull, inferior poet, Thomas Shadwell. (The effective satirizing in verse of a particular individual has been familiar since the ancient Greeks and Romans.) Dryden made Shadwell the butt of a mock-epic poem in which the king of the realms of Nonsense selects him as his heir apparent. The essence of the wit in this poem—*MacFlecknoe* (pages 440-441)—lies in its topsy-turvy praise of Shadwell, as when, for instance, he is called "mature in dulness." We have, consequently, a series of momentarily concealed insults which reveal themselves, delightfully and devastatingly, in a succession of "double-takes" or minor explosions:

This aged Prince, now flourishing in peace,
And blest with issue of a large increase;
Worn out with business, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the State;
And pond'ring which of all his sons was fit
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,
Cried: " 'Tis resolved; for Nature pleads, that he
Should only rule, who most resembles me.
Sh———alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dulness from his tender years:
Sh———alone, of all my sons, is he
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.
The rest to some faint meaning make pretense,
But Sh———never deviates into sense.
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
Strike thro', and make a lucid interval;
But Sh———'s genuine night admits no ray,
His rising fogs prevail upon the day.

There are some famous personal attacks in English verse in which wit and emotion are powerfully fused. (The only emotion Dryden had wasted on Shadwell was a rather cold contempt.) The sharpest, most venomous of all is without doubt Pope's characterization of Lord Hervey in his *Epistle to Arbuthnot.* Here Lord Hervey, a court favorite, is given the name "Sporus," after a favorite eunuch of Nero's. Though granting that he is not worthy of notice—being a "thing of silk," a "mere white curd of Ass's milk," and an insensitive insect ("Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?")—Pope launches his jeering couplets so fiercely that they have been called "screams" of hatred and contempt:

Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,
This painted child of dirt, that stinks and stings;
Whose buzz the witty and the fair annoys,
Yet Wit ne'er tastes, and Beauty ne'er enjoys;
So well-bred spaniels civilly delight
In mumbling of the game they dare not bite.
Eternal smiles his emptiness betray,
As shallow streams run dimpling all the way,

Whether in florid impotence he speaks,
And, as the prompter breathes, the puppet squeaks,
Or at the ear of Eve, familiar Toad,
Half froth, half venom, spits himself abroad,
In puns, or politics, or tales, or lies,
Or spite, or smut, or rhymes, or blasphemies;
His wit all see-saw between *that* and *this*,
Now high, now low, now master up, now miss,
And he himself one vile Antithesis.
Amphibious thing! that acting either part,
The trifling head, or the corrupted heart;
Fop at the toilet, flatt'rer at the board,
Now trips a Lady, and now struts a Lord.
Eve's tempter thus the Rabbins have exprest,
A cherub's face, a reptile all the rest;
Beauty that shocks you, Parts that none will trust,
Wit that can creep, and Pride that licks the dust.

Another savage sketch is Jonathan Swift's *A Satyrical Elegy* (pages 441-442), written at the death of the Duke of Marlborough. A few lines will show the bluntness of Swift's language, the clear intention to heap insult on the name of a hated enemy:

Behold, his funeral appears,
Nor widow's sighs, nor orphan's tears,
Wont at such times each heart to pierce,
Attend the progress of his hearse.
And what of that? his friends may say.
He had those honours in his day.
True to his profit and his pride,
He made them weep before he died.

The wit here, of course, derives from the shifting meaning of "widow" and "orphan." At first they denote the fact that Marlborough left no wife or child of his own; then they are reminders of his ruthless policy of war.

Similar are the attacks of Shelley and Byron on Lord Castlereagh, the Prime Minister who bore so much responsibility for crushing the European struggles for popular freedom after the French Revolution. In *The Masque of Anarchy*, Shelley cries out,

I met Murder on the way—
He had a mask like Castlereagh. . . .

And Byron, hearing of Castlereagh's madness and suicide, set down this harsh judgment:

LORD BYRON *Epigrams on Castlereagh*

I.

So Castlereagh has cut his throat1 The worst
Of this is,—that his own was not the first.

II.

So *He* has cut his throat at lastl He? Who?
The man who cut his country's long ago.

Behind these angry outbursts of Shelley and Byron, of course, lies the fervor for liberty of the younger Romantics of the last century, the same fervor that appears in Shelley's appeal to his countrymen to

Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number—
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many—they are few.

Attacks and appeals such as these, in their eagerness to win the reader's emotional assent, often are not really satire but pure oratory. The work of Pope and Dryden is more characteristic, because of its finesse and its ever-dominant wit. Modern poets, however, have learned from both schools and have developed their own satirical styles in accordance with the times. Our poetry today includes bitter sallies against intellectual vulgarization and social injustice, satirical portraits of social types, and subtle gibes at various aspects of our culture. The variety of poetic satire seems greater today than ever before, partly because contemporary poets are oppressed by the increasing mechanization and standardization of life and partly because of the widespread sense that civilized society has not lived up to its moral promise but has engulfed man in greater dilemmas than he faced in the past. It ranges from Metaphysical conceits like Hart Crane's "Legs awaken salads in the brain" (to suggest, slyly, the susceptibilities of a burlesque audience) to the light but devastating forays of John Betjeman:

Gracious Lord, oh bomb the Germans.
  Spare their women for Thy sake,
And if that is not too easy
  We will pardon Thy mistake.
But, gracious Lord, whate'er shall be
Don't let anyone bomb me.

Keep our empire undismembered
  Guide our forces by Thy Hand,
Gallant blacks from far Jamaica,
  Honduras and Totoland;
Protect them Lord in all their fights,
And, even more, protect the whites.

But whatever its main character—head-on damnation of evil, parody, or lighthearted irony—successful satire, like other poetry written to make a point, depends for its full achievement on wit and dramatic conviction.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

i.

JOHN DRYDEN from *MacFlecknoe*

OR, A SATIRE UPON THE TRUE-BLUE-
PROTESTANT POET
T. S.[1]

ALL HUMAN things are subject to decay,
And when Fate summons, monarchs must obey.
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
Was call'd to empire, and had governed long:
In prose and'verse, was own'd, without dispute,
Thro' all the realms of *Nonsense*, absolute.
This aged Prince, now flourishing in peace,
And blest with issue of a large increase,
Worn out with business, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the State;
And, pond'ring which of all his sons was fit
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,
Cried: " 'Tis resolv'd; for Nature pleads, that he
Should only rule, who most resembles me.
Sh——alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dulness from his tender years:
Sh——alone of all my sons is he
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.
The rest to some faint meaning make pretense,
But Sh——never deviates into sense.
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
Strike thro', and make a lucid interval;
But Sh——'s genuine night admits no ray,
His rising fogs prevail upon the day.

---

[1] Thomas Shadwell

Besides, his goodly fabric fills the eye,
And seems designed for thoughtless majesty:
Thoughtless as monarch oaks that shade the plain,
And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.
Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,
Thou last great prophet of tautology. ...

JOHN WILMOT, EARL OF ROCHESTER *On Charles II*

HERE LIES our Sovereign Lord the King,
  Whose word no man relies on,
Who never said a foolish thing,
  Nor ever did a wise one.

SIR JOHN HARINGTON *Of Treason*

TREASON DOTH never prosper—what's the reason?
If it doth prosper, none dare call it treason.

JONATHAN SWIFT *A Satyrical Elegy on the Death of a Late Famous General*[2] *1722*

His GRACE! impossible! what, dead!
Of old age, too, and in his bed!
And could that mighty warrior fall,
And so inglorious, after all?
Well, since he's gone, no matter how,
The last loud trump must wake him now;
And, trust me, as the noise grows stronger,
He'd wish to sleep a little longer.
And could he be indeed so old
As by the newspapers we're told?
Threescore, I think, is pretty high;
'Twas time, in conscience he should die!

---

[2] the Duke of Marlborough.

This world he cumber'd long enough;
He burnt his candle to the snuff;
And that's the reason, some folks think,
He left behind so great a stink.
Behold his funeral appears,
Nor widow's sighs, nor orphan's tears,
Wont at such times each heart to pierce,
Attend the progress of his hearse.
And what of that? his friends may say,
He had those honours in his day.
True to his profit and his pride,
He made them weep before he died.
Come hither, all ye empty things,
Ye bubbles raised by breath of kings!
Who float upon the tide of state;
Come hither, and behold your fate.
Let Pride be taught by this rebuke,
How very mean a thing's a duke;
From all his ill-got honours flung,
Turn'd to that dirt from whence he sprung.

ALEXANDER POPE *On the Collar of a Dog Presented by Mr. Pope to the Prince of Wales*

I AM his Highness' dog at Kew;
Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?

ALEXANDER POPE *At Timon's Villa*

(from *Epistle to Burlington)*

AT TIMON'S Villa let us pass a day,
Where all cry out, "What sums are thrown away!"
So proud, so grand; of that stupendous air,
Soft and agreeable come never there.
Greatness, with Timon, dwells in such a draught
As brings all Brobdignag before your thought.

To compass this, his building is a town,
His pond an ocean, his parterre a down:
Who but must laugh, the master when he sees,
A puny insect, shivering at a breezel
Lo, what huge heaps of littleness around!
The whole, a laboured quarry above ground;
Two cupids squirt before; a lake behind
Improves the keenness of the northern wind.
His gardens next your admiration call,
On every side you look, behold the wall!
No pleasing intricacies intervene,
No artful wildness to perplex the scene;
Grove nods at grove, each alley has a brother,
And half the platform just reflects the other.
The suffering eye inverted nature sees,
Trees cut to statues, statues thick as trees;
With here a fountain, never to be played;
And there a summer-house that knows no shade;
Here Amphitrite sails through myrtle bowers;
There gladiators fight, or die in flowers;
Unwatercd see the drooping sea-horse mourn,
And swallows roost in Nilus' dusty urn.
  My lord advances with majestic mien,
Smit with the mighty pleasure, to be seen:
But soft,—by regular approach,—not yet,—
First through the length of yon hot terrace sweat;
And when up ten steep slopes you've dragged your thighs,
Just at his study door he'll bless your eyes.
  His study! with what authors is it stored?
In books, not authors, curious is my lord;
To all their dated backs he turns you round:
These Aldus printed, those Du Sueil has bound.
Lo, some are vellum, and the rest as good
For all his lordship knows, but they are wood.
For Locke or Milton 'tis in vain to look,
These shelves admit not any modern book.
  And now the chapel's silver bell you hear,
That summons you to all the pride of prayer;

Light quirks of music, broken and uneven,
Make the soul dance upon a jig to Heaven.
On painted ceilings you devoutly stare,
Where sprawl the saints of Verrio or Laguerre,
On gilded clouds in fair expansion lie,
And bring all paradise before your eye.
To rest, the cushion and soft dean invite,
Who never mentions hell to ears polite.
  But hark! the chiming clocks to dinner call;
A hundred footsteps scrape the marble hall;
The rich buffet well coloured serpents grace,
And gaping Tritons spew to wash your face.
Is this a dinner? this a genial room?
No, 'tis a temple, and a hecatomb.
A solemn sacrifice, performed in state,
You drink by measure, and to minutes eat.
So quick retires each flying course, you'd swear
Sancho's dread doctor and his wand were there.
Between each act the trembling salvers ring,
From soup to sweet-wine, and God bless the King.
In plenty starving, tantalized in state,
And complaisantly helped to all I hate,
Treated, caressed, and tired, I take my leave,
Sick of his civil pride from morn to eve;
I curse such lavish cost, and little skill,
And swear no day was ever passed so ill.
  Yet hence the poor are clothed, the hungry fed;
Health to himself, and to his infants bread
The labourer bears: What his hard heart denies,
His charitable vanity supplies.
  Another age shall see the golden ear
Embrown the slope, and nod on the parterre,
Deep harvests bury all his pride has planned,
And laughing Ceres re-assume the land.

2.

RUPERT BROOKE *Heaven*

FISH (FLY-replete, in depth of June,
Dawdling away their wat'ry noon)
Ponder deep wisdom, dark or clear,
Each secret fishy hope or fear.
Fish say, they have their Stream and Pond;
But is there anything Beyond?
This life cannot be All, they swear,
For how unpleasant, if it were!
One may not doubt that, somehow, Good
Shall come of Water and of Mud;
And, sure, the reverent eye must see
A purpose in Liquidity.
We darkly know, by Faith we cry,
The future is not Wholly Dry.
Mud unto mud!—Death eddies near—
Not here the appointed End, not here!
But somewhere, beyond Space and Time,
Is wetter water, slimier slime!
And there (they trust) there swimmeth One
Who swam ere rivers were begun,
Immense, of fishy form and mind,
Squamous, omnipotent, and kind;
And under that Almighty Fin,
The littlest fish may enter in.
Oh! never fly conceals a hook,
Fish say, in the Eternal Brook,
But more than mundane weeds are there,
And mud, celestially fair;
Fat caterpillars drift around,
And Paradisal grubs are found;
Unfading moths, immortal flies,
And the worm that never dies.
And in that Heaven of all their wish,
There shall be no more land, say fish.

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON *Cassandra*

I HEARD one who said: "Verily,
What word have I for children here?
Your Dollar is your only Word,
The wrath of it your only fear.

"You build it altars tall enough
To make you see, but you are blind;
You cannot leave it long enough
To look before you or behind.

"When Reason beckons you to pause,
You laugh and say that you know best;
But what it is you know, you keep
As dark as ingots in a chest.

"You laugh and answer, 'We are young;
Oh, leave us now, and let us grow:'
Not asking how much more of this
Will Time endure or Fate bestow.

"Because a few complacent years
Have made your peril of your pride,
Think you that you are to go on
Forever pampered and untried?

"What lost eclipse of history,
What bivouac of the marching stars,
Has given the sign for you to see
Millenniums and last great wars?

"What unrecorded overthrow
Of all the world has ever known,
Or ever been, has made itself
So plain to you, and you alone?

"Your Dollar, Dove and Eagle make
A Trinity that even you
Rate higher than you rate yourselves;
It pays, it flatters, and it's new.

"And though your very flesh and blood
Be what your Eagle eats and drinks,
You'll praise him for the best of birds,
Not knowing what the Eagle thinks.

"The power is yours, but not the sight;
You see not upon what you tread;
You have the ages for your guide,
But not the wisdom to be led.

"Think you to tread forever down
The merciless old verities?
And are you never to have eyes
To see the world for what it is?

"Are you to pay for what you have
With all you are?"—No other word
We caught, but with a laughing crowd
Moved on. None heeded, and few heard.

E. E. CUMMINGS *"next to of course god america i*

"next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water.

LOUISE BOGAN *Several Voices out of a Cloud*

COME DRUNKS and drug-takers; come perverts unnerved!
Receive the laurel, given, though late, on merit; to whom
and wherever deserved.

Parochial punks, trimmers, nice people, joiners true-blue,
Get the hell out of the way of the laurel. It is deathless.
And it isn't for you.

LOUIS MACNIECE *Bagpipe Music*

IT'S NO go the merrygoround, it's no go the rickshaw,
All we want is a limousine and a ticket for the peepshow.
Their knickers are made of crepe-de-chine, their shoes are
made of python,
Their halls ace lined with tiger rugs and their walls with
heads of bison.

John MacDonald found a corpse, put it under the sofa,
Waited till it came to life and hit it with a poker,
Sold its eyes for souvenirs, sold its blood for whiskey,
Kept its bones for dumb-bells to use when he was fifty.

It's no go the Yogi-Man, it's no go Blavatsky,
All we want is a bank balance and a bit of skirt in a taxi.

Annie MacDougall went to milk, caught her foot in the
heather,
Woke to hear a dance record playing of Old Vienna.
It's no go your maidenheads, it's no go your culture,
All we want is a Dunlop tyre and the devil mend the
puncture.

The Laird o' Phelps spent Hogmannay declaring he was
sober;
Counted his feet to prove the fact and found he had one foot
over.

Mrs. Carmichael had her fifth, looked at the job with repulsion,
Said to the midwife "Take it away; I'm through with over-production."

It's no go the gossip column, it's no go the Ceilidh,
All we want is a mother's help and a sugar-stick for the baby.

Willie Murray cut his thumb, couldn't count the damage,
Took the hide of an Ayrshire cow and used it for a bandage.
His brother caught three hundred cran when the seas were lavish,
Threw the bleeders back in the sea and went upon the parish.

It's no go the Herring Board, it's no go the Bible,
All we want is a packet of fags when our hands are idle.

It's no go the picture palace, it's no go the stadium,
It's no go the country cot with a pot of pink geraniums.
It's no go the Government grants, it's no go the elections,
Sit on your arse for fifty years and hang your hat on a pension.

It's no go my honey love, it's no go my poppet;
Work your hands from day to day, the winds will blow the profit.
The glass is falling hour by hour, the glass will fall for ever,
But if you break the bloody glass you won't hold up the weather.

KENNETH FEARING *Thirteen O'Clock*

WHY DO they whistle so loud, when they walk past the graveyard late at night?
Why do they look behind them when they reach the gates? Why do they have any gates? Why don't they go through the wall?
But why, O why do they make that horrible whistling sound?

GO AWAY, LIVE PEOPLE, STOP HAUNTING THE DEAD.

If they catch you, it is said, they make you rap, rap, rap on a table all night,
And blow through a trumpet and float around the room in long white veils,
While they ask you, and ask you: Can you hear us, Uncle Ted?
Are you happy, Uncle Ted? Should we buy or should we sell? Should we marry, Uncle Ted?
What became of Uncle Ned, Uncle Ted, and is he happy, and ask him if he knows what became of Uncle Fred?

KEEP AWAY, LIVE PEOPLE, KEEP FAR AWAY,
STAY IN THE WORLD'S OTHER WORLD WHERE YOU REALLY BELONG, YOU WILL PROBABLY BE MUCH HAPPIER THERE.

And who knows what they are hunting for, always looking, looking, looking with sharp bright eyes where they ought to have sockets?
Whoever saw them really grin with their teeth?
Who knows why they worry, or what they scheme, with a brain where there should be nothing but good, damp air?

STAY AWAY, LIVE PEOPLE, STAY AWAY, STAY AWAY,
YOU MEAN NO HARM, AND WE AREN'T AFRAID OF YOU, AND WE DON'T BELIEVE SUCH PEOPLE EXIST,
BUT WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR? WHO DO YOU WANT?
WHO? WHO? WHO? O WHO?

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 18

1. What are the specific objects of satire in Pope's *At Timon's Villa* and in Cummings' poem? Does Pope gain any advantage by speaking in his own person? Does Cummings gain other advantages by having someone else be the main speaker?

Which of these pieces ridicules a social type or point of view more effectively?

2. In *MacFlecknoe*, a mock-heroic poem deflating the reputation of Shadwell (see discussion on pages 435-436), Dryden is intrigued with the comic possibilities of a Kingdom of Dullness whose values are diametrically unlike those of genuine wit. Is his topsy-turvy method of attack as successful as the direct assault, in Louise Bogan's poem, upon literary mediocrity and pretentiousness?
3. Compare the selections by Pope in this section with the passage from *Essay on Man* in the preceding section. Does he seem more at home and more impressive in one vein than in the other? Do you find passages in the satirical pieces as serious and strongly stated as in the explicit argument? more so?
4. What simple device for reversing ordinary habits of thinking to gain a witty or satirical effect does Fearing employ? Find other poems which use this method.
5. Rupert Brooke's poem is in part a rejoinder to the portions of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* on pages 425-437. What serious differences of attitude and opinion lie between the two writers? Upon what devices does Brooke's satire depend? How successful is he?
6. Explain the title of Robinson's poem. Who is being addressed? Do the tone and the specific points made—especially in line 3 and in the eighth, ninth, and final stanzas—seem appropriate to an unheeded prophet in a tragic situation?
7. What serious attitudes are expressed in the poem by MacNeice? Notice that the poet speaks in terms of "we." What does "our" attitude or situation add up to as a comment on modern man's view of life and its problems and possibilities?

///. IMPLIED ARGUMENT: IRONY AND AMBIGUITY

One of the most potent intellectual resources of a poet is irony —the use of language to imply the precise opposite of what is actually stated. In its clearest form, irony is the handmaiden of satire. Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* was a case in point, and so are the following tongue-in-cheek lines by Arthur Hugh Clough which purport to interpret the Ten Commandments in an "up-to-date" way and make them more businesslike. The effect of these lines depends upon the apparent solemnity with which they recommend a superficial religious conformity as the high road not to heavenly glory but to commercial and social success. *The Latest Decalogue* is a satire on Victorian respectability and utilitarianism.

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH *The Latest Decalogue*

Thou shalt have one God only; who
Would be at the expense of two?

No graven images may be
Worshipped, except the currency:

Swear not at all; for, for thy curse
Thine enemy is none the worse:

At church on Sunday to attend
Will serve to keep the world thy friend:

Honour thy parents; that is, all
From whom advancement may befall;

Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive
Officiously to keep alive:

Do not adultery commit;
Advantage rarely comes of it:

Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat,
When it's so lucrative to cheat:

Bear not false witness; let the lie
Have time on its own wings to fly:

Thou shalt not covet, but tradition
Approves all form of competition.

But irony may be used *without* satire. It may, instead, be employed to give edge to the emotion of a lyric poem. In Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* (pages 651-653), it underlines a lover's impatience. The speaker has been presenting the conventional argument that if we do not seize the joys of life when we are young, old age and death will deprive us of them forever. At one point he pretends to consider the advantages of existence in the grave, *as if* he were thinking the problem over seriously, from every point of view. We know that no one really thinks this way; philosophers have discussed the relative value of life and death, but not in terms that are more suitable to the renting of living quarters than to religion and metaphysics:

The Grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Irony may be even more subtle, and certainly very serious in its effects, when it implies not a denial of a pretended attitude but a sense of the discrepancy between human desires and the tragic realities of life. This kind of irony is found in the climax of Milton's sonnet *On His Deceased Wife,* in which he tells of dreaming that he has once again seen his young wife who died in childbirth. The effect of irony here lies in the brutality with which truth breaks in on his dream. This effect is increased for us if we note Milton's reference to his blindness in the words "veil'd" and "fancied" and the restraint with which he suggests, through the frustration of the moment of waking, his deeper misery because of her death:

Her face was veil'd; yet to my fancied sight,
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shin'd
So clear, as in no face with more delight.
But O as to embrace me she enclin'd
I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night

In its usefulness for opening up the relation between illusion and reality, irony is closely related to ambiguity. Indeed, irony is a special instance of ambiguity, the expression in a single term of more than one meaning. Ambiguity, when it is intentionally and skilfully used, modifies, enriches, compares, illustrates, and even undermines or denies an idea at the same time as it expresses it, and thus is a subtle way of suggesting the complexity and variability—the "ambiguity"—of things. Irony and ambiguity can exist in a single word or a brief figure, or they may be extended throughout the development and denouement of a complete plot.

A passage in Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale* will illustrate this relationship. The tale itself is a rollicking yet tragic account of three foolish drunkards who stagger out one morning to catch and kill Death! Of course, they find only their own deaths, which they themselves, unwittingly, have contrived through their greed. The person telling this ironic story is himself exceedingly avaricious; yet it is he, again ironically, who proclaims its moral—that greed for wealth is the root of all evil. The passage we are concerned with now, however—the most moving in the tale—is the great transition point between the rollicking satire of the beginning and the tragic insight of the ending. The drunks have met and insulted an old man because of his great age. As part of his reply, before he directs them to the place where they will find Death, he utters a complaint in which he describes his own terrible longing to die. No irony could be greater than that which lies in the difference between the superficial hatred of the roisterers for death and the old man's profound desire for it.

> Thus walke I, lyk a restelees caityf,
> And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
> I knokke with my staf, both erly and late,
> And seye, "Leve moder, leet me in!
> Lo, how I vanysshe, flessh, and blood, and skyn!
> Alias! when shul my bones been at reste!"[1]

[1] A rough translation into modern English follows:
Thus walk I, like a restless prisoner,
And on the ground, which is my mother's gate,
I knock with my staff, both early and late,
And say, "Dear Mother, let me in!
Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin!
Alas, when shall my bones be at rest?"

A profound idea wells up in this passage—the idea that we cannot conceive of bringing an end to death without at the same time destroying the principle of the life-cycle here symbolized by Mother Earth. The complaint becomes a devastating comment on the vanity of the human desire to circumvent the destiny of man, which includes death as well as birth and growth. In his deep knowledge and weariness of life, the old man wishes to complete his own cycle as nature intended it to be completed.

But who is the old man? The most direct answer is that he is simply a very wise and aged person, and that when he refers to the earth as his mother he is merely speaking figuratively. Nevertheless, this explanation does not account for his being *unable* to die, or for the assurance with which he describes the place where the men can find Death. There is something about him of the magical and the supernatural; and his calling the earth his mother summons up, actually, the beliefs and fears embodied in primitive mythology.

Chaucer does not pause to explain just who the old man is; hence the ambiguity of this character, who can be seen in several different ways. The most obvious explanation, and the most satisfying one, is that he is Death himself—and what a crowning irony, to find Death complaining that he cannot die, even while he is arranging for the self-destruction of the poor fools who have set out to tamper with things better left alone! Even if we do not see him as Death, however, he can at least be seen as a passionately conceived spirit of old age, speaking for the natural order of things as opposed to the younger men's desire to defy that natural order. He is in any case a mystical and prophetic figure, and Chaucer's deliberate avoidance of explanatory comment deepens the mystery and awe that surround him.

A different sort of ambiguity and irony can be found in a seemingly light poem of William Blake's:

WILLIAM BLAKE / *asked a thief*

I asked a thief to steal me a peach:
He turned up his eyes.
I ask'd a lithe lady to lie her down:
Holy and meek she cries.

As soon as I went an angel came:
He wink'd at the thief
And smil'd at the dame,
And without one word spoke
Had a peach from the tree,
And 'twixt earnest and joke
Enjoy'd the Lady.

While the ambiguity of Chaucer's poem is centered in one character and one incident which deepen the meaning of the whole work, Blake's poem is ambiguous in its intent rather than in its characterization and action. We know just what has happened and who has done it. The thief and the lady have refused —on supposedly ethical grounds—the speaker's request for their services. But the angel seems to have an unspoken understanding with them, and easily makes them forget their pious pretensions. How are we to explain this poem? On the surface it is simply a joke, deriving its humor from a reversal of what one would ordinarily expect—a-joke which may be tartly suggesting that the successful profligate must *pretend* to be an angel. But the author does not *say* the angel is not really one. Indeed, if we push into the poem a bit further, he seems rather to be suggesting that only some supernatural being can free us to behave spontaneously and unselfconsciously, and in this suggestion he is castigating conventional morality as hypocritical and unnatural. There is a powerful lesson hidden in the implication that angels and ordinary human beings live by entirely different rules, and rightly so—that "you can do anything if you're an angel." Though the pleasure of the poem lies first of all in the comic characterizations of lady and thief, in the debonair dexterity of the angel, and in the amusing paradox of the situation, this unorthodox and exciting concept goes far beyond either playful whimsy, or conventional moralizing, or commonplace cynicism.

In Blake's deceptively light poem, as elsewhere in his writings, there is a searching analysis of popular beliefs, both economic and sexual. The "I" of the poem is a "natural man," who desires to have what is simply good and gratifying to the senses. Those who could get it for him or give it to him are prevented from responding by what transpires to be a hypocritical and conventional morality. It is only the "angel," who paradoxically seems to have all the suave and adept worldliness of the devil, whose neat and accomplished approach overcomes their scruples without a word spoken.

But the "moral" of this poem—for it *is* a poem which impresses us as having a moral, however ambivalent it may be—is probably not that it is important to be an "angel" because then you can do anything or take anything. It is true that for the timid ordinary being who must ask, his natural desires are thwarted by uncertainty and over-seriousness; and it is true that the angel has none of this uncertainty, and none of the solemnity with which philosophers and moralists deal with problems of conduct. But the true meaning of angels is seen in the fact that only they are gay, innocent, and convincing enough—and now the angel is seen to be more like a real angel and less like a limb of Satan—to overcome the scruples of the thief and the lady and *set them free* to perform the services they are ideally created to perform as human beings. The point of view is familiar in this poet's other work—for instance, in these more explicit lines:

> Abstinence sows sand all over
> The ruddy limbs & flaming hair,
> But Desire Gratified
> Plants fruits of life & beauty there.

When we begin to think of the angel not as the slick accomplished seducer, but as the liberator of the senses and the instincts from the bondage of respectability and fear, we are in a position to appreciate the truly critical and original force of this dynamic poem.[2]

In its oblique handling of a very "touchy" matter, *I asked a thief* resembles many modern poems that challenge accepted standards of thought and behavior. It is unlike the characteristic work of the day, however, in its surface clarity. The poem

[2] Even this line of thought does not exhaust the richness of suggestion. There are also undoubted parallels between the fable here and the story of the temptation and the fall in the Garden of Eden. This may lead us too far astray, but the unorthodox nature of Blake's genuinely religious thought could be demonstrated were we to follow out the possible identifications: the thief with Adam, the lady with Eve, the angel with the Serpent, and, perhaps, the "I" with Everyman. But we are concerned here only to illustrate the richness of ambiguity and irony that adheres to a short and apparently light and even comic poem.

becomes difficult and ambiguous only when we probe beneath this surface. Modern poets, on the other hand, often put on a kind of protective armor of imagery which, once penetrated, is seen to have covered a sense of isolation from the orthodox world and its beliefs.

Hart Crane's *Passage* (pages 473-474) is an instance. Perhaps the most pervasive fear of thinking people, and the most difficult to contemplate, is that all our values are illusory. *Passage* approaches this problem by giving us an "autobiographical" account in a series of metaphors and other images. This account tells how the speaker sought "an improved infancy"—a rebirth in a more beautiful and sunnier life—through a deliberate putting-aside of the sordid, petty, diseased "night" memories of actual human experience. The "sapphire" brilliance of sky and sea in the open daylight would lead him, he thought, to the purer arena of artistic vision. But the laws of life could not be circumvented, and the vision of his art was seen to be furtive, evasive—the "stolen book" of a "thief." Seeing himself thus—not as the laurel-crowned hero of the human spirit but as a "split" being, half thief and half death-messenger—he is overwhelmed by a new and terrible vision of the impersonal, non-human nature of the universe in which he lives.

It would be impossible directly to express the ideas implied by *Passage* without seeming to most people frightened and oversensitive. The oblique method of Hart Crane helps him avoid creating this impression before the precise character of his attitude has been made clear to the reader who must take the trouble of penetrating the imagery of each stanza. Of course, there is a risk which a poet like Hart Crane takes. The reader may not be willing to go along with him to the end. On the other hand, Blake's risk was that the reader would be satisfied with the easier and less complete meaning of his poem. Every poet, certainly, runs the risk of being misunderstood by the hasty, lazy, or wrongheaded reader.

One more kind of ambiguity may be seen in Richard Eberhart's *The Soul Longs to Return Whence It Came* (pages 471-473). The poem as a whole reveals how the same single object of attention can evoke apparently irreconcilable reactions, which are then shown in a new relationship. We shall not go into the whole poem here, but one passage may suggest how these opposed reactions, after throwing ironic light on one another's limitations, unite finally in creating a wider sense of reality. The speaker has been walking through a cemetery toward his mother's grave; near it, there is a tree:

> I walked a few paces;
> It was good, the tree; the friendliness of it.
> I touched it, I thought of the roots;
> They would have pierced her seven years.
> O all peoples! O mighty shadows!
> My eyes opened along the avenue
> **Of** tombstones, the common land of death.

He has been thinking of the tree from the viewpoint of one alive, has been consoled and reassured by its "friendliness." Then suddenly he realizes that its roots must have been piercing his mother's corpse for seven years! The pang of realization sends his mind out in a wave of identification with *all* the dead. We have moved from a specific, limited anecdote to the deepest emotional demands that human existence can make upon our sympathies.

Here, as in the poems by Chaucer, by Blake, and by Crane, ambiguity—the suggestion of more than one valid interpretation for the feelings and the experiences presented and for the very words through which they are communicated to us—has done its enriching work. It has enabled the poet to awaken our sensibilities and awareness on the broadest possible scale without abandoning himself to vagueness or to mere sermonizing.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

JOHN DONNE *The Apparition*

WHEN BY thy scorn, O murd'ress, I am dead,
And that thou think'st thee free
From all solicitation from me,
Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,
And thee, feign'd vestal, in worse arms shall see:
Then thy sick taper will begin to wink,
And he, whose thou art then, being tir'd before,
Will, if thou stir, or pinch to wake him, think
        Thou calFst for more,
And in false sleep, will from thee shrink:
And then, poor aspen wretch, neglected thou
Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lie
        A verier ghost than I.
What I will say, I will not tell thee now,
Lest that preserve thee; and since my love is spent,
I'd rather thou shouldst painfully repent,
Than by my threatenings rest still innocent.

JOHN MILTON *On His Deceased Wife*

METHOUGHT I saw my late espoused Saint
  Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,
  Whom Jove's great Son to her glad Husband gave,
  Rescu'd from death by force though pale and faint.
Mine as whom washt from spot of child-bed taint,
  Purification in the old Law did save,
  And such, as yet once more I trust to have
  Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind:
  Her face was veil'd; yet to my fancied sight,
  Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shin'd
So clear, as in no face with more delight.
  But O as to embrace me she enclin'd
  I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night.

ANDREW MARVELL *The Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers*

SEE WITH what simplicity
This nymph begins her golden daysl
In the green grass she loves to lie,
And there with her fair aspect tames
The wilder flowers, and gives them names,
But only with the roses plays,
        And them does tell
What colour best becomes them, and what smell.

Who can foretell for what high cause
This darling of the gods was born?
Yet this is she whose chaster laws
The wanton Love shall one day fear,
And, under her command severe,
See his bow broke and ensigns torn.
        Happy, who can
Appease this virtuous enemy of man!

O then let me in time compound
And parley with those conquering eyes,
Ere they have tried their force to wound;
Ere with their glancing wheels they drive
In triumph over hearts that strive,
And them that yield but more despise:
        Let me be laid
Where I may see thy glories from some shade.

Meantime, whilst every verdant thing
Itself does at thy beauty charm,
Reform the errors of the Spring:
Make that the tulips may have share
Of sweetness, seeing they are fair;
And roses of their thorns disarm;
        But most procure
That violets may a longer age endure.

But O, young beauty of the woods,
Whom nature courts with fruits and flowers,
Gather the flowers, but spare the buds,
Lest Flora, angry at thy crime
To kill her infants in their prime,
Do quickly make th' example yours;
And, ere we see,
Nip in the blossom all our hopes and thee.

MATTHEW PRIOR *To a Child of Quality*

FIVE YEARS OLD, MDCCIV, THE AUTHOR THEN FORTY

LORDS, KNIGHTS, and squires, the numerous band
That wear the fair Miss Mary's fetters,
Were summoned by her high command,
To show their passions by their letters.

My pen among the rest I took,
Lest those bright eyes that cannot read
Should dart their kindling fires, and look
The power they have to be obeyed.

Nor quality nor reputation
Forbid me yet my flame to tell;
Dear five years old befriends my passion,
And I may write till she can spell.

For while she makes her silkworms beds
With all the tender things I swear,
Whilst all the house my passion reads
In papers round her baby hair,

She may receive and own my flame,
For, though the strictest prudes should know it,
She'll pass for a most virtuous dame,
And I for an unhappy poet.

Then too, alasl when she shall tear
The lines some younger rival sends,
She'll give me leave to write, I fear,
And we shall still continue friends.

For, as our different ages move,
'Tis so ordained, (would Fate but mend it!)
That I shall be past making love,
When she begins to comprehend it.

w. B. YEATS *For Anne Gregory*

"NEVER SHALL a young man,
Thrown into despair
By those great honey-coloured
Ramparts at your ear,
Love you for yourself alone
And not your yellow hair."

"But I can get a hair-dye
And set such colour there,
Brown, or black, or carrot,
That young men in despair
May love me for myself alone
And not my yellow hair."

"I heard an old religious man
But yesternight declare
That he had found a text to prove
That only God, my dear,
Could love you for yourself alone
And not your yellow hair."

ALEXANDER POPE *The Death of the Duke of Buckingham*

(from *Moral Essays,* Epistle III)

IN THE worst inn's worst room, with mat half-hung,
The floors of plaister, and the walls of dung,
On once a flock-bed, but repair'd with straw,
With tape-ty'd curtains, never meant to draw,
The George and Garter dangling from that bed
Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,
Great Villiers lies—alas! how chang'd from him,
That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim!
Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,
The bow'r of wanton Shrewsbury and love;
Or just as gay, at Council, in a ring
Of mimic'd Statesmen, and their merry King.
No Wit to flatter left of all his store!
No Fool to laugh at, which he valu'd more.
There, Victor of his health, of fortune, friends,
And fame, this lord of useless thousands ends.

THOMAS GRAY *On the Death of a Favourite Gat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes*

'TWAS ON a lofty vase's side,
Where China's gayest art had dy'd
  The azure flowers, that blow;
Demurest of the tabby kind,
The pensive Selima reclin'd,
  Gazed on the lake below.

Her conscious tail her joy declar'd;
The fair round face, the snowy beard,
  The velvet of her paws,
Her coat, that with the tortoise vies,
Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,
  She saw; and purr'd applause.

Still had she gaz'd; but 'midst the tide
Two angel forms were seen to glide,
The Genii of the stream:
Their scaly armour's Tyrian hue
Thro' richest purple to the view
Betray'd a golden gleam.

The hapless Nymph with wonder saw:
A whisker first and then a claw,
With many an ardent wish,
She stretch'd in vain to reach the prize.
What female heart can gold despise?
What Cat's averse to fish?

Presumptuous Maid! with looks intent
Again she stretch'd, again she bent,
Nor knew the gulf between.
(Malignant Fate sat by, and smil'd)
The slipp'ry verge her feet beguil'd,
She tumbled headlong in.

Eight times emerging from the flood
She mew'd to ev'ry watery God,
Some speedy aid to send.
No Dolphin came, no Nereid stirr'd:
Nor cruel Tom, nor Susan heard.
A Fav'rite has no friend!

From hence, ye Beauties, undeceiv'd,
Know, one false step is ne'er retriev'd,
And be with caution bold.
Not all that tempts your wand'ring eyes
And heedless hearts, is lawful prize;
Nor all, that glisters, gold.

