
UNIT 48 DYLAN THOMAS

Structure

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48.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall discuss five poems by Dylan Thomas. After reading this unit you will be able

- a. to appreciate Dylan Thomas as a poet
- b. to enjoy the five poems interpreted for you
- c. to know his proper place in the tradition of 20th Century English Poetry.

48.1 INTRODUCTION

G.M. Hopkins was something of a precursor of modern poetry. W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were the major poets of the first quarter of this Century. W.H. Auden represented the thirties. You are acquainted with these poets Dylan Thomas and Philip Larkin represent the Forties and the fifties respectively.

In this unit we are going to learn something about the life and art of Dylan Thomas, read and interpret five of his better known poems, and acquaint ourselves with some critical discussions of his poetry. We shall see that he was in some ways a poet of transition from modernism to post-war poetry.

48.2 DYLAN THOMAS

Modernism in English poetry reflected post-war (1) disillusionment, the impact of science and industrial society and an elite cosmopolitanism. Literary movements like symbolism, imagism, classicism, surrealism, socialism etc. Contributed to its emergence. Traditional verse forms and the paraphrasable content of poetry were rejected. Consequently, new poetry characterised by free verse, missing syntactic links and recondite allusions became obscure and difficult for the common reader. But the cinema, the radio, the television and other new audio-visual means of mass communication posed a challenge to the elite tendency. Class and mass cultures clashed.

If you contrast the presentations in the two essays in this unit by Deb Ratna you will be able to understand the difference in treatment going with the subject. While the earlier essay was about certain features the present one is about four poets who came together for certain reasons and were similar in certain ways. Much of what has been said above regarding your first essay is applicable to the second and third essays as well.

52.2.2 The Second Essay

The second essay has to be written on a single *British poet* from any period in English literature. Your essay on Robert Frost or A. K. Ramanujam or Derck Walcott would not be evaluated as they are American, Indian and Caribbean poets respectively. You could write on any aspect of any poet discussed on this course. For instance :

1. The Three Influences on Chaucer's Poetry
2. Donne as a Metaphysical Poet
3. Milton as a Religious poet
4. Dryden as a Political Satyrst
5. Browning's Love Poetry

However, you could write alternatively, on any aspect of a poet not discussed on this course. For example,

1. Robert Burns as a people's poet
2. G. M. Hopkins's technical innovations
3. R. S. Thomas as a Welsh Poet or a Religious Poet
4. Siegfried Sassoon, the War Poet
5. The Poetry of Donald Davie.

In either case you may be required to read poems and critical essays not necessarily provided in the blocks. However, you could also base your essays on the readings provided in the blocks.

52.2.3 The Third Essay

Finally, you have to write an essay on a poem. It does not matter whether the poem is long or short but you must have enough to say on it in about 2500-3000 words. We have not discussed *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*, *Crow* or *The Haw Lantern* but you could discuss one of them in your third essay.

This does not mean that you cannot discuss some of the poems that have been examined on this course such as 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came' or 'Fra Lippo Lippi' or *The Waste Land*. However don't copy chunks of the text provided as lessons in the units because your examiners may penalize you for doing so and reward you for your answer in your own words to the extent possible.

Submit your essay well before the deadline given to you by the university and in the manner you are asked to do so. Follow the instructions carefully lest your essays should get lost. Perhaps it may be a good idea to send the first essay in April, second in June and the third one in August.

52.3 TERM-END EXAMINATION

In this section we will give you a model question paper for the term-end examination and then tell you about the craft of writing a reference to context question and how to score highly on it.

52.3.1 A model question paper

Essays and
Evaluations

Term End Examination
British Poetry
MEGOI

Full marks : 100

Time : 3 hours

Attempt all the 10 questions below. Each question carries 10 marks.

Explain the passages below with reference to their contexts supplying brief critical comments where necessary :

1. Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
And thereto hadde he ridden (no man ferre)
As wel in Cristendom as hethenesse,
And ever honoured for his worthinesse.

Or

For trewely ye have as merry a stevene
As any aungel hath, that is in hevене ;
Therewith ye han in musik more felinge
Than hadde Boëce, or any that can singe.

2. Ye tradefull Merchants, that with weary toyle,
do seeke most pretious things to make your gain ;
and both the Indias of their treasures spoile,
What needeth you to seeke so farre in vaine ?

Or

And whylaest she doth her dight,
Doe ye to her of ioy and solace sing,
That all the woods may answer and your eccho ring.

3. And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other fat doth rome,
It leaves, and hearkens after it,
And growes erect, at it comes home.

Or

But at my back I always hear
Times winged Chariot hurrying near :
And yonder all before us lye
Deserts of vast eternity.

4. The broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the moon whose orb
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
At evening from the top of Fesole,
Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,
Rivers or mountains, in her spotty globe.

Or

Advise if this be worth
Attempting, or to sit in darkness here
Hatching Vain empires.

5. The lovely Thais by his side
Sate like a blooming Eastern bride
In flow'r of youth and beauty's pride.

Or

Nine years ! cries he, who high in Drury-lane,
Lull'd by soft zephyrous thro' the broken pane,
Rhymes ere he wakes and prints before term ends,
Oblig'd by hunger, and request of friends :

6. 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.