THOMAS GRAY *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*

YE DISTANT spires, ye antique towers,
That crown the watery glade,
Where grateful Science still adores
Her Henry's holy shade;
And ye, that from the stately brow
Of Windsor's heights the expanse below
Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey,
Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among
Wanders the hoary Thames along
His silver-winding way.

Ah happy hills, ah pleasing shade,
Ah fields beloved in vain,
Where once Ay careless childhood strayed,
A stranger yet to painl
I feel the gales, that from ye blow,
A momentary bliss bestow,
As waving fresh their gladsome wing
My weary soul they seem to soothe,
And, redolent of joy and youth,
To breathe a second spring.

Say, Father Thames, for thou hast seen
Full many a sprightly race
Disporting on thy margent green
The paths of pleasure trace,
Who foremost now delight to cleave
With pliant arm thy glassy wave?
The captive linnet which enthral?
What idle progeny succeed
To chase the rolling circle's speed,
Or urge the flying ball?

While some on earnest business bent
Their murmuring labours ply
'Gainst graver hours, that bring constraint
To sweeten liberty;
Some bold adventurers disdain
The limits of their little reign,
And unknown regions dare descry;
Still as they run they look behind,
They hear a voice in every wind,
And snatch a fearful joy.

Gay hope is theirs by fancy fed,
Less pleasing when possest;
The tear forgot as soon as shed,
The sunshine of the breast;
Theirs buxom health of rosy hue,
Wild wit, invention ever-new,
And lively cheer of vigour born;
The thoughtless day, the easy night,
The spirits pure, the slumbers light,
That fly the approach of morn.

Alas, regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day;
Yet see how all around 'em wait
The ministers of human Fate,
And black Misfortune's baleful train!
Ah, show them where in ambush stand,
To seize their prey, the murtherous band!
Ah, tell them they are men!

These shall the fury Passions tear,
The vultures of the mind,
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,
And Shame that skulks behind;
Or pining Love shall waste their youth,
Or Jealousy with rankling tooth,

That inly gnaws the secret heart,
And Envy wan, and faded Care,
Grim-visaged comfortless Despair,
And Sorrow's piercing dart.

Ambition this shall tempt to rise,
Then whirl the wretch from high,
To bitter Scorn a sacrifice,
And grinning Infamy.
The stings of Falsehood those shall try,
And hard Unkindness' altered eye,
That mocks the tear it forced to flow;
And keen Remorse with blood defiled,
And moody Madness laughing wild
Amid severest woe.

Lo! in the vale of years beneath
A grisly troop^are seen,
The painful family of Death,
More hideous than their queen.
This racks the joints, this fires the veins,
That every labouring sinew strains,
Those in the deeper vitals rage;
Lo, Poverty, to fill the band,
That numbs the soul with icy hand,
And slow-consuming Age.

To each his sufferings; all are men,
Condemned alike to groan,
The tender for another's pain,
The unfeeling for his own.
Yet ah! why should they know their fate?
Since sorrow never comes too late,
And happiness too swiftly flies.
Thought would destroy their paradise.
No more; where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON *Calm is the morn without a sound*

(from *In Memoriam)*

XI

CALM is the morn without a sound,
  Calm as to suit a calmer grief,
  And only through the faded leaf
The chestnut pattering to the ground:

Calm and deep peace on this high wold,
  And on these dews that drench the furze,
  And all the silvery gossamers
That twinkle into green and gold:

Calm and still light on yon great plain
  That sweeps with all its autumn bowers,
  And crowded farms and lessening towers,
To mingle with the bounding main:

Calm and deep peace in this wide air,
  These leaves that redden to the fall;
  And in my heart, if calm at all,
If any calm, a calm despair:

Calm on the seas, and silver sleep,
  And waves that sway themselves in rest,
  And dead calm in that noble breast
Which heaves but with the heaving deep.

EMILY DICKINSON *Drowning is not so pitiful*

DROWNING is not so pitiful
  As the attempt to rise.
Three times, 'tis said, a sinking man
  Comes up to face the skies,

And then declines for ever
   To that abhorred abode
Where hope and he part company,—
   For he is grasped of God.
The Maker's cordial visage,
   However good to see,
Is shunned, we must admit it,
   Like an adversity.

THOMAS HARDY *Channel Firing*

THAT NIGHT your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel window squares,
We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. While drearisome
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The mouse let fall the altar-crumb,
The worms drew back into the mounds,

The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, "No;
It's gunnery practice out at sea
Just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be:

"All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters
They do no more for Chrises sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

"That this is not the judgment-hour
For some of them's a blessed thing,
For if it were they'd have to scour
Hell's floor for so much threatening ...

"Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need)/'

So down we lay again. "I wonder,
Will the world ever saner be,"
Said one, "than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!"

And many a skeleton shook his head.
"Instead of preaching forty years,"
My neighbor Parson Thirdly said,
"I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer."

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

April, 1914

RICHARD EBERHART *The Soul Longs to Return Whence It Came*

I DROVE up to the graveyard, which
Used to frighten me as a boy,
When I walked down the river past it,
And evening was coming on. I'd make sure
I came home from the woods early enough.
I drove in, I found to the place, I
Left the motor running. My eyes hurried,
To recognize the great oak tree
On the little slope, among the stones.
It was a high day, a crisp day,
The cleanest kind of Autumn day,
With brisk intoxicating air, a
Little wind that frisked, yet there was
Old age in the atmosphere, nostalgia,
The subtle heaviness of the Fall.
I stilled the motor. I walked a few paces;
It was good, the tree; the friendliness of it.
I touched it, I thought of the roots;

They would have pierced her seven years.
O all peoples! O mighty shadows!
My eyes opened along the avenue
Of tombstones, the common land of death.
Humiliation of all loves lost,
That might have had full meaning in any
Plot of ground, come, hear the silence,
See the quivering light. My mind worked
Almost imperceptibly, I
In the command, I the wilful ponderer.
I must have stood silent and thoughtful
There. A host of dry leaves
Danced on the ground in the wind.
They startled, they curved up from the ground,
There was a dry rustling, rattling.
The sun was motionless and brittle.
I felt the blood darken in my cheeks
And burn. Like running. My eyes
Telescoped on decay, I out of command.
Fear, tenderness, they seized me.
My eyes were hot, I dared not look
At the leaves. A pagan urge swept me.
Multitudes, O multitudes in one.
The urge of the earth, the titan
Wild and primitive lust, fused
On the ground of her grave.
I was a being of feeling alone.
I flung myself down on the earth
Full length on the great earth, full length,
I wept out the dark load of human love.
In pagan adoration I adored her.
I felt the actual earth of her.
Victor and victim of humility,
I closed in the wordless ecstasy
Of mystery: where there is no thought
But feeling lost in itself forever,
Profound, remote, immediate, and calm.
Frightened, I stood up, I looked about
Suspiciously, hurriedly (a rustling),

As if the sun, the air, the trees
Were human, might not understand.
I drew breath, it made a sound,
I stepped gingerly away. Then
The mind came like a fire, it
Tortured man, I thought of madness.
The mind will not accept the blood.
The sun and sky, the trees and grasses,
And the whispering leaves, took on
Their usual characters. I went away,
Slowly, tingling, elated, saying, saying
Mother, Great Being, O Source of Life
To whom in wisdom we return,
Accept this humble servant evermore.

HART CRANE *Passage*

WHERE THE cedar leaf divides the sky
I heard the sea.
In sapphire arenas of the hills
I was promised an improved infancy.

Sulking, sanctioning the sun,
My memory I left in a ravine,—
Casual louse that tissues the buckwheat,
Aprons rocks, congregates pears
In moonlit bushels
And wakens alleys with a hidden cough.

Dangerously the summer burned
(I had joined the entrainments of the wind).
The shadows of boulders lengthened my back:
In the bronze gongs of my cheeks
The rain dried without odour.

"It is not long, it is not long;
See where the red and black
Vine-stanchioned valleys—": Hut the wind

Died speaking through the ages that you know
And hug, chimney-sooted heart of man!
So was I turned about and back, much as your smoke
Compiles a too well-known biography.

The evening was a spear in the ravine
That throve through very oak. And had I walked
The dozen particular decimals of time?
Touching an opening laurel, I found
A thief beneath, my stolen book in hand.

"Why are you back here—smiling an iron coffin?"
"To argue with the laurel," I replied:
"Am justified in transience, fleeing
Under the constant wonder of your eyes—."

He closed the book. And from the Ptolemies
Sand troughed us in a glittering abyss.
A serpent swam a vertex to the sun
—On unpaced beaches leaned its tongue and drummed.
What fountains did I hear? what icy speeches?
Memory, committed to the page, had broke.

ANONYMOUS *An Epitaph*

GAILY I lived, as ease and nature taught,
And spent my little life without a thought;
And am amazed that Death, that tyrant grim,
Should think of me, who never thought of him.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 19

1. It is a common experience suddenly to see something familiar or apparently trivial in a new and significant light. To what extent do the ironic effects in the poems by Gray, Tennyson, and Dickinson take their forcefulness from just such unexpected insights?
2. Milton's sonnet makes several oblique references to the fact that the blind poet had never *seen* his dead wife. Much of the tragic power

of the piece arises from the ironic contrast between the denial of sight on earth and the hoped-for sight of her in heaven. Analyze the poem for the dramatic development of this ironic contrast.

3. Why is there irony in the relation of the two voices in Yeats's poem? What new element of comic irony is added in the closing stanza? What is the ultimate truth of the poem? Does it not touch upon the conflict between a secular and a religious view of motive and conduct?
4. What is the author's attitude toward his subject in Pope's poem? in Gray's *On the Death of a Favourite Cat?* Is Pope's irony directed against "great Villiers," the downfallen Duke of Buckingham himself? Or is it expended simply upon the striking difference between the Duke's former estate and that in which he met his end—as an expression of the savage, unpredictable nature of fate? Is Gray at all serious in his mock-heroic tribute to his cat's beauty and in his moralizing?
5. Turn to the footnote on page 8 comparing Ransom's *Janet Waking* with Hardy's poem. How does irony enter into the effect described there as common to both poems?
6. Marvell's poem opens with a picture of a beautiful little girl playing among flowers. In her childish play a number of implied meanings, developed in succeeding stanzas, are seen. What are they? What have they to do with the poet's prophecy of her coming victory over the god of love, with his teasing prayer to her (as a goddess in her own right) to correct the deficiencies of the flowers, and with his final warning? Is the rather formal language helpful in bridging the very different tones at the beginning and at the end of this poem? How important is irony to the poem's emotional development?

   Prior's poem, also, is addressed to a little girl. What differences do you find in the style, the point of view, and the general character of the irony?
7. What situation in Donne's poem causes the speaker to make his prediction? Is it a serious prediction? What is meant by lines 11-13?

   Discuss the ways in which this poem is ambiguous and the purpose of this ambiguity.
8. Would the motives (discussed on pages 457-458) behind the ambiguity of Crane's *Passage* serve also to account for that of Emily Dickinson's *'Twos like a maelstrom, with a notch* (page 207; discussed briefly in question on page 209)?

IV. METAPHYSICAL POETRY

Intellect and wit are not the exclusive property of the Metaphysical poet, but they are inseparable from his work. Successful Metaphysical verse, indeed, so interweaves these qualities with its emotional effects as to make clearer than any other mode of poetry the tremendous importance of *thought* in poetic achievement. Two poems by John Donne—*The Sun Rising* and *Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward*—will illustrate the "development by rapid association of thought"[1] and the mature, analytical, and complex personality that characterize this poetry at its best. Donne is its classic representative—a man whose instinct compelled him to bring the whole of experience into his verse and to choose the most direct and what, for his learned and fantastic mind, was the most natural form of expression. (Donne was roughly of the same generation as Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and the dramatists of the Mermaid Tavern, but he was not, like them, a man of the people, the son of a yeoman or a bricklayer, but a representative of the gentry. He was Catholic by birth, educated at the university, trained for the law and the Church, and closely attached to the Court.) He is colloquial, elevated, slangy, rhetorical, erudite, familiar—all in the same brief poem; and he takes his language from the court and the camp, from the jargon of the law, from the study, and from the market place.

This curious combination of qualities, it is interesting to note, can be found alike in his youthful "profane" love poems and in the passionate religious poems of his later life. This can be made clear by a detailed examination of a characteristic example of each group. Here is one of the early poems.

JOHN DONNE *The Sun Rising*

Busy old fool, unruly Sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us?

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[1] T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets." *(Selected Essays)*

Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school-boys and sour prentices,
Go tell court-huntsmen that the king will ride,
Call country ants to harvest offices;
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams so reverend and strong
Why shouldst thou think?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
But that I would not lose her sight so long.
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and to-morrow late tell me,
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt hear, "All here in one bed lay."

She's all states, and all princes I;
Nothing else is;
Princes do but play us; compared to this,
All honour's mimic, all wealth alchemy.
Thou, Sun, art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus;
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy centre is, these walls thy sphere.

The Sun Rising is, in the first place, intended to be an amusing, witty, "clever" poem. It is light verse, but it is also, as we shall see, intensely serious—a good demonstration of the fact that seriousness has nothing to do with solemnity and can be accompanied by a good deal of levity. The poem, of course, is addressed to a somewhat sophisticated audience—sophisticated not so much with respect to manners and morals as with respect to literary convention. The poet is reacting against the artificiality and absurdity of the fashionable love poetry of courtly chivalry in which the conceit of the beloved's eyes outshining the sun had long become a tedious cliché.[2] Donne laughs at the hyperboles

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[2] Cf. Shakespeare's sonnet *My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,* page 648.

(the fantastic exaggerations) of the courtly poetry by pretending to accept them. He piles hyperbole on hyperbole and praises his mistress in the most extravagant manner.

But the poem is not intended to be merely literary satire or criticism. It is a genuine and deeply felt expression of the poet's sense of the beauty and perfection of his loved one. Its final purpose is to express the poet's sense of happiness and completeness in the possession of his mistress. *She* is so all-perfect, all-lovely, all-complete that she, and she alone, makes the fantastic hyperboles of the courtly poets sober truth.

From the first line we must be aware that the *tone* of the poem and the changes and developments of the tone are of the first importance. The poem begins with a ranting, swashbuckling, arrogant address to the sun. Like many of Donne's poems this one begins suddenly, with a sharp, surprising colloquial exclamation:

> Busy old fool, unruly Sun. . . .

Why this tone? And why the contempt so harshly expressed all through this first stanza—"saucy pedantic wretch," "court-huntsmen," "country ants"?

The reason is that in the happy and complete possession of his mistress the poet feels that he possesses, rules, and controls the whole world, and therefore is superior to the sun itself. The lover complaining against the sun at morning for ending a night of happiness was, of course, one of the traditional themes of courtly love poetry, but Donne treats it familiarly, colloquially, irreverently. One of the most concentrated paradoxes of the poem is the application in the first line of the epithet "unruly" to the sun. The sun is actually the standard of order, regulation, and law; but order, rule, and law in the field of nature, of society, of business, and of the court threaten the interests and pleasures of love. So the poet-lover rails against them all. Love transcends time, and the lovers cannot help regarding the sun, which makes time, as a wretch and a busybody to be scorned and triumphed over.

In the second stanza the poet, still ranting and swaggering, proceeds to develop the thought of the present good fortune that makes him superior to the world-dominating sun. And he does so in terms that also manage to pay exquisite compliments to his mistress. The girl sums up in herself all the riches and perfume of the Orient and the West; she is the glory of the whole world, concentrated and epitomized. Also, the setting of the scene, only implied in the first stanza, is now made more specific.

One of the strangest and most powerful effects of the poem is the progressive softening of the tone until the outrageous and amusing hyperboles of the opening stanza and the air of extravagant enthusiasm with which they are delivered modulate, in the final stanza, into a hushed and serious (though still fantastic and half-playful) expression of the happiness and trust of a completely satisfied devotion.

The Sun Rising is characteristic of Donne's youthful secular love poetry. It is lighter in texture but not essentially different in method from the deeply felt and sometimes terror-stricken religious poems of his maturity and old age. In fact, if we compare it with *Good Friday, 1613,* a poem of greater complexity and scope written after Donne was forty, we find some startling parallels. The earlier poem proudly mocks the sun and the principle of universal order it represents. It argues satirically against the imperious demands of time and the powers that be upon the happy, self-contained world of the two lovers. *Good Friday, 1613,* on the other hand, is a humble and pious if even more passionate statement. In it the image of the sun is approached with absolute awe and respect. Christ, the *son* of God, is pictured as the *sun* (the pun is deliberate on Donne's part) around which the poet's soul, in the figure of a heavenly "sphere," should properly revolve. A deeply serious though wittify imaginative argument, ending in a prayer, reverses the relation between the speaker and the sun that we remember in *The Sun Rising.* The poems are indeed unlike in their literal themes and in their feeling toward the central images of universal authority, but the similarity in technique should be apparent:

JOHN DONNE *Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward*

Let man's soul be a sphere, and then in this
The intelligence that moves, devotion is;
And as the other spheres, by being grown
Subject to foreign motion, lose "their own,

And being by others hurried every day,
Scarce in a year their natural form obey:
Pleasure or business so, our souls admit
For their first mover, and are whirled by it.
Hence is 't that I am carried towards the west
This day, when my soul's form bends towards the east.
There I should see a sun, by rising set,
And by that setting, endless day beget;
But that Christ on this cross did rise and fall,
Sin had eternally benighted all.
Yet dare I'almost be glad I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for me.
Who sees God's face, that is self life, must die;
What a death were it then to see God die!
It made his own lieutenant, nature, shrink;
It made his footstool crack, and the sun wink.
Could I behold those hands which span the poles
And tune all spheres at once, pierced with those holes?
Could I behold that endless height, which is
Zenith to us and our antipodes,
Humbled below us? or that blood which is
The seat of all our souls, if not of his,
Made dirt of dust, or that flesh which was worn
By God for his apparel, ragg'd and torn?
If on these things I durst not look, durst I
Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
Who was God's partner here, and furnished thus
Half of that sacrifice which ransomed us?
Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
They are present yet unto my memory,
For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards me,
O Savior, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
I turn my back to thee but to receive
Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
Oh, think me worth thine anger, punish me,
Burn off my rusts, and my deformity;
Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou mayst know me, and I'll turn my face.

A brief summary of the ideas and progress of thought in this poem should be useful. Good Friday is part of Holy Week, the week preceding Easter Sunday. On Good Friday the Crucifixion of Christ is commemorated, and on Easter His Resurrection is celebrated. The poet is therefore thinking in a vein appropriate to the observation of the day that makes the most solemn religious symbol of the Christian faith: the sacrifice of Jesus. At the same time, he very strikingly applies the language of traditional science and philosophy to this contemplation. Hence the special terms and concepts used in this poem: the medieval concept of an "intelligence/' for instance—a guiding spirit or angel who directs and governs the laws by which heavenly bodies move; the Aristotelian terms "form" (the essential nature of a thing) and "first mover" (a philosophical, secular phrase for denoting the creative aspect of God); or the notion, from medieval physiology, of blood as the vehicle uniting the soul to the body—hence, in line 26, "the seat of all our souls." Donne's beginning is at once "scientific" and religious: Imagine, he says, that man's soul is a sphere, like one of the heavenly bodies, and that its guiding spirit is pious devotion.

But the heavenly bodies, he reminds us, all have distorted orbits because of the influence of the motions of other spheres; and so it is with the soul, which is often "whirled" from its true course by business or pleasure instead of holding to it through piety. On Good Friday, the soul's whole attention should be bent eastward—that is, toward the place where the Crucifixion occurred. Instead, the less essential concerns that take up most of our time are bearing it away from contemplation of divine sacrifice—"westward." Besides, the poet admits, he is afraid of such contemplation. It would be a terrible thing to see the living God directly, and therefore even more terrible to gaze upon Him dying, humbled, and tortured, and upon the suffering of Mary, His mother. (The truly devout soul would envisage these events so vividly that they would take place, literally, before it.) The poet does, however, even as he is being borne away from direct contact with these tragic events, remember them and pray for Christ's grace, so that he may learn how to be more devoted and be purged of his sins and hence be enabled to hope for final salvation. Thus, he implies, the influence of divine mercy may prove stronger than that of the secular world and help his weak soul to find its proper orbit once more.

Now it is clear that Donne is not here offering *proof* of the soul's existence and nature, or of the Tightness of his religious faith. These are assumptions his poem takes for granted with intense sincerity. Rather, the argument of the poem has to do with the *relation* between the speaker and these unchallenged truths of faith. First we see him *separated from* Christ, who *came toward* man in dying for him, though the poet expresses his overwhelming fear of coming into the divine presence. And finally we see envisioned a way by which God and the speaker (that is, God and man) can come together after all. The sense of *movement,* apart and together, is brought out by the image of the sphere traveling through space and falsely curving away from its true center of attraction and from its own true orbit. Donne's witty puns and paradoxes, with their "double meanings," are miniature replicas of this double movement in the poem's central image.

The movement of thought in *Good Friday,* then, has been projected by a series of images: the image of the moving of spheres around a magnetic center, and of contrary forces at work on them; the image of Jesus on the cross—first pictured as a rising and setting sun, and later as a vast paradox containing infinite space and yet subject to infinite humbling and reduction; the image of Mary; and finally, the image of the speaker in his own person appealing directly to Christ. Paralleling this movement, the tone of the language develops from that of intellectual and scientific reasoning (lines 1-10) to one of earnest prayer at the end. In between, the subtle reasoner of the opening lines has become the factual observer (11-14), the humble and awestruck apologist for himself (15-32), the object of God's attention (35-36) and the humble penitent (37-38). The statement has grown increasingly personal, as though with the development of his poetic theme the author had actually come closer to God and God become more particularly attentive to him, until he is emboldened to make the final appeal of the closing couplet.

Donne's poems, we have noted, are classic examples of Metaphysical verse. The chief characteristic of Metaphysical writing that we are interested in here is its *emotional intellectuality.* The speaker is always a complex personality, always aware of the involved nature of moral choice and of the ideas current among educated people of his time; and he has too much respect for his intellectual training and integrity to sacrifice his knowledge for the sake of the excitement of being carried away by his feelings. So, what he knows about science, about his own weaknesses and needs, about actual human nature keeps cropping up in his verse, lending it wryness, subtlety, irony and humor. Wit is essential to writing of this kind, which balances so many diverse elements. Metaphysical poetry is an amalgam of the "pure" poetry of emotional incantation and the analytical poetry of men like Pope and Rochester; or rather, it represents the attempt of a highly civilized personality to remain true to his basic, instinctive humanity while applying the lessons of science, philosophy, and sophisticated religion to the central problems of his life.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE from *Sonnets*

XCIV

THEY THAT have power to hurt, and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow:
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,
And husband nature's riches from expense.
They are the Lords and owners of their faces;
Others, but stewards of their excellence,
The summer's flower is to the summer sweet
Though to itself it only live and die,
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
　　For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds
　　Lilies that fester smell far worse then weeds.

CXLVI

POOR SOUL, the center of my sinful earth,
Thrall to these rebel powers that thee array,
Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth.
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more:
So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then.

BEN JONSON *To Heaven*

GOOD, AND great God, can I not think of thee,
But it must, straight, my melancholy be?
Is it interpreted in me disease,
That, laden with my sins, I seek for ease?
O, be thou witness, that the reins dost know,
And hearts of all, if I be sad for show,
And judge me after: if I dare pretend
To aught but grace, or aim at other end.
As thou art all, so be thou all to me,
First, midst, and last, converted one, and three;
My faith, my hope, my love: and in this state,
My judge, my witness, and my advocate.
Where have I been this while exil'd from thee?
And whither rap'd, now thou but stoop'st to me?
Dwell, dwell here still: O, being every-where,
How can I doubt to find thee ever, here?
I know my state, both full of shame, and scorn,
Conceiv'd in sin, and unto labour born,
Standing with fear, and must with horror fall,
And destin'd unto judgement, after all.
I feel my griefs too, and there scarce is ground,
Upon my flesh t'inflict another wound.
Yet dare I not complain, or wish for death
With holy Paul, lest it be thought the breath
Of discontent; or that these prayers be
For weariness of life, not love of thee.

JOHN DONNE *The Ecstasy*

WHERE, LIKE a pillow on a bed,
A pregnant bank swell'd up, to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best.

Our hands were firmly cemented
   With a fast balm, which thence did spring;
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
   Our eyes upon one double string;

So t' entergraft our hands, as yet
   Was all the means to make us one;
And pictures in our eyes to get
   Was all our propagation.

As, 'twixt two equal armies, Fate
   Suspends uncertain victory,
Our souls (which to advance their state
   Were gone out) hung 'twixt her, and me.

And whilst our souls negotiate there,
   We like sepulchral statues lay;
All day, the same our postures were,
   And we said nothing, all the day.

If any, so by love refin'd,
   That he soul's language understood,
And by good love were grown all mind,
   Within convenient distance stood,

He (though he knew not which soul spake,
   Because both meant, both spake the same)
Might thence a new concoction take,
   And part far purer than he came.

This ecstasy doth unperplex
   (We said) and tell us what we love;
We see by this, it was not sex;
   We see, we saw not what did move:

But as all several souls contain
   Mixture of things, they know not what,
Love, these mix'd souls, doth mix again,
   And makes both one, each this and that.

A single violet transplant,
The strength, the colour, and the size
(All which before was poor and scant)
Redoubles still, and multiplies.

When love with one another so
Interinanimates two souls,
That abler soul, which thence doth flow,
Defects of loneliness controls.

We then, who are this new soul, know,
Of what we are composed, and made,
For th'atomies of which we grow,
Are souls, whom no change can invade.

But, O alas! so long, so far
Our bodies why do we forbear?
They are ours, though not we; we are
Th'intelligences, they the spheres.

We owe them thanks, because they thus
Did us, to us, at first convey,
Yielded their forces, sense, to us,
Nor are dross to us, but allay.

On man heaven's influence works not so,
But that it first imprints the air;
For soul into the soul may flow,
Though it to body first repair.

As our blood labours to beget
Spirits, as like souls as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
That subtle knot, which makes us man;

So must pure lovers' souls descend
T' affections, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
Else a great prince in prison lies.

To'our bodies turn we then, that so
Weak men on love reveal'd may look;
Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
But yet the body is his book.

And if some lover, such as we,
Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still mark us, he shall see
Small change when we're to bodies gone.

JOHN DONNE *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning*

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,
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,
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
Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined
That ourselves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care less eyes, lips and hands to miss.

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 arc two so
As still twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the iix'cl loot, makes no show
To move, but doth, il th* othei do.

And though it in (he centre sit$_t$
Yet, when the other i.n doth loam,
It leans, and hearkens alter it,
And glows erect, as that conies home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like tli* other loot, obliquely inn;
Thy firmness makes my circle[1] just,
And makes me end where 1 begun.

JOHN DONNE *The Good-nionow*

I WONDFR, by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream oi ihee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room, an every where.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone;
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have show^{r}n,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mix'd equally;
If our two loves be one, or thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

JOHN DONNE from *Holy Sonnets*

VII

AT THE round earth's imagin'd corners blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and tp your scattered bodies go,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall overthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space;
For, if above all these my sins abound,
"Tis late to ask abundance of Thy grace,
When we are there. Here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent, for that's as good
As if Thou hadst seal'd my pardon with Thy blood.

IX

IF POISONOUS minerals, and if that tree,
Whose fruit threw death on else immortal us,
If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
Cannot be damn'd, Alas! why should I be?
Why should intent or reason, borne in me,
Make sins, else equal, in me more heinous?
And mercy being easy, and glorious
To God, in his stern wrath, why threatens he?
But who am I, that dare dispute with thee?

0 God, Oh! of thine only worthy blood,
And my tears, make a heavenly Lethean flood,
And drown in it my sins' black memory;
That thou remember them, some claim as debt,
1 think it mercy, i£ thou wilt forget.

X

DEATH, BE not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou are 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,
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,
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.

XIII

WHAT IF this present were the world's last night?
Mark in my heart, O Soul, where thou dost dwell,
The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
Whether that countenance can thee affright:
Tears in his eyes quench the amazing light,
Blood fills his frowns, which from his pierc'd head fell,
And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell,
Which pray'd forgiveness for his foes' fierce spite?
No, no; but as in my idolatry
I said to all my profane mistresses,
Beauty, of pity, foulness only is
A sign of rigour: so I say to thee,
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assigned,
This beauteous form assures*a piteous mind.

XIV

BATTER MY heart, three personed God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, overthrow me and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

XVIII

SHOW ME, deaf Christ, thy Spouse so bright and clear.
What! is it She, which on the other shore
Goes richly painted? or which rob'd and tore
Laments and mourns in Germany and here?
Sleeps she a thousand, then peeps up one year?
Is she self truth and errs? now new, now outwore?
Doth she, and did she, and shall she evermore
On one, on seven, or on no hill appear?
Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights
First travail we to seek and then make Love?
Betray, kind husband, thy spouse to our sights,
And let mine amorous soul court thy mild Dove,
Who is most true, and pleasing to thee, then
When she'is embraced and open to most men.

ANDREW MARVELL *The Garden*

How VAINLY men themselves amaze
To win the Palm, the Oak, or Bays;
And their uncessant Labours see
Crown'd from some single Herb or Tree,

Whose short and narrow-verged Shade
Does prudently their Toils upbraid;
While all Flow'rs and all Trees do close
To weave the Garlands of repose.

Fair quiet, have I found thee here,
And Innocence thy Sister dear!
Mistaken long; I sought you then
In busy Companies of Men.
Your sacred Plants, if here below,
Only among the Plants will grow.
Society is all but rude,
To this delicious Solitude.

No white nor red was ever seen
So am'rous as this lovely green.
Fond Lovers, cruel as their Flame,
Cut in these Trees their Mistress' name.
Little, Alas, they know, or heed,
How far these Beauties Hers exceedl
Fair Trees! where s'eer your barks I wound,
No Name shall but your own be found.

When we have run our Passion's heat,
Love hither makes his best retreat.
The *Gods,* that mortal Beauty chase,
Still in a Tree did end their race.
Apollo hunted *Daphne* so,
Only that She might Laurel grow.
And *Pan* did after *Syrinx* speed,
Not as a nymph, but for a Reed.

What wond'rous Life in this I lead!
Ripe Apples drop about my head;
The Luscious Clusters of the Vine
Upon my Mouth do crush their Wine;
The Nectarine, and curious Peach,
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,
Insnar'd with Flow'rs, I fall on Grass.

Meanwhile the Mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness:
The Mind, that Ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other Worlds, and other Seas;
Annihilating all that's made
To a green Thought in a green Shade.

Here at the Fountain's sliding foot,
Or at some Fruit-tree's mossy root,
Casting the Body's Vest aside,
My Soul into the boughs does glide:
There like a Bird it sits, and sings,
Then whets, and combs its silver Wings;
And, till prepar'd for longer flight,
Waves in its Plumes the various Light.

Such was that happy Garden-state,
While Man there walk'd without a Mate:
After a Place so pure, and sweet,
What other Help could yet be meet!
But 'twas beyond a Mortal's share
To wander solitary there:
Two Paradises 'twere in one
To live in Paradise alone.

How well the skilfull Gard'ner drew
Of flow'rs and herbs this Dial new;
Where from above the milder Sun
Does through a fragrant Zodiack run;
And, as it works, th'industrious Bee
Computes its time as well as we.
How could such sweet and wholesome Hours
Be reckoned but with herbs and flow'rs!

WILLIAM EMPSON *Legal Fiction*

LAW MAKES long spokes of the short stakes of men.
Your well fenced out real estate of mind
No high flat of the nomad citizen
Looks over, or train leaves behind.

Your rights extend under and above your claim
Without bound; you own land in Heaven and Hell;
Your part of earth's surface and mass the same,
Of all cosmos' volume, and all stars as well.

Your rights reach down where all owners meet, in Hell's
Pointed exclusive conclave, at earth's centre
(Your spun farm's root still on that axis dwells);
And up, through galaxies, a growing sector.

You are nomad yet; the lighthouse beam you own
Flashes, like Lucifer, through the firmament.
Earth's axis varies; your dark central cone
Wavers, a candle's shadow, at the end.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 20

i. Outline the situation and argument of Donne's *The Ecstasy,* noting the underlying theme that binds its paradoxical images and thoughts together. What attitude does the poem seem to advocate toward the question of the comparative role of body and soul in perfect love? How does it submit conventional attitudes of Platonic and courtly love to the test of realistic psychological experience? What situation in the poem is described by the title?

List the kinds of knowledge and learning possessed by the poet and revealed in this poem. Do they contribute to the impressiveness of the argument? What is the meaning and significance in the context of the poem of the following words: *pregnant, entergraft, concoction, ecstasy, interinanimates, atomies, intelligences, sphere, allay, spirits, souls, love reveaVdf* (For assistance consult notes in H. J. C. Grierson. *The Poems of John Donne,* Vol. II.)

2. What signs do you find in *A Valediction Forbidding Mourning* that it is by the author of *The Ecstasy?* (Compare subject-matter, point of view, diction, imagery, and speaking voice from this point of view.)
3. In Shakespeare's *Sonnet XCIV,* what is the relation between the rather theoretical argument of the octave and the imagery of flowers and weeds of the sestet? Compare the theme, diction and structure in Donne's *Holy Sonnet XIII.*
4. Why does the tone shift so drastically between the beginning and the end in both Donne's *Holy Sonnet VII* and his *Holy Sonnet IX?* Is this shift necessary to full completion of the argument in each case?
5. What is the intended effect of the religious use of sexual imagery in *Holy Sonnets XIV* and *XVIII?*
6. Marvell's poem first presents a familiar classical theme—the pleasures of a rural retreat. It next treats it with a playful exaggeration, then with a sensuous intensity, then with a philosophical subtlety, and, finally, with religious overtones. Comment on the paradoxical and Metaphysical aspects of the poem, discussing especially the meaning of stanzas i, 4, and 6-9. Do the imagery and the general rhythmic and "musical" pattern of the poem maintain a basic unity despite the changes in tone and thought?
7. Shakespeare's *Sonnet CXLVI* and Empson's poem both play on the theme of property. In which of the two poems does irony have a greater part? Which is closer to Donne in combining wit, seriousness, complex argument, and paradoxical imagery or statement?
8. Can you find other examples of metaphysical poetry and of the metaphysical conceit in the work of Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, Louis MacNeice, W. H. Auden, and other modern writers represented elsewhere in this book?

CHAPTER six *Poetic Symbolism*

I. SYMBOL AND EVOCATION

"MAN," SAYS THE philosopher Ernst Cassirer, "lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience."[1]

Even our most prosaic thinking is dominated by symbols—coins, trade-marks, directional signals on cars, for example. And our emotional lives are full of such symbols as engagement rings, gifts, meaningful looks and gestures, diplomas and prizes. Insofar as one thing is used to represent something else, we may call it a symbol. A symbol may be quite withojnj^mo^—witness the numbers and signs used in mathematics to denote relationships and quantities. But it may also be charged with feeling: the Flag, the Cross, the Statue of Liberty. The latter kind of symbol not only denotes an idea, but also connotes, and evokes, an attitude toward it and an emotion that surrounds it. The symbols of poetry fall in this second class.

In the most general sense—too general to be very useful in practice—all poetry is symbolic, since it has the power to control our imaginations by suggesting new associations for familiar ideas and experiences. From this point of view, Shakespeare's metaphor beginning his *Sonnet LXXIII* is symbolic:

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold. . . .[2]

The association of the barren, abandoned, chilled look of trees in late autumn with old age is a visible and generally sensuous representation of something not itself directly present to the senses.

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[1] Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man.*

[2] See pages 91-93, above, for this poem and a discussion of it.

But more precisely, we do not use the word "symbol" merely as a synonym for "figure of speech." An image is a symbol, first, when it comes already fraught with literary, historical, or popular associations; its emotional power will be most strongly felt, of course, when it is placed in the right context and so phrased as to be unusually startling and significant. Three lines by the Elizabethan poet Thomas Nashe will illustrate this principle:

> Brightness falls from the air,
> Queens have died young and fair,
> Dust hath closed Helen's eye. . . .

Nowhere in these lines does the poet explicitly state his melancholy underlying theme that death must come to all things, even the most beautiful. It is the unusual, brilliant effect of the beginning that especially takes the imagination. The notion is so unexpected that at first we may get the *wrong* impression, an impression of heavenly brightness descending and illuminating us—a happy and blessed picture. Then the true picture takes shape, of bright daylight that disappears and leaves the air dark, dull, and cold. The shock of this belated realization adds to its power and intensity, to the effect of irredeemable loss. And finally therefore, aided by the lines that follow "Brightness falls from the air," we will think of the universal fact of death, applicable to all things however glorious and lovely.

Supporting this striking image that so takes us unawares, we have first the simple pathos—half folk-wisdom and half a "truth" of fairy-tale lore—of "Queens have died young and fair." The fresh, naive directness of the statement saves it from triteness and provides an emotional frame for the preceding line. And afterward, the full elegiac note of sadness is struck in the reminder of the death of Helen of Troy, the great popularly accepted symbol of erotic feminine beauty in all ages since Homer. It is hard to think of Helen dead, and the somewhat surprising use of her name with all its evocative power in this way helps give the passage its reverberating richness. The second and third lines lend to the extraordinary image they follow the quality of a traditional symbol, for they bring to it their own connotations of fallen brightness from mythology and popular legendry.

Images become symbols in yet other ways. If a poet lays emphasis on an image by pointing out that it has a special meaning and perhaps even defining that meaning for us, it then becomes a symbol almost by main force. The following passage from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* contains two examples of this second, more obvious, and often more static type of poetic symbolism. Notice how explicitly the poet makes clear what his symbolic clues are, and how we are to interpret them. Wordsworth, in this passage, tells how he would gaze at the faces on London's crowded streets, trying to fathom the mysterious meaning behind each of them. The blind beggar he once saw there, wearing his pathetic "written paper" that told his life story, signifies the futile superficiality of all men's supposed knowledge. Similarly, the poet's vision of a "second-sight procession" is a sign of the vagueness with which, at best, essential truth presents itself to our limited human understanding. It should be clear from these lines that even such interpreted symbols vary greatly in their intensity of evocation.

How oft, amid those overflowing streets,
Have I gone forward with the crowd, and said
Unto myself, "The face of every one
That passes by me is a mystery!"
Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed
By thoughts of what and whither, when and how,
Until the shapes before my eyes became
A second-sight procession, such as glides
Over still mountains, or appears in dreams;
And once, far-travelled in such mood, beyond
The reach of common indication, lost
Amid the moving pageant, I was smitten
Abruptly, with the view (a sight not rare)
Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face,
Stood, propped against a wall, upon his chest
Wearing a written paper, to explain
His story, whence he came, and who he was.
Caught by the spectacle my mind turned round
As with the might of waters; an apt type
This label seemed of the utmost we can know,

Both of ourselves and of the universe;
And, on the shape of that unmoving man,
His steadfast face and sightless eyes, I gazed,
As if admonished from another world.

Wordsworth's symbolism here is effective, both in clarifying his conception and in suggesting the feeling with which he associated it. But one of his symbols, the blind beggar with his piece of paper, is far inferior in emotional power to the symbol that precedes it—the dim, visionary procession gliding in the distance, elusive and significant as a dream. One reason is that the poet comments on the obvious meaning of the beggar-symbol so quickly and explicitly that it is hard for us to catch its special evocation peculiar to itself. Unlike the purer symbol it follows, it is overly dominated by its intended didactic function. Were it not for the grave and compelling seriousness of ''steadfast face and sightless eyes," it would serve this function very poorly; it would merely illustrate an idea, mechanically and without being itself the embodiment of a living meaning.

In Longfellow's *Hymn to the Night* we find an even more striking contrast between the effect of purer symbolism and that of static, mechanically didactic symbolism. The poem opens with these immensely suggestive and moving lines:

I heard the trailing garments of the Night
  Sweep through her marble halls!
I saw her sable skirts all fringed with light
  From the celestial walls!

But the poem dwindles into a much narrower, prosier thing, and sacrifices the great range of thought and feeling with which it began, when we hear, in a later "explanatory" stanza:

O holy Night! from thee I learn to bear
  What man has borne before!
Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care,
  And they complain no more.

In his zeal to interpret and teach, the poet has lost sight of the immensely more meaningful, though less explicit, symbol with which he began.

One of the important considerations of which a poet who falls into such mechanical didacticism loses sight is the essential technical difference between a symbol and an ordmary^ggjire^ of speech: the greater magnetic power in the former tcTevoke many psychological associations. This magnetic power is most completely felt in the purest poetic symbols, in which a figure of speech is *implied but^not^stated^* In this kind of imageT the poet does not, for example, say that his love is like a rose; he does not say, even, that she *is* a rose.[3] Rather, perhaps, he will treat the rose itself as his subject, but in a special way. Omitting any reference to the woman who would ordinarily be his main topic, he may yet attribute to the rose qualities he feels belong both to it and to her, and other qualities arising from the association itself. The result, if successful, will produce not only the effect an ordinary metaphor would have produced, but also the transcendent, subtle, and vital connotations which William Butler Yeats has called "perfectly symbolical."[4] Once again we may turn to Blake for an example:

WILLIAM BLAKE *The Sick Rose*

O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

In this poem we have the purest sort of symbolism, in which we feel a precise, concentrated, terrifyingly significant meaning. The atmosphere is tragic; the imagery suggests the corruption of life and joy by death or by some force hostile to them yet needing them for its own nourishment. The "worm" suggests both the snake that corrupted Eden and the worms of the grave; darkness and terror attend it. The rose suggests full-blown womanliness, beautiful and vulnerable. Something in the world has infected and blighted this joyous presence in life, and is destroying it. We may read a number of possible interpretations, all actually present, into this symbolism; however, its power will be explained not by any one interpretation, nor yet by the flash of perception in the implied metaphors, but by the violent, self-contained life of the symbol itself: the flower possessed and being killed by the worm.

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[3] See the discussion of simile and metaphor and the references to Burns's *O my luve is like a red, red rose,* on pages 49-50.

[4] William Butler Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry." *(Essays)*

Why should "natural" symbols like the rose and the "brightness" that "falls from the air" strike us as purer in their evocative power than most traditional symbols? Logically, it would seem that symbols of the latter type, trailing their inherited associations behind them as they enter a poem, carry a greater suggestiveness from the start than those the poet himself has brought into significant focus for the first time. We remember the aura about the name of Helen of Troy, in Nashe's lines. And when Spenser writes of a knight that

> .... on his breast a bloody Cross he bore,
> The dear remembrance of his dying Lord,

it

we respond at once to the knight's character and to the virtues he represents.

Yet the poet who depends on traditional symbols runs the great risk of finding himself either with a stereotyped set of images or with a team of runaway images whose powerful general associations force him to lose sight of his own attitudes once he gets behind them. If the poet is as steeped in classical literature and learning as Milton, and as gifted, he can use such symbols freshly. But for all his learning Milton, like Dante, knew the value and force of images drawn from ordinary human experience—birds, animals, flowers, sun and stars, sickness, birth, and all the other many familiar yet emotionally significant data of daily life. Amid the mythological and Biblical figures that dominate his elegy *Lycidas* (pages 518-523), we find such homely images as the following ones (intended to symbolize greedy and incompetent priests and their neglected congregations):

> .... such as for their bellies' sake
> Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold. . . .
> Blind mouthsl that scarce themselves know how to hold
> A sheep-hook, or have learn'd aught else the least
> That to the faithful herdsman's art belongsl

What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw,
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread. . . .

It is, of course, traditional to view priests as shepherds (pastors) and those to whom they minister as their flocks. What renders the symbolism here memorable, however, is not Milton's use of conventional associations but the way he transmutes them through the passionate sense of reality revealed in the pictures of the corrupt clergy and their effect on their "sheep." In the context of the poem, this is no mere generalized painting but a furious attack on the practices of the established church by a fiery Puritan of the 1630*5. Without the sense of common realities here displayed, the attack could not have been so overwhelmingly managed. Nor would the young minister Edward King, upon whose death this poem was written, have appeared to such noble advantage when described in the elegant, traditional pastoral terms of the classical elegy, except for this harsh, earthy passage. Again, when Milton wishes to suggest the beauty and simplicity of character of his friend, and the affection he inspired, he does so indirectly by describing the common but lovely English flowers that will be strewed on his hearse by the mourners—

.... the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head. . . .

This symbolism is not only appropriate to the character ascribed to Milton's friend; it is also, like the symbolism of the sick and hungry sheep, drawn from the pervasive but usually undefined associations that lie deep in the recurrent observations, joys, and difficulties of people in their everyday life. A natural symbol is really halfway to being a traditional symbol, from this point of view. Its advantage lies in the greater leeway it allows the poet to draw on one or another of its familiar associations in his own unique fashion, because it has never been popularly viewed as representative of an institution or a creed, and is not therefore surrounded by fierce loyalties and taboos and authorized interpretations.

Thus, when Walt Whitman, in his elegy for Lincoln (pages 526-535), wished to create appropriate symbols for the greatness of the dead President, for the love with which he cherished his memory, and for his own role as a poet singing a message of consolation and courage, he chose three natural objects: the western star, the lilac, and the hermit thrush. Instead of counting on the accumulated richness of traditional symbols, he gained something of the same effect through accumulative presentation. His symbols emerge most fully at the end of the poem, after he has driven them home to us in many ways. By the time we reach the final lines with their final tribute—

> .... for the dead I loved so well,
> For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands, and this
> for his dear sake,
> Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
> There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

—the star, the flower, and the bird have become carriers of universal meanings that go far beyond the specific occasion that led to their use in this poem.

A poet using a traditional symbol will often elaborate on it by adding details of action, atmosphere, and sense-impression which suggest his own response to it. He hopes thus to gain from its initial advantages and at the same time to re-create it into something newly discovered, like the symbols of Whitman. We have already seen, in Milton's *Lycidas,* how a writer of great power can thus transmute what would, in weaker hands, be merely trite simply by force of his own intensely conceived realistic details. The "blind mouths" and "scrannel pipes of wretched straw" (this for its scratchy authenticity of sound especially) and sheep "swoln with wind" that "rot inwardly" are so alive with their disgust that they redefine the traditional associations of pastoral poetry—in which all the characters are represented as living in an idealized rural setting—as well as of the relation o£ the clerical pastor and his flock.

Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* (pages 524-526) employs certain traditional symbols such as the Roman god Bacchus and his leopards—symbols of intoxication through wine-drinking—in a quite conventional fashion. But they have a relatively minor function in the poem. The major symbol, the sweet-singing nightingale with its mythological associations of suffering and desire, is exalted through the concentrated pressure of emotion and imagination. We do not have here the brilliant realistic visualization with which Milton reawakens meanings latent in symbolic language: instead, an old symbol is redefined for us in the light of the feelings and imagined states of being the poet attaches to it. The bird's song is made first of all a sense-experience. But as the poet's mood that has been brought to light by it develops and changes, it takes on meanings that are neither in nature nor in tradition, meanings arising from his uniquely personal sense of the abyss between reality and joyous self-transformation.

Keats's *Ode* begins with an impassioned, almost physical statement of painful depression:

> My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
> My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk. ...

We then learn what has induced this feeling—the nightingale singing in the richly scented summer woodlands. And we learn also that it is *excess of happiness* that is responsible for the poet's anguish. Pleasure too intense is pain. The Classic references to *Lethe*, the river of forgetfulness from which the dead must drink, and *dryad*, a wood spirit, here the nightingale, are in keeping with the reference to the hemlock, the drug used to kill Socrates.

How can the poet, he asks himself, enter into the happy world where the nightingale dwells? He suggests the cool, fragrant, intoxicating wine of Provence—a province in the south of France associated with the troubadours and medieval love poetry. This is a happier and more enticing draught than the hemlock of the previous stanza. But the poet's desire is to escape from the limitations and frustrations of the world of fact in which the poet's waking life is spent.

The third stanza makes clear why he wishes to escape—or what he wishes to escape from. It is Time—as in Donne's *The Sun*

*Rising**—that is the destroyer of youth and beauty and the corrupter of love. But the tone is much more intense than in Donne's brilliant and witty poem, for it is of his own approaching death and wasted youth that Keats is thinking. He knew at the time the poem was composed that he was touched with consumption.

The poet rejects escape through the medium of opiates or wine. "Bacchus and his pards" refers to the god of wine, followed by his train of revelers and his sacred leopards. Instead it is with the aid of poetry, i.e., the creative imagination, the emotions and the senses, that he will escape into the world of eternal happiness and beauty, of which we should now realize the bird has become the symbol. And in the fourth stanza the magical change does come about, suddenly:

> Already with thee! Tender is the night. . . .

The tone is one of surprise. The spell has worked. The poet is transported from the world of sick thought and numbing pain into the eternal, ever-youthful world of the imagination. All is a Midsummer Night's dream of rich and exquisite music, which is presented in the rest of this stanza and in the next with an intensity and precision that perfectly realize the aim of the artist to endow the world of imagination with reality.

The beautiful but almost purely descriptive fifth stanza gives way to a deeply emotional and intensely personal development in the sixth. Here is the expression of perfect ecstasy; but how is it to be retained? How can the inevitable relapse that terminates it be escaped? Is there no way to thwart the ebbing back of the sorrows of the sick world of reality? Only one way suggests itself, and it has suggested itself before: to die at the moment of intensest ecstasy—

> To cease upon the midnight with no pain.

Indeed, in the mood of excitement that the bird has induced, death itself is a sensuous experience—

> Now more than ever seems it *rich* to die.

In the seventh—the most famous and wonderful stanza—the bird as a symbol of eternal, superhuman beauty and as a liberator

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[5] Discussed on pages 476-479.

of the heart into the fairy-land of the imagination is presented with the greatest directness and in ringing tones that are sharply contrasted to the yearning desperation of the stanza before.

But suddenly, almost unconsciously, at the height of his excitement the poet has stumbled on a word—the word "forlorn"—and the vision so magically and intensely presented in the lines that begin "Already with thee!" (line 35) collapses like a bubble. The poet is left forsaken with no resource but his own lonely and inadequate self. The total experience the poem presents is not the ecstatic vision of its central section with its *seeming* escape into the eternal world of the imagination, but the melancholy and disillusioned awakening to the fact that "the fancy"(he does not call it imagination, which to him was man's highest faculty for perceiving truth)"cannot cheat so well as she is famed to do/[1] But with what skill the song of the bird fading in the distance is equated to the gradual fading away of the happy vision and the return of the harsh world where but to think is to be full of sorrowl And all this without the mechanical sort of translation of symbol into specified meaning which makes for such a letdown in a poem like Longfellow's *Hymn to the Night.*

But a poet, however skilful, may well lack the power of Milton or of Keats. Or having an imagination of a different cast, he may seek to transmute a traditional symbol by refining upon its details until he has made it over into a subtle interpretation of his own. The following descriptive passages, from the seventeenth-century poet Giles Fletcher's *Christ's Victory and Triumph,* show the kind of development into complexity we might profitably consider. The poet is painting an idealized portrait of the youthful Christ as the most perfect and most beautiful of men. He knows that he can count on the long-established power of this symbol, and hence feels free to elaborate upon it in a way which many modern readers will find rather precious—that is, artificial and pretentious—until they see what lies beneath the surface. Near the beginning, Christ is described in a simple, direct fashion, even though the method is not a literal or a realistic one. Fletcher writes:

> His hair was black, and in small curls did twine,
> As though it were the shadow of some light,
> And underneath his face, as day, did shine,

But sure the day shined not half so bright,
Nor the sun's shadow made so dark a night.

It is an impression of pure luminosity framed by the black hair that Fletcher is after. The succeeding lines embroider upon this impression, now through imagery, now through worshipful comment, and add other details until, much farther on, we come upon this stanza:

His cheeks as snowy apples, sop't in wine,
Had their red roses quench't with lilies white,
And like to garden strawberries did shine,
Wasn't in a bowl of milk, or rose-buds bright
Unbosoming their breasts against the light:
    Here love-sick souls did eat, there drank, and made
    Sweet-smelling posies, that could never fade,
But worldly eyes him thought more like some living shade.

The first part of this stanza is still simple and direct. All that conveys sweetnessf health, freshness, humanity is presented in the picture of fruits and flowers, wine and milk, so that the figure of Christ appears as both familiar and delightful. (The effect is not unlike that of Milton's picture of the flowers to be strewn on the grave of Lycidas.) But it is curious to note too that the images of apples, wine, roses, strawberries, and milk suggest a springtime sacrificial offering in an English country church. This leads to the further reminder, then, for the alert reader, that Christ was himself a sacrifice, a sacrifice of all that is natural, sweet, and beautiful. The poet now begins to speak to a heightened consciousness, one that can penetrate beyond the simple sensuous beauty of the images of flowers and fruits to the spiritual beauty of Christ revealed to "love-sick souls*'—faithful communicants—alone. The reference is to the meaning of the sacrament in which the communicant symbolically partakes of the body and blood of Christ, to identify himself with the divine nature. Notice how the delicate implications of sacrifice in the opening lines become definite and explicit as the stanza goes on—even to the specific doctrinal distinction between the faithful communicants and the more "worldly eyes" which see Jesus merely as a "living shade." (Perhaps their viewpoint is purely secular; at best, it is merely superstitious, below the level of the exalted vision of true believers.) The author has retained the orthodox connotations of his symbol, but has newly imbued them with the special associations of country sweetness, pure color, and ecstatic worship.

A typical example of the transmuting of a traditional symbol by a modern poet may be found in T. S. Eliot's vision, in *The Waste Land,* of London as a hellish place, the abode of the living dead. His method is to describe the crowds on the street as though they were passing through the mysteriously "unreal" landscape of Hell, in an atmosphere of murk and filth, with an unwilled, pointless, flowing movement. Eliot's picture is based on the oldest traditions of European literature and mythology, and especially on Dante's *Injerno.* It is the unexpected literalness with which he describes the actual city, London, in terms of Hell that turns his symbolism into something completely new:

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

The final three lines of this quotation closely echo lines in Canto III of the *Inferno,* in which Dante describes his entrance into Hell. Here, near the very gates, he sees the horde of souls who "lived without blame, and without praise," who never committed themselves to good or evil causes but were only "for themselves," who never made a decision nor entered into life and consequently have no being or personality that can know either salvation or damnation. They are the hollow men, the vast multitudes of the mediocre and the timidly selfish. Dante is overwhelmed by their number: "I had not thought death had undone so many." Death has "undone" them in the elementary sense that they have died. But the word itself has a certain rich ambiguity, for it also suggests, as part of this ruin that death has brought them, the unwrapping of flesh and bones from the bodiless spirits. And more than this, it suggests the special misery of their present indefinite status. We are told that they have passed into utter oblivion; even "deep Hell receives them not, for the wicked would have some glory over them," and "they are envious of every other lot."

The shock of Eliot's lines echoing Dante lies in the sudden apparition of the big-city multitudes as misery-driven creatures, so uninspired and characterless that they are like these forgotten shades, excluded from further damnation as well as from glory, envisioned in the *Inferno.* Of course, Eliot does not say they are "like" the shades, or that they are suffering spirits wavering on the edge of Hell. Rather, he creates his own symbol in which all the suggestions of unreality, suffering, and pity converge: Here is the Unreal City, and here are its inhabitants. The reader should compare this brief passage with that by Wordsworth quoted on pages 499-500. He will see that they share the essential evocativeness of all symbolism, but that the Eliot passage omits explanation, transition, everything that will not contribute to the purest evocative effect.

In reviewing these various forms the symbol may take—simple and complex, natural and traditional, static and pure and poet-transmuted—we must always remember the special evocative character of the poetic symbol. It is the kind of image which directs our sensibilities, magnetically, toward a deep emotional awareness that includes but goes beyond intellectual concepts. It may appear in a single line or group of lines only. It may, by itself or in relation to other symbols, dominate the structure of a whole poem. Or it may, in the purest and most concentrated poetry, actually be inseparable from the poem as a whole. (The lines from Nashe will illustrate the first of these possibilities; Whitman's *When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,* the second of them; and Blake's *The Sick Rose,* the third.)

Most symbols derive their rich suggestiveness from their gradual accumulation of associations in the speech and thought of mankind at large. Others are developed in the history of literature itself, and still others in the work of a single writer. (The more we study the work of any serious, accomplished poet, the more we shall understand the special meaning he habitually gives to certain images. He thus makes them symbols uniquely his own—symbols that are at once the clues to the deepest meanings of his work and to values intensely significant to mankind at large.) But there is a constant cross-fertilization going on among these symbols despite their apparently varied sources. Fletcher's youthful Christ is a traditional symbol personally re-created. Eliot's London is a personal symbol tremendously reinforced by traditional and literary evocations. So are the surprising angels of Blake,[6] which become an important symbol in his work because of their compelling nature and recurrent appearance, and — for similar reasons — the music and wine in the poetry of Keats, the towers of Shelley and Yeats, and the mountains and rivers of Wordsworth.

A NOTE ON THE SYMBOLIST MOVEMENT

Often the term symbolism is used in a rather special sense to denote the characteristic methods and theories of the nineteenth-century movement called French Symbolism. This movement has had a marked influence on the modern poets of many countries, including the English-speaking ones. Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé and others, feeling that modern utilitarianism and science-mindedness were alien to the traditions and aims of art, sought to create a verse which could rise, as C. M. Bowra has written, "through scent, colour, and sound to raptures of the spirit."[7] The essence of this movement is "its insistence on a world of ideal beauty, and its conviction that this is realised through art. The ecstasies which religion claims for the devout through prayer and contemplation are claimed by the Symbolist for the poet through the exercise of his craft."

"Intensity, "concentrated richness," musical suggestiveness, evocativeness — these were the qualities especially valued by the Symbolists and those whom they influenced. From their point of view, any image, any figure of speech, any literary or mythological or historical allusion, any turn of speech even, may be symbolic, carrying us toward a mystical realization beyond immediate experience. In a famous passage, Yeats illustrates what he calls "the continuous indefinable symbolism which is the substance of all style":

> There are no lines with more melancholy beauty than these by Burns—

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[6] See his *I asked a thief,* and the discussion of this poem, on pages 455-458.
[7] C. M. Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism.*

The white moon is setting behind the white wave,
And Time is setting with me, Ol

and these lines are perfectly symbolical. Take from them the whiteness of the moon and of the wave, whose relation to the setting of Time is too subtle for the intellect, and you take from them their beauty. But when all are together, moon and wave and whiteness and setting Time and the last melancholy cry, they evoke an emotion which cannot be evoked by any other arrangement of colours and sounds and forms.[8]

In the early poems of Yeats, we find many passages which strive for this kind of evocation, for example:

.... the shadows of the wood,
And the white breast of the dim sea
And all dishevelled wandering stars.[9]

and:

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the lasuembers of daylight die;
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.[10]

The Symbolists' idealization of artistic sensibility and the artistic symbol has not only been sustained in some of the most powerful tendencies of modern literature but has also helped create a veritable "religion of art" in much contemporary criticism.

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[8] William Butler Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry."
[8] William Butler Yeats, *Who Goes with Fergus?*
[10] William Butler Yeats, *Adam's Curse.*

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

i.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER *Hyd, Absolon, thy gilte tresses clere*

Hyd,[1] ABSOLON, thy gilte[2] tresses clere;[3]
Ester, ley thou thy meknesse al a-doun;
Hyd, Jonathas, al thy frendly manere;
Penalopee, and Marcia Catoun,
Mak of your wyfhood no comparisoun;
Hyde ye your beautes, Isoude and Eleyne,
Alceste is here, that al that may desteyne.[4]

Thy faire bodye, lat hit nat appere,
Lavyne; and thou, Lucresse of Rome toun,
And Polixene, that boghte love so dere,
Eek Cleopatre, with al thy passioun,
Hyde ye your trouthe in love and your renoun;
And thou, Tisbe, that hast for love swich[5] peyne:[6]
Alceste is here, that al that may desteyne.

Herro, Dido, Laudomia, alle in-fere,[7]
Eek[8] Phyllis, hanging for thy Demophoun,
And Canace, espyed[9] by thy chere,[10]
Ysiphile, betrayed with Jasoun,
Mak of your trouthe in love no bost[11] ne soun;[12]
Nor Ypermistre or Adriane, ne pleyne;[13]
Alceste is here, that al that may desteyne.

[1] hide [2] golden [8] bright * bedim [5] such [6] distress
[7] together [8] also * disclosed * [10] appearance ll boast
[12] sound [13] lament

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR *Past ruin'd Ilion Helen lives*

PAST RUIN'D Ilion Helen lives,
  Alcestis rises from the shades;
Verse calls them forth; 'tis verse that gives
  Immortal youth to mortal maids.

Soon shall Oblivion's deepening veil
  Hide all the peopled hills you see,
The gay, the proud, while lovers hail
  In distant ages you and me.

The tear for; fading beauty check,
  For passing glory cease to sigh;
One form shall rise above the wreck,
  One name, Janthe, shall not die.

FRANCOIS VILLON *The Ballad of Dead Ladies*[14]

TELL ME now in what hidden way is
  Lady Flora the lovely Roman?
Where's Hipparchia, and where is Thai's,
  Neither of them the fairer woman?
  Where is Echo, beheld of no man,
Only heard on river and mere,—
  She whose beauty was more than human? . . .
But where are the snows of yester-year?

Where's H^loise, the learned nun,
  For whose sake Abeillard, I ween,
Lost manhood and put priesthood on?
  (From Love he won such dule and teen!)
  And where, I pray you, is the Queen

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[14] Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Who willed that Buridan should steer
  Sewed in a sack's mouth down the Seine? . . .
But where are the snows of yester-year?

White Queen Blanche, like a queen of lilies,
  With a voice like any mermaiden,—
Bertha Broadfoot, Beatrice, Alice,
  And Ermengarde the lady of Maine,—
  And that good Joan whom Englishmen
At Rouen doomed and burned her there,—
  Mother of God, where are they then? . . .
But where are the snows of yester-year?

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,
  Where they are gone, nor yet this year,
Except with this for an over-word,—
  But where are the snows of yester-year?

EDGAR LEE MASTERS *The Hill*

WHERE ARE Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley,
The weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the boozer, the fighter?
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

One passed in a fever,
One was burned in a mine,
One was killed in a brawl,
One died in a jail,
One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife—
All, all, are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where are Ella, Kate, Mag, Lizzie and Edith,
The tender heart, the simple soul, the loud, the proud, the happy one?—
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

One died in shameful childbirth,
One of a thwarted love,
One at the hands of a brute in a brothel,
One of a broken pride, in the search for heart's desire,
One after life in far-away London and Paris
Was brought to her little space by Ella and Kate and Mag—
All, all, are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where are Uncle Isaac and Aunt Emily,
And old Towny Kincaid and Sevigne Houghton,
And Major Walker who had talked
With venerable men of the revolution?—
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

They brought them dead sons from the war,
And daughters whom life had crushed,
And their children fatherless, crying—
All, all, are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where is Old Fiddler Jones
Who played with life all his ninety years,
Braving the sleet with bared breast,
Drinking, rioting, thinking neither of wife nor kin,
Nor gold, nor love, nor heaven?
Lo! he babbles of the fish-frys of long ago,
Of the horse races of long ago at Clary's Grove,
Of what Abe Lincoln said
One time at Springfield.

2.

WILLIAM BLAKE *Ah! Sun-flower*

AH! SUN-FLOWER, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done;

Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves, and aspire
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS *The Cat and the Moon*

The cat went here and there
And the moon spun round like a top,
And the nearest kin of the moon,
The creeping cat, looked up.
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,
For wander and wail as he would,
The pure cold light in the sky
Troubled his animal blood.
Minnaloushe runs in the grass
Lifting his delicate feet.
Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?
When two close kindred meet
What better than call a dance?
Maybe the moon may learn,
Tired of that courtly fashion,
A new dance turn.
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
From moonlit place to place,
The sacred moon overhead
Has taken a new phase.
Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils
Will pass from change to change,
And that from round to crescent,
From crescent to round they range?
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass
Alone, important and wise,
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes.

EMILY DICKINSON *Because I could not stop for Death*

BECAUSE I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

We passed the school where children played
At wrestling in a ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

3.

JOHN MILTON *Lycidos*

In this Monody the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637; and, by occasion, foretells the ruin of our corrupted Clergy, then in their height.

YET ONCE more, O ye laurels, and once more,
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never-sear,
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
And with forc'd fingers rude
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear
Compels me to disturb your season due;
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:
Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
He must not float upon his watery bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear.
   Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse:
So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favour my destin'd urn,
And as he passes turn,
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud!
For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.
   Together both, ere the high lawns appeared
Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
We drove a-field, and both together heard
What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft till the star that rose, at ev'ning bright
Toward heav'n's descent had slop'd his westering wheel.
Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute;
Tempered to the oaten flute,
Rough Satyrs danc'd, and Fauns with clov'n heel
From the glad sound would not be absent long;
And old Damcetas lov'd to hear our song.
   But, O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone and never must return!
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves,

With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn.
The willows, and the hazel copses green,
Shall now no more be seen,
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the white-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear.
Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
For neither were ye playing on the steep
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream.
Ay me! I fondly dream!
Had ye been there—for what could that have done?
What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself for her enchanting son,
Whom universal nature did lament,
When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His gory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore?
Alas! what boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with th' abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"
Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ears:

"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed."
  O fountain Arethuse, and thou honoured flood,
Smooth-sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood.
But now my oat proceeds,
And listens to the Herald of the Sea,
That came in Neptune's plea.
He ask'd the waves, and ask'd the felon winds,
What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?
And questioned every gust of rugged wings
That blows from off each beaked promontory.
They knew not of his story;
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd:
The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.
It was that fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.
  Next Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,
His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe.
Ah! who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?
Last came, and last did go,
The Pilot of the Galilean Lake;
Two massy keys he bore of metals twain,
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain)
He shook his miter'd locks, and stern bespake:
How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,
Anow of such as for their bellies' sake,
Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold!
Of other care they little reck*hing make

Than how to scramble at the shearer's feast,
And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook, or have learn'd ought else the least
That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs!
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw,
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said,
But that two-handed engine at the door,
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.
   Return, Alpheus, the dread voice is past,
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,
And call the yales, and bid them hither cast
Their bells, and flow'rets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low where the mild whispers use
Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enamel'd eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied show'rs,
And purple all the ground with vernal flow'rs.
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk-rose, and the well-attir'd woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears;
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.
For so, to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
Ay me! whilst thee the shores, and sounding seas
Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd;

Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
Or whether thou, to our moist vows deny'd,
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great Vision of the guarded mount
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold.
Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth:
And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth.
Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,
Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor,
So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves,
Where other groves, and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more;
Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
To all that wander in that perilous flood.

Thus sang the uncouth swain to th' oaks and rills,
While the still morn went out with sandals gray:
He touch'd the tender stops of various quills,
With eager thought warbling his Doric lay:
And now the sun had stretch'd out all the hills,
And now was dropt into the western bay;
At last he rose, and twitch'd his mantle blue:
To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

JOHN KEATS *Ode to a Nightingale*

MY HEART aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness, —
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:

Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Clustered around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild:
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstacy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn 1 the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

WALT WHITMAN *When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd*

1

WHEN LILACS last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.

2

O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night—O moody, tearful night!
O great star disappeared—O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

3

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,

With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,
With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the dooryard,
With delicate-colour'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break.

4

In the swamp in secluded recesses,
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush,
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat,
Death's outlet song of life (for well, dear brother, I know
If thou was not granted to sing thou would'st surely die).

5

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,
Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets peep'd from the ground, spotting the grey debris,
Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the endless grass,
Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-brown fields uprisen,
Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards,
Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,
Night and day journeys a coffin.

6

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land,

With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves as of crape-veil'd women standing,
With processions long and winding and the flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of faces and the unbared heads,
With the waiting dep6t, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,
With dirges through the night, with the shout and voices rising strong and solemn,
With all the mournful voices of the dirges pour'd around the coffin,
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—where amid these you journey,
With the tolling, tolling bells' perpetual clang,
Here, coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of lilac.

7

(Nor for you, for one alone,
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,
For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you, 0 sane and sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,
O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies,
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you, O death.)

8

O western orb, sailing the heaven,
Now I know what you must have meant as a month since 1 walk'd,
As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,
As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after night,

As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side (while the other stars all look'd on),
As we wander'd together the solemn night (for something I know not what kept me from sleep),
As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west how full you were of woe,
As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool transparent night,
As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward black of the night,
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you, sad orb,
Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

9

Sing on there in the swamp,
O singer,, bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call,
I hear, I come presently, I understand you,
But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has detained me,
The star my departing comrade holds and detains me.

10

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?

Sea-winds blown from east and west,
Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western sea, till there on the prairies meeting,
These and with these and the breath of my chant,
I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

11

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?

Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,

With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the grey smoke lucid and bright,
With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent sinking sun, burning, expanding the air,
With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves of the trees prolific,
In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river, with a wind-dapple here and there,
With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line against the sky, and shadows,
And the city at hand with dwellings so dense, and stacks of chimneys,
And all the scenes of life and the workshops, and the workmen homeward returning.

12

Lo, body and soul — this land,
My own Manhattan with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying tides, and the ships,
The varied and ample land, the South and the North in the light, Ohio's shores and flashing Missouri,
And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with grass and corn.
Lo, the most excellent sun so calm and haughty,
The violet and purple morn with just-felt breezes,
The gentle soft-born measureless light,
The miracle spreading bathing all, the fulfill'd noon,
The coming eve delicious, the welcome night and the stars,
Over my cities shining all, enveloping man and land.

13

Sing on, sing on, you grey-brown bird,
Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from the bushes,
Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.

Sing on, dearest brother, warble your reedy song.
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.

O liquid and free and tender!
O wild and loose to my soul — O wondrous singer!
You only I hear — yet the star holds me (but will soon depart),
Yet the lilac with mastering odour holds me.

14

Now while I sat in the day and look'd forth,
In the close of the day with its light and the fields of spring and the farmers preparing their crops,
In the large unconscious scenery of my land with its lakes and forests,
In the heavenly aerial beauty (after the perturb'd winds and the storms),
Under the arching heavens of the afternoon swift passing, and the voices of children and women,
The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw the ships how they sail'd,
And the summer approaching with richness, and the fields all busy with labour,
And the infinite separate houses, how they all went on, each with its meals and minutia of daily usages,
And the streets how their throbbings throbb'd, and the cities pent — lo, then and there,
Falling upon them all and among them all, enveloping me with the rest,
Appeared the cloud, appear'd the long black trail,
And I knew death, its thought, and the sacred knowledge of death.

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,
And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding the hands of companions,
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not,
Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,
To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still.

And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me,
The grey-brown bird I know receiv'd us comrades three,
And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for him I love.

From deep secluded recesses,
From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still,
Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,
As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night,
And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Prats'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come
unfalteringly.

Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the
dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Loved in the flood of thy bliss, O death.

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and
feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread
sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairies wide,
Over the dense-pack'd cities all the teeming wharves and ways,
O float this carol with joy, with joy to thee, O death.

15

To the tally of my soul,
Loud and strong kept up the grey-brown bird,
With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night.

Loud in the pines and cedars dim,
Clear in the freshness moist and the swamp-perfume,
And I with my comrades there in the night.

While my sight that was bound in my eyes unclosed,
As to long panoramas of visions.

And I saw askant the armies,
I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-flags,
Borne through the smoke of the battles and pierc'd with missiles I saw them,
And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody,
And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs (and all in silence),
And the stalls all splintered and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,
I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,

But I saw they were not as was thought,
They themselves were fully at rest, they suffered not,
The living remained and suffered, the mother suffer'd,
And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remained suffer'd.

16

Passing the visions, passing the night,
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands,
Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying song of my soul,
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-altering song,
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling, flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet again bursting with joy,
Covering the earth and filling the spread of heaven,
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,
Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,
I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning with spring.

I cease from my song for thee,
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting west, communing with thee,
O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the night,
The song, the wondrous chant of the grey-brown bird,
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,
With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance full of woe,
With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,
Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever to keep, for the dead I loved so well,
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands—and this for his dear sake,

Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

4.

STEPHEN SPENDER *The Express*

AFTER THE first powerful plain manifesto
The black statement of pistons, without more fuss
But gliding like a queen, she leaves the station.
Without bowing and with restrained unconcern
She passes the houses which humbly crowd outside,
The gasworks and at last the heavy page
Of death, printed by gravestones in the cemetery.
Beyond the town there lies the open country
Where, gathering speed, she acquires mystery,
The luminous self-possession of ships on ocean.
It is now she begins to sing—at first quite low
Then loud, and at last with a jazzy madness—
The song of her whistle screaming at curves,
Of deafening tunnels, brakes, innumerable bolts.
And always light, aerial, underneath
Goes the elate metre of her wheels.
Steaming through metal landscape on her lines
She plunges new eras of wild happiness
Where speed throws up strange shapes, broad curves
And parallels clean like the steel of guns.
At last, further than Edinburgh or Rome,
Beyond the crest of the world, she reaches night
Where only a low streamline brightness
Of phosphorus on the tossing hills is white.
Ah, like a comet through flame she moves entranced
Wrapt in her music no bird song, no, nor bough
Breaking with honey buds, shall ever equal.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS *The Yachts*

contend in a sea which the land partly encloses
shielding them from the too heavy blows
of an ungoverned ocean which when it chooses

tortures the biggest hulls, the best man knows
to pit against its beating, and sinks them pitilessly.
Mothlike in mists, scintillant in the minute

brilliance of cloudless days, with broad bellying sails
they glide to the wind tossing green water
from their sharp prows while over them the crew crawls

ant-like, solicitously grooming them, releasing,
making fast as they turn, lean far over and having
caught the wind again, side by side, head for the mark.

In a well guarded arena of open water surrounded by
lesser and greater craft which, sycophant, lumbering
and flittering follow them, they appear youthful, rare

as the light of a happy eye, live with the grace
of all that in the mind is feckless, free and
naturally to be desired. Now the sea which holds them

is moody, lapping their glossy sides, as if feeling
for some slightest flaw but fails completely.
Today no race. Then the wind comes again. The yachts

move, jockeying for a start, the signal is set and they
are off. Now the waves strike at them but they are too
well made, they slip through, though they take in canvas.

Arms with hands grasping seek to clutch at the prows.
Bodies thrown recklessly in the way are cut aside.
It is a sea of faces about them in agony, in despair

until the horror of the race dawns staggering the mind,
the whole sea become an entanglement of watery bodies
lost to the world bearing what they cannot hold. Broken,

beaten, desolate, reaching from the dead to be taken up
they cry out, failing, failing! their cries rising
in waves still as the skillful yachts pass over.

HART CRANE *To Brooklyn Bridge*

How MANY dawns, chill from his rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high
Over the chained bay waters Liberty—

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes
As apparitional as sails that cross
Some page of figures to be filed away;
—Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft
A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,
Tilting there momently, shrill shirt ballooning,
A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,
A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;
All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .
Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,
Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow
Of anonymity time cannot raise:
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
Beading thy path—condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.
The City's fiery parcels all undone,
Already snow submerges an iron year …

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

DYLAN THOMAS *The force that through the green fuse drives the flower*

THE FORCE that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.

The hand that whirls the water in the pool
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind
Hauls my shroud sail.
And I am dumb to tell the hanging man
How of my clay is made the hangman's lime.

The lips of time leech to the fountain head;
Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
Shall calm her sores.
And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind
How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.

And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 21

1. Analyze the use of traditional symbols in the first group of poems in this section and in the poem by Emily Dickinson. Is Masters' *The Hill* as free of such symbols as it may seem to be on first reading?
2. Consider the discussion of Blake's *The Sick Rose* on pages 501-502, and then read his *Ah! Sun-flower* to see whether these poems present similar examples of tragic symbolism. What possible meanings does the latter poem embody? Do these meanings account for most of the effect of the symbols employed?
3. What use of symbols from nature and common experience is made in the poems by Yeats, Spender, and Williams? What effect does the shift from familiar associations to associations of a more fantastic or imaginative sort create in each of these poems?
4. In a series of related images, the speaker in *To Brooklyn Bridge* presents his motives for desiring to read divinity into an inanimate and man-made thing like Brooklyn Bridge. How do the pictures in the opening stanzas of seagulls rising from the water, of daydreaming office employees, and of crowded motion picture theaters suggest these motives?