Or

Thus for, O Friend ! did I, not used to make
A present joy the matter of a song
Pour forth that day my soul in measured strains
That would not be forgotten, and are here
Recorded :

Or

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.

7. The World can hear not the sweet notes that move
The sphere whose light is melody to lovers –
A wonder worthy of his rhyme.

Or

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me

8. 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 Saviour at his sermon on the mount,

Or

Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She's just my niece ... Herodias, I would say –
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off !

9. The long-legged moor-hens dive,
And hens to moor-cocks call ;
Minute by minute they live :
The stone's in the midst of all.

Or

Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and took to windward
Consider Phelbas, Who was once handsome and tall as you.

10. And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of the windfall light.

Or

When the lights come on at four
At the end of another year?
Give me your arm, old toad;
Help me down Cemetery Road.

52.3.2 The craft of writing reference to context questions

Now you know that you would be expected to explain in the final examination the meanings of ten passages - one from each block on this course with reference to their contexts. You would also supply critical comments on those passages. Each of the six activities given below will carry marks as indicated against them.

- (a) State the reference briefly i. e. the title of the work from which the extract has been taken and the name of the author. ($\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1$)
- (b) Give the context in some detail. (2)
- (c) Explain the meaning of the passage within that context. (2)
- (d) Show how it refers back and /or ahead to certain other matters in the poem. (2)
- (e) State the literary devices made use of and their relevance or otherwise. (1)
- (f) Make any other observation that you consider relevant - any reference to the poet's life or period or the history of the genre to which the poem belongs that may help us appreciate the given passage better. (2)

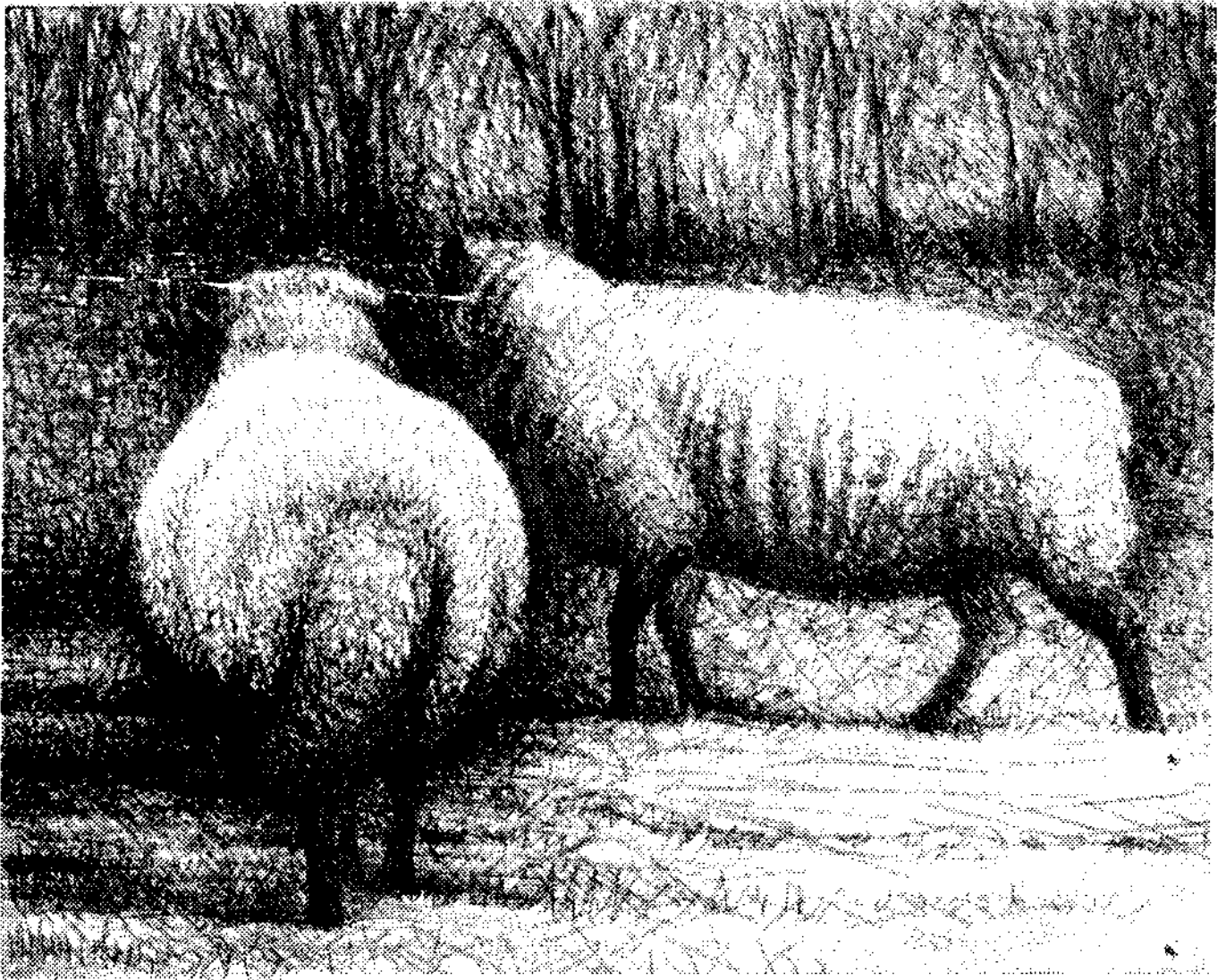
Above you have the various aspects of a reference to context question indicated explicitly. Now a simple formula would be to remember that the first three activities and the succeeding three activities are both equally important. However, the latter three will depend on how well you perform the former three activities.