   The poet addresses the Bridge as though it were a deity, thus attaching to it the associations of religious worship. What characteristics of divinity are attributed to it in the fourth and sixth stanzas, and in stanzas seven through nine? How do stanzas ten and eleven alter the first impression that the speaker does not question the divinity of the Bridge?

Could you make a case for the idea that this poem dramatizes, in its imagery and central symbol, the unfulfilled need for a unifying faith in the contemporary world?

5. It has been suggested that *Lycidas*, in addition to its avowed purpose as an elegy lamenting the death of Milton's friend Edward King, also symbolizes a state of mind in the poet. Milton feared he would die too soon to fulfill all his ambitions to write great poetry and to serve his nation as a moral and religious reformer and a lover of freedom. (See E. M. W. Tillyard's *Milton*, pages 80-85, for a fuller development of this idea.) Do the leading symbols of the poem support the contention of Mr. Tillyard that its "real subject is the resolving of these fears (and of his bitter scorn of the clergy) into an exalted state of mental calm" and that as a whole *Lycidas* expresses "a mind calm after struggle but keyed up to perform heroic deeds"?
6. In Dylan Thomas' poem, the poet's own self—body, life, mind, and sexuality—becomes a concentrated symbol of all existence. Explain the stages by which this symbol is developed. What is meant by the refrain "And I am dumb to tell" in each stanza? *Why* does the poet say this in each of the stanzas?

II. ALLEGORY AND INTELLECTUAL SYMBOLISM

We cannot contemplate any symbol without seeing that it embodies intellectual meanings and trying to formulate them clearly. Didactic writers—that is, writers with a definite aim of teaching some truth or belief through their writing—have always taken advantage of this fact by illustrating their arguments as vividly as they could. The dialogues of Plato, the speeches in the Book of Job in the Old Testament, the parables of the New Testament all seek to persuade not merely through facts and logic, but also through pictures that win us by way of our feelings and imaginations. The Anglo-Saxon historian Bede recounts a touching symbolic parable used in the conversion to Christianity of a Northumbrian king in the seventh century:

> Such appears to me, king, this present life of man on earth in comparison with the time which is unknown to us, as though you were sitting at the banquet with your leaders and thanes in winter and the fire was lighted and your hall warmed, and it rained and snowed and stormed outside; and there should come a sparrow and quickly fly through the house, come in through one door and go out through the other. Now in the time that he is inside he is not touched by the storm of winter; but that is only the twinkling of an eye and the least interval, and at once he comes from winter back to winter again. So this life of men appears save for but a little while; what goes before or what follows after we do not know. Therefore, if this teaching should bring anything more certain and more proper, it is fitting that we follow it.

Many popular poems too are really pictorial arguments or parables of a sort, with a single important difference. The symbols they present usually do not arise from the poet's search for illustrations to illuminate his theme and viewpoint. On the contrary, the symbols came first, and the poet then sought for a "noble" way of interpreting them. Many of Longfellow's poems are of this variety. A good example is his *Hymn to the Night,* discussed on pages 500-501. Another example is Bryant's *To a Waterfowl.* Moved by the distant sight of a solitary bird flying in the sky, the poet felt the universal significance of the certain, unwavering flight of the small creature toward its proper destination in the midst of vastness and danger:

> All day thy wings have fanned,
> At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere,
> Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
> Though the dark night is near.

Pondering the significance of the bird in his flight, Bryant discovers "the lesson thou hast given"—the guidance of God in which all of us, in our lonely life-journeys, must trust. Poetry like this really consists of two independent aspects—the imagery, or story, as such, which is often original and moving, and the "moral," generally contrived and obvious but sometimes appropriate and effective in its own right.

In allegorical writing, which generally takes a narrative form, the picture-story with an interpretation reaches its extreme form. But an allegory, unlike a parable, is not merely a story consistent with an attached moral. This most elaborate form of symbolic didactic argument makes a point through everything that appears in it; every image, character, and incident, as well as the entire plot, signifies a definable abstraction. The abstraction may be a doctrine, a psychological conflict, a social type, even a particular individual's character—anything which can be stated as a general proposition. One of the allegorist's chief devices is personification—the representation of ideas and inanimate things as though they were living beings; and together with this device, he will also use the related type of metaphor in which an abstract idea is seen as a concrete object. When, as in Dante, the pictures are thoroughly alive and compelling in themselves, even though at the same time they represent abstract principles, current politics, or other implied meanings, we approach the state of pure symbolism in the sense already discussed in the preceding section. But in any case, the narrative form gets the symbols moving in active relation with one another, and thus clarifies the intended meaning of all of them, as well as the meaning of the whole sequence of events. The symbols, quite static in themselves, come to life through their interplay, which is essential to the success of an allegorical work.

Thus, the hero of the first book of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is the Red Cross Knight who symbolizes, among other things, the idea of holiness and the mission of the Anglican Church. His armor is that of a true Christian, for he is clad

> .... in mightie armes and silver shielde,
> Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,

and on this shield there is the image of Christ on the Cross, fashioned there

> For soveraine hope, which in his helpe he had:
> Right faithfull true he was in deede and word.

(The description of the knight's armor was also a definite reminder, to Spenser's Bible-conscious sixteenth-century readers, of St. Paul's allegorical figure of "putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.")

This knight fights for the lady Una, who represents the one true faith as the Protestant poet conceives it. She is lovely, pure, innocent, "and by descent from royal lineage"—that is, she represents genuine Christianity as it is derived from the kingdom of God by way of the Gospels. The knight's chief adversary, on the other hand, represents the Catholic Church and the hypocrisy which Spenser—a zealous Puritan—attributed to it. The adversary, Archimago, seems a pious, simple hermit. He dresses in sober black, walks humbly with his eyes cast down,

> And all the way he prayèd, as he went,
> And often knockt his breast, as one that did repent.

But in reality he is

> A bold bad man, that dared to call by name
> Great Gorgon, Prince of darkness and dead night. . . .

The knight tears himself free of Archimago's influence, as was foreshadowed in his earlier victory over the foul dragon of erroneous religious doctrine—"a monster vile, whom God and man does hate."

An allegory, then, is a quite elaborate pictorial dramatization of relationships among ideas, attitudes, institutions, and other abstract concepts. Of necessity, therefore, it must be a work of considerable length. But many shorter pieces are allegorical in a more limited sense; they use one or another typical feature of allegory, and it is clear that the symbols in them are more important for their implied significance than they are for themselves.[1] Thus, Collins' brief eighteenth-century *Ode* in praise of all soldiers who have died in their country's service (page 666) employs allegorical personification. When such soldiers die, we are told, they are blessed and mourned by the principles for which they fought:

> There Honour comes, a Pilgrim grey,
> To bless the Turf that wraps their Clay,
> And Freedom shall awhile repair,
> To dwell a weeping Hermit there!

In a more concentrated intellectual manner, George Herbert's *The Pulley* presents an argument in compact story form, through concrete images. God with his glass of blessings—"jewels" in the sense that they are so precious—is shown in his essential relation to mankind, as the devout Metaphysical poet-priest conceived it. This poem too is partially allegorical, despite its conceits, its witty punning and explicit reasoning, and its brevity.

[1] Long poems, too, may be allegorical in certain respects only. Thus, the medieval romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* though symbolic, is only partially allegorical. This exceptionally fine narrative poem is written in a Middle English too difficult for most readers except special students; but the following translation of a few lines will illustrate our meaning. In them the poet "explains" the five-pointed golden star on the hero's shield:

> It is a sign which Solomon once chose, a symbolic token of fidelity. For it is a figure with five points, on which each line is fused with the next, so that it is endless. And indeed, the English, as I hear, do call it "the endless knot." And therefore was it most fitting for this knight and his noble coat of arms, since Gawain was five ways famous—and five times in each way—as a good knight. Like refined gold he was free of all blemish—never discourteous, graced with virtues among men. . . .
>
> First he was faultless in his five wits; and secondly, his five fingers never failed him; and all his earthly faith was fixed on the five wounds that Christ, as the Creed says, endured on the Cross. In battle, above all else, he fixed his mind on one sole source of courage—the five joys the fair queen of Heaven took from her child. Fitly then he bore her image high on the back of his shield, that, seeing it there he might never fail in his courage. And the fifth five were these, the highest of the virtues: his generosity, and his love of his fellows, and courtesy that never faltered, and chastity, and piety which surpasses all else. The five virtues were more firmly fixed in him than in all other men. Fivefold were they fixed, each linked to the next at all the five points, everywhere inseparable. …

GEORGE HERBERT *The Pulley*

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
"Let us," said He, "pour on him all we can;
Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span."

So strength first made a way,
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honor, pleasure;
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all His treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

"For if I should," said He,
Bestow this jewel also on My creature,
He would adore My gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.

"Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness;
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to My breast."

Herbert does not say outright that God withholds peace of soul from men until they turn directly to Him for it, and that He does so for the sake of their souls' salvation. Rather, the poet images forth this familiar religious doctrine in a tale that has the ring of fairy-legendry. The "glass of blessings," the notion of all the world's resources being concentrated "into a span," the punning on the word "rest," and the portrait of God as a kindly, artful, wise benefactor all serve to translate the idea into something vividly dramatic. The effect is, finally, to change a pious thought into an active illustration of the pulley-like relationship by which God maintains His control over man.

Closely allied in purpose, and yet very different in character from allegory, is the kind of poem in which a writer describes an adventure or a scene and then explains its inherent significance or makes his characters do so.Because it is so clearly about an imaginary and symbolic incident, the following poem is even nearer to allegory than most such work.

WILFRED OWEN *Strange Meeting*

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And by his smile I knew that sullen hall,
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.
With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
"Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."
"None," said the other, "save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled,
Or, discontent, boil bloody and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.

Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday, through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried, but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now. . .."

Wilfred Owen, the author of *Strange Meeting,* was killed in the first World War before he could quite complete the poem. His meaning, however, is clear enough. The speaker has had a vision of meeting, in Hell, a man he had killed in battle, one with aspirations like his own to serve mankind in some high way. The war, he learns, has, by making him the destroyer of other men's hopes and ideals, also corrupted his own. War is thus seen as a spoiler of men and of societies. The passionate speech of the "strange friend," with its consonantal rhymes such as *wild-world* or *killed-cold,* is the heart of the poem. The rocking, music of the rhymes helps set the theme hypnotically—the bitter frustration by war of the ecstatic creativity of the human spirit. The narrative provides only the slightest of dramatic frameworks, but it does help us to see that the "I" of the poem stands not for the poet only but for any soldier in any army of any war, while the strange friend represents both the nobler aspects of the average man and the special group of sensitive and idealistic persons to be found in any society.

Strange Meeting thus stands midway between the didactic, often contrived symbolism of allegory and parable and the pure symbolism discussed in the preceding section. A brief poem by Randall Jarrell will remind us of how ideas are embodied in the latter kind of writing.

RANDALL JARRELL *The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner*

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

The thought behind this poem, though much less explicit than that of *Strange Meeting,* is a great deal more concrete and forceful. The reason is that the two final lines present nightmare reality with a physical directness that simultaneously shocks and convinces. We are not told in so many words that there is such a thing as what Owen calls "the pity of war" or that it has stunted the growth of the free and creative spirit. Instead, the poem provides a series of images in which birth and death are linked. From his mother's womb the speaker "fell into" that of the State. There is a similar wrenching away from nature in his being carried up into the world of air-combat and away from earth (the old familiar "Mother Earth" of tradition.) The womb and birth imagery is horribly reversed in the final line. We note that the true mother is warm, personal, protective; the State is cold, uninterested, and its womb is one in which the developing personality is neither cherished nor awakened intellectually—in which the "wet fur" of the embryo human intelligence freezes before it realizes its own misery of existence. From the instinctive, mindless, natural care of the mother ("my mother's sleep") the young human animal has been drafted into the orbit of the impersonal State; the earth contains a dream of life, but does not know how to keep her charges true to that dream. Death itself comes to the man in a virtual nightmare, while he is curled up like a foetus in the ball turret. Both the pathos and the meaning, then, derive from this unawakened dream-quality, this unrealized consciousness; it is as if a child should die before coming to any awareness of itself or its possibilities in life. All these ideas and suggestions are concentrated in 'the symbol of the womb.

The intellectual implications of such symbolism, as in the symbolic dialogue of *Strange Meeting*, are an essential ingredient of the poem in which they appear. It is true that in Owen's poem we are closer to allegory—which, as Yeats once observed, requires "right information" for its interpretation rather than the "right intuition" which pure symbolism demands of the reader. But both Owen and Jarrell are bringing attitudes to light and life—however different the forms in which they appear, and however important it is to remember that a good poem is never merely the vehicle for an idea. The abhorrence of war and the other allied ideas we find in the two pieces by Owen and Jarrell are the durable intellectual cement of these poems. In the same way—to turn to a less drastic treatment of a related theme—there is an underlying acceptance, more cheerful, perhaps, and more normal, of the world-as-it-is implied in the following poem by John Manifold. Even in war, many poets have found it possible to employ symbols of joyous normality like Manifold's when their experience and temperament have made it possible for them to do so. The poem has less weight than Owen's or Jarrell's, yet stands up well under close scrutiny. Notice how, in the second stanza, the picture of the charming, laughing young girl running down toward the singing soldiers takes on a special glow. There is perfect reciprocity between their movements and hers, and she becomes a symbol for them as they swing by "adoring her there." A natural sympathy flows between the soldiers and the girl, though their "high fettle" is of a different order from her childish excitement. They are moving out of a familiar world, she remains a part of it, and this particular nostalgic moment has a special symbolic meaning.

JOHN MANIFOLD *Fife Tune*[2]

6/8 FOR SIXTH PLATOON, 308TH I.T.C.

One morning in spring
We marched from Devizes
All shapes and all sizes
Like beads on a string,
But yet with a swing
We trod the bluemetal
And full of high fettle
We started to sing.

She ran down the stair
A twelve-year-old darling
And laughing and calling
She tossed her bright hair;
Then silent to stare
At the men flowing past her—
There were all she could master
Adoring her there.

---

[2] From *Selected Verses* by John Manifold. Copyrighted 1946 by the John Day Company.

It's seldom I'll see
A sweeter or prettier;
I doubt we'll forget her
In two years or three,
And lucky he'll be
She takes for a lover
While we are far over
The treacherous sea.

We are reminded even here, by the way, that good poetry is rarely all light or all dark. Underlying the high-spirited march rhythm is an ironic disparity between what the girl symbolizes —the youth and natural beauty that the men would stay with and love were they not being sent away to go and fight over the treacherous sea—and the war to which they are moving. Notice that, as they march by, they are "adoring" her, as though she were a young goddess of love who has descended among them to "master" them and perhaps—as goddesses will—select one mortal for her consort. But her lover will be chosen only eventually, when she is older; and *he will not in any event be from among them, for they may not linger even a moment to worship here. So the expectant, happy, maturing girl and the soldiers moving the wrong way—away from her—make a picture, fuller and more significant than is at first apparent, of the frustration of the life-force itself. Were this frustration not implied, the poem would seem empty and false, its "normal" tone unearned and therefore pointless. With it, the quick bright love of life of the poem as a whole makes itself felt even more convincingly because of its honest recognitions. In seeking to imply the full intellectual meaning of his anecdote, the poet has raised to a symbolic level what would otherwise have been merely a very slight song, glancingly poignant but without further significance.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

DANTE ALIGHIERI *Midway the Journey*[1]

(from *Inferno:* Canto I)

MIDWAY THE the journey of this life I was 'ware
That I had strayed into a dark forest,
And the right path appeared not anywhere.
Ah, tongue cannot describe how it oppressed,
This wood, so harsh, dismal and wild, that fear
At thought of it strikes now into my breast.
So bitter it is, death is scarce bitterer.
But, for the good it was my hap to find,
I speak of the other things that I saw there.
I cannot well remember in my mind
How I came thither, so was I immersed
In sleep, when the true way I left behind.
But when my footsteps had attained the first
Slope of a hill, at the end of that drear vale
Which with such terror had my spirit pierced,
I looked up, and beheld its shoulders pale
Already in clothing of that planet's light
Which guideth men on all roads without fail.
Then had my bosom a little of respite
From what had all the lake of my heart tost
While I so piteously endured the night.
As one, whom pantings of his breath exhaust,
Escaped from the deep water to the shore,
Turns back and gazes on the danger crost,
So my mind, fleeing still and stricken sore,
Turned back to gaze astonished on that pass
Which none hath ever left alive before.
When my tired body had rested a brief space
I trod anew the slope, desert and bare,
With the firmer foot still in_the lower place.

---

[1] Translated by Laurence Binyon.

And at the ascent, as 't were on the first stair,
Behold! a Leopard light and swift of limb
And covered with a hide of spotted hair.
And he would not depart, but still would trim
His pace to front me, so that many a time
I turned me to go back, because of him.
The moment was the morning's earliest prime,
And the sun mounted up, accompanied
With those stars chosen in his choir to climb
When divine Love first motioned and enskied
Those beauteous things; so that a hope I caught
To evade that creature with the freckled hide.
The hour of time and the sweet season wrought
Thus on me; yet not so much, but when appeared
A Lion, terror to my heart he brought.
He seemed coming against me with head reared
Ravening with hunger, and so terrible
That the very air seemed of his breath afeared;
And a She-Wolf, that in her famished fell
Looked all infuriate craving; she hath meant
To many ere now that they in misery dwell.
On me the grimness of her aspect sent
A burden that my spirit overpowered,
So that I lost the hope of the ascent.
As one that is with lust of gain devoured,
When comes the time that makes him lose, will rack
His thoughts, lamenting all his hope deflowered,
To such state brought me, in dread of his attack,
That restless beast, who by degrees perforce
To where the Sun is silent drove me back....

ANONYMOUS *Lully, lulley*

LULLY, LULLEY, lully; lulley,
The faucon hath borne my make away.

He bare him up, he bare him down,
He bare him into an orchard brown.

In that orchard there was an hall,
That was hanged with purple and pall.

And in that hall there was a bed,
It was hanged with gold so red.

And in that bed there lieth a knight,
His woundes bleeding day and night.

By that bedside kneeleth a may,
But she weepeth both night and day.

And by that bedside there standeth a stone,
Corpus Christi written thereon.

EDMUND SPENSER *The Faerie Queene*

(from Book I: Canto I)

The Patron of true Holinesse,
Foule Errour doth defeate:
Hypocrisie him to entrappe,
Doth to his home entreate.

A GENTLE Knight was pricking[2] on the plaine,
Y-cladd in mightie armes and silver shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe wounds did remaine,
The cruell markes of many a bloudy fielde;
Yet armes till that time did he never wield:
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:
Full jolly[3] knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,
As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt.

But on his brest a bloudie Crosse he bore,
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,
For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,
And dead as living ever him adored:

---

[2] riding, using spurs
[8] handsome

Upon his shield the like was also scored,
For soveraine hope, which in his helpe he had:
Right faithfull true he was in deede and word,
But of his cheere did seeme too solemne sad;
Yet nothing did he dread, but ever was ydrad[4]. . . .

A lovely Ladie[5] rode him faire beside,
Upon a lowly Asse more white then snow,
Yet she much whiter, but the same did hide
Under a vele, that wimpled[6] was full low,
And over all a blacke stole she did throw,
As one that inly mournd: so was she sad,
And heavie sat upon her palfrey slow:
Seemed in heart some hidden care she had,
And by her in a line a milke white lambe she lad.

So pure and innocent, as that same lambe,
She was. in life and every vertuous lore,
And by descent from Royall lynage came
Of ancient Kings and Queenes, that had of yore
Their sceptres stretcht from East to Westerne shore,
And all the world in their subjection held;
Till that infernal fiend with foule uprore
Forwasted all their land, and them expeld:
Whom to avenge, she had this Knight from far compel'd[7].

Behind her farre away a Dwarfe[8] did lag,
That lasie seemd in being ever last,
Or wearied with bearing of her bag
Of needments at his backe. Thus as they past,
The day with cloudes was suddeine overcast,
And angry Jove an hideous storme of raine
Did poure into his Lemans[9] lap so fast,
That every wight to shrowd[10] it did constrain,
And this faire couple eke to shroud themselves were fain.

---

[4] dreaded, the past participle
[5] Una or Truth [6] folded, pleated [7] summoned [8] Prudence
[9] beloved's (the Earth's) [10] take cover

Enforst to seeke some covert nigh at hand,
A shadie grove not far away they spide,
That promist ayde the tempest to withstand:
Whose loftie trees yclad with sommers pride,
Did spred so broad, that heavens light did hide,
Not perceable with power of any starre:
And all within were pathes and alleies wide,
With footing worne, and leading inward farre:
Faire harbour that them seemes; so in they entred arre.

And foorth they passe, with pleasure forward led,
Joying to heare the birdes sweete harmony,
Which therein shrouded from the tempest dred,
Seemd in their song to scorne the cruell sky.
Much can they prayse the trees so straight and hy,
The sayling Pine, the Cedar proud and tall,
The vine-prop Elme, the Poplar never dry,
The builder Oake, sole king of forests all,
The Aspine good for staves, the Cypresse funerall….

The Laurell, meed of mightie Conquerours
And Poets sage, the Firre that weepeth still,
The Willow worne of forlorne Paramours,
The Eugh obedient to the benders will,
The Birch for shaftes, the Sallow for the mill,
The Mirrhe sweete bleeding in the bitter wound,
The warlike Beech, the Ash for nothing ill,
The fruitfull Olive, and the Platane round,
The carver Holme, the Maple seeldom inward sound.

Led with delight, they thus beguile the way,
Untill the blustring storme is overblowne;
When weening to returne, whence they did stray,
They cannot finde that path, which first was showne,
But wander too and fro in wayes unknowne,
Furthest from end then, when they neerest weene,
That makes them doubt, their wits be not their owne:
So many pathes, so many turnings scene,
That which of them to take, in diverse doubt they been.

At last resolving forward still to fare,
Till that some end they finde or in or out,
That path they take, that beaten seemd most bare,
And like to lead the labyrinth about;[11]
Which when by tract they hunted had throughout,
At length it brought them to a hollow cave,
Amid the thickest woods. The Champion stout
Eftsoones dismounted from his courser brave,
And to the Dwarfe a while his needlesse spere he gave.

Be well aware, quoth then that Ladie milde,
Least suddaine mischiefe ye too rash provoke:
The danger hid, the place unknowne and wilde,
Breedes dreadfull doubts: Oft fire is without smoke,
And perill without show: therefore your stroke
Sir knight with-hold, till further triall made.
Ah Ladie (said he) shame were to revoke
The forward footing for an hidden shade:
Vertue gives her selfe light, through darkenesse for to wade.

Yea but (quoth she) the perill of this place
I better wot then you, though now too late
To wish you backe returne with foule disgrace,
Yet wisedome warnes, whilest foot is in the gate,
To stay the steppe, ere forcèd to retrate.
This is the wandring wood, this *Errours den,*
A monster vile, whom God and man does hate:
Therefore I read[12] beware. Fly fly (quoth then
The fearefull Dwarfe:) this is no place for living men.

But full of fire and greedy hardiment,
The youthfull knight could not for ought be staide,
But forth unto the darksome hole he went,
And lookèd in: his glistring armour made
A litle glooming light, much like a shade,
By which he saw the ugly monster plaine,
Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine,
Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.

[11] out of [12] advise

And, as she lay upon the durtie ground,
Her huge long taile her den all overspred,
Yet was in knots and many boughtes[13] upwound,
Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred
A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
Sucking upon her poisnous dugs; each one
Of sundrie shapes, yet all ill-favored:
Soone as that uncouth light upon them shone,
Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone.

Their dam upstart out of her den effraide,
And rushed forth, hurling her hideous taile
About her cursed head; whose folds displaid
Were stretcht now forth at length without entraile.[14]
She lookt about, and seeing one in mayle,
Armed to point, sought backe to turne againe;
For light she hated as the deadly bale,[15]
Ay wont in desert darknes to remaine,
Where plain none might see her, nor she see any plaine.

Which when the valiant Elfe[16] perceiv'd, he lept
As Lyon fierce upon the flying pray,
And with his trenchand blade her boldly kept
From turning backe, and forced her to stay:
Therewith enrag'd she loudly gan to bray,
And turning fierce her speckled taile advaunst,
Threatning her angrie sting, him to dismay;
Who, nought aghast, his mightie hand enhaunst.[17]
The stroke down from her head unto her shoulder glaunst.

Much daunted with that dint her sence was dazd;
Yet kindling rage her selfe she gathered round,
And all attonce her beastly bodie raizd
With doubled forces high above the ground:
Tho,[18] wrapping up her wrethed sterne a-rownd,
Lept fierce upon his shield, and her huge traine
All suddenly about his body wound,
That hand or foot to stirr he strove in vaine.
God helpe the man so wrapt in Errours endlesse traine!

Cecils [14]coil is destruction [16]the Knight [17]raised [18]then

His Lady, sad to see his sore constraint,
Gride out, Now, now, Sir knight, shew what ye bee:
Add faith unto your force, and be not faint;
Strangle her, els she sure will strangle thee.
That when he heard, in great perplexitie,
His gall did grate for griefe and high disdaine;
And, knitting all his force, got one hand free,
Wherewith he grypt her gorge with so great paine,
That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine.

Therewith she spewd out of her filthie maw
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe.
Her vomit full of bookes and papers[19] was,
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
Her filthie pafbreake all the place defiled has.

As when old father Nilus gins to swell
With timely pride above the Aegyptian vale,
His fattie waves do fertile slime outwell,
And overflow each plaine and lowly dale:
But when his later spring gins to avale,
Huge heapes of mudd he leaves, wherein there breed
Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male
And partly female, of his fruitfull seed;
Such ugly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man reed.

The same so sore annoyed has the knight,
That welnigh chokfcd with the deadly stinke,
His forces faile, ne can no longer fight.
Whose corage when the feend perceiv'd to shrinke,
She poured forth out of her hellish sinke
Her fruitfull cursed spawne of serpents small,
Deformed monsters, fowle, and blacke as inke,
Which swarming all about his legs did crall,
And him encombred sore, but could not hurt at all.

[19] attacks on Queen Elizabeth and the Church of England

As gentle Shepheard in sweete even-tide,
When ruddy *Phoebus* gins to welke[20] in west,
High on an hill, his flocke to vewen wide,
Markes which do byte their hasty supper best;
A cloud of combrous gnattes do him molest,
All striving to infixe their feeble stings,
That from their noyance he no where can rest,
But with his clownish hands their tender wings
He brusheth oft, and oft doth mar their murmurings.

Thus ill bestedd, and fearefull more of shame,
Then of the certaine perill he stood in,
Halfe furious unto his foe he came,
Resolved in minde all suddenly to win
Or soone to lose, before he once would lin;[21]
And strooke at her with more then manly force,
That from her body full of filthie sin
He raft her hatefull head without remorse;
A streame of cole black bloud forth gushed from her corse.

Her scattred brood, soone as their Parent deare
They saw so rudely falling to the ground,
Groning full deadly, all with troublous feare,
Gathred themselves about her body round,
Weening their wonted entrance to have found
At her wide mouth: but being there withstood
They flocked all about her bleeding wound,
And sucked up their dying mothers blood,
Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good.

That detestable sight him much amazde,
To see th'unkindly Impes of heaven accurst,
Devoure their dam; on whom while so he gazd,
Having all satisfide their bloudy thurst,
Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst,
And bowels gushing forth: well worthy end
Of such as drunke her life, the which them murst;

[20] wane [21] cease, stop

Now needeth him no lenger labour spend,
His foes have slaine themselves, with whom he should contend.

His Ladie seeing all, that chaunst, from farre
Approcht in hast to greet his victorie,
And said, Faire knight, borne under happy starre,
Who see your vanquisht foes before you lye:
Well worthy be you of that Armorie,
Wherein ye have great glory wonne this day,
And prooved your strength on a strong enimie,
Your first adventure: many such I pray,
And henceforth ever wish, that like succeed it may.

Then mounted he upon his Steede againe,
And with the Lady backward sought to wend;
That path he kept, which beaten was most plaine,
Ne ever would to any by-way bend,
But still did follow one unto the end,
The which at last out of the wod them brought.
So forward on his way (with God to trend)
He passed forth, and new adventure sought;
Long way he travelled, before he heard of ought.

GEORGE HERBERT *Redemption*

HAVING BEEN tenant long to a rich lord,
Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
And make a suit unto him, to afford
A new small-rented lease, and cancel the old.
In heaven at his manor I him sought:
They told me there, that he was lately gone
About some land, which he had dearly bought
Long since on earth to take possession.
I straight returned, and knowing his great birth,
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts:

At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
Of thieves and murderers: there I him espied,
Who straight, *Your suit is granted,* said, and died.

GEORGE HERBERT *Love*

LOVE BADE me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lacked anything.

"A guest," I answered, "worthy to be here."
Love said, "You shall be he."
"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee."
Love took my hand, and smiling, did reply,
"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve."
"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"
"My dear, then I will serve."
"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."
So I did sit and eat.

GEORGE HERBERT *The Churck-FloOT*

MARK YOU the floor? that square and speckled stone,
Which looks so firm and strong,
Is Patience:

And th' other black and grave, wherewith each one
Is checkered all along,
Humility:

The gentle rising, which on either hand
Leads to the Quire above,
Is Confidence:

By the sweet cement, which in one sure band
Ties the whole frame, is Love
And Charity.

Hither sometimes Sin steals, and stains,
The marbles' neat and curious veins:
But all is cleansed when the marble weeps.
Sometimes Death, puffing at the door,
Blows all the dust about the floor:
But while he thinks to spoil the room, he sweeps.
Blest be the Architect, whose art
Could build so strong in a weak heart.

GEORGE HERBERT *Peace*

SWEET PEACE, where dost thou dwell? I humbly crave,
Let me once know.
I sought thee in a secret cave,
And ask'd, if Peace were there.
A hollow wind did seem to answer, No:
Go seek elsewhere.

I did; and going did a rainbow note:
Surely, thought I,
This is the lace of Peace's coat:
I will search out the matter.
But while I lookt the clouds immediately
Did break and scatter.

Then went I to a garden and did spy
A gallant flower,
The crown Imperiall: Sure, said I,
Peace at the root must dwell.
But when I digg'd, I saw a worm devoure
What show'd so well.

At length I met a rev'rend good old man;
Whom when for Peace
I did demand, he thus began:
There was a Prince of old
At Salem dwelt, who liv'd with good increase
Of flock and fold.

He sweetly liv'd; yet sweetnesse did not save
His life from foes.
But after death out of his grave
There sprang twelve stalks of wheat;
Which many wondring at, got some of those
To plant and set.

It prospered strangely, and did soon disperse
Through all the earth:
For they that taste it do rehearse,
That vertue lies therein;
A secret vertue, bringing peace and mirth
By flight of sinne.

Take of this grain, which in my garden grows,
And grows for you;
Make bread of it: and that repose
And peace, which everywhere
With so much earnestness you do pursue
Is only there.

HENRY VAUGHAN *Regeneration*

A WARD, and still in bonds, one day
I stole abroad.
It was high-spring, and all the way
Primros'd and hung with shade;
Yet, was it frost within,
And surly winds
Blasted my infant buds, and sin
Like Clouds eclips'd my mind.

Storm'd thus; I straight perceiv'd my spring
Mere stage, and show,
My walk a monstrous, mountain'd thing
Rough-cast with Rocks, and snow;
And as a Pilgrim's Eye,
Far from relief,
Measures the melancholy sky,
Then drops, and rains for grief,

So sigh'd I upwards still. At last
'Twixt steps, and falls,
I reach'd the pinnacle, where plac'd
I found a pair of scales:
I took them up and laid
In th'one late pains;
The other smoke and pleasures weigh'd
But prov'd the heavier grains.

With that, some cried, *Away,* straight I
Obey'd, and led
Full East, a fair, fresh field could spy:
Some call'd it, *Jacob's Bed* —
A Virgin-soil, which no
Rude feet ere trod,
Where (since he stept there) only go
Prophets, and friends of God.

Hert, I repos'd; but scarce well set,
A grove descried
Of stately height, whose branches met
And mixt on every side;
I entered, and once in
(Amaz'd to see't)
Found all was chang'd, and a new spring
Did all my senses greet:

The unthrift Sun shot vital gold
A thousand pieces,
And heaven its azure did unfold
Checqu'r'd with snowy fleeces;
The air was all in spice,
And every bush
A garland wore* Thus fed my eyes,
But all the Ear lay hush.

Only a little Fountain lent
Some use for Ears,
And on the dumb shades language spent
The Music of her tears;
I drew her near, and found
The Cistern full
Of divers stones, some bright, and round,
Others ill-shap'd, and dull.

The first (pray mark) as quick as light
Danc'd through the flood,
But th'last, more heavy than the night,
Nail'd to the Center stood;
I wonder'd much, but tir'd
At last with thought,
My restless Eye that still desir'd
As strange an object brought:

It was a bank of flowers, where I descried
(Though 'twas mid-day)
Some fast asleep, others broad-eyed
And taking in the Ray;
Here musing long, I heard
A rushing wind
Which still increased, but whence it stirr'd
No where I could not find;

I turn'd me round, and to each shade
Dispatch'd an Eye,
To see, if any leaf had made
Least motion, or Reply,
But while I listening sought
My mind to ease
By knowing, where 'twas, or where not,
It whisper'd, *Where I please.*

Lord, then said I, *On me one breath,*
And let me die before my death!

CANT. CAP. 5. VER. If.

Arise O north, and come thou South-wind, and blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.

MARK ALEXANDER BOYD Fra[22] *bank to bank*

FRA BANK to bank, fra wood to wood I rin,
Ourhailit[23] with my feeble fantasie;
Like till[24] a leaf that fallis from a tree,
Or till a reed ourblawin with the win.
Two gods guides me: the ane of tham is blin,
Yea and a bairn brocht up in vanitie;
The next a wife ingenrit[25] of the sea,
And lichter nor[26] a dauphin[27] with her fin.
Unhappy is the man for evermair
That tills the sand and sawis in the air;
But twice unhappier is he, I lairn,
That feidis in his hairt a mad desire,
And follows on a woman throw the fire,
Led by a blind and teachit by a bairn.

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[22] from
[2S] carried away
[24] to
[25] woman born
[26] lighter than
[27] dolphin

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *Stepping Westward*

While my Fellow-traveller and I were walking by the side of Loch Katrine, one fine evening after sunset, in our road to a Hut where, in the course of our Tour, we had been hospitably entertained some weeks before, we met, in one of the loneliest parts of that solitary region, two well-dressed Women, one of whom said to us, by way of greeting, "What, you are stepping westward?"

"What, you are stepping westward?"—"Yea"
—'T would be a *wildish* destiny,
If we, who thus together roam
In a strange Land, and far from home,
Were in this place the guests of Chance:
Yet who would stop, or fear to advance,
Though home or shelter he had none,
With such a sky to lead him on?

The dewy ground was dark and cold;
Behind, all gloomy to behold;
And stepping westward seemed to be
A kind of *heavenly* destiny:
I liked the greeting; 'twas a sound
Of something without place or bound;
And seemed to give me spiritual right
To travel through that region bright.

The voice was soft, and she who spake
Was walking by her native lake:
The salutation had to me
The very sound of courtesy:
Its power was felt; and while my eye
Was fixed upon the glowing sky,
The echo of the voice enwrought
A human sweetness with the thought
Of travelling through the world that lay
Before me in my endless way.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW *Hymn to the Night*

Ἀσπασίη· τρίλλιστος[28]

I HEARD the trailing garments of the Night
Sweep through her marble halls1
I saw her sable skirts all fringed with light
From the celestial walls!

I felt her presence, by its spell of might,
Stoop o'er me from above;
The calm, majestic presence of the Night,
As of the one I love.

I heard the sounds of sorrow and delight,
The manifold, soft chimes,
That fill the haunted chambers of the Night,
Like some old poet's rhymes.

From the cool cisterns of the midnight air
My spirit drank repose;
The fountain of perpetual peace flows there, —
From those deep cisterns flows.

Oh holy Night! from thee I learn to bear
What man has borne before!
Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care,
And they complain no more.

Peace! Peace! Orestes-like I breathe this prayer!
Descend with broad-winged flight,
The welcome, the thrice-prayed for, the most fair,
The best-beloved Night!

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[28] Welcome! Thrice-prayed for!

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT *To a Waterfowl*

WHITHER, MIDST falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As, darkly seen against the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

Seek'st thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean-side?

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast—
The desert and illimitable air—
Lone wandering, but not lost.

All day thy wings have fanned,
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere,
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night is near.

And soon that toil shall end;
Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest,
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend,
Soon, o'er thy sheltered nest.

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven
Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart
Deeply has sunk the lesson thou hast given,
And shall not soon depart.

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

WALT WHITMAN *A noiseless patient spider*

A NOISELESS patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launched forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself.
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

MARGARET AVISON *The Butterfly*

AN UPROAR,
a spruce-green sky, bound in iron,
the murky sea running a sulphur scum,
I saw a butterfly, suddenly.
It clung between the ribs of the storm, wavering,
and flung against the battering bone-wind.
I remember it glued to the grit of that rain-strewn beach
that glowered around it, swallowed its startled design
in the larger iridescence of unstrung dark.

That wild, sour air, those miles of crouching forest, that moth
when all enveloping space
is a thin glass globe, swirling with storm

tempt us to stare, and seize analogies.
The Voice that stilled the sea of Galilee
overtoned by the new peace, the fierce subhuman peace
of such an east sky, blanched like Eternity.

The meaning of the moth, even the smashed moth, the meaning of the moth—
can't we stab that one angle into the curve of space
that sweeps so unrelenting, far above,
towards the subhuman swamp of under-dark?

RICHARD EBERHART *The Groundhog*

IN JUNE, amid the golden fields,
I saw a groundhog lying dead.
Dead lay he; my senses shook,
And mind outshot our naked frailty.
There lowly in the vigorous summer
His form began its senseless change,
And made my senses waver dim
Seeing nature ferocious in him.
Inspecting close his maggots' might
And seething cauldron of his being,
Half with loathing, half with a strange love,
I poked him with an angry stick.
The fever arose, became a flame
And Vigour circumscribed the skies,
Immense energy in the sun,
And through my frame a sunless trembling.
My stick had done nor good nor harm.
Then stood I silent in the day
Watching the object, as before;
And kept my reverence for knowledge
Trying for control, to be still,
To quell the passion of the blood;
Until I had bent down on my knees
Praying for joy in the sight of decay.
And so I left: and I returned

In Autumn strict of eye, to see
The sap gone out of the groundhog,
But the bony sodden hulk remained.
But the year had lost its meaning,
And in intellectual chains
I lost both love and loathing,
Mured up in the wall of wisdom.
Another summer took the fields again
Massive and burning, full of life,
But when I chanced upon the spot
There was only a little hair left,
And bones bleaching in the sunlight
Beautiful as architecture;
I watched them like a geometer,
And cut a walking stick from a birch.
It has been three years, now.
There is no sign of the groundhog.
I stood there in the whirling summer,
My hand capped a withered heart,
And thought of China and of Greece,
Of Alexander in his tent;
Of Montaigne in his tower,
Of Saint Theresa in her wild lament.

D. H. LAWRENCE *Tortoise Shell*

THE CROSS, the Cross
Goes deeper in than we know,
Deeper into life;
Right into the marrow
And through the bone.

Along the back of the baby tortoise
The scales are locked in an arch like a bridge,
Scale-lapping, like a lobster's sections
Or a bee's.

Then crossways down his sides
Tiger-stripes and wasp-bands.

Five, and five again, and five again,
And round the edges twenty-five little ones,
The sections of the baby tortoise shell.

Four, and a keystone;
Four, and a keystone;
Four, and a keystone;
Then twenty-four, and a tiny little keystone.

It needed Pythagoras to see life playing with counters on the living back
Of the baby tortoise;
Life establishing the first eternal mathematical tablet,
Not in stone, like the Judean Lord, or bronze, but in life-clouded, life-rosy tortoise shell.

The first little mathematical gentleman
Stepping, wee mite, in his loose trousers
Under all the eternal dome of mathematical law.

Fives, and tens,
Threes and fours and twelves,
All the *volte face* of decimals,
The whirligig of dozens and the pinnacle of seven.

Turn him on his back,
The kicking little beetle,
And there again, on his shell tender, earth-touching belly,
The long cleavage of division, upright of the eternal cross
And on either side count five,
On each side, two above, on each side two below
The dark bar horizontal.

The Cross!
It goes right through him, the sprottling insect,
Through his cross-wise cloven psyche,
Through his five-fold complex-nature.

So turn him over on his toes again;
Four pin-point toes, and a problematical thumb-piece,
Four rowing limbs, and one wedge-balancing head,
Four and one makes five, which is the clue to all mathematics.

The Lord wrote it all down on the little slate
Of the baby tortoise.
Outward and visible indication of the plan within,
The complex, manifold involvedness of an individual creature
Plotted out
On this small bird, this rudiment,
This little dome, this pediment
Of all creation,
This slow one.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 22

1. A useful way to distinguish allegory from pure symbolism is to observe that the former is a *method;* it sets up a conscious and limiting equivalent for every image and detail. The latter, on the other hand, is an independent force arising from subconscious and traditional associations; it can be manipulated but not limited. Apply this distinction to a comparison of *Lulley, lully* with *The Three Ravens* (page 311). Why is the former poem more dearly allegorical than the latter?
2. Write an interpretation of the passage by Dante, considering it as a portrayal of the state of mind of the author, a devout medieval Catholic, midway through his life. Check your interpretation against the introduction and notes in any readily available translation of the *Inferno.* How much special information must one possess to grasp Dante's basic thought and feeling here? Does the need for this information really exist? If so, does it detract from your pleasure in the poem and your sense of its value?
3. Herbert's *The Church-Floor* divides itself into three parts: (i) allegorical description; (2) dramatic narrative; (3) a concluding couplet that unexpectedly transforms the whole setting and hence the meaning of the poem. Can you detect an inner as well as an outer realism in "neat and curious veins," "the marble weeps," "puffing at the door," and "dust"? In what sense can one say the allegory is on a twofold level in this poem?

In what way can the dramatic structure of *Redemption* be regarded as similar to that of *The Church-Floor?* A story is told with great concentration in this poem: Do the images and incidents have validity on the ordinary familiar level of everyday experience? How is it made clear that they have another, deeper validity as well?

4. What is the situation described in Boyd's poem? What are the names, in mythology, of the blind child-god and the goddess born out of the sea?

   "I suppose this is the most beautiful sonnet in the language," writes Ezra Pound in *ABC of Reading.* Discuss this judgment.

5. Apply the distinction made in Question 1 to an analysis of Vaughan's *Regeneration:*
   i. Outline the twofold development of the allegory of pilgrimage (through an inner and outer landscape) in this poem.
   ii. Show that the poem is allegorical rather than purely symbolic by explaining the meaning of the various properties encountered: the Primros'd way, the shade, the frost, the surly wind, the infant buds, the Clouds, the pinnacle, the pair of Scales, the East, the fair, fresh field, *Jacob's bed,* the grove, the spring, the little Fountain, the Cistern full of divers stones; the bank of flowers, the sleepers and the watchers; and finally the rushing wind.
   iii. What are some of the sources of these images?
6. Compare the symbolic use of animal figures by Bryant, Lawrence, Whitman, and Miss Avison. In which of these poems are emotion and thought most closely integrated?
7. How does the meaning of the term "stepping westward" change in each stanza of Wordsworth's poem? Compare the symbolism here with that in Blake's *Ah! Sun-flower* (pages 516-517).
8. What attitudes toward death and toward our customary rationalizing about it or ignoring it are developed in Eberhart's *The Groundhog?* What is the relation of the central symbol, through all the changes it undergoes, to these developing attitudes?

III. THE SYMBOL AS A DIRECTIVE FORCE

The magnetism of poetic symbols is their most striking quality. Within poems, they provide a vital emotional center around which a pattern may emerge. (Indeed, poetry is always in some sense compressed and patterned symbolic statement.) At the same time they place in focus emotional attitudes toward important questions of all kinds. Though these symbols are born of the pressure of tradition and experience on the *poet's* imagination, they evoke a similar emotional attitude in the responsive reader. He may not agree with the poet's view of life, but he will understand better than before how it is possible to hold such a view and have genuinely deep feelings about it.

A simple example of this double directive power may be seen in Shelley's *Ozymandias* (page 583). The scattered pieces of a broken statue in the desert wastes of "an antique land" hold the stage here. We see one part of the statue at a time, and then the "lone and level sands" that engulf it. This sequence determines the structure of the poem and its meaning; it is also the key to the larger theme—the vanity of pride in material power, especially as it manifests itself in rulers and empires. It is curious how the poet's description of the great sneering sculptured head dominates the imagination and makes what might otherwise be merely obvious seem startlingly significant.

A more complex example is found in Yeats's *Leda and the Swan* (page 583). Here a mythical incident, the ravishment of the girl Leda by the Greek god Zeus in the form of a swan, is brought to violent, sensuous life at the climactic moment. We are shown how the experience, with all its mystery, would have felt to Leda and we are reminded of the subsequent mythical events: the birth of Helen of Troy, the Trojan War, the tragic return afterward to Greece of King Agamemnon. The literature and art around these events, of course, are high points in Western culture; we might almost say they created it. The poem ends with the interesting question whether Leda, having been impregnated by the god with his power to create the future, had any awareness of how the future was now working through her. The symbolic incident, its results, its meaning to the human being involved—these make the ordering of the poem. But this poem brings us not to a set attitude but to a problem: Is man merely the creature of impersonal forces that use him and pass on, a creature that can be excited when seized by them for their own purposes but himself only a passive vehicle of an "indifferent" divinity? Or does he have a portion of divine intelligence within himself? After all, the myths of Leda and Helen and the Trojan War are man-created. The problem has many religious, historical, and philosophical reverberations. The mystery of the union of Zeus and Leda becomes the mystery of the source of human creativity.

Whether simple or complex, then, the poetic symbol that gives direction to a poem is at the same time organizing a conception of reality or of the approach to some problem concerning it. Inside the poem and out, the new and special light thrown by the symbol makes familiar sights and thoughts seem new and special too. The symbolic poem that has this effect reveals to us a view of the world so complete, so consistent within itself, that it must somehow remain part of our own view henceforth.

A detailed examination of the following poem by Yeats will reveal how profound the connection can be between the place of symbols in the structure of poetry and their relation to reality.. The symbols of this poem are self-contained; the poem has an intense life of its own. Nevertheless, they also shed an unusually brilliant light on a myriad of real-life problems as the term is ordinarily understood—such problems as the usefulness of art, the predicament of old age, and the proper aims of human thought and action.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS *Sailing to Byzantium*

I

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees
—Those dying generations—at their song,
The salmon falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,

Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect.

II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

III

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,[1]
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

IV

Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

To begin with the first symbols of the poem, the speaker is an old man describing an uncongenial country. In the very first line we look at that country—the world of nature—through his eyes. The exceptionally observant and self-analytical protagonist tells us that it is "no country for old men." Nature belongs to the young, and to the animal world—or rather, they to it—for it is characterized by mating and giving birth, processes interrupted only by death which, in turn, makes room for more "dying generations" caught in the round of "sensual music." The speaker does not despise the sensual life; the language he uses to describe it shows this fact. But he feels that an old man is merely a cast-off remnant of that life ("a tattered coat upon a stick," a scarecrow,) and can never again take any satisfaction from it.

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[1] swoop down (and gather me up) in a hawklike movement

All the images used to picture the sensual world evoke both its power of enchantment and the pathetic transience of the life within it. The young lovers, the singing birds that must die soon, the fish swarming in the waters, all make a music in praise of fertility and natural mortality. And it *is* a "music," with all the connotations of beauty and value that the word must have for us. But the only part of the life-cycle now applicable to the old man is death. (Notice that the idea of dying is brought into the first stanza three times.) After all, however, there is apparently something else available—something to which only those not hypnotized and caught up in the natural cycle can pay attention: another world of intelligence, spirituality, and art suggested by the phrase "monuments of unageing intellect."

This new idea, brought in at the very close of the first stanza, seems at first to offer only the weakest, most pedantic alternative for the speaker. But as the poet develops it in later stanzas, we see it in images as intense and poignant as those of the sensual world, and we soon realize that two sets of symbols are being played against one another in a very telling way. Thus, the second stanza speaks of a soul's music that must be learnt instead of the "sensual music" of the beginning. It is a music to be studied in the "singing-school" of man's greatest creative achievements in religion and thought and especially art. In the same way, and for the same reasons, the speaker turns from the country of entranced fleshly life to Byzantium—the symbol of the ideal, esthetic, transformed existence he longs for. (Byzantium suggests a far-off, unfamiliar civilization, whose art is non-representational and whose religion has taken an exotic form because of the merging of Western and Eastern churches *and religious traditions.)

The interplay of the two opposing sets of symbols is intricate and rich despite the shortness of the poem. Note, for instance, that there are old men in Byzantium too—the "sages standing in God's holy fire" to whom the speaker appeals. But in them the last remnants of sensuality have long been purged away, and he begs them to do the same for him. Again, instead of the flesh-and-blood birds ("those dying generations") of the first stanza, there are golden birds in Byzantium; the speaker would be one of these, artificial, precious, durable beyond time. "I have read somewhere," Yeats's note to this poem tells us, "that in the Emperor's palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang." His song, when *he* is a golden bird, will be that of spiritual ecstasy (the soul "clapping its hands and singing"). And he will be surrounded, not by the heedless, hypnotized young lovers and other animal creatures of the sexual cycle, but by an audience that is elegant, abstract, and like the beings of the sensual life only in the way that a work of art is like life—that is, there are resemblances but each has its own unique laws. There, he will have no age; past, present, and future are all one there.

But though the poem is so complex in its patterns, it never moves away from its central, directing symbol. As we have seen, it brings us again and again to view life in terms of music. The opposed kinds of music define the subject of the poem for us in their own way; they make the symbol around which the poem grows and from which it takes its life. Against the naked rhythms of the sensual life, enmeshed in the sharp, helpless, tragically limited ecstasy of the life-cycle, is set the loud, strong, deliberately created music of soul and will. Music means life, and the protagonist will be but a lifeless scarecrow if he cannot supplant the music of nature with that of the singing-masters of the soul.

And so he forsakes all allegiance to nature and commits himself entirely to their tutelage. But will they accept him into their "Byzantium," where the "holy fire" of divine inspiration is the only atmosphere breathed? We do not know. He has sailed to Byzantium, and he has prayed to be released from the deathly taunt of his old associations, but whether his prayer is to be granted we do not know. Perhaps it will be, since in the final stanza the poet imagines what the new life in the "artifice of eternity" will be like. Its music will not be of that intensely rapturous yet tragic sort associated with procreation and the death of the old to make way for the new; it will be calm, and the audience will be a part of perfection and therefore not desperate in its clutching for transient joys, for experience without form. Yet perhaps the transformation will not come to pass (in the literal sense, of course, it cannot)—in which case the whole poem is but the pathetic song of an old man excluded from the only two kinds of music that mean richness and life, the music of youthful passion and that of pure soul's achievement. It is, if this be true, a song of desolation, impure because his heart is still "fastened to a dying animal" and sterile because his vision is not yet realized.

In either case, the poem is a song which sets the music of one kind of desire against that of another, possibly to be created in the future. There is the ceaseless round of the first stanza (almost a monotone, except for the cyclical character of the music and the intensity), implied by the cataloguing of kinds of creatures and the inclusiveness of the fifth, sixth, and seventh lines. (One almost overlooks the suggestion that this is the music of but a single season—"all summer long"—and the implication that it is therefore inferior in kind and illusory.) Next there is the vision of the soul rising joyously away from this:

> . . . unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress. . . .

Following up this vision, the third stanza is pure prayer and incantation, in which the speaker transfers the language of desire to the realm of eternity, so that the two kinds of music seem to intermingle for a moment before the calm, formal music of the concluding stanza brings the poem to a close. In the third stanza, too, as throughout the poem, the rhythm, rhyme, and imagery themselves symbolize the poem's larger qualities. Here the "sages," the agents of the soul, are set into action against the sick, animal heart of man, their cycles (the "gyres" in which they swing away from their centers to seize upon the stuff of human experience and transform it into the substance of art) are eternal whereas those of the lower world are temporary. The eighth line (with a fraction of the seventh) foreshadows the mood of the concluding stanza. The s's, long a-sounds, long t-sounds, and r's carry echoes of each of these opposites into the images of the other. Thus there is a music of sound and image within the larger music of emotions and ideas, and this inner music reinforces the clash and resolution of the poem's guiding symbols.

Sailing to Byzantium is one of those poems which have strongly influenced the thinking and feelings of a good many readers. It has, at the least, sharpened their sense of the seriousness and reality of the motivations of creative minds. It is a poem of the sort which redirects our attention to the basic choices of our lives, and to the way in which these choices affect our long-range perspectives. Curiously, it helps us to see the very weaknesses of the human condition in a light that lends them dignity and high significance. It presents unchallengeable proof of the power of the poetic symbol to create relationships and meanings around itself that seem to depend on nothing else but the intensity and depth with which the symbol is conceived, and at the same time to rearrange our understanding of what the real world is and of what our individual places are in it.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

w. B. YEATS *Leda and the Swan*

A SUDDEN blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.
                                        Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY *Ozymandias*

I MET a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair1"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS *The Windhover*

To Christ our Lord

I CAUGHT this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasyl then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: sheer p16d makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

JOHN MILTON *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*

THIS is the Month, and this the happy morn
Wherein the Son of Heav'n's eternal King,
Of wedded Maid, and Virgin Mother born,
Our great Redemption from above did bring;
For so the holy Sages once did sing,
That he our deadly forfeit should release,
And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

That glorious Form, that Light unsufferable,
And that far-beaming blaze of Majesty,
Wherewith he wont at Heav'n's high Council-Table,
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,

He laid aside; and here with us to be,
Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day,
And chose with us a darksome House of mortal Clay.

Say Heav'nly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
Afford a Present to the Infant God?
Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain,
To welcome him to this his new abode,
Now while the Heav'n, by the Sun's team untrod,
Hath took no print of the approaching light,
And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright?

See how from far upon the Eastern road
The Star-led Wizards haste with odours sweet!
O run, prevent them with thy humble ode,
And lay it lowly at his blessed feet!
Have thou the honour first, thy Lord to greet,
And join thy voice unto the Angel Quire,
From out his secret Altar toucht with hallow'd fire.

THE HYMN

It was the Winter wild,
While the Heav'n-born child
All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies;
Nature in awe to him
Had dofft her gawdy trim,
With her great Master so to sympathize:
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the Sun her lusty Paramour.

Only with speeches fair
She woo's the gentle Air
To hide her guilty front with innocent Snow,
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame
The Saintly Veil of Maiden white to throw,
Confounded, that her Makers eyes
Should look so near upon her foul deformities.

But he, her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-ey'd Peace:
She, crown'd with Olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphere,[1]
His ready Harbinger;
With Turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,
And waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal Peace through Sea and Land.

No War, or Battle's sound,
Was heard the World around,
The idle Spear and Shield were high up hung,
The hooked Chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood,
The Trumpet spake not to the armed throng,
And Kings sate still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of light
His reign of peace upon the earth began:
The Winds, with wonder whist,[2]
Smoothly the waters kist,
Whispering new joyes to the milde Ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While Birds of Calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

The Stars with deep amaze
Stand fixt in steadfast gaze,
Bending one way their precious influence,[3]
And will not take their flight,
For all the morning light,
Or *Lucifer* that often warn'd them thence;
But in their glimmering Orbs did glow,
Until their Lord himself bespake, and bid them go.

---

[1] the whole globe of the stars, revolving—according to Ptolemaic astronomy—about the earth

[2] hushed

[8] In astrology, the stars are supposed to affect human destiny.

And though the shady gloom
Had given day her room,
  The Sun himself with-held his wonted speed
And hid his head for shame,
As his inferior flame
  The new enlightn'd world no more should need;
He saw a greater Sun appear
Than his bright Throne, or burning Axletree could bear.

The Shepherds on the Lawn,
Or ere the point of dawn,
  Sate simply chatting in a rustic row;
Full little thought they then
That the mighty Fan[4]
  Was kindly come to live with them below;
Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep—

When such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet,
  As never was by mortal finger strook,
Divinely-warbl'd voice
Answering the stringed noise,
  As all their souls in blissful rapture took:
The Air, such pleasure loath to lose,
With thousand echoes still prolongs each heav'nly close.

Nature, that heard such sound
Beneath the hollow round
  Of *Cynthia's* seat,[5] the Airy region thrilling,
Now was almost won
To think her part was done,
  And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;
She knew such harmony alone
Could hold all Heav'n and Earth in happier union.

---

[4] Christ is often given this name in Renaissance poetry, and is thus identified with the Grecian god of universal nature.

[5] the moon's sphere

At last surrounds their sight
A Globe of circular light,
   That with long beams the shame-fac't night array'd;
The helmed Cherubim
And sworded Seraphim
   Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displayed,
Harping in loud and solemn quire,
With unexpressive notes to Heav'ns new-born Heir.

Such Music (as 'tis said)
Before was never made,
   But when of old the sons of morning sung,
While the Creator great
His Constellations set,
   And the well-ballanc't world on hinges hung,
And cast the dark foundations deep,
And bid the welt'ring waves their oozy channel keep.

Ring out, ye crystal spheres:
Once bless our human ears
   (If ye have power to touch our senses so)
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious timd;
   And let the Base of Heav'n's deep Organ blow,
And with your ninefold harmony
Make up full consort to th'Angelic symphony.

For if such holy Song
Enwrap our fancy long,
   Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold,
And speckl'd vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
   And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould,
And Hell itself will pass away,
And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.

Yea Truth, and Justice, then
Will down return to men,
   Orb'd in a Rain-bow; and like glories wearing

Mercy will sit between,
Thron'd in Celestial sheen,
With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering,
And Heav'n, as at some Festival,
Will open wide the Gates of her high Palace Hall.

But wisest Fate says No,
This must not yet be so;
The Babe lies yet in smiling Infancy,
That on the bitter cross
Must redeem our loss,
So both himself and us to glorify:
Yet first to those ychain'd in sleep,
The wakeful trump of doom must thunder through the deep,

With such a horrid clang
As on mount *Sinai* rang
While the red fire, and smold'ring clouds out brake:
The aged Earth aghast
With terror of that blast,
Shall from the surface to the center shake;
When, at the world's last session,
The dreadful Judge in middle Air shall spread his throne.

And then at last our bliss
Full and perfect is,
But now begins; for from this happy Day
Th'old Dragon under ground
In straiter limits bound,
Not half so far casts his usurped sway,
And, wroth to see his Kingdom fail,
Swinges the scaly Horror of his folded tail.

The Oracles are dumb;[6]
No voice or hideous hum
Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.

---

[6] At Christ's birth, pagan oracles are said to have ceased making prophecies. This is part of the general confusion of evil, paganism, and nature-worship here being described.

Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine,
With hollow shriek the steep of *Delphos* leaving.
No nightly trance, or breathed spell,
Inspires the pale-ey'd Priest from the prophetic cell.

The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament;
From haunted spring, and dale
Edg'd with poplar pale,
The parting Genius[7] is with sighing sent;
With flow'r-inwov'n tresses torn,
The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

In consecrated Earth,
And on the holy Hearth,
The *Lars*, and *Lemures*,[8] moan with midnight plaint;
In Urns, and Altars round,
A drear and dying sound
Affrights the *Flamens*[9] at their service quaint;
And the chill Marble seems to sweat,
While each peculiar power foregoes his wonted seat.

Peor, and *Baalim*,[10]
Forsake their Temples dim,
With that twice-batter'd god of *Palestine;*
And mooned *Ashtaroth*,
Heav'ns Queen and Mother both,
Now sits not girt with Tapers' holy shine;
The Libyc *Hammon* shrinks his horn;
In vain the *Tyrian* Maids their wounded *Thammuz* mourn.

[7] guardian spirit of a locality
[8] Roman household gods and spirits of the dead
[9] pagan priests
[10] In this and the three succeeding stanzas, Milton names various pagan deities whose power has been destroyed.

And sullen *Moloch,* fled,
Hath left in shadows dread
His burning Idol all of blackest hue;
In vain with Cymbals' ring
They call the grisly King
In dismal dance about the furnace blue;
The brutish gods of *Nile* as fast,
Isis and *Orus,* and the Dog *Anubis,* haste.

Nor is *Osiris* seen
In *Memphian* Grove, or Green,
Trampling the unshow'r'd Grass with lowings loud,
Nor can he be at rest
Within his sacred chest;
Naught but profoundest Hell can be his shroud;
In vain with Timbrel'd Anthems dark
The sable-stoled Sorcerers bear his worshipt Ark.

He feels from *Juda's* Land
The dreaded Infant's hand;
The rays of *Bethlehem* blind his dusky eyn.
Nor all the Gods beside
Longer dare abide,
Not *Typhon* huge ending in snaky twine:
Our Babe to shew his Godhead true,
Can in his swaddling bands control the damned crew.

So when the Sun in bed,
Curtain'd with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an Orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale,
Troop to th'infernal Jail,
Each fetter'd Ghost slips to his several grave,
And the yellow-skirted *Fays,*
Fly after the Night-steeds, leaving their Moon-lov'd maze.

But see, the Virgin blest
Hath laid her Babe to rest.
Time is our tedious Song should here have ending:

Heav'ns youngest teemed Star[11]
Hath fixt her polisht Car,
Her sleeping Lord with Handmaid Lamp attending:
And all about the Courtly Stable,
Bright-harness't Angels sit in order serviceable.

JOHN DRYDEN *The Secular Masque*

(Enter Janus.)

JANUS: CHRONOS, CHRONOS, mend thy pace:
An hundred times[12] the rolling Sun
Around the Radiant Belt has run
In his revolving race.
Behold, behold, the goal in sight;
Spread thy fans, and wing thy flight.

(Enter Chronos, with a scythe in his hand, and a great globe on his back, which he sets down at his entrance.)

CHRONOS: Weary, weary of my weight,
Let me, let me drop my freight,
And leave the World behind.
I could not bear
Another year,
The load of human-kind.

(Enter Momus, laughing.)

MOMUS: Ha! hal hal Hal hal ha! well hast thou done
To lay down thy pack,
And lighten thy back.
The World was a fool, e'er since it begun,

---

[11] the newest-born star—the star of Bethlehem
[12] This poem celebrates the ending of the seventeenth century.

And since neither Janus, nor Chronos, nor I
Can hinder the crimes
Or mend the bad times,
'Tis better to laugh than to cry.

Cho. of all 3. *'Tis better to laugh than to cry.*

JANUS: Since Momus comes to laugh below,
Old Time, begin the show,
That he may see, in every Scene,
What changes in this Age have been.
CHRONOS: Then, Goddess of the Silver Bow, begin.

(Horns, or Hunting-music within. Enter Diana.)

DIANA: With horns and with hounds I waken the day,
And hye to my woodland walks away:
I tuck up my robe, and am buskined soon,
And tie to my forehead a waxing Moon.
I course the fleet stag, unkennel the fox,
And chase the wild goats o'er summits of rocks:
With shouting and hooting we pierce thro' the sky,
And Echo turns hunter, and doubles the cry.

Cho. of all: *With shouting and hooting,* &c.

JANUS: Then our age was in its prime:
CHRONOS: Free from rage.
DIANA: And free from crime.
MOMUS: A very merry, dancing, drinking,
Laughing, quaffing, and unthinking time.

Cho. of all: *Then our age,* &c.

(Dance of Diana's attendants.)

(Enter Mars.)

MARS: Inspire the vocal brass, inspire;
The World is past its infant age:
Arms and honour,
Arms and honour,

Set the martial mind on fire,
And kindle manly rage.
Mars has looked the sky to red;
And Peace, the lazy Good, is fled.
Plenty, Peace, and Pleasure fly;
The sprightly green
In woodland-walks no more is seen;
The sprightly green has drunk the Tyrian dye.

Cho. of all: *Plenty, Peace,* &c.

MARS: Sound the trumpet, beat the drum;
Through all the World around,
Sound a Reveille, sound, sound,
The Warrior-God is come.

Cho. of all: *Sound the trumpet,* &c.

MOMUS: Thy sword within the scabbard keep,
And let Mankind agree;
Better the World were fast asleep,
Than kept awake by thee.
The fools are only thinner,
With all our cost and care;
But neither side a winner,
For things are as they were.

Cho. of all: *The fools are only, Sec.*

(Enter Venus.)

VENUS: Calms appear when storms are past;
Love will have his hour at last:
Nature is my kindly care;
Mars destroys, and I repair;
Take me, take me, while you may,
Venus comes not ev'ry day.

Cho. of all: *Take her, take her,* 8cc.

CHRONOS: The World was then so light,
I scarcely felt the weight;
Joy rul'd the day, and Love the night.
But since the Queen of Pleasure left the ground,
I faint, I lag,
And feebly drag
The ponderous Orb around.

MOMUS: All, all of a piece throughout:
Pointing to Diana: Thy chase had a beast in view;
to Mars: Thy wars brought nothing about;
to Venus: Thy lovers were all untrue.
JANUS: 'Tis well an old Age is out.
CHRONOS: And time to begin a new.

Cho. of all: *All, all of a piece throughout:*
Thy chase had a beast in view;
Thy wars brought nothing about;
Thy lovers were all untrue.
'Tis well an old Age is out,
And time to begin a new.

(Dance of Huntsmen, Nymphs, Warriors, and Lovers.)

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY *Chorus* from *Hellas*

THE WORLD'S great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.

A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
From waves serener far;
A new Peneus rolls his fountains
Against the morning star.
Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep
Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep.

A loftier Argo cleaves the main,
  Fraught with a later prize;
Another Orpheus sings again,
  And loves, and weeps, and dies.
A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore.

Oh, write no more the tale of Troy,
  If earth Death's scroll must be!
Nor mix with Laian rage the joy
  Which dawns upon the free:
Although a subtler Sphinx renew
Riddles of death Thebes never knew.

Another Athens shall arise,
  And to remoter time
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
  The splendour of its prime;
And leave, if nought so bright may live,
All earth can take or Heaven can give.

Saturn and Love their long repose
  Shall burst, more bright and good
Than all who fell, than One who rose,
  Than many unsubdued:
Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers,
But votive tears and symbol flowers.

Oh, cease! must hate and death return?
  Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
  Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past,
Oh, might it die or rest at last!

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS *Two Songs from a Play*

I

I SAW a staring virgin stand
Where holy Dionysus died,
And tear the heart out of his side,
And lay the heart upon her hand
And bear that beating heart away;
And then did all the Muses sing
Of Magnus Annus at the spring,
As though God's death were but a play.

Another Troy must rise and set,
Another lineage feed the crow,
Another Argo's painted prow
Drive to a flashier bauble yet.
The Roman Empire stood appalled:
It dropped the reins of peace and war
When that fierce virgin and her Star
Out of the fabulous darkness called.

II

IN PITY for man's darkening thought
He walked that room and issued thence
In Galilean turbulence;
The Babylonian starlight brought
A fabulous, formless darkness in;
Odor of blood when Christ was slain
Made all Platonic tolerance vain
And vain all Doric discipline.

Everything that man esteems
Endures a moment or a day.
Love's pleasure drives his love away,
The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
The herald's cry, the soldier's tread
Exhaust his glory and his might:
Whatever flames upon the night
Man's own resinous heart has fed.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS *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
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.
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,
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,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

w. H. AUDEN *And the age ended*

AND THE age ended, and the last deliverer died
In bed, grown idle and unhappy; they were safe:
The sudden shadow of the giant's enormous calf
Would fall no more at dusk across the lawn outside.

They slept in peace: in marshes here and there no doubt
A sterile dragon lingered to a natural death,
But in a year the spoor had vanished from the heath;
The kobold's knocking in the mountain petered out.

Only the sculptors and poets were half sad,
And the pert retinue from the magician's house
Grumbled and went elsewhere. The vanquished powers were
glad

To be invisible and free: without remorse
Struck down the sons who strayed into their course,
And ravished the daughters, and drove the fathers mad.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 23

1. The poems in this section present religious or historical themes. These themes, and the poets' ways of viewing them, are dramatically revealed through symbols. (Thus, the broken statue and its inscription, in *Ozymandias,* project ironic contempt for earthly power. Thus too the vivid picture of the swan and Leda sensuously bodies forth the mystery of man's creativity and of his relation to the shaping powers of history.) How do the symbols in each poem perform this double function?
2. From what different points of view are the past and future of mankind seen in the poems by Milton and by Shelley? To what extent are they talking about the same things? Do they suggest standards of good and evil? evaluations of man's prospects of future happiness? Compare these poems with each other in these respects.

   What great difference in emotional effect from both these poems does the central symbol in Yeats's *The Second Coming* create? To what degree does the difference derive from the different light it throws on traditional values of religion and culture generally? To what degree from the suggestiveness of the pictured symbol itself?
3. *Two Songs from a Play* clearly echoes Shelley's poem and replies to it. Compare the employment of similar symbols to different ends in these poems.

   Both also echo the Latin poet Virgil's *Fourth Eclogue.* Consult a translation and comment on the parallels and differences.
4. Read Hopkins' *God's Grandeur,* and the discussion of it, on pages 94-97. What theme is found both in this poem and in Hopkins' *The Windhover?* Does the symbol of the kestrel hawk, as Hopkins develops it, make the latter poem more dynamic or compelling? (Note the bird's identification both with Jesus and with the ideal medieval chivalric hero. Are these identifications forced?)

In which of these poems does the contrast of emphatic beginning and quieter conclusion seem more effectively carried through? Does the difficulty of lines 10-11 in *The Windhover* weaken the poem?

5. Compare the symbolic pictures of the ending of an age—the seventeenth century in the one, the pre-scientific era in the other—in the poems of Dryden and Auden. In which of these poems does the symbolism have greater "directive force"? Hardy's *The Darkling Thrush* (pages 62-63), written at the end of the nineteenth century, may similarly be compared with both these poems.

CHAPTER SEVEN *Poetry in Its Frame of Reference*

I. TRADITION AND POETIC THOUGHT: CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC

A POEM, WE have seen, may have many meanings at once, particularly since the poet's intention cannot be altogether a conscious one. One reason—apart from the human mind's stubborn complexities—is that words and ideas are never any one person's property; they carry along with them all the connotations and varying meanings which the history of man's thought has given them. The sum of all these connotations and possible meanings is the poem's whole "frame of reference." In a narrative poem, for instance, the hero will be a new version of many other heroes resembling each other in their virtues, abilities, and deficiencies. (Think back, for a moment, over the many heroes of motion-pictures you have seen. Do they not, for the most part, bear very strong resemblances to one another? Similar resemblances can be found among the heroes of epic and other narrative poems, and among the speaking personalities of lyric poems.) And however successfully it says what he wants it to say, the language a poet uses will also suggest the kind of thinking common to his times and something of his own private character. The very form he writes in—ballad, dramatic monologue, or any other—will suggest other works written in the same form. His images, too, are part of a history of such images. Thus, a poem using a flower-image reminds us of a whole tradition, perhaps, of love-poems. Because such associations are always present, a poem is always, more or less subtly, emphasizing certain ideas and attitudes and minimizing others, justifying a set of assumptions of some kind—in short, working upon our beliefs.

So it is that many poems, in addition to what they say on the surface, point to certain implied assumptions that may be just as important as their apparent meaning. It is part of the "game," the method of art, that one thing should be done in terms of another. Narrative catches and holds our attention more easily than logic, and often serves as a faÇade for it. And "logic," in turn, is often mainly a way of getting at an emotional or moral insight. When we have become accustomed to such transfers of meaning within a poem, we trouble ourselves less about final interpretation and more about the relation between any possible interpretation and the underlying assumptions of the poem as a whole. For we see that the argument is important, but that its importance lies in its contribution to the poem's felt meaning rather than in the abstract theme.

Let us see how, in each of two poems about a woman's beauty, the narrative structure resolves itself into a kind of argument, which in turn is absorbed into a set of values and attitudes implied by the sounds and images of the poem. The first is a nineteenth-century Romantic poem.

EDGAR ALLAN POE *To Helen*

Helen, thy beauty is to me
  Like those Nicèan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
  The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
  To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
  Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
  To the glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
  How statue-like I see thee stand,
  The agate lamp within thy hand!

Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
 Are Holy Land!

One hardly notices the fact here that the speaker is telling a "story"—that is, recounting something that has "happened" to him. (Helen's beauty has brought him to an appreciation of the magnificent, serene security of the values of classical art and thought, and to a realization of the mysterious significance of her nature.) Helen's face—perhaps the reader is expected to make an association with Marlowe's famous line: "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?"—reminds him of the vessels by which weary travelers would return home in the long-distant, the mythic past. Since the name Helen evokes the legend of the beautiful woman over whom Homer tells us the Trojan War was fought, and since the next stanza praises the glories of classical Greece and Rome, it would be a fair guess that the speaker is thinking of the Grecian warriors—very possibly Odysseus, the weariest "way-worn wanderer" in literature—returning home from Troy.

Helen's beauty, the speaker says, has borne him "homeward" gently and pleasurably—"o'er a perfumed sea." Now such a statement cannot be read literally. If the poem had ended with the second stanza, we might believe it was intended to argue, rather too blatantly, that the beauty of the woman the speaker is addressing (if, indeed, he is not directly addressing the original Helen's memory) has led him to appreciate the kindred beauty of classical art. Such art, and the standards embodied in it, he might be arguing, is calm, reassuring, nobly beautiful—a true port for such stormy, uncontrolled natures as his own.

In the third stanza, however—the most intense one in this poem—the emphasis on classical beauty is minimized. Now that Helen's beauty has brought the voyager to a vision of calm and security after violent despair, she is nevertheless still remote, a strange, statue-like, though brilliant figure in the window-niche. He calls her Psyche—"soul"—thus endowing her with a spiritual, unreachable quality. The name Psyche also recalls the heroine of the Greek myth who married Cupid but spoiled the marriage by attempting to look directly into his face. She is then a symbol both of beauty and of frustration from the ancient world which he calls the "Holy Land"; and "Holy Land," of course, has a sacred Biblical association, though it is Greece of which he is speaking.

Clearly, though the poem does have to do with the values of classical art symbolized by Helen, this is not really its major theme. Rather, the last stanza suggests a kind of mystery, as we have seen, at the heart of the poem, instead of an intellectual purpose. One could argue that the poem is actually about the speaker's feeling for a particular woman; or that it is a confession of failure in love or in poetic achievement; or that Helen, and the "native shore," and classical Greece and Rome, and Psyche, and "Holy Land" all symbolize a long-lost, much-desired security, such as a mother gives her infant child. At any rate, the general "argument" which we have followed through seems to blend with the speaker's private associations (just as the *h's, l*'s, and n's in "Helen" and "Holy Land," together with a few other sounds almost equally widespread throughout the poem, blend the two motifs in a musical way).

Some of the more salient characteristics of Romanticism may be found in *To Helen.* We feel a conflict in it between the clear line of the argument and the emotional content of the images, with the latter element dominating. The poet is trying to convey, partly through an appeal to subconscious emotions, a sense of a compelling, ideal vision—to *make* it come to life through the intensity of his presentation of it. William Blake's *The Tyger* has a similar objective, and we have suggested its closeness to the spirit of the primitive magician. Romantic poetry does use the methods of magic, trying to make real that which is desired in wish or imaginatively conceived, and trying to evoke the essence of the remote, the long-past, or the future objective. This unworldliness of the Romantic writer is closely related to the attempts, in such modern poems as *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prujrock,* to evoke our sense of the human meaning of experience through images rather than through logical presentation. The "argument" of a romantic poem tends to imply a rejection of the world as it is, or seems to be in favor of some more idealized or "deeper" understanding of it.

The second of our poems about a woman's beauty is written in the Classical tradition:

EDMUND WALLER *Song*

Go lovely Rose
Tell her that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows
When I resemble her to thee,
How sweet and fair she seems to be.

Tell her that's young,
And shuns to have her graces spy'd,
That hadst thou sprung
In Desarts, where no men abide,
Thou must have uncommended dy'd.

Small is the worth
Of Beauty from the light retir'd;
Bid her come forth,
Suffer her self to be desir'd,
And not blush so to be admir'd.

Then die, that she,
The common fate of all things rare,
May read in thee;
How small a part of time they share,
That are so wondrous sweet and fair.