Finally, you might like to know, as some of our prospective students did, about the rationale for our method of examination. Some of them had, several years ago, taken a part of their M. A. (English) examination. Others had done their B. A. with English as one of their subjects. They told me that they had written their answers of critical questions on Chaucer and Milton's 'Lycidas' without ever going through their texts. This would not be possible when you have to explain a passage from a poem with reference to its context. This was what the course writers had also said when we met to plan the outline syllabus of the course and the ways and means of transacting the curriculum planned by us. A first hand reading of the poems selected for you thus becomes very important. With this kind of preparation you may even, if required, be able to answer critical questions in an original manner.

52.4 LET'S SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the three types of essays you would be writing for your counsellors. We also told you about our reason for giving you a set of three such assignments. We also told you about the frequent pitfalls and the ways of overcoming them and pursuing your study of British Poetry most fruitfully and doing well.

Now you should be familiar with the type of question paper you should expect at the final examination and the ways and means of scoring high marks on it. Wish you success in everything you do in your life.



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CGM 201

APPENDIX

**POEMS PRESCRIBED FOR DETAILED
STUDY**

I
POEMS OF 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.

'POEM IN OCTOBER'

It was my thirteen year to heaven
 Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood
 And the mussel pooled and the heron
 Priested shore
 The morning beckon
 With water praying and call of seagull and rook
 And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed wall
 Myself to set foot

That second
 In the still sleeping town and set forth.
 My birthday began with the water –
 Birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my name
 Above the farms and the white horses
 And I rose
 In rainy autumn
 And walked abroad in a shower of all my days
 High tide and the heron dived when I took the road
 Over the border.
 And the gates
 Of the town closed as the town awoke.

A springful of larks in a rolling
 Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling
 Blackbirds and the sun of October
 Summery
 On the hill's shoulder,
 Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly
 Come in the morning where I wandered and listened
 To the rain wringing
 Wind blow cold
 In the wood faraway under me.

Pale rain over the dwindling harbour
 And over the sea wet church the size of a snail
 With its horns through mist and the castle
 Brown as owls
 But all the gardens

Of spring and summer were blooming in the tall tales
 Beyond the border and under the lark full cloud.
 There could I marvel
 My birthday
 Away but the weather turned around.

It turned away from the blithe country
 And down the other air and the blue altered sky
 Streamed again a wonder of summer
 With apples
 Pears and red currants
 And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
 Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
 Through the parables
 Of sunlight
 And the legends of the green chapels

And the twice told fields of infancy
 That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine.
 These were the woods the river and sea
 Where a boy
 In the listening
 Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy
 To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.
 And the mystery
 Sang alive
 Still in the water and singing birds.

And there could I marvel my birthday

Away but the weather turned around. And the true
 Joy of the long dead child sang burning
 In the sun.
 It was my thirtieth
 Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon
 Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.
 O may my heart's truth
 Still be sung
 On this high hill in a year's turning.
 This is a birthday poem celebrating childhood and nature in a
 manner reminiscent of Wordsworth. Another birthday poem by the
 poet is shorter but equally remarkable. It is as follows:

Twenty four years remind the tears of my eyes.
 (Bury the dead for fear that they walk to the grave in labour)
 In the groin of the natural doorway I crouched like a tailor
 Sewing a shroud for a journey
 By the light of the meat-eating sun.
 Dressed to die, the sensual strut begun,
 With my red veins full of money,
 In the final direction of the elementary town
 I advance for as long as forever is.

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
 About the lifting house and happy as the grass was green,
 The night above the dingle starry,
 Time let me hail and climb
 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
 And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
 And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
 Trail with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the windfall light.
 And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
 About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
 In the sun that is young once only,
 Time let me play and be
 Golden in the mercy of his means,
 And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
 And the sabbath rang slowly
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.
 All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
 Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
 And playing, lovely and watery
 And fire green as grass.
 And nightly under the simple stars
 As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
 All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the night-jars
 Flying with the ricks, and the horses
 Flashing into the dark
 And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
 With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
 Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
 The sky gathered again
 And the sun grew round that very day.
 So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
 In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
 Out of the whinnying green stable
 On to the fields of praise.
 And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
 Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long.
 In the sun born over and over,
 I ran my heedless ways,
 My wishes raced through the house high hay
 And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
 In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
 Before the children green and golden
 Follow him out of grace,
 Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
 Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
 In the moon that is always rising,
 Nor that riding