Here, as in *To Helen,* there is a chronological sequence—a "story," as it were, foretold in a series of commands to the rose. The lover directs it to "go" to his desired mistress with a series of symbolic "messages." It is to represent her own sweetness and beauty to her; it is to persuade her to make herself available to the speaker, for otherwise her loveliness will be wasted; and it is to die, symbolizing life's brevity and the urgency of seizing joy while We may.

This chronological sequence is inseparable from the argument, which develops an extremely familiar seventeenth-century poetic theme with unusual grace and masculine persuasive force. The argument is clear and sharp, rising to passionate directness in the closing lines of the third stanza and falling into a genuinely sad mood over the mutability of "all things rare" recalled at the end. It moves through four definite stages: First comes the "proof," by way of the rose, of the lover's sincerity in praising his lady's beauty. Then, through the image of the desert flower, he makes the further point that this beauty must not be wasted. The same point is asserted more urgently and directly, in terms of the lady herself and not in the imagery of flowers, in the third stanza. And in the fourth, it is once again reinforced by the reminder of the brevity of youth and beauty.

Go lovely Rose does not reject the values of this world as *To Helen* does. But like other worldly poems in the Classical tradition it is preoccupied with that which is most desirable in life and presents it with such zest and elegance as to idealize it. To the Classical standards of intellectual clarity and stylistic grace it adds the special interest of the seventeenth-century Cavalier poet in writing songs for music. (This poem, in fact, was set to music by the famous composer Lawes.)

From these two examples, then, we see the way in which poems imply the assumptions of the traditions in which they were written. In the Romantic tradition of Poe's poem, a high value is placed on escape from the humdrum and the familiar, and on the search for some ideal, ineffable beauty, usually represented in a feminine symbol. In the Cavalier, Classical tradition of Waller other values appear: an elegant, worldly gallantry, the union of manliness with grace, and of art with ardor. Such assumptions deeply influence our feelings about any poem we read, particularly as we are likely to respond more easily to one tradition than to another because of training and temperament. Though every poem, therefore, in its own way implies the attitudes of some significant tradition in human thought, we shall be wise to think of its unique achievement within that tradition, rather than to lump together all Romantic, or all Classical, or all Metaphysical, or all "modern" poems indiscriminately. A hundred poems, and more, have tried unsuccessfully—and with similar images—to do what Waller's poem does so well. They are cold and tedious. And a great many poems may be found which are only fuzzy where *To Helen* is mysteriously suggestive. Such poems do not succeed in implying the real, living values of their traditions as the final stanza of Poe's poem does, and as, with more complete success, Waller's poem does. Poems convince us most deeply by moving us to share in their assumptions, in the sense that for the time being they arouse the kind of feelings that can exist only between two persons who, understanding and respecting one another's motives, feel a sympathetic kinship independent of their matter-of-fact opinions and attitudes.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

1. The Classical Tradition

ANONYMOUS *The Silver Swan*

THE SILVER swan, who living had no note,
When death approacht unlockt her silent throat;
Leaning her breast against the reedy shore,
Thus sung her first and last, and sung no more:
"Farewell all joys, O death come close mine eyes,
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise."

SIR WALTER RALEIGH *Even such is time*

EVEN SUCH is time, that takes in trust
  Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
And pays us but with earth and dust;
  Who, in the dark and silent grave,
When we have wandered all our ways,
Shuts up the story of our days.
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
My God shall raise me up, I trust.

BEN JONSON *An **Ode to** Himself*

WHERE DOST thou careless lie,
  Buried in ease and sloth?
Knowledge that sleeps doth die;
And this security,
  It is the common moth
That eats on wits and arts, and oft destroys them both.

Are all the Aonian springs
  Dried up? Lies Thespia waste?
Doth Clarius' harp want strings,
That not a nymph now sings?
  Or droop they as disgraced,
To see their seats and bowers by chattering pies defaced?

If hence thy silence be,
  As 'tis too just a cause,
Let this thought quicken thee:
Minds that are great and free
  Should not on fortune pause;
'Tis crown enough to virtue still, her own applause.

What though the greedy fry
  Be taken with false baits
Of worded balladry,
And think it poesy?
  They die with their conceits,
And only piteous scorn upon their folly waits.

Then take in hand thy lyre;
  Strike in thy proper strain;
With Japhet's line aspire
Sol's chariot for new fire
  To give the world again;
Who aided him will thee, the issue of Jove's brain.

And, since our dainty age
  Cannot endure reproof,
Make not thyself a page;
To that strumpet the stage;
  But sing high and aloof,
Safe from the wolf's black jaw, and the dull ass's hoof.

ROBERT HERRICK *Upon Julia Weeping*

SHE BY the River sate, and sitting there,
She wept, and made it deeper by a tear.

ROBERT HERRICK *To Laurels*

A FUNERAL stone,
Or Verse I covet none;
But only crave
Of you, that I may have
A sacred Laurel springing from my grave:
Which being seen,
Blest with perpetual green,
May grow to be
Not so much call'd a tree,
As the eternal monument of me.

JOHN DRYDEN *To the Memory of Mr. Oldham*

FAREWELL, TOO little and too lately known,
Whom I began to think and call my own;
For sure our souls were near alli'd, and thine
Cast in the same poetic mould with mine.
One common note on either lyre did strike,
And knaves and fools we both abhorr'd alike.
To the same goal did both our studies drive:
The last set out the soonest did arrive.
Thus Nisus fell upon the slippery place.
Whilst his young friend perform'd and won the race.
O early ripe! to thy abundant store
What could advancing Age have added more?
It might (what Nature never gives the young)
Have taught the numbers of thy native tongue.
But Satire needs not those, and wit will shine
Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line:

A noble error, and but seldom made,
When poets are by too much force betray'd.
Thy gen'rous fruits, though gathered ere their prime,
Still shew'd a quickness; and maturing time
But mellows what we write to the dull sweets of rhyme.
Once more, hail, and farewell! farewell, thou young
But ah! too short, Marcellus of our tongue!
Thy brows with ivy and with laurels bound;
But fate and gloomy night encompass thee around.

MATTHEW PRIOR *A Better Answer (to Cloe Jealous)*

DEAR CLOE, how blubbered is that pretty face!
  Thy cheek all on fire, and thy hair all uncurled!
Prithee quit this caprice; and (as old Falstaff says)
  Let us e'en talk a little like folks of this world.

How canst thou presume, thou hast leave to destroy
  The beauties, which Venus but lent to thy keeping?
Those looks were designed to inspire love and joy;
  More ordinary eyes may serve people for weeping.

To be vexed at a trifle or two that I writ,
  Your judgment at once and my passion you wrong:
You take that for fact which will scarce be found wit:
  Od's life! must one swear to the truth of a song?

What I speak, my fair Cloe, and what I write, shows
  The difference there is betwixt nature and art;
I court others in verse, but I love thee in prose;
  And they have my whimsies, but thou hast my heart.

The god of us verse-men (you know, child), the Sun,
  How after his journeys he sets up his rest;
If at morning o'er earth 'tis his fancy to run,
  At night he reclines on his Thetis's breast.

So when I am wearied with wandering all day,
 To thee my delight in the evening I come;
No matter what beauties I saw in my way—
 They were but my visits, but thou art my home.

Then finish, dear Cloe, this pastoral war;
 And let us like Horace and Lydia agree:
For thou art a girl as much brighter than her,
 As he was a poet sublimer than me.

ALEXANDER POPE *Ode on Solitude*

HAPPY THE man whose wish and care
 A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air,
  In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
 Whose flocks supply him with attire,
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,
  In winter fire.

Blest, who can unconcern'dly find
 Hours, days, and years slide soft away,
In health of body, peace of mind,
  Quiet by day,

Sound sleep by night; study and ease,
 Together mixt; sweet recreation;
And Innocence, which most does please
  With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown,
 Thus unlamented let me die,
Steal from the world, and not a stone
  Tell where I lie.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR *Ternissa! you are fled!*

TERNISSA! YOU are fled!
I say not to the dead,
But to the happy ones who rest below:
For surely, surely, where
Your voice and graces are,
Nothing of death can any feel or know.
Girls who delight to dwell
Where grows most asphodel,
Gather to their calm breasts each word you speak:
The mild Persephone
Places you on her knee,
And your cool palm smoothes down stern Pluto's cheek.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR *Dirce*

STAND CLOSE around, ye Stygian set,
With Dirce in one boat convey'd!
Or Charon, seeing, may forget
That he is old, and she a shade.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR *Rose Aylmer*

AH WHAT avails the sceptred race,
Ah what the form divine!
What every virtue, every grace!
Rose Aylmer, all were thine.

Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes
May weep, but never see,
A night of memories and sighs
I consecrate to thee.

THOMAS HARDY *The Comet at Yell'ham*

I

IT BENDS far over Yeirham Plain,
  And we, from Yeirham Height,
Stand and regard its fiery train,
  So soon to swim from sight.

II

It will return long years hence, when
  As now its strange swift shine
Will fall on Yell'ham; but not then
  On that sweet form of thine.

A. E. HOUSMAN *To an Athlete Dying Young*

THE TIME you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

Today, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsman of a stiller town.

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel grows
It withers quicker than the rose.

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears:

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honors out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.

So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.

And round that early-laureled head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.

ROBERT FROST *Reluctance*

OUT THROUGH the fields and the woods
   And over the walls I have wended;
I have climbed the hills of view
   And looked at the world, and descended;
I have come by the highway home,
   And lo, it is ended.

The leaves are all dead on the ground,
   Save those that the oak is keeping
To ravel them one by one
   And let them go scraping and creeping
Out over the crusted snow,
   When others are sleeping.

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,
   No longer blown hither and thither;
The last lone aster is gone;
   The flowers of the witch-hazel wither;
The heart is still aching to seek,
   But the feet question "Whither?"

Ah, when to the heart of man
  Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
  To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
  Of a love or a season?

YVOR WINTERS *An Ode on the Despoilers of Learning in an American University* (1947)

THIS WAS our heritage:
In Learning's monument
To study, and teach the young,
Until our days were spent;
To reëmbody mind
In age succeeding age,
That some few men might see,
Though, mostly, men were blind;
To hold what men had wrung
From struggle to atone
For man's stupidity,
In labor and alone.

But now the insensate, calm
Performers of the hour,
Cold, with cold eye and palm,
Desiring trivial power,
And terror-struck within
At their own emptiness,
Move in. As they move in,
Slow and invidious,
They pause and calculate,
Then, as such beings use,
With long-perfected hate,
Strike the immortal Muse.

What art of prose or verse
Should bring their like to book?
What consecrated curse
And pious rhetoric?
No one: we need but look.
For these have come too far:
They stand here, coarse and lined,
And permanent as stone,
In the final light of mind.
The body politic
Of Learning is its own
Inscrutable old Bar.

2. The Romantic Spirit

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*

On revisiting the bank of the Wye during a tour,
July 13, 1798

FIVE YEARS have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur. — Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke

Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye;
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir

Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
0 sylvan Wyel thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes

The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
For thou art with me here upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her! 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy; for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed

With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee; and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance—
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence—wilt thou then forget
That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH *To Toussaint L'Ouverture*[1]

TOUSSAINT, THE most unhappy man of men!
Whether the whistling Rustic tend his plough
Within thy hearing, or thy head be now
Pillowed in some deep dungeon's earless den;—
O miserable Chieftain! where and when
Wilt thou find patience! Yet die not; do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:
Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,
Live, and take comfort, Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON *Sonnet On Chlllon*[2]

ETERNAL SPIRIT of the chainless Mind!
  Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art,
  For there thy habitation is the heart—
The heart which love of thee alone can bind;
And when thy sons to fetters are consign'd—
  To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,
  Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.
Chillon! thy prison is a holy place,
  And thy sad floor an altar—for 'twas trod,
Until his very steps have left a trace
  Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a sod,
By Bonnivard!—May none those marks efface!
  For they appeal from tyranny to God.

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[1] Pierre Dominique Breda, liberator of Haiti made captive by the French; he later died in prison.

[2] place of the dungeon where Francois de Bonnivard, the sixteenth-century Swiss patriot, was imprisoned for his political and religious opinions

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY Song *to the Men of England*

MEN OF England, wherefore plough
For the lords who lay ye low?
Wherefore weave with toil and care
The rich robes your tyrants wear?

Wherefore feed, and clothe, and save,
From the cradle to the grave,
Those ungrateful drones who would
Drain your sweat—nay, drink your blood?

Wherefore, Bees of England, forge
Many a weapon, chain, and scourge,
That these stingless drones may spoil
The forced produce of your toil?

Have ye leisure, comfort, calm,
Shelter, food, love's gentle balm?
Or what is it ye buy so dear
With your pain and with your fear?

The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps;
The robes ye weave, another wears;
The arms ye forge, another bears.

Sow seed,—but let no tyrant reap;
Find wealth,—let no impostor heap;
Weave robes,—let not the idle wear;
Forge arms,—in your defence to bear.

Shrink to your cellars, holes, and cells;
In halls ye deck, another dwells.
Why shake the chains ye wrought? Ye see
The steel ye tempered glance on ye.

With plough and spade, and hoe and loom,
Trace your grave, and build your tomb,
And weave your winding-sheet, till fair
England be your sepulchre.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY *To* ———

ONE WORD is too often profaned
For me to profane it,
One feeling too falsely disdain'd
For thee to disdain it;
One hope is too like despair
For prudence to smother,
And Pity from thee more dear
Than that from another.

I can give not what men call love;
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not,—
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow?

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY *The Indian Serenade*

I ARISE from dreams of thee
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright:
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Hath led me—who knows how?
To thy chamber window, Sweet!

The wandering airs they faint
On the dark, the silent stream—
The Champak odours fail
Like sweet thoughts in a dream;
The nightingale's complaint,
It dies upon her heart;
As I must on thine,
Oh, belovèd as thou art!

Oh lift me from the grass!
I die! I faint! I fail!
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheek is cold and white, alas!
My heart beats loud and fast;
Oh! press it to thine own again,
Where it will break at last.

JOHN KEATS *Ode on Melancholy*

No, NO, go not to Lethe, neither twist
  Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd
  By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
  Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
    Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
  For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
    And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
  Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
  And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
  Or on the rainbow of the salt sandwave,
    Or on the wealth of globed peonies;

Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine:
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

JOHN KEATS *La Belle Dame sans Merci*

O WHAT can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing,

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lilly on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever dew,
And on thy cheek a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew,
And sure in language strange she said—
"I love thee true."

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept, and sigh'd full sore.
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dream'd—Ah! woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—"La Belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!"

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill side.

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

STEPHEN SPENDER / *I think continually of those who were truly great*

I THINK continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the spirit clothed from head to foot in song.
And who hoarded from the spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.

What is precious is never to forget
The delight of the blood drawn from ageless springs
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth;
Never to deny its pleasure in the simple morning light,
Nor its grave evening demand for love.
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit.

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields
See how these names are feted by the wavering grass,
And by the streamers of white cloud,
And whispers of wind in the listening sky;
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts the fire's center.
Born of the sun they traveled a short while towards the sun,
And left the vivid air signed with their honor.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 24

1. In classical writing every idea is called up to the mind as nakedly as possible, and at the same time as distinctly; it is exhibited in white light, and left to produce its effect by its own unaided power. In romantic writing, on the other hand, all objects are exhibited as it were through a coloured and iridescent atmosphere. Round about every central idea the romantic writer

> summons up a cloud of accessory and subordinate ideas for the sake of enhancing its effect, if at the risk of confusing its outlines. The temper, again, of the romantic writer is one of excitement, while the temper of the classical writer is one of self-possession. No matter what the power of his subject, the classical writer does not fail to assert his mastery over it and over himself, while the romantic writer seems as though his subject were ever on the point of dazzling and carrying him away. On the one hand there is calm, on the other hand enthusiasm; the virtues of the one style are strength of grasp, with clearness and justice of presentment; the virtues of the other style are glow of spirit, with magic and richness of suggestion.
>
> Sidney Colvin, Preface to
> *Selections from Landor* (Golden Treasury Series.)

Test the accuracy of these distinctions by contrasting one of the poems in the Classical group with one on a comparable theme in the Romantic group.

2. How does Jonson in the first stanza *of An Ode to Himself* relate his own weaknesses to those of mankind at large? What has this to do with the theme of the poem? Do the questions in the second stanza about the haunts of Apollo and the Muses (learning and the arts) suggest a loss of inspiration in Jonson or in his contemporaries? On what grounds does the poet take courage even while attacking the kind of audience available to him? Is the attack on this audience a sign of arrogance and tactlessness, or of moral and intellectual integrity?

   What similarities of attitude and form do you find in this poem and in Winters' poem? Why can both poems be called Classical?

3. Would you say that Wordsworth's *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* is less precisely worded than Jonson's *An Ode to Himself*, or is it being precise about a different kind of thing? Summarize the argument of the former poem. Trace the connections of the scene itself, now revisited, to the feelings described in the second verse-paragraph, to the contrast between past and present attitudes of the poet developed in the next section, and to the address to his sister at the end.

   Compare the appeal of the most striking passages in Jonson's poem and in Wordsworth's.

4. Beauty, joy, melancholy, and death are associated with one another in both of Keats's poems. The key to their association seems to lie in the experience of love, seen in both poems as initiation into

suffering. In which of these poems does the presentation seem more intense in its suggestion of the closeness of horror and ecstasy?

5. Develop, and illustrate, the idea that the most satisfying poetry combines some of the characteristic virtues of both the Romantic and the Classical temper.

//. *THE "AGE AND BODY OF THE TIME"*

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night,
God said, Let Newton be! *and all was light.*
POPE

It did not last; the Devil shouting Ho!
Let Einstein bet *restored the* status quo.
J. C. SQUIRE

Besides such literary and intellectual traditions as Classicism and Romanticism, poetry also embodies basic attitudes of its creator and his age. Through the microscope of these attitudes the poet subjects the great universal themes—love, war, death, morality, truth, religion, and the others—to sharp private scrutiny. The "private" aspect of the picture is essential—the poet's special talent and sensitivity exist apart from the broader meanings he expresses through them. Thus, it was a special sensitivity to *touch* that gave Walt Whitman's poetry much of its force: "Blind, loving wrestling touch, sheath'd hooded sharp-tooth'd touch!" he wrote in *Song of Myself.* But it was his attitude toward the genteel, repressive moral code of his era that led him to employ this sensitivity as he often did. An example can be seen in his *Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore* (pages 658-659). Here we have a sympathetic, accurate description of a frustrated woman's feelings that is an excellent clue to hidden needs and struggles of spirit in mid-nineteenth-century America and England.

Certainly, therefore, if we selected one of the great themes —love, or perhaps war—and traced it throughout the history of English poetry, we would not find that all the poets of a given era approached it in just the same way. Yet certain key-relationships would exist. We may instance Marlowe's *The Passionate Shepherd to his Love,* Raleigh's *The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd,* and Shakespeare's *Sonnet CXXIX,* all written in the same general period of time. Marlowe's poem (pages 645-646) is all gay, airy, unworldly fancy—the sort of pretty pastoral love song the Elizabethans could do so well. Raleigh's toughminded *Reply* (pages 646-647) derives at least some of its humor from the fact that Raleigh realized the absurdity of taking pastoral symbolism literally; that is, his poem is an appreciative parody of Marlowe's, as well as a sensible one. Shakespeare's *Sonnet CXXIX* (page 649) is unlike both these poems in its deep moral seriousness. It is a savage complaint against the power of sexual desire. Its argument is uttered in white heat, its explosive anger expressed through the pell-mell piling up of bitter word-play and strong adjectives. The very first sentence distorts normal word order to emphasize the harrowing theme—the definition of overriding lust as the wanton expenditure of the stuff of life. The poem has a moral effect in the true sense of compelling the reader to explore his own character as part of his response to it. But superb as this poem is, it would not be quite so effective in its brutal honesty were it not for the many other sonnets and lyric poems written in Shakespeare's day which exalted love in highflown, courtly, or idyllic terms. Part of its impact comes from the shock of seeing conventional subjects treated frankly and realistically in a sonnet. Thus, there is a time-relationship among these poems, though one could hardly reduce the relationship to a formula.

In Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* (pages 651-653) we have an example of how the passionate intellectualism of much seventeenth-century verse allowed room for levity, courtly lovemaking, satirical realism, and intense seriousness in the same poem. Marvell first idealizes a lady's beauty and virtue in bantering, sometimes sardonic language. Then he describes piercingly—though still wittily and banteringly—the frightening vistas of death ahead. (The "tomorrow we die" argument is itself a longstanding convention.) Finally, its humor and irony sloughed off behind it, we find the argument rising to its most passionate and serious tone, projecting a vision of the man and woman transformed by ecstatic love—superior to time and death, and themselves like gods.

It is interesting to compare the elegantly refined moral sentiments of Oliver Goldsmith's *Stanzas on Woman* (page 653) with the intense poetry of Shakespeare's *Sonnet CXXIX* and Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*. The expression of such general and rather artificial sentiments was one of the fashions of the eighteenth century, and Goldsmith's poem was highly successful as an "affectingly" high-toned comment on the social meaning of love and desire:

When lovely Woman stoops to folly,
  And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy,
  What art can wash her guilt away?

With sympathetic restraint, Goldsmith then goes on to tell "lovely Woman" that her only escape from shame " — is to die." He does not at any point suggest that life is not always as simple as he here makes it out to be. In this sense, his poem is itself almost as flippant if not as satirical as T. S. Eliot's parody, in *The Waste Land*, of its opening lines. Eliot's parody is also, of course, a caustic comment on the amorality of many people in our own day:

When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramaphone.

The poetry of war is easier to see in relation to its time. Primitive war-poets, for example, were uncritical reporters who treated war as a fact of life dreadful only as death at sea or in some natural catastrophe could be called dreadful. When the West Saxons defeated the invading Scots and Danes at Brunanburh in the tenth century, their poet sang of how fiercely they had "hacked at the flyers before us" and of how the enemy were "shamed in their souls." Without pity, he painted the bleak terror of the carnage that had been wrought:

Many a carcase they left to be carrion . . .
Gave to the garbaging war-hawk to gorge it, and
That gray beast, the wolf of the weald.

Such poetry has none of the patriotic fervor of a poem like Drayton's *Agincourt*, written at the height of Elizabethan England's newborn national pride. This poem celebrates the exploits of a fifteenth-century monarch as a glorious background for the still more glorious present. The first stanza is unforgettable in its freshness and enthusiasm:

Fair stood the wind for France
  Where we our sails advance,
Nor now to prove our chance
  Longer will tarry;
But putting to the main,
At Caux, the mouth of Seine,
With all his martial train
  Landed King Harry.

Toward the end, the poem mingles this ardent patriotism with a medieval delight in the prowess of individual noblemen and with a still more ancient relish for the sheer clash and brutality of battle:

Warwick in blood did wade,
  Oxford the foe invade,
And cruel slaughter made
  Still as they ran up;
Suffolk his axe did ply,
Beaumont and Willoughby
Bare them right doughtily,
  Ferrers and Fanhope.

Compare this inspired doggerel or Richard Lovelace's much subtler *To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars* (pages 665-666), which in its way justifies war on grounds of personal honor, with two post-Restoration poems: Anne Winchilsea's *Trail all your pikes* (page 666) and William Collins' *Ode Written in the Beginning of the Year 1746* (page 666). The Countess of Winchilsea's poem marks both a commonsense reaction against extravagantly chivalric conceptions inherited from the Middle Ages and an emergence of modern questioning, humane values. Her point of view is feminine, with a realistic frame of reference that subverts, not without pity, men's pretensions to martial glory and their insistence that women admire these pretensions. Had *Trail all your pikes* only been written by some Lucasta half a century earlier, it would certainly have made the gallant Lovelace wince. Collins' brief, perfect allegorical poem is not critical, yet it too marks a shift from simple acceptance of war, whether fatalistic or enthusiastic, to a concern with its larger meanings. This poem is as patriotic as *Agincourt*, but its nationalism is abstract, it avoids swashbuckling, and it is consolatory rather than exultant in its gentle affirmation that those who die for their country perish nobly.

Though poems critical of war have been composed in earlier ages, the closer we come to our own day the more we find a special emphasis on personal *experience* of war itself, and very often on the death and the suffering involved in it. Whitman's *A sight in camp in the daybreak gray and dim* (page 668), for instance, is consolatory, like Collins' *Ode*. But Collins' dead soldiers, though he says they have preserved the nation and now sweeten the earth, are still anonymous. Whitman's poem is an unaffected expression of love for particular soldiers in the Civil War whose still bodies he comes upon in the early morning. He refuses to dismiss them as lost to the meanings of life and love, describing them in detail and stressing the divinity of their being. Had he not been so ardently concerned to deny the possible meaninglessness of any death, and also so imbued with his sense of the North's evangelical mission in the Civil War, Whitman's personal feelings for these soldiers might have led him to write a poem like Jarrell's *Death of the Ball Turret Gunner* (page 547), which, as we have seen, turns the spotlight with unwavering realism on death in war. This poem of World War II recalls the characteristically shocked response of many poets—Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, Herbert Read, and many others—to the first World War, a response similar to that expressed in such a novel as Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. Over the past century and a half, indeed, as wars have become more devastating and society less willing to accept them as necessary and inevitable, our poetry has increasingly stressed the horror, the pity, and the irony of their occurrence.

But a poet's frame of reference is of course not only a matter of his approach to such well defined themes as love and war. It also enters into any description, narrative, or emotional perception—each of which will in its own way encompass an evaluation of the experience of being alive in a certain time and place. Even the simplest description of a scene will suggest, through its selection of detail and its general tone, an attitude toward what the scene itself represents. A contemporary American poet, Delmore Schwartz, shows a city morning in its heavy, impervious, recurrent sameness:

> The stony street
> Displayed the stillness in which buildings stand,
> The street-lamp's vigil and the horse's patience.

And T. S. Eliot presents an equally depressing impression of evening in the modern city:

T. s. ELIOT *Prelude I*

> The winter evening settles down
> With smell of steaks in passageways.
> Six o'clock.
> The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
> And now a gusty shower wraps
> The grimy scraps
> Of withered leaves about your feet
> And newspapers from vacant lots;
> The showers beat
> On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
> And at the corner of the street
> A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
> And then the lighting of the lamps.

Such apparently uncomplicated descriptions exist within their own specific frames of reference. In these two passages more than a hint of dissatisfaction is present, of gloomy implication that patience and resignation are needed to cope with dreary reality. In strong contrast, the opening stanza of Charles Cotton's *Evening Quatrains* (pages 674-675) suggests a happier set of attitudes in the speaker—one appropriate to the rural setting and to the vitality of classical imagery and myth in the seventeenth century:

> The Day's grown old, the fainting Sun
> Has but a little way to run,
> And yet his Steeds, with all his skill,
> Scarce lug the Chariot down the Hill.

The tone of weariness in these lines reflects the natural feeling at the end of a long summer's day rather than anything tiresome in the appearance of the sun itself. In fact, the poem treats the sun "sympathetically," personifying it as Apollo with his steeds reaching journey's end as the day wears on. The frame of reference includes classical mythology, and Apollo is one of the more attractive of the Grecian gods. The image of the slow-moving horses of the sun and their master's anxiety to get home is amusing without being forced. Notice how the succession of stressed syllables in "Dáy's grówn óld" and "Scárce lúg" slows up the movement of the first and fourth lines, while the second and third move much faster—a device which sharpens the contrast between the sun-god's eagerness to speed his horses and their tired reluctance to go at all. This clever pacing makes the description amusing and personal, though the imagery may at first seem only flatly conventional.

That Cotton intended the stanza to have this amusing and personal effect is made clear by a further series of whimsical contrasts:

The Shadows now so long do grow
That Brambles like tall Cedars show,
Mole-hills seem Mountains, and the Ant
Appears a monstrous Elephant.

A very little little Flock
Shades thrice the ground that it would stock;
Whilst the small Stripling following them,
Appears a mighty Polypheme.

The scene is a pastoral one, in which the landscape and all that moves on it change by magic, grotesquely but charmingly distorted. In the last stanza of *Evening*, the humorous realism and the genial mythological framework come together easily and naturally:

And now on Benches all are sat
In the cool Air to sit and chat,
Till Phoebus, dipping in the West,
Shall lead the World the way to Rest.

Thus, Cotton's world was not a simpler one than that of Eliot and Schwartz, but its way of thinking was different It *looked* at things differently. Cotton saw things in the light of a civilizadon still predominantly rural; his training colored his view of life with a strongly classical pigmentation, and he was not concerned to evaluate critically either the civilization or the training. Many of our latter-day poets, on the other hand, are oppressed by a burdensome sense of a life deprived of important values—a life that might have been otherwise. Poetry in any era reveals what Shakespeare called the "form and pressure" of "the very age and body of the time." Therefore, it helps us evaluate our own world and its relation to the past.

The poetry of the last hundred years has performed this function more deliberately and certainly more self-consciously than did most poetry before it. Since the middle of the nineteenth century the blows against what seemed the established order have been so many and so severe that there has been an unending search to find new values or to rediscover the old ones. The impact of Darwin, Marx, Freud, and the scientific relativists has caused a confusion more disturbing even than the chaos introduced into the medieval cosmos by the Copernican philosophy. In the wake of this confusion has come the attempt by thinkers and artists, including poets, to compare our civilization with those of past centuries in order to define it clearly and to enable us to envision where we have gone astray, what our strengths and weaknesses are, and the directions in which our best hopes for the future lie.

One of the poets who have most effectively attempted this type of evaluation of our society's unique time and place is T. S. Eliot. The intense sensitivity of his work has bitten deep enough to influence the thinking of at least two generations. His specific religious and philosophical ideas are not on the surface shared by most poets and readers, but his fundamentally critical attitude toward mechanized and impersonal civilization is very widely held indeed. Most important, as a reading of his poem *Gerontion* (pages 678-679) will show, Eliot gives voice to the fear of emptiness and pointlessness that haunts the modern mind.

Gerontion is at first a puzzling and difficult poem because, like abstract painting, it is hard to see what it is about. The form is clear, and there seems to be a plot or action. Characters appear and disappear, a situation is presented, or perhaps merely suggested, and reflections and conclusions are drawn. But everything is so oblique, and the literary and historical references with which the poem abounds are so subtle or erudite, that it is not surprising that *Gerontion* should have been appreciated as great poetry before its complete meaning had been rightly or widely understood. It was felt at once that the loose blank verse in which the poem is written was handled with a mastery of style that recalled the distinction of the late Elizabethan dramatists and, indeed, of Shakespeare himself. And, further, it was clear in a general way that the poem (written in 1920) was about history, that it concerned itself with the breakdown of civilization, culture, and religion in Europe, and that it was an expression of emotional attitudes about the contemporary chaos—and perhaps also that it was an intensely religious poem. But beyond this nothing was certain. The abstract and apparently disconnected method of development, the unfamiliar allusions, and the return to something like the complex traditionalism of Milton's *Lycidas* —all this made the detailed significance of the poem hard to perceive. Not until the poem has been analyzed in detail is it possible to grasp its full significance. Let us suggest the lines this analysis should follow.

To begin with, the title *Gerontion* means "old man," and the poem is a soliloquy or an abstract dramatic monologue, the reverie of an old man who stands as a symbol of the spiritual decrepitude of our age of collapsing values and of religious and cultural confusion. The epigraph,

> Thou hast nor youth nor age
> But as it were an after dinner sleep
> Dreaming of both,

is from the Duke's speech in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (III, i). There, it is intended to show that life—the "thou" addressed—is. nothing much; here, it asserts the emptiness of a life divorced from significant action. Its implications in the two works may *appear* similar, but they are as far apart as heroic stoicism and spiritual despair.

The poem is an impersonal and dramatic one, and the action takes place in an old man's consciousness—an old man who is himself the symbol of an age, a civilization, a period of history—

and the poem as it develops is a meditation on history, its present stage, and the lessons that can or cannot be drawn from it ·

The opening lines give a vivid impressionistic picture of decay and weariness, of a time of regret for the heroism and certainty of a period of action far in the past. Rain, the sea, water, are symbols in this poem of spiritual vitality, and contrarily dryness ("a dry month"), sand, rock, and stone, of spiritual deadness and insensitivity.

The "hot gates" is a reference to Thermopylae (which means literally "the hot gates"), the most heroic episode in the Greek wars for freedom against the invading Persians. The reference to heroic action in the distant past of the race only emphasizes more forcefully the present age of meaningless, tired routine in which there is no incitement to significant heroic action.

As the nightmare-like picture develops, we get a view of modern Europe as a bankrupt, decadent, and wasted land, the fitting symbol for which is an old man,

> A dull head among windy spaces,

in a patched and tumble-down house in a refuse-laden stony field. Suddenly a suggestion is made as to the cause of the breakdown. It is the absence or corruption of the religious spirit in the modern world, and particularly the decay of faith in Christianity, that has robbed our culture of significance and meaning. This is suggested indirectly in the phantasmagoric pictures and bitter prophetic words which follow in the lines beginning "Signs are taken for wonders." "We would see a sign!" is the scornful and dubious cry of the Pharisees demanding of Christ that he perform a miracle to prove his divinity.

> The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
> Swaddled with darkness

is an allusion to a Christmas sermon preached by Bishop Lancelot Andrewes at the Court of King James I. The preacher is referring to the divine mystery of the infant Christ in the manger—himself the Word, that is, God, and yet at the same time a human infant in swaddling clothes, unable to speak a word. The effect of this modified quotation is to suggest in the most concentrated way the modern rejection of belief, our Pharisaical demand to be shown proof before we believe and the inability of Jesus to speak to us today. How different in an earlier, fresher age, "the juvescence of the year!" Then Christ came with the power and beauty of a tiger, with the godlike energy and glory that Blake's tiger symbolizes. There is here a conscious, if oblique, reference to Blake's famous lyric,

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright
In the forests of the night.

Our Spring is simply the spawning rebirth of vegetable and animal matter, not a renewal of spiritual strength or a resurrection of the crucified Christ. Hence May is "depraved," its sign, the flowering judas, recalling not Christ but Christ's betrayer. The host is eaten, divided, and drunk "among whispers" in a sinister and blasphemous celebration of the Mass. Who are the celebrants of the unholy service? They are figures briefly but vividly etched as the empty, slightly decadent, and neurotic denizens of a chaotic cosmopolitan world, shadows in the mind of the symbolic old man whose reverie is the substance of the poem.

Now the nightmare-like reverie, filled with sudden glimpses and half-remembered figures, is replaced by a passage of controlled meditation. The protagonist of the poem, this old man in a dry month, who is filled with the knowledge of evil, if not of good, considers the possibility of redemption: "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" Can we not from the knowledge of the past and the intelligent study of history learn how to recover faith and wholeness and the human perfection that comes from spiritual health? But alas, vanity, distraction, and confusion subtly distort the lessons of history. Indeed, good and evil, virtue and vice, honesty and hypocrisy are so inextricably mixed that we have lost the means and the power (and perhaps the will) to win forgiveness and return to the life-giving springs of faith.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.

This completes the cycle of the Christian year, the Great Year of two thousand years of Christianity. Originally ("in the juvescence of the year") Christ came with the power and the beauty of the tiger. He came, as Mr. W. Mankowitz declares in his *Notes on*

Gerontion, "gently, in our interest." But now after the "impudent crimes" and "unnatural vices" he comes again in the new year as a devouring, destroying, punitive force.

Already the destruction has been partially accomplished, and before we can reach any conclusion to our effort to examine the meaning of history, we "stiffen in a rented house"—that is, we grow insensitive, old, unsubtle, and unresponsive, stagnating in a culture we live in but cannot make our own. In this phrase there is a suggestion, too, of the brevity of life. The end of the materialist is to stiffen in death in the coffin he occupies but does not own.

After protesting his sincerity in making these bitter and despairing judgments, the protagonist continues to develop his awareness of the consequences of our condition. Human contact, the life-giving sense of oneness that was once possible in passionate love, has been transformed from beauty to terror, and at last has been adulterated by nervous, destructive probing, until finally the senses themselves have been weakened, distorted, and intellectualized almost out of existence, so that not even these can be used to draw human beings together.

> I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
> To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
> I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
> Since what is kept must be adulterated?
> I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch:
> How should I use them for your closer contact?

It is significant that in this passage T. S. Eliot has drawn upon the versification of some of the late Elizabethan dramatists, who were expressing a similar disillusionment with the enthusiasm and sensuous excitement of the earlier Renaissance. Eliot's paragraph beginning, "I that was near your heart," recalls in its cadence at least three passages from the Elizabethan dramatists that the modern poet has written about in his critical essays. The first is from Middleton's *The Changeling* (V, iii) :

> O come not near me, Sir, I shall defile you!
> I that am of your blood was taken from you
> For your better health; look no more upon %
> But cast it to the ground regardlessly,
> Let the common sewer take it from distinction.

The second is from Chapman's *Tragedy ,of Charles, Duke of Byron* (V):

> Why should I keep my soul in this dark light,
> Whose black beams lighted me to lose myself?
> When I have lost my arms, my fame, my wind,
> Friends, brothers, hopes, fortunes, and even my fury?

And the third is from *Hamlet* (III, iii):

> Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
> Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
> Or but a sickly part of one true sense.

What all these passages have in common is a tone of bitter and disillusioned self-contempt, and in echoing them (not literally, but in cadence and rhythm) the modern poet is suggesting a comparison between the complexity and corrupting weariness of the modern intellect and the bitterness and horror with which the late Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists expressed *their* sense of the spiritual corruption of the later Renaissance.

In the stanza that follows we have a concentrated and very vivid analysis of modern decadence. Indeed, it is almost a definition of our decadence:

> Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
> With pungent sauces, multiply variety
> In a wilderness of mirrors.

Then comes an ominous note. Do we imagine that such a civilization and such a culture will live forever? Already the spider and the weevil are preparing themselves. The time will come when all the frail and empty characters such as those glimpsed for a moment in the early part of the poem will be whirled into existlessness. Other names are mentioned, De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, but they take their place in the slightly sinister cosmopolitan society inhabited by Fräulein Von Kulp, Madame de Tornquist, Mr. Silvero and the rest.

In this passage too there is another oblique reference to the Elizabethans. The lines

> . . . whirled
> Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear

In fractured atoms, . . .
White feathers in the snow. . . .

are a reminiscence of a passage in Chapman's tragedy *Bussy D'Ambois* (V, i):

... fly where men feel
The burning axletree, and those that suffer
Beneath the chariot of the snowy Bear. . . .

And now by a process of free association that anticipates the technique of the psychological novel and the moving-picture the poem is filled with images of the open sea, the salt stinging spray, and the untrammeled wind. These are symbols of spiritual vitality in sharply ironic contrast to the symbols of spiritual torpor with which the poem is mainly filled, and to which it returns in the final dispirited look at himself with which the tired old man concludes his reverie. The last line of all is a critical and apologetic summing up of the poem itself.

Tenants of the house,
Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.

This is the humiliating and humility-breeding truth of what the poem is and what it is about.

But humility is the beginning of wisdom and the beginning of holiness. In the later religious poems of T. S. Eliot, *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and the *Four Quartets* (1935-44), the positive rather than the negative aspect of the modern search for faith is explored.[1] In the light of these, *Gerontion* appears as a confessional poem. It is based on the assumption (as is also the more ambitious treatment of the same theme in the epoch-making *The Waste Land*, 1922) that the healing waters of God's grace have been dried up within us and that the modern task is to discover the way to make them flow again.

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[1] See *Little Gidding* (pages 715-722) and the analysis of it (pages 696-702).

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

1. Poems of Love

ANONYMOUS *Western wind, when will thou blow*

WESTERN WIND, when will thou blow,
  The small rain down can rain?
Christ, if my love were in my arms
  And I in my bed again!

JOHN LYLY *Cupid and my Campaspe played*

CUPID AND my Campaspe played
At cards for kisses; Cupid paid.
He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows,
His mother's doves and team of sparrows;
Loses them too. Then down he throws
The coral of his lip, the rose
Growing on's cheek (but none knows how);
With these, the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple of his chin;
All these did my Campaspe win.
At last he set her both his eyes;
She won,-and Cupid blind did rise.
O Love, has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas! become of me?

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*

COME LIVE with me, and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dales and fields,
And all the craggy mountains yields.

There we will sit upon the rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
With a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers and a kirtle
Embroider'd all with leaves of myrtle.

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull,
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs,
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH *The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd*

IF ALL the world and love were young,
And truth in every Shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move,
To live with thee, and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold,
When Rivers rage, and Rocks grow cold,
And Philomel becometh dumb,
The rest complains of cares to come.

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields,
To wayward winter reckoning yields,
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

Thy gown, thy shoes, thy beds of Roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies,
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten:
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and Ivy buds,
Thy Coral clasps and Amber studs,
All these in me no means can move,
To come to thee, and be thy love.

But could youth last, and love still breed,
Had joys no date, nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move,
To live with thee, and be thy love.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY *Leave me, O love*

LEAVE ME, O love which reachest but to dust;
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust,
Whatever fades but fading pleasure brings.
Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;
Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light,
That doth both shine and give us sight to see.
O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide
In this small course which birth draws out to death,
And think how evil becometh him to slide,
Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.
  Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see;
  Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE *Sonnet CXVI*

LET ME not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE *Sonnet CXXX*

MY MISTRESS' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE *Sonnet CXXIX*

TH' EXPENSE of Spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and, till action, lust
Is perjur'd, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated as a swallow'd bait
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have extreme;
A bliss in proof, and prov'd, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

SIR THOMAS WYATT *They flee from me*

THEY FLEE from me, that sometime did me seek
With naked foot, stalking in my chamber:
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek,
That now are wild, and do not remember
That sometime they put themselves in danger
To take bread at my hand; and now they range
Busily seeking with a continual change.

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better; but once, in special,
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall,
And she me caught in her armes long and small,
Therewithal sweetly did me kiss,
And softly said, "Dear heart, how like you this?"

It was no dream; I lay broad waking:
But all is turned, thorough my gentleness,
Into a strange fashion of forsaking;
And I have leave to go of her goodness,
And she also to use new-fangledness.
But since that I so kindly am served,
I would fain know what she hath deserved.

JOHN DONNE *The Anniversary*

ALL KINGS, and all their favourites,
All glory of honours, beauties, wits,
The sun itself, which makes times, as they pass,
Is elder by a year now than it was
When thou and I first one another saw.
All other things to their destruction draw;
Only our love hath no decay:
This no to-morrow hath, nor yesterday;
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

Two graves must hide thine and my corse;
If one might, death were no divorce.
Alas! as well as other princes, we
—Who prince enough in one another be—
Must leave at last in death these eyes and ears,
Oft fed with true oaths, and with sweet salt tears;
But souls where nothing dwells but love
—All other thoughts being inmates—then shall prove
This, or a love increasèd there above,
When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove.

And then we shall be throughly blest;
But we no more than all the rest.
Here upon earth we're kings, and none but we
Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be.

Who is so safe as we? where none can do
Treason to us, except one of us two.
    True and false fears let us refrain;
Let us love nobly, and live, and add again
Years and years unto years, till we attain
To write threescore; this is the second of our reign.

ROBERT HERRICK *To the Virgins to Make Much of Time*

GATHER YE rosebuds while ye may:
  Old Time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that smiles to-day
  To-morrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the Sun,
  The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
  And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
  When Youth and Blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
  Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
  And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime
  You may for ever tarry.

ANDREW MARVELL *To His Coy Mistress*

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
Should'st Rubies find: I by the Tide
Of H*umber* would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood:
And you should if you please refuse
Till the Conversion of the *Jews*.
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:
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.
   But at my back I always hear
Time's winged Chariot hurrying near:
And yonder all before us lie
Desarts of vast Eternity.
Thy Beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble Vault, shall sound
My echoing Song. Then Worms shall try
That long preserved Virginity,
And your quaint Honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my Lust.
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
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-chapt pow'r.
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
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH *Stanzas on Woman*

WHEN LOVELY Woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy,
What art can wash her guilt away?

The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom—is, to die.

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON *She walks in beauty*

SHE WALKS in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!

JOHN KEATS *Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art*

BRIGHT STAR! would I were steadfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON *Come into the garden, Maud*

COME INTO the garden, Maud,
For the black bat, night, has flown,
Come into the garden, Maud,
I am here at the gate alone;
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,
And the musk of the rose is blown.

For a breeze of morning moves,
And the planet of Love is on high,
Beginning to faint in the light that she loves
On a bed of daffodil sky,
To faint in the light of the sun she loves,
To faint in his light, and to die.

All night have the roses heard
The flute, violin, bassoon;

All night has the casement jessamine stirr'd
To the dancers dancing in tune;
Till a silence fell with the waking bird,
And a hush with the setting moon.

I said to the lily, "There is but one,
With whom she has heart to be gay.
When will the dancers leave her alone?
She is weary of dance and play."
Now half to the setting moon are gone,
And half to the rising day;
Low on the sand and loud on the stone
The last wheel echoes away.

I said to the rose, "The brief night goes
In babble and revel and wine.
O young lord-lover, what sighs are those,
For one that will never be thine?
But mine, but mine," so I sware to the rose,
"For ever and ever, mine."

And the soul of the rose went into my blood,
As the music clash'd in the hall;
And long by the garden lake I stood,
For I heard your rivulet fall
From the lake to the meadow and on to the wood,
Our wood, that is dearer than all;

From the meadow your walks have left so sweet
That whenever a March-wind sighs
He sets the jewel-print of your feet
In violets blue as your eyes,
To the woody hollows in which we meet
And the valleys of Paradise.

The slender acacia would not shake
One long milk-bloom on the tree;
The white lake-blossom fell into the lake
As the pimpernel dozed on the lea;

But the rose was awake all night for your sake,
  Knowing your promise to me;
The lilies and roses were all awake,
  They sighed for the dawn and thee.

Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,
  Come hither, the dances are done,
In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls,
  Queen lily and rose in one;
Shine out, little head, sunning over with curls,
  To the flowers, and be their sun.

There has fallen a splendid tear
  From the passion-flower at the gate.
She is coming, my dove, my dear;
  She is coming, my life, my fate.
The red rose cries, "She is near, she is near;"
  And the white rose weeps, "She is late;"
The larkspur listens, "I hear, I hear;"
  And the lily whispers, "I wait."

She is coming, my own, my sweet;
  Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat,
  Were it earth in an earthy bed;
My dust would hear her and beat,
  Had I lain for a century dead,
Would start and tremble under her feet,
  And blossom in purple and red.

ROBERT BROWNING *Two in the Campagna*

I WONDER do you feel to-day,
  As I have felt since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
  In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May?

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalized me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

Help me to hold it! First it left
The yellowing fennel, run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin; yonder weed
Took up the floating weft,

Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles—blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal; and last,
Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast!

The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air-
Rome's ghost since her decease.

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
Such letting Nature have her way
While Heaven looks from its towers!

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above!
How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

I would that you were all to me,
  You that are just so much, no more,
Nor yours, nor mine, nor slave nor free!
  Where does the fault lie? What the core
Of the wound, since wound must be?

I would I could adopt your will,
  See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
  At your soul's springs,—your part my part
In life, for good and ill.

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,
  Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth—I pluck the rose
  And love it more than tongue can speak—
Then the good minute goes.

Already how am I so far
  Out of that minute? Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
  Onward, "whenever light winds blow,
Fixed by no friendly star?

Just when I seemed about to learn!
  Where is the thread now? Off again!
The old trick! Only I discern—
  Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

WALT WHITMAN *Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore*

(from *Song of Myself*)

TWENTY-EIGHT young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the
window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?
Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth
bather,
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from
their long hair,
Little streams pass'd all over their bodies.

An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,
It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge
to the sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them,
They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and
bending arch,
They do not think whom they souse with spray.

JAMES LAUGHLIN *The Summons*

HE WENT out to their glorious
war & went down in it and his
last belief was

her love as he breathed flame
in the waves and sank burning
now I lie under

his picture in the dark room
in the wife's bed and partake
of his unknown

life does he see does he stand
in the room does he feel does
he burn again

later I wake in the night while
she sleeps and call out to him
wanderer come

return to this bed & embody the
love that was yours and is hers
and is mine
and endures.

2. Poems of War

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON *Battle of Brunanburh*[1]

"Constantinus, King of the Scots, after having sworn allegiance to Athelstan allied himself with the Danes of Ireland under Anlaf, and invading England, was defeated by Athelstan and his brother Edmund with great slaughter at Brunanburh in the year 937."

Athelstan King,
Lord among Earls,
Bracelet-bestower and
Baron of Barons,
He with his brother,
Edmund Atheling,
Gaining a lifelong
Glory in battle,
Slew with the sword-edge

[1] Translated from the Anglo-Saxon.

There by Brunanburh,
Brake the shield-wall,
Hew'd the linden-wood,[2]
Hack'd the battle-shield,
Sons of Edward with hammer'd brands

Theirs was a greatness
Got from their grandsires—
Theirs that so often in
Strife with their enemies
Struck for their hoards and their hearts and their homes.

Bow'd the spoiler,
Bent the Scotsman,
Fell the ship-crews
Doom'd to the death.
All the field with blood of the fighters
Flow'd, from when first the great
Sun-Star of morning-tide,
Lamp of the Lord God
Lord everlasting,
Glode over earth till the glorious creature
Sank to his setting.

There lay many a man
Marr'd by the javelin,
Men of the Northland
Shot over shield.
There was the Scotsman
Weary of war.

We the West-Saxons,
Long as the daylight
Lasted, in companies
Troubled the track of the host that we hated;
Grimly with swords that were sharp from the grindstone,
Fiercely we hack'd at the flyers before us.

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[2] **shields of lindenwood**

Mighty the Mercian,
Hard was his hand-play,
Sparing not any of
Those that with Anlaf,
Warriors over the
Weltering waters
Borne in the bark's-bosom,
Drew to this island—
Doom'd to the death.

Five young kings put asleep by the sword-stroke,
Seven strong earls of the army of Anlaf
Fell on the war-field, numberless numbers,
Shipmen and Scotsmen.

Then the Norse leader—
Dire was his need of it,
Few were his following—
Fled to his war-ship;
Fleeted his vessel to sea with the king in it,
Saving his life on the fallow flood.

Also the crafty one
Constantinus,
Crept to his North again,
Hoar-headed hero!

Slender warrant had
He to be proud of
The welcome of war-knives—
He that was reft of his
Folk and his friends that had
Fallen in conflict,
Leaving his son too
Lost in the carnage,
Mangled to morsels,
A youngster in war !

Slender reason had
He to be glad of
The clash of the war-glaive—
Traitor and trickster
And spurner of treaties—
He nor had Anlaf
With armies so broken
A reason for bragging
That they had the better
In perils of battle
On places of slaughter—
The struggle of standards,
The rush of the javelins,
The crash of the charges,
The wielding of weapons—
The play that they play'd with
The children of Edward.

Then with their nail'd prows
Parted the Norsemen, a
Blood-redden'd relic of
Javelins over
The jarring breaker, the deep-sea billow,
Shaping their way toward Dyflen[3] again,
Shamed in their souls.

Also the brethren,
King and Atheling,
Each in his glory,
Went to his own in his own West-Saxon-land,
Glad of the war.

Many a carcase they left to be carrion,
Many a livid one, many a sallow-skin—
Left for the white-tail'd eagle to tear it, and
Left for the horny-nibb'd raven to rend it, and
Gave to the garbaging war-hawk to gorge it, and
That gray beast, the wolf of the weald.

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[3] Dublin

Never had huger
Slaughter of heroes
Slain by the sword-edge—
Such as old writers
Have writ of in histories—
Hapt in this isle, since
Up from the East hither
Saxon and Angle from
Over the broad billow
Broke into Britain with
Haughty war-workers who
Harried the Welshman, when
Earls that were lured by the
Hunger of glory gat
Hold of the land.

THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK *The War-Song of Dinas Vawr*

THE MOUNTAIN sheep are sweeter,
But the valley sheep are fatter;
We therefore deemed it meeter
To carry off the latter.
We made an expedition;
We met a host, and quelled it;
We forced a strong position,
And killed the men who held it.

On Dyfed's richest valley,
Where herds of kine were brousing,
We made a mighty sally,
To furnish our carousing.
Fierce warriors rushed to meet us;
We met them, and overthrew them:
They struggled hard to beat us;
But we conquered them, and slew them.

As we drove our prize at leisure,
The king marched forth to catch us:
His rage surpassed all measure,
But his people could not match us.
He fled to his hall-pillars;
And, ere our force we led off,
Some sacked his house and cellars,
While others cut his head off.

We there, in strife bewild'ring,
Spilt blood enough to swim in:
We orphaned many children,
And widowed many women.
The eagles and the ravens
We glutted with our foemen;
The heroes and the cravens,
The spearmen and the bowmen.

We brought away from battle,
And much their land bemoaned them,
Two thousand head of cattle,
And the head of him who owned them:
Ednyfed, king of Dyfed,
His head was borne before us;
His wine and beasts supplied our feasts,
And his overthrow, our chorus.

RICHARD LOVELACE *To Lucdsta, Going to the Wars*

TELL ME not (Sweet) I am unkind,
  That from the Nunnery
Of thy chaste breast, and quiet mind,
  To War and Arms I fly.

True, a new Mistress now I chase,
  The first Foe in the Field;
And with a stronger Faith imbrace
  A Sword, a Horse, a Shield.

Yet this Inconstancy is such,
As thou too shalt adore;
I could not love thee (Dear) so much,
Lov'd I not Honour more.

ANNE FINCH, COUNTESS OF WINCHILSEA *Trail all your pikes*

TRAIL ALL your pikes, dispirit every drum,
March in a slow procession from afar,
Ye silent, ye dejected, men of war.
Be still the hautboys, and the flute be dumb !
Display no more, in vain, the lofty banner;
For see where on the bier before ye lies
The pale, the fall'n, the untimely sacrifice
To your mistaken shrine, to your false idol Honour.

WILLIAM COLLINS *Ode Written in the Beginning of the Year 1746*

How SLEEP the Brave, who sink to Rest,
By all their Country's Wishes blest!
When Spring, with dewy Fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallow'd Mold,
She there shall dress a sweeter Sod,
Than Fancy's Feet have ever trod.

By Fairy Hands their Knell is rung,
By Forms unseen their Dirge is sung;
There Honour comes, a Pilgrim grey,
To bless the Turf that wraps their Clay,
And Freedom shall awhile repair,
To dwell a weeping Hermit there !

RALPH WALDO EMERSON *Concord Hymn*

BY THE rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare
To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

HERMAN MELVILLE *The Portent*

HANGING FROM the beam,
Slowly swaying (such the law),
Gaunt the shadow on your green,
Shenandoah!
The cut is on the crown
(Lo, John Brown),
And the stabs shall heal no more.

Hidden in the cap
Is the anguish none can draw;
So your future veils its face,
Shenandoah!
But the streaming beard is shown
(Weird John Brown)
The meteor of the war.

WALT WHITMAN *A sight in camp in the daybreak gray and dim*

A SIGHT in camp in the daybreak gray and dim,
As from my tent I emerge so early sleepless,
As slow I walk in the cool fresh air the path near by the hospital tent,
Three forms I see on stretchers lying, brought out there untended lying,
Over each the blanket spread, ample brownish woolen blanket,
Grey and heavy blanket, folding, covering all.

Curious I halt and silent stand,
Then with light fingers I from the face of the nearest the first just lift the blanket;
Who are you elderly man so gaunt and grim, with well-gray'd hair, and flesh all sunken about thy eyes?
Who are you my dear comrade?

Then to the second I step—and who are you my child and darling?
Who are you sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming?

Then to the third—a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory;
Young man I think I know you—I think this face is the face of the dead Christ himself,
Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies.

RUPERT BROOKE *The Soldier*

IF I SHOULD die, think only this of me:
  That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
  In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;

A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

WILFRED OWEN *Insensibility*

HAPPY ARE men who yet before they are killed
Can let their veins run cold.
Whom no compassion fleers
Or makes their feet
Sore on the alleys cobbled with their brothers.
The front line withers,
But they are troops who fade, not flowers
For poets' tearful fooling:
Men, gaps for filling:
Losses who might have fought
Longer; but no one bothers.

And some cease feeling
Even themselves or for themselves.
Dullness best solves
The tease and doubt of shelling,
And Chance's strange arithmetic
Comes simpler than the reckoning of their shilling.
They keep no check on armies' decimation,

Happy are these who lose imagination:
They have enough to carry with ammunition.
Their spirit drags no pack,
Their old wounds save with cold can not more ache.

Having seen all things red,
Their eyes are rid
Of the hurt of the colour of blood for ever.
And terror's first constriction over,
Their hearts remain small-drawn.
Their senses in some scorching cautery of battle
Now long since ironed,
Can laugh among the dying, unconcerned.

Happy the soldier home, with not a notion
How somewhere, every dawn, some men attack,
And many sighs are drained.
Happy the lad whose mind was never trained:
His days are worth forgetting more than not.
He sings along the march
Which we march taciturn, because of dusk,
The long, forlorn, relentless trend
From larger day to huger night.

We wise, who with a thought besmirch
Blood over all our soul,
How should we seek our task
But through his blunt and lashless eyes?
Alive, he is not vital overmuch;
Dying, not mortal overmuch;
Nor sad, nor proud,
Nor curious at all.
He cannot tell
Old men's placidity from his.

But cursed are dullards whom no cannon stuns,
That they should be as stones;
Wretched are they, and mean
With paucity that never was simplicity.
By choice they made themselves immune
To pity and whatever moans in man
Before the last sea and the hapless stars;
Whatever mourns when many leave these shores;
Whatever shares
The eternal reciprocity of tears.

EDWARD THOMAS *As the team's head-brass*

As THE team's head-brass flashed out on the turn
The lovers disappeared into the wood.
I sat among the boughs of the fallen elm
That strewed the angle of the fallow, and
Watched the plough narrowing a yellow square
Of charlock. Every time the horses turned
Instead of treading me down, the ploughman leaned
Upon the handles to say or ask a word,
About the weather, next about the war.
Scraping the share he faced towards the wood,
And screwed along the furrow till the brass flashed
Once more.
The blizzard felled the elm whose crest
I sat in, by a woodpecker's round hole,
The ploughman said. "When will they take it away?"
"When the war's over." So the talk began—
One minute and an interval of ten,
A minute more and the same interval.
"Have you been out?" "No." "And don't want to, perhaps?"
"If I could only come back again, I should.
I could spare an arm. I shouldn't want to lose
A leg. If I should lose my head, why, so,
I should want nothing more. . . . Have many gone
From here?" "Yes." "Many lost?" "Yes, a good few.
Only two teams work on the farm this year.
One of my mates is dead. The second day
In France they killed him. It was back in March,
The very night of the blizzard, too. Now if
He had stayed here we should have moved the tree."
"And I should not have sat here. Everything
Would have been different. For it would have been
Another world." "Ay, and a better, though
If we could see all all might seem good." Then
The lovers came out of the wood again:
The horses started and for the last time
I watched the clods crumble and topple over
After the ploughshare and the stumbling team.

THOMAS HARDY *In Time of "the Breaking of Nations"*[4]

I

ONLY A man harrowing clods
  In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
  Half asleep as they stalk.

II

Only thin smoke without flame
  From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
  Though Dynasties pass.

III

Yonder a maid and her wight
  Come whispering by;
War's annals will fade into night
  Ere their story die.

HERBERT READ *To a Conscript of 1940*

Qui n'a pas une fois désespéré de l'honneur, ne sera jamais un héros.[5]

GEORGES BERNANOS

A SOLDIER passed me in the freshly fallen snow,
  His footsteps muffled, his face unearthly grey;
And my heart gave a sudden leap
  As I gazed on a ghost of five-and-twenty years ago.

I shouted Halt! and my voice had the old accustomed ring
  And he obeyed it as it was obeyed
In the shrouded days when I too was one
  Of an army of young men marching

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[4] See Jeremiah 51:20.

[5] He who has not at least once despaired of his honor will never be a hero.

Into the unknown. He turned towards me and I said:
  "I am one of those who went before you
Five-and-twenty years ago: one of the many who never returned,
  Of the many who returned and yet were dead.

We went where you are going, into the rain and the mud;
  We fought as you will fight
With death and darkness and despair;
  We gave what you will give—our brains and our blood.

We think we gave in vain. The world was not renewed.
  There was hope in the homestead and anger in the streets
But the old world was restored and we returned
  To the dreary field and workshop, and the immemorial feud

Of rich and poor. Our victory was our defeat
  Power was retained where power had been misused
And youth was left to sweep away
  The ashes that the fire had strewn beneath our feet.

But one thing we learned: there is no glory in the deed
  Until the soldier wears a badge of tarnished braid;
There are heroes who have heard the rally and have seen
  The glitter of a garland round their head.

Theirs is the hollow victory. They are deceived.
  But you, my brother and my ghost, if you can go
Knowing that there is no reward, no certain use
  In all your sacrifice, then honour is reprieved.

To fight without hope is to fight with grace,
  The self reconstructed, the false heart repaired."
Then I turned with a smile, and he answered my salute
  As he stood against the fretted hedge, which was like white lace.

RICHARD EBERHART *The Fury of Aerial Bombardment*

You WOULD think the fury of aerial bombardment
Would rouse God to relent; the infinite spaces
Are still silent. He looks on shock-pried faces.
History, even, does not know what is meant.

You would feel that after so many centuries
God would give man to repent; yet he can kill
As Cain could, but with multitudinous will,
No farther advanced than in his ancient furies.

Was man made stupid to see his own stupidity?
Is God by definition indifferent, beyond us all?
Is the eternal truth man's fighting soul
Wherein the Beast ravens in its own avidity?

Of Van Wettering I speak, and Averill,
Names on a list, whose faces I do not recall
But they are gone to early death, who late in school
Distinguished the belt feed lever from the belt holding pawl.

3. Variations on a Theme

CHARLES COTTON *Evening Quatrains*

THE DAY'S grown old, the fainting Sun
Has but a little way to run,
And yet his Steeds, with all his skill,
Scarce lug the Chariot down the Hill.

With Labour spent, and Thirst opprest,
Whilst they strain hard to gain the West,
From Fetlocks hot drops melted light,
Which turn to Meteors in the Night.

The Shadows now so long do grow
That Brambles like tall Cedars show,
Mole-hills seem Mountains, and the Ant
Appears a monstrous Elephant.

A very little little Flock
Shades thrice the ground that it would stock;
Whilst the small Stripling following them
Appears a mighty Polypheme.

These being brought into the Fold
And by the thrifty Master told,
He thinks his Wages are well paid,
Since none are either lost or stray'd.

Now lowing Herds are each-where heard,
Chains rattle in the Villain's Yard,
The Cart's on Tail set down to rest,
Bearing on high the Cuckold's crest.

The hedge is stripped, the Clothes brought in;
Nought's left without should be within;
The Bees are hiv'd, and hum their Charm
Whilst every House does seem a Swarm.

The Cock now to the Roost is prest,
For he must call up all the rest;
The Sow's fast pegg'd within the Sty
To still her squeaking Progeny.

Each one has had his Supping Mess,
The Cheese is put into the Press,
The Pans and Bowls clean scalded all,
Rear'd up against the Milk-house Wall.

And now on Benches all are sat
In the cool Air to sit and chat,
Till Phoebus, dipping in the West,
Shall lead the World the way to Rest.

WILLIAM COLLINS *Ode to Evening*

IF OUGHT of Oaten Stop, or Pastoral Song,
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest Ear,
Like thy own solemn Springs,
Thy Springs, and dying Gales,

O Nymph reserved, while now the bright-hair'd Sun
Sits in yon western Tent, whose cloudy Skirts,
With Brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy Bed:

Now Air is hush'd, save where the weak-ey'd Bat,
With short shrill Shriek flits by on leathern Wing,
Or where the Beetle winds
His small but sullen Horn,

As oft he rises 'midst the twilight Path,
Against the Pilgrim born in heedless Hum:
Now teach me, Maid compos'd,
To breathe some soften'd Strain,

Whose Numbers stealing thro' thy darkening Vale,
May not unseemly with its Stillness suit,
As musing slow, I hail
Thy genial lov'd Return 1

For when thy folding Star arising shews
His paly Circlet, at his warning Lamp
The fragrant Hours, and Elves
Who slept in Flow'rs the Day,

And many a Nymph who wreathes her Brows with Sedge,
And sheds the freshening Dew, and lovelier still,
The Pensive Pleasures sweet
Prepare thy shadowy Car.

Then lead, calm Vot'ress, where some sheety Lake,
Cheers the lone Heath, or some time-hallow'd Pile,
Or up-land Fallows grey
Reflect its last cool Gleam.

But when chill blustering Winds, or driving Rain,
Forbid my willing Feet, be mine the Hut,
That from the Mountain's Side,
Views Wilds, and swelling Floods,

And Hamlets brown, and dim-discover'd Spires,
And hears their simple Bell, and marks o'er all
Thy Dewy Fingers draw
The gradual dusky Veil.

While Spring shall pour his Show'rs, as oft he wont,
And bathe thy breathing Tresses, meekest Eve !
While Summer loves to sport,
Beneath thy ling'ring Light;

While sallow Autumn fills thy Lap with Leaves,
Or Winter yelling thro' the troublous Air,
Affrights thy shrinking Train,
And rudely rends thy Robes,

So long sure-found beneath thy sylvan Shed,
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lip'd Health,
Thy gentlest Influence own,
And hymn thy fav'rite Name!

THOMAS GRAY *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*

THE CURFEW tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds:

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r
The mopeing owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bow'r,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knee the envied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke:
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye Proud, impute to These the fault,
  If Mem'ry o'er their Tomb no Trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
  The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated bust
  Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
  Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
  Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
  Or wak'd to extasy the living lyre.

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
  Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
  And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
  The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
  And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast
  The little Tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
  Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
  The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
  And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbad: nor circumscrib'd alone
  Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;
Forbad to wade through slaughter to a throne,
  And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhimes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unlettered muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing ling'ring look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E'en in our Ashes live their wonted Fires.

For thee, who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead,
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,—

Haply some hoary-headed Swain may say,
"Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away
To meet the sun upon the upland lawn.

"There at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
  That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
  And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

"Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
  Mutt'ring his wayward fancies he would rove,
Now drooping, woeful-wan, like one forlorn,
  Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

"One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,
  Along the heath, and near his fav'rite tree;
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
  Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he:

"The next, with dirges due in sad array
  Slow thro' the church-way path we saw him borne.—
Approach and read (for thou can'st read) the lay,
  Grav'd on the stone beneath yon aged thorn."

THE EPITAPH

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth
  A Youth, to Fortune and to Fame unknown.
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,
  And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
  Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:
He gave to Mis'ry all he had, a tear,
  He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he wish'd) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,
  Or draw his frailties from their dread abode
(There they alike in trembling hope repose),
  The bosom of his Father and his God.

MATTHEW ARNOLD *A Summer Night*

IN THE deserted, moon-blanch'd street,
How lonely rings the echo of my feet!
Those windows, which I gaze at, frown,
Silent and white, unopening down,
Repellent as the world;—but see,
A break between the housetops shows
The moon! and, lost behind her, fading dim
Into the dewy dark obscurity
Down at the far horizon's rim,
Doth a whole tract of heaven disclose!

And to my mind the thought
Is on a sudden brought
Of a past night, and a far different scene.
Headlands stood out into the moonlit deep
As clearly as at noon;
The spring-tide's brimming flow
Heaved dazzlingly between;
Houses, with long white sweep,
Girdled the glistening bay;
Behind, through the soft air,
The blue haze-cradled mountains spread away.
That night was far more fair—
But the same restless pacings to and fro,
And the same vainly throbbing heart was there,
And the same bright, calm moon.

And the calm moonlight seems to say:
Hast thou then still the old unquiet breast,
Which neither deadens into rest,
Nor ever feels the fiery glow
That whirls the spirit from itself away,
But fluctuates to and fro,
Never by passion quite possess'd
And never quite benumb'd by the world's sway?—
And I, I know not if to pray

Still to be what I am, or yield and be
Like all the other men I see.

For most men in a brazen prison live,
Where, in the sun's hot eye,
With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly
Their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give,
Dreaming of nought beyond their prison-wall.
And as, year after year,
Fresh products of their barren labour fall
From their tired hands, and rest
Never yet comes more near,
Gloom settles slowly down over their breast;
And while they try to stem
The waves of mournful thought by which they are prest,
Death in their prison reaches them,
Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest.

And the rest, a few,
Escape their prison and depart
On the wide ocean of life anew.
There the freed prisoner, where'er his heart
Listeth, will sail;
Nor doth he know how there prevail,
Despotic on that sea,
Trade-winds which cross it from eternity.
Awhile he holds some false way, undebarr'd
By thwarting signs, and braves
The freshening wind and blackening waves.
And then the tempest strikes him; and between
The lightning-bursts is seen
Only a driving wreck,
And the pale master on his spar-strewn deck
With anguish'd face and flying hair
Grasping the rudder hard,
Still bent to make some port he knows not where,
Still standing for some false, impossible shore.
And sterner comes the roar

Of sea and wind, and through the deepening gloom
Fainter and fainter wreck and helmsman loom,
And he too disappears, and comes no more.

Is there no life, but these alone?
Madman or slave, must man be one?

Plainness and clearness without shadow of stain!
Clearness divine!
Ye heavens, whose pure dark regions have no sign
Of languor, though so calm, and, though so great,
Are yet untroubled and unpassionate;
Who, though so noble, share in the world's toil,
And, though so task'd, keep free from dust and soil!
I will not say that your mild deeps retain
A tinge, it may be, of their silent pain
Who have long'd deeply once, and long'd in vain—
But I will rather say that you remain
A world above man's head, to let him see
How boundless might his soul's horizons be,
How vast, yet of what clear transparency!
How it were good to live there, and breathe free;
How fair a lot to fill
Is left to each man still!

T. s. ELIOT *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*

TWELVE O'CLOCK.
Along the reaches of the street
Held in a lunar synthesis,
Whispering lunar incantations
Dissolve the floors of memory
And all its clear relations,
Its divisions and precisions,
Every street lamp that I pass
Beats like a fatalistic drum,
And through the spaces of the dark
Midnight shakes the memory
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.

Half-past one,
The street-lamp sputtered,
The street-lamp muttered,
The street-lamp said, "Regard that woman
Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door
Which opens on her like a grin.
You see the border of her dress
Is torn and stained with sand,
And you see the corner of her eye
Twists like a crooked pin."

The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things;
A twisted branch upon the beach
Eaten smooth, and polished
As if the world gave up
The secret of its skeleton,
Stiff and white.
A broken spring in a factory yard,
Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left
Hard and curled and ready to snap.

Half-past two,
The street-lamp said,
"Remark the cat which flattens itself in the gutter,
Slips out its tongue
And devours a morsel of rancid butter."
So the hand of the child, automatic,
Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay.
I could see nothing behind that child's eye.
I have seen eyes in the street
Trying to peer through lighted shutters,
And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
An old crab with barnacles on his back,
Grippe the end of a stick which I held him.

Half-past three,
The lamp sputtered,
The lamp muttered in the dark.
The lamp hummed:
"Regard the moon,
La lune ne garde aucune rancune,[8]
She winks a feeble eye,
She smiles into corners.
She smooths the hair of the grass.
The moon has lost her memory.
A washed-out smallpox cracks her face,
Her hand twists a paper rose,
That smells of dust and eau de Cologne,
She is alone
With all the old nocturnal smells
That cross and cross across her brain."
The reminiscence comes
Of sunless dry geraniums
And dust in crevices,
Smells of chestnuts in the streets,
And female smells in shuttered rooms,
And cigarettes in corridors
And cocktail smells in bars.

The lamp said,
"Four o'clock,
Here is the number on the door.
Memory!
You have the key,
The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair.
Mount.
The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,
Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life."

The last twist of the knife.

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[6] The moon holds no grudges.

T. S. ELIOT *Gerontion*

Thou hast nor youth nor age
But as it were an after dinner sleep
Dreaming of both.

HERE I am, an old man in a dry month,
Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.
My house is a decayed house,
And the jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.
The goat coughs at night in the field overhead;
Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, merds.
The woman keeps the kitchen, makes tea,
Sneezes at evening, poking the peevish gutter.
I an old man,
A dull head among windy spaces.

Signs are taken for wonders. "We would see a sign!"
The word within a word, unable to speak a word,
Swaddled with darkness. In the juvescence of the year
Came Christ the tiger

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas,
To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero
With caressing hands, at Limoges
Who walked all night in the next room;

By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
Shifting the candles; Fräulein von Kulp
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.
Vacant shuttles

Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,
An old man in a draughty house
Under a windy knob.

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
Guides us by vanities. Think now
She gives when our attention is distracted
And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving. Gives too late
What's not believed in, or if still believed,
In memory only, reconsidered passion. Gives too soon
Into weak hands, what's thought can be dispensed with
Till the refusal propagates a fear. Think
Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.
These tears are shaken from the wrath-bearing tree.

The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours. Think at last
We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house. Think at last
I have not made this show purposelessly
And it is not by any concitation
Of the backward devils.
I would meet you upon this honestly.
I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it
Since what is kept must be adulterated?
I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
How should I use them for your closer contact?

These with a thousand small deliberations
Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
With pungent sauces, multiply variety

In a wilderness of mirrors. What will the spider do,
Suspend its operations, will the weevil
Delay? De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel, whirled
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
In fractured atoms. Gull against the wind, in the windy
straits
Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn,
White feathers in the snow, the Gulf claims,
And an old man driven by the Trades
To a sleepy corner.

Tenants of the house,
Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.

ALLEN TATE *The Mediterranean*

Quern das finem, rex magne, dolorum?[7]

WHERE WE went in the boat was a long bay
A slingshot wide, walled in by towering stone—
Peaked margin of antiquity's delay,
And we went there out of time's monotone:

Where we went in the black hull no light moved
But a gull white-winged along the feckless wave,
The breeze, unseen but fierce as a body loved,
That boat drove onward like a willing slave:

Where we went in the small ship the seaweed
Parted and gave to us the murmuring shore
And we made feast and in our secret need
Devoured the very plates Aeneas bore:

Where derelict you see through the low twilight
The green coast that you, thunder-tossed, would win,
Drop sail, and hastening to drink all night
Eat dish and bowl—to take that sweet land in!

---

[7] When, great King, will you bring an end to our griefs? (A play on a line in Virgil's *Aeneid.* See Question 5, page 692.)

Where we feasted and caroused on the sandless
Pebbles, affecting our day of piracy,
What prophecy of eaten plates could landless
Wanderers fulfil by the ancient sea?

We for that time might taste the famous age
Eternal here yet hidden from our eyes
When lust of power undid its stuffless rage;
They, in a wineskin, bore earth's paradise.

Let us lie down once more by the breathing side
Of Ocean, where our live forefathers sleep
As if the Known Sea still were a month wide—
Atlantis howls but is no longer steep!

What country shall we conquer, what fair land
Unman our conquest and locate our blood?
We've cracked the hemispheres with careless hand!
Now, from the gates of Hercules we flood

Westward, westward, till the barbarous brine
Whelms us to the tired world where tasseling corn,
Fat beans, grapes sweeter than muscadine
Rot on the vine: in that land were we born.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ *In the naked bed, in Plato's cave*

IN THE naked bed, in Plato's cave,
Reflected headlights slowly slid the wall,
Carpenters hammered under the shaded window,
Wind troubled the window curtains all night long,
A fleet of trucks strained uphill, grinding,
Their freights covered, as usual.
The ceiling lightened again, the slanting diagram
Slid slowly forth.
Hearing the milkman's chop,
His striving up the stair, the bottle's chink,
I rose from bed, lit a cigarette,

And walked to the window. The stony street
Displayed the stillness in which buildings stand,
The street-lamp's vigil and the horse's patience.
The winter sky's pure capital
Turned me back to bed with exhausted eyes.

Strangeness grew in the motionless air. The loose
Film grayed. Shaking wagons, hooves' waterfalls,
Sounded far off, increasing, louder and nearer.
A car coughed, starting. Morning, softly
Melting the air, lifted the half-covered chair
From underseas, kindled the looking-glass,
Distinguished the dresses and the white wall.
The bird called tentatively, whistled, called,
Bubbled and whistled, so! Perplexed, still wet
With sleep, affectionate, hungry and cold. So, so,
O son of man, the ignorant night, the travail
Of early morning, the mystery of beginning
Again and again,
while History is unforgiven.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 25

1. Analyze the poems in Group i of this section to see how their authors bring serious feelings about other matters to bear on the theme of love. (Examples of such "feelings": Sidney's religious idealism; Browning's sense of the isolation and elusiveness of each individual's innermost self; Laughlin's attitude toward war.)

   Compare the attitudes toward fidelity in love and marriage in these poems.

   What is the relation between the speaker's feelings about the natural world and his feelings toward the woman he loves in *Western wind* and in the poems by Keats and Tennyson?

   In what sense are all these attitudes brought to bear on the tone, imagery, organization, and general style of these poems? Write an essay on one of them from this point of view.

2. Emerson's poem commemorates men who died at Concord in Revolutionary days. Melville's poem commemorates John Brown, whose abortive revolt foreshadowed the Civil War. Eberhart's poem com-

memorates men killed in World War II. Compare the assumptions behind these poems and their significance for the modern reader.

The three poems by Hardy, Thomas, and Owen, all written in connection with World War I, go behind politics and immediate issues to what are considered fundamental values. Explain. Do the poems of Emerson, Melville, and Eberhart do so also? Are the "ultimate" values the same in all these poems?

Compare the power of these poems—and of the poems by Brooke and Read—to hold your sympathetic attention and affect your attitude toward war. Is this *persuasive* power related to their intensity of diction and imagery and their *poetic* power generally?

3. What is the primary concern of Collins' *Ode to Evening?* To suggest the many conflicting associations of evening? something more philosophical, such as an attitude toward nature or truth?

   Compare the imagery in Collins' descriptive passages with that in the opening three stanzas of Gray's poem. Account for similarities and differences of effect.

   What is the effect of the "artificial" diction of the eighteenth century and of the device of personification in these poems? Do they suggest an attitude toward life unlike your own?

4. Do the images of night and memory in *Rhapsody on a Windy Night* suggest problems and attitudes like those of Arnold's poem? Which of these poems is more concerned with life or "destiny" in general? with contemporary society as the poet sees it? with the problems of sensitive individuals in a difficult world?

5. Allen Tate's poem attempts the difficult feat of speaking from two viewpoints at once—that of Aeneas, hero of Virgil's *Aeneid,* and his followers; and that of modern Americans. The poem refers to specific incidents of the landing of Aeneas in Italy, when the feasting and devouring of "plates" (broad slabs of hard bread) fulfilled a prophecy that these things would happen when the voyagers arrived at the site of the future Roman Empire. What characterization of the modern spirit emerges in the course of this poem? What relation does this characterization bear to the memory of Aeneas and of his heroic destiny?

   Compare the attitudes toward modern man in this poem with those in *Gerontion* and in Delmore Schwartz's poem. Which of these poems handles its materials most richly and successfully?

6. *Gerontion* suggests that we are at the end of a great historical cycle. Yeats's poems on pages 583 and 597-598 also speak of such cycles. Compare the symbolizing and use of this cyclical concept by the two poets.

///. QUEST AND RECONCILIATION

Even through the hollow eyes of death
I spy life peering.

SHAKESPEARE

At the close of our book we return to the largest frame of reference of poetry—the extent of the poet's awareness of the discrepancies between what *is* and what *seems,* and between what *is* and what *ought to be.* All the resources of the great poet, all his powers of description, image-making, story-telling, dramatization, intellectual suppleness, and imaginative conception are put to the test in his ultimate effort to deal with these discrepancies. He needs both technical proficiency and tough integrity of character, and must not be satisfied with glib or easy solutions. He must recognize, as John Donne's *Third Satyre* has it, that truth "stands on a huge hill," "craggy and steep,"

. . . and he that will
Reach her, about must, and about must go;
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so. . .

In solving the moral and esthetic problem of how to tell the truth, the poet seems often to be hostile to the world around him. In truth, however bitter its savor, there is nevertheless always an implied affirmation of the essential value of honesty. One does not find a powerful poem of rejection without also finding a possibility implied of accepting life as a whole and in a better way. Though such poetry is often necessarily complex and ambiguous, it may also brilliantly simplify in order to strike to the heart of a situation and squeeze the real and the ideal as close together as possible. Blake's *London* is one of the brilliantly simple poems, presenting its criticism of life and its affirmations of value in the very same images.

WILLIAM BLAKE *London*

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 blackening Church appalls;
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.

London, at first, seems an expression of outright rejection. Blake sees not merely unrealized potentialities but deathly pain —"weakness" and "woe"—everywhere. Each face, each voice, reminds him of the frustrations, lies, and cruelty of the city's life in the early years of the Industrial Revolution. The pathetic little chimney-sweeps make religion and morality seem arrant hypocrisy; the suffering of soldiers belies the benevolence of governments and rulers; the cursing street-harlots force him to think of the perversion of marital happiness which their existence means. (The final lines compress references to illegitimate birth, syphilis, and the ugliness which seems to the speaker to have blighted love in all its aspects; the compression is achieved by a series of related outbursts of sound and image, culminating in the paradoxical "Marriage hearse" which brings the poem to its tragic close.)

Yet to feel so strongly on the subject of the "chartering"—the parceling out for hire and profit—of the city while the potentialities for joy and love are thwarted is to have a humane vision of the right relations between man and man, man and woman, and man and God. The corruption of society, the failure of Church and State, the perversion of love can arouse savage condemnation only in someone with a blazing concern for those right relations. Thus, *London*, in the very vehemence of its description and its rejection of all that has blighted human life and affection, gives us a pure affirmation of their intrinsic beauty.

Blake views evil and suffering in the light of his concept of *love* as the great creative force. His *London* exemplifies the way in which many poems of stature imply critical and affirmative attitudes at one and the same time. The importance of such "opposite implication" must be recognized if we are to understand the real functions of much of the paradoxical, ironic, ambiguous, and mystical language of poetry. Blake's method here is to give us images that paint the harsh truth as tragically and nakedly as possible, and yet are also unmistakable emblems of what is valued most (freedom, health, joy, enlightenment, the happiness of children, peace, and innocent sexual love).

Whitman's *Out of the cradle endlessly rocking* (pages 705-712) moves more explicitly from tragic observation to affirmation. It frames an attitude toward the fact of death through its opening evocation of the nostalgic, sense-laden memories of boyhood, its account of the two birds and the two songs of joy and of longing, and its colloquy between the boy and the sea. The opening chant, which summons up so freshly the mysterious sense of life and of an unbearable and mysterious pain of experience, prepares us to accept death as essential to the most intense meanings of life, and to the profound connection of elemental nature with man's highest thoughts and feelings. The poem is a major effort to recognize the fact of death for what it is and at the same time to redefine it mystically. We must remember that the mystical redefinition is less philosophical than emotional—part of the poet's memory of how he identified himself with the whole of nature:

> Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,)
> Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it mostly to me?

and later,

> O you singer solitary, singing by yourself—projecting me . . .

Here the poet helps make sure we do remember what he is doing—symbolically describing a subjective state by personifying bird, sea, and his own soul. He does not wish us to think these things literally happened, of course, but he does not wish us to think of them as mere make-believe either. If such things do not literally happen, their *meaning* is possible, it is devoutly to be desired, and its possibility alone makes all experience, even the most tragic, too rich to be diminished by fear or squeamishness. We are to face death and rejoice in it, not so much for consolation as for the realization that it is inseparable from all growth and love. It is the key to immersion in that strangely magnetic reality described in the first stanza and in the stanzas that follow the final song of the bird.

Another mystical assertion of faith, but of a more explicitly religious order, underlies T. S. Eliot's *Little Gidding* (pages 715-722), a poem difficult and complex enough to need extended analysis. *Little Gidding* is the final poem in the sequence called *Four Quartets.* Each of the *Quartets* parallels the others and reinforces their attempt to visualize a timeless, eternal, and divine essence at the heart of all being, a "still point" around which "the unstill world still whirled."[1] In these poems, Eliot wishes to face what he considers the terrible emptiness of material experience with a cold, precise truthfulness, but nevertheless to assert against that emptiness the miraculous grace of God which can transform everything. In each of the *Quartets* one of the four material elements—earth, air, fire, and water—is a key symbol around which this double motif is developed. Each poem is constructed in a similar musical sequence of five movements in which two attitudes and tones are contrasted, counterpointed, and interrelated.

Little Gidding, the culminating poem, utilizes the symbol of fire to unify and animate its several movements. Glancing through the poem, we can see at once the many contrasting ways in which it employs this symbol. First there is the midwinter sun that "flames the ice" with a "glare" and "glow" that produces no heat. The soul, on the other hand, feels a "pentecostal fire." This Pentecostal fire of Love, indeed, is the underlying "goal" of the poem—the soul feels its stirring within itself, and all of nature and experience hint at its possibility in the many manifestations of whiteness, glowing, fire, and warmth always around us, until at the close of the poem it is fully visualized. (The specific reference is to the moment described in the New Testament when, during the feast of Pentecost seven weeks after the Crucifixion, the Apostles were visited with "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind" and "cloven tongues like as of fire," and were "all filled with the Holy Ghost.") The whiteness of the hedges in May, the allusion to the "communication" of those who have died as "tongued with fire beyond the language of the living," the images of burning and bombing and of the expiring fires of life in an old man—all these are variations on the central symbol. In general we may say that the problem is to get from the materialistic *here*—where the fire is of the senses, sometimes chill, sometimes lovely and promising, sometimes evilly destructive—to the mystical and spiritual *there*, where it refines and reveals and transports.

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[1] This symbol of the "still point" is derived from Dante's vision of universal order in the last Canto of the *Paradiso.* See pages 267-268.

The poem therefore takes us on a symbolic pilgrimage. Hence the importance of the title: Little Gidding is a place in England where, the poet believes, at one time in the past humility and devotion were rewarded by the descent of God's grace. (It was the Anglican religious community founded by Nicholas Ferrar and visited by his friends the religious poets George Herbert arid Richard Crashaw.) The poem begins with an invitation to a pilgrimage. We shall journey from wherever we are and from the midwinter of this age to the springtime of rebirth during the short moment of Little Gidding's greatness in the seventeenth century. The journey to spiritual revelation is no easy one, and we see from the paradoxically related images of midwinter, spring, and summer, and of the

pentecostal fire
In the dark time of the year. . . .

that the cold landscape upon which the fire of love is about to descend is no material or familiar one:

This is the spring time
But not in time's covenant.

The second part of the opening section of the poem restates the theme of pilgrimage to a holy place in terms of the immediate and material conditions of place and time—in terms of here and now and of you and me—though with a glance back into history when "a broken king," Charles I, passed through Little Gidding in the moment of defeat and darkness.

The movement comes to a close with a passage that grows increasingly more specific. The poem began with an indirect, symbolist evocation of paradoxes to create a feeling of the ideal *otherworldliness* in which faith can operate. It moves now into direct instruction:

> You are not here to verify . . .
> You are here to kneel
> Where prayer has been valid—

and statement:

> What the dead had no speech for, when living
> They can tell you, being dead.

The movement ends with two lines that recapitulate, not only the opening theme of this movement but of *Burnt Norton,* the first of the *Quartets* as well.

> Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
> Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

The second movement of *Little Gidding* begins with a subtly woven lyric on the mortality of the four elements, earth, air, fire, and water, out of which the ancient and the medieval world believed the universe to be constructed. This is followed by a passage of sustained dramatic narrative. Here the precise bare imagery of Dante and an approximation of Dante's *terza rima* (without rhyme but with an alternation of masculine and feminine endings) catch the formal effect of Dante's Italian.[2] This is a scene from the modern Inferno of London during the Blitz of World War II. The sharply visualized concrete details, the somber atmosphere, the sober tone, and the unmistakable significance of the symbolic material all combine again to suggest Dante. The time is "the uncertain hour before the morning"; the phrase looks forward with hope to the reconciliation with which the poem ends. It is the hour just before the "All Clear," which brings the section to a close—the hour

> After the dark dove with the flickering tongue
> Had passed below the horizon of his homing
> While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin.

[2] *Term rima:* a sequence of three-line stanzas rhyming aba, bcb, cdc, etc., in which *The Divine Comedy* is written. For a discussion of the accurate and concentrated visual imagery of Dante and its influence on modern poetry see Chapter III, especially pages 211-213.

The "dark dove," the bombing plane that brings fire and destruction, is the antithesis of the Holy Dove—the Holy Spirit that descended on Pentecost. Out of that fire and destruction, however, comes the suffering that brings the soul closer to God, and so in one sense the dark Dove is identifiable in the consequences of its act with the Pentecostal Dove.

At first, or on one level of meaning, the application of the name *dove* to the bombing plane is a bitter irony. But in its deeper significance it anticipates, and concentrates in a single word, the ultimate meaning of the poem: that out of evil comes good, and out of suffering, salvation.

The main action of this dramatic episode is the poet's colloquy with the vividly realized shade of "a familiar compound ghost." Some of the details here suggest the figure of Dante, and some suggest the ghost of Hamlet's father, but the shade is also the poet's own inner awareness or conscience.

The verse here takes on a spareness and dignity that intensifies the feeling of sincerity and underlines, as it were, the importance of what is being said. The shade, whether of Dante or of the poet's own best self, or both, speaks of the "gifts reserved for age": "the cold friction of expiring sense," "the conscious impotence of rage at human folly," "the laceration of laughter," and the bitterness and shame of self-realization. The section comes to an end as the horn announcing "All Clear" is heard. There is a return to the key symbol, now "the refining fire," and a final allusion to the ghost of Hamlet's father, who also returned to impose on the living the obligation to see things as they are and to remember the relation between this world and the world of spirit.

After the painful personal recognitions of truth in the speech of the shade, and its stern reminder that the "refining fire" of humility, self-abnegation, and absolute submission to God's mercy alone can restore the "exasperated spirit" to righteousness and hope, the next movement returns to a calmer philosophical meditation. What exactly *should* be our relation to other persons, to specific historical causes, to the things of this life? The answer is a familiar one in Eliot's writing—neither a complete immersion in them nor a dead indifference. If love is limited to desire alone, if there is no detachment at all from the specific object desired, it cannot expand beyond it to become another kind of love, divine in origin and direction. We must be able to grow beyond the attachment of the moment. If we can do so, all things, all experiences, all history will lead us to the transcendent pattern of spiritual meaning:

> . . . Thus, love of a country
> Begins as attachment to our own field of action
> And comes to find that action of little importance
> Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
> History may be freedom. See, how they vanish,
> The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
> To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

If not, we shall be preoccupied with dead or dying things, and with a stale meaningless series of defeats and victories:

> Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
> We have taken from the defeated. . . .

Better the absolute acceptance of defeat symbolized by the "broken king" Charles I at nightfall, by Jesus on the Cross, by all who go or are taken past earthly hope. This transmutation of the struggles of history into a liberating order is a special instance of the poet's theme of good brought out of the heart of evil. He affirms it in words echoed from the medieval English mystic Juliana of Norwich:

> Sin is Behovely, but....
> All manner of thing shall be well
> By the purification of the motive
> In the ground of our beseeching.

The brief, lyrical fourth section returns to the great paradox of the dove descending, in the first stanza as the bomber with its "flame of incandescent terror," and in the second stanza as "Love," the Holy Spirit—for the Pentecostal fire itself is both fearful and desirable.

> Who then devised the torment? Love.
> Love is the unfamiliar Name
> Behind the hands that wove
> The intolerable shirt of flame
> Which human power cannot remove.

As human beings, the refrain affirms, we live inescapably either in the fire of self-hood, sense, and lust or in the consuming and terrible fire of God's love.

The last section of *Little Gidding* returns to the theme that is central to all parts of the *Four Quartets*—the cyclic linking of beginnings and endings.

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.

To perceive the unbroken circle of consequences,—looking in either direction, back into the past or forward into the future—is to transcend time. The meditation on this theme is a recapitulation and expansion of the long meditation in the second quartet, *East Coker,* on the motto engraved on Mary Stuart's ring:

> In my end is my beginning
> In my beginning is my end.

It is developed on several lines and embraces several fields. The poet's concern—echoing Dante's—with "the language of the tribe"; the historian's concern with the liberation of memory and the recovery of the living past; and the Christian's concern with the problem of redemption are themes which combine into a pattern of reflection and affirmation. This in turn gives way to a lyrical conclusion that recalls the intuitions and experiences of childhood presented in the opening section of *Burnt Norton,* the first of the *Quartets,* and weaves together the symbols used throughout the whole poem.

T. S. Eliot has gone further than any other modern poet towards uniting lyrical and reflective poetry. Indeed, in the *Quartets* he has invented a style that can modulate from the reflective to the dramatic, from the discursive to the concentrated, and from the colloquial to the dignified without ever ceasing to be lyrical. Despite his abstract theme (the concept of time and our subjective consciousness of it) and his erudite use of neo-Platonic, Christian, and scientific philosophical speculations, Eliot has found a way to make the most abstruse material concrete and immediate. His poem-sequence is about history and the way the past impinges upon the present as well as about Time in both its universal and its personal and individual aspects. It thus moves in the field of philosophy and psychology. Yet it *rejects* the conclusions and meanings of secular experience and affirms a faith in the supernatural dogmas of religion.

"Opposite implication," then, is everywhere in *Little Gidding*. We find it especially in the clear thesis that illumination at the "still point" is *not* a matter of secular understanding, though that is the only understanding we can ever attain of ourselves. It is a mystical bestowal of grace, long prepared for, yet unexpected and undeserved. But even here the poet rejects the impression that everything is easy, clear, cut-and-dried, or certain. He is presenting both the *is* and the *ought-to-be* as difficult and elusive; we must not think the moral task he sets any less demanding than that in Blake's *London* or less related to life's tragic richness than that in Whitman's *Out of the cradle.*

On the contrary, *Little Gidding* is a hard-earned affirmation of an orthodox religious attitude—hard-earned because it does not ignore the difficulties with which such an attitude must contend. It might profitably be compared with Yeats's *A Dialogue of Self and Soul* (pages 713-715)—a hard-earned affirmation of an unorthodox attitude that might almost be described as "secular religiosity." Just as the Shade in *Little Gidding* reminds the poet of the realities which he must not allow himself to forget, so the Soul in Yeats's poem recalls to the Self the limitations of human possibility unaided by divine grace: the "crumbling battlements" that are its poor mortal defences, the frivolity of fixing one's attention on emblems of love and war—of the gracious ceremony and brave meanings that are only man-made. The image of the star, like Eliot's winter sun, is valuable only for suggesting its opposite: the light of the spirit which exists beyond death, which we must accept as true without questioning, and which we can arrive at only by *detaching* ourselves from the particular causes and desires and experiences which are the accidental markers of any life.

The Soul appears to win the argument, except that the Self takes a completely independent tack in the second part of the poem. Admitting the arguments against *this life*—it *is* ugly, painful, and unjust, and perhaps the Soul is right to castigate its frivolity and its "criminal" obsession with the cycle of reproduction and death—he nevertheless is willing to accept all this.

And doing so, he is overwhelmed with a pure bliss of the sort felt by souls emerging from Purgatory and entering Paradise. He has detached himself, not from the specific love of material experience ugly or beautiful, but from the sense of guilt and "remorse." *Now* he is "saved," though his "salvation" is the exact opposite, theologically speaking, of what Eliot would mean by the word:

> When such as I cast out remorse
> So great a sweetness flows into the breast
> We must laugh and we must sing,
> We are blest by everything,
> Everything we look upon is blest.

The childlike ecstasy of these closing lines is very unlike the wise, ambiguous, philosophical language used by the Soul in its final speech. Yet it would be a rash reader who could say that the liberation of spirit here expressed is very different in feeling from that promised in Eliot's poem. There is the same sense of beatitude and release here as in

> Quick now, here, now, always—
> A condition of complete simplicity
> (Costing not less than everything)
> And all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well ....

The reason for the similarity is clear and significant. Though both poems deal with metaphysical and religious matters, they are poetry and not philosophy; their rhetoric and structure is that of emotion rather than logic. Both emerge into affirmation from the struggle to reconcile suffering with faith in the possibility of love and meaning, and both use essential methods of art. They evoke, they employ incantation and opposite implication, they set voices and modulations of tone against one another, and they move from one clearly set stage of insight or tension to the next and always toward the final moment of equilibrium or assertion.

Great poetry has this kind of growth into affirmation of its own kind. The affirmation may be made with the sharpest cutting blade, as in Blake's *London,* or it may rise through a subtler poetic logic of associations. But it will be present, though the difficulties in its way will generally also be present. And when it is, the triumph is of the candid, passionate, and resurgent poetic imagination rather than of any particular creed or ideology. In fact, the very construction of an integrated and living poem is symbolically an affirmation of the value of human will and imagination.

POEMS FOR READING AND ANALYSIS

JOHN MILTON *Final Chorus* from *Samson Agonistes*

ALL Is best, though we oft doubt
What th' unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.
Oft he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns
And to his faithful Champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously; whence *Gaza*[1] mourns
And all that band them to resist
His uncontrollable intent.
His servants he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismist,
And calm of mind all passion spent.

WALT WHITMAN *Out of the cradle endlessly rocking*

OUT OF the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
Out of the Ninth-month midnight,
Over the sterile sands, and the fields beyond, where the child,
    leaving his bed, wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot,
Down from the shower'd halo,
Up from the mystic play of shadows, twining and twisting as
    if they were alive,
Out from the patches of briers and blackberries,
From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,
From your memories, sad brother—from the fitful risings and
    fallings I heard,

---

[1] Site of the Philistine temple Samson destroyed. (See the Old Testament tale.)

From under that yellow half-moon, late-risen, and swollen as if with tears,
From those beginning notes of sickness and love, there in the transparent mist,
From the thousand responses of my heart, never to cease,
From the myriad thence-aroused words,
From the word stronger and more delicious than any,
From such, as now they start, the scene revisiting,
As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing,
Borne hither—ere all eludes me, hurriedly,
A man—yet by these tears a little boy again,
Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,
Taking all hints to use them—but swiftly leaping beyond them,
A reminiscence sing.

Once, Paumanok,
When the snows had melted—when the lilac-scent was in the air, and the Fifth-month grass was growing,
Up this sea-shore, in some briers,
Two guests from Alabama—two together,
And their nest, and four light-green eggs, spotted with brown,
And every day the he-bird, to and fro, near at hand,
And every day the she-bird, crouch'd on her nest, silent, with bright eyes,
And every day I, a curious boy, never too close, never disturbing them,
Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating.

Shine! shine! shine!
Pour down your warmth, great Sun!
While we bask—we two together.

Two together!
Winds blow South, or winds blow North,
Day come white, or night come black,
Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
Singing all time, minding no time,
While we two keep together.

Till of a sudden
May-be kill'd, unknown to her mate,
One forenoon the she-bird crouch'd not on the nest,
Nor returned that afternoon, nor the next,
Nor ever appeared again.
And thenceforward, all summer, in the sound of the sea,
And at night, under the full of the moon, in calmer weather,
Over the hoarse surging of the sea,
Or flitting from brier to brier by day,
I saw, I heard at intervals, the remaining one, the he-bird,
The solitary guest from Alabama.

Blow! blow! blow!
Blow up, sea-winds, along Paumanok's shore!
I wait and I wait, till you blow my mate to me.

Yes, when the stars glisten'd,
All night long, on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,
Down, almost amid the slapping waves,
Sat the lone singer, wonderful, causing tears.

He caird on his mate;
He pour'd forth the meanings which I, of all men, know.

Yes, my brother, I know;
The rest might not—but I have treasured every note;
For once, and more than once, dimly, down to the beach gliding,
Silent, avoiding the moonbeams, blending myself with the shadows,
Recalling now the obscure shapes, the echoes, the sounds and sights after their sorts,
The white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing,
I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,
Listened long and long.

Listened, to keep, to sing—now translating the notes,
Following you, my brother.

Soothe! soothe! soothe!
Close on its wave soothes the wave behind,
And again another behind, embracing and lapping, every one close,
But my love soothes not me, not me.

Low hangs the moon—it rose late;
O it is lagging—O I think it is heavy with love, with love.

O madly the sea pushes, pushes upon the land,
With love—with love.

O night! do I not see my love fluttering out there among the breakers?
What is that little black thing I see there in the white?

Loud! loud! loud!
Loud I call to you, my love!
High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves;
Surely you must know who is here, is here;
You must know who I am, my love.

Low-hanging moon!
What is that dusky spot in your brown yellow?
O it is the shape, the shape of my mate!
O moon, do not keep her from me any longer.

Land! land! O land!
Whichever way I turn, O I think you could give me my mate back again, if you only would;
For I am almost sure I see her dimly whichever way I look.

O rising stars!
Perhaps the one I want so much will rise, will rise with some of you.

O throat! O trembling throat!
Sound clearer through the atmosphere!
Pierce the woods, the earth;
Somewhere listening to catch you, must be the one I want.

Shake out, carols!
Solitary here—the night's carols!
Carols of lonesome love! Death's carols!
Carols under that lagging, yellow, waning moon!
O, under that moon, where she droops almost down into the sea!
O reckless, despairing carols.

But soft! sink low;
Soft! let me just murmur;
And do you wait a moment, you husky-noised sea;
For somewhere I believe I heard my mate responding to me,
So faint—I must be still, be still to listen;
But not altogether still, for then she might not come immediately to me.

Hither, my love!
Here I am! Here!
With this just-sustain'd note I announced myself to you;
This gentle call is for you, my love, for you.

Do not be decoy'd elsewhere!
That is the whistle of the wind—it is not my voice;
That is the fluttering, the fluttering of the spray;
Those are the shadows of leaves.

O darkness! O in vain!
O I am very sick and sorrowful.

O brown halo in the sky, near the moon, drooping upon the sea!
O troubled reflection in the sea!
O throat! O throbbing heart!
O all—and I singing uselessly, uselessly all the night.

Yet I murmur, murmur on!
O murmurs—you yourselves make me continue to sing, I know not why.

O past! O life! O songs of joy!
In the air—in the woods—over fields;
Loved! loved! loved! loved! loved!
But my love no more, no more with me!
We two together no more.

The aria sinking;
All else continuing—the stars shining,
The winds blowing—the notes of the bird continuous echoing,
With angry moans the fierce old mother incessantly moaning,
On the sands of Paumanok's shore, grey and rustling;
The yellow half-moon enlarged, sagging down, drooping, the face of the sea almost touching;
The boy ecstatic—with his bare feet the waves, with his hair the atmosphere dallying,
The love in the heart long pent, now loose, now at last tumultuously bursting,
The aria's meaning, the ears, the Soul, swiftly depositing,
The strange tears down the cheeks coursing,
The colloquy there—the trio—each uttering,
The undertone—the savage old mother, incessantly crying,
To the boy's Soul's questions sullenly timing—some drown'd secret hissing,
To the outsetting bard of love.

Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,)
Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it mostly to me?
For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping,
Now I have heard you,
Now in a moment I know what I am for—I awake,
And already a thousand singers—a thousand songs, clearer, louder and more sorrowful than yours,
A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die.

O you singer, solitary, singing by yourself—projecting me;
O solitary me, listening—never more shall I cease perpetuating you;

Never more shall I escape, never more the reverberations,
Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from me,
Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before what there, in the night,
By the sea, under the yellow and sagging moon,
The messenger there aroused—the fire, the sweet hell within,
The unknown want, the destiny of me.

O give me the clue! (it lurks in the night here somewhere;)
O if I am to have so much, let me have more!
O a word! O what is my destination? (I fear it is henceforth chaos;)
O how joys, dreads, convolutions, human shapes, and all shapes, spring as from graves around me!
O phantoms! you cover all the land and all the sea!
O I cannot see in the dimness whether you smile or frown upon me;
O vapour, a look, a word! O well-beloved!
O you dear women's and men's phantoms!

A word then, (for I will conquer it,)
The word final, superior to all,
Subtle, sent up—what is it?—I listen;
Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?
Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands?

Whereto answering, the sea,
Delaying not, hurrying not,
Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before daybreak,
Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word Death;
And again Death—ever Death, Death, Death,
Hissing melodious, neither like the bird, nor like my arous'd child's heart,
But edging near, as privately for me, rustling at my feet,
Creeping thence steadily up to my ears, and laving me softly all over,
Death, Death, Death, Death, Death.

Which I do not forget,
But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,
That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's grey
beach,
With the thousand responsive songs, at random,
My own songs, awaked from that hour;
And with them the key, the word up from the waves,
The word of the sweetest song, and all songs,
That strong and delicious word which, creeping to my feet,
The sea whisper'd me.

DYLAN THOMAS *And death shall have no dominion*

AND DEATH shall have no dominion.
Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
Under the windings of the sea
They lying long shall not die windily;
Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,
And the unicorn evils run them through;
Split all ends up they shan't crack;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
No more may gulls cry at their ears
Or waves break loud on the seashores;
Where blew a flower may a flower no more

Lift its head to the blows of the rain;
Though they be mad and dead as nails,
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,
And death shall have no dominion.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS *A Dialogue of Self and Soul*

I

MY SOUL. I summon to the winding ancient stair;
Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
Upon the breathless starlit air,
Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;
Fix every wandering thought upon
That quarter where all thought is done:
Who can distinguish darkness from the soul?

MY SELF. The consecrated blade upon my knees
Is Sato's ancient blade, still as it was,
Still razor-keen, still like a looking-glass
Unspotted by the centuries;
That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn
From some court-lady's dress and round
The wooden scabbard bound and wound,
Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn.

MY SOUL. Why should the imagination of a man
Long past his prime remember things that are
Emblematical of love and war?
Think of ancestral night that can,
If but imagination scorn the earth
And intellect its wandering
To this and that and t'other thing,
Deliver from the crime of death and birth.

MY SELF. Montashigi, third of his family, fashioned it
Five hundred years ago, about it lie
Flowers from I know not what embroidery—
Heart's purple—and all these I set
For emblems of the day against the tower
Emblematical of the night,
And claim as by a soldier's right
A charter to commit the crime once more.

MY SOUL. Such fullness in that quarter overflows
And falls into the basin of the mind
That man is stricken deaf and dumb and blind,
For intellect no longer knows
Is from the *Ought,* or *Knower* from the *Known*—
That is to say, ascends to Heaven;
Only the dead can be forgiven;
But when I think of that my tongue's a stone.

II

MY SELF. A living man is blind and drinks his drop.
What matter if the ditches are impure?
What matter if I live it all once more?
Endure that toil of growing up;
The ignominy of boyhood; the distress
Of boyhood changing into man;
The unfinished man and his pain
Brought face to face with his own clumsiness;

The finished man among his enemies?—
How in the name of Heaven can he escape
That defiling and disfigured shape
The mirror of malicious eyes
Casts upon his eyes until at last
He thinks that shape must be his shape?
And what's the good of an escape
If honour find him in the wintry blast?

I am content to live it all again
And yet again, if it be life to pitch
Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
A blind man battering blind men;
Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
The folly that man does
Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud woman not kindred of his soul.

I am content to follow to its source,
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.

T. S. ELIOT *Little Gidding*

(from *Four Quartets)*

I

MIDWINTER SPRING is its own season
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.
When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.
And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,
Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire
In the dark time of the year. Between melting and freezing
The soul's sap quivers. There is no earth smell
Or smell of living thing. This is the spring time
But not in time's covenant. Now the hedgerow
Is blanched for an hour with transitory blossom

Of snow, a bloom more sudden
Than that of summer, neither budding nor fading,
Not in the scheme of generation.
Where is the summer, the unimaginable
Zero summer?

If you came this way,
Taking the route you would be likely to take
From the place you would be likely to come from,
If you came this way in may time, you would find the hedges
White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness.
It would be the same at the end of the journey,
If you came at night like a broken king,
If you came by day not knowing what you came for,
It would be the same, when you leave the rough road
And turn behind the pig-sty to the dull faÇade
And the tombstone. And what you thought you came for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
If at all. Either you had no purpose
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And is altered in fulfilment. There are other places
Which also are the world's end, some at the sea jaws,
Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city—
But this is the nearest, in place and time,
Now and in England.

If you came this way,
Taking any route:, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.
And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication

Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.
Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

II

Ash on an old man's sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.
Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended.
Dust inbreathed was a house—
The wall, the wainscot and the mouse.
The death of hope and despair,
    This is the death of air.

There are flood and drouth
Over the eyes and in the mouth,
Dead water and dead sand
Contending for the upper hand.
The parched eviscerate soil
Gapes at the vanity of toil,
Laughs without mirth.
    This is the death of earth.

Water and fire succeed
The town, the pasture and the weed.
Water and fire deride
The sacrifice that we denied.
Water and fire shall rot
The marred foundations we forgot,
Of sanctuary and choir.
    This is the death of water and fire.

In the uncertain hour before the morning
  Near the ending of interminable night
  At the recurrent end of the unending
After the dark dove with the flickering tongue
  Had passed below the horizon of his homing
  While the dead leaves still rattled on like tin

Over the asphalt where no other sound was
Between three districts whence the smoke arose
I met one walking, loitering and hurried
As if blown towards me like the metal leaves
Before the urban dawn wind unresisting.
And as I fixed upon the down-turned face
That pointed scrutiny with which we challenge
The first-met stranger in the waning dusk
I caught the sudden look of some dead master
Whom I had known, forgotten, half-recalled
Both one and many; in the brown baked features
The eyes of a familiar compound ghost
Both intimate and unidentifiable.
So I assumed a double part, and cried
And heard another's voice cry: "WhatI are *you* here?"
Although we were not. I was still the same,
Knowing myself yet being someone other—
And he a face still forming; yet the words sufficed
To compel the recognition they preceded.
And so, compliant to the common wind,
Too strange to each other for misunderstanding,
In concord at this intersection time
Of meeting nowhere, no before and after,
We trod the pavement in a dead patrol.
I said: "The wonder that I feel is easy,
Yet ease is cause of wonder. Therefore speak:
I may not comprehend, may not remember."
And he: "I am not eager to rehearse
My thought and theory which you have forgotten.
These things have served their purpose: let them be.
So with your own, and pray they be forgiven
By others, as I pray you to forgive
Both bad and good. Last season's fruit is eaten
And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail.
For last year's words belong to last year's language
And next year's words await another voice.
But, as the passage now presents no hindrance
To the spirit unappeased and peregrine
Between two worlds become much like each other,

So I find words I never thought to speak
In streets I never thought I should revisit
When I left my body on a distant shore.
Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled us
To purify the dialect of the tribe
And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight,
Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
First, the cold friction of expiring sense
Without enchantment, offering no promise
But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
As body and soul begin to fall asunder.
Second, the conscious impotence of rage
At human folly, and the laceration
Of laughter at what ceases to amuse.
And last, the rending pain of re-enactment
Of all that you have done, and been; the shame
Of motives late revealed, and the awareness
Of things ill done and done to others' harm
Which once you took for exercise of virtue.
Then fools' approval stings, and honour stains.
From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
Where you must move in measure, like a dancer."
The day was breaking. In the disfigured street
He left me, with a kind of valediction,
And faded on the blowing of the horn.

III

There are three conditions which often look alike
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:
Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment
From self and from things and from persons; and, growing between them, indifference
Which resembles the others as death resembles life,
Being between two lives—unflowering, between
The live and the dead nettle. This is the use of memory:
For liberation—not less of love but expanding

Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country
Begins as attachment to our own field of action
And comes to find that action of little importance
Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
History may be freedom. See, now they vanish,
The faces and places, with the self which, as it could, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

Sin is Behovely, but
All shall be well, and
All manner of thing shall be well.
If I think, again, of this place,
And of people, not wholly commendable,
Of no immediate kin or kindness,
But some of peculiar genius,
All touched by a common genius,
United in the strife which divided them;
If I think of a king at nightfall,
Of three men, and more, on the scaffold
And a few who died forgotten
In other places, here and abroad,
And of one who died blind and quiet,
Why should we celebrate
These dead men more than the dying?
It is not to ring the bell backward
Nor is it an incantation
To summon the spectre of a Rose.
We cannot revive old factions
We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum.
These men, and those who opposed them
And those whom they opposed
Accept the constitution of silence
And are folded in a single party.
Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us—a symbol:

A symbol perfected in death.
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
By the purification of the motive
In the ground of our beseeching.

IV

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair
   Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
   To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
   We only live, only suspire
   Consumed by either fire or fire.

V

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. And every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph. And any action
Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.

We die with the dying:
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them.
The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree
Are of equal duration. A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.
With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER *O yonge fresshe folkes*
(from *Troilus and Criseyde)*

O YONGE fresshe folkes, he or she,
In whiche ay love up-groweth with your age,
Repeireth horn fro worldly vanité!
And of your herte up-casteth the visage
To th'ilke God that after his image
You made; and thinketh all n'is but a faire
This world, that passeth sone as floures faire!

And loveth Him, the whiche that right for love
Upon a cros, our soules for to beye,
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene above;
For he n'il falsen no wight, dar I seye,
That wol his herte all hoolly on him leye!
And sin He best to love is, and most meke,
What nedeth feyned loves for to seke?

• • • •

Thou oon, and two, and three, eterne onlive,
That regnest ay in three and two and oon,
Uncircumscript, and al mayst circumscrive,
Us from visible and invisible foon
Defende! And to thy mercy, everichoon,
So make us, Jesus, for thy mercy digne,
For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne!

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES - 26

1. Discuss any poem in this book from the point of view of the idea of "opposite implication" developed in this section.
2. Compare and contrast any poem in this section with others by the same author in this book. Do you find differences in the attitudes to similar questions, or are the attitudes of acceptance, rejection, or reconciliation essentially the same? Remember that the same poet

may take diametrically opposed "positions" in different poems. This may show him as being inconsistent; if so, would the fact make him a lesser poet? It may also reveal him as an experimenter with possible attitudes toward the same problems; if so, would the fact be a sign of insincerity?

For instance, how is the attitude toward history and what can or cannot be learned from it as presented in *Gerontion* (pages 687-689) modified and developed in *Little Gidding?*

3. Do you agree that the poems by Whitman, Yeats, Thomas, and Eliot in this section have the scope and the stature we have attributed to them? Discuss any points of disagreement that have occurred to you in your reading of any one of these poems. Try to support your judgment by analyzing the poem yourself.
4. As a longer exercise, trace the development of any poet whose work has interested you especially by analyzing a few of his other best or most characteristic poems. Do you find marked changes in technique and attitude? Do these changes show a complete shift in the kinds of subjects and effects that interest him—or do they reveal new insights into old themes and greater skill in developing them?

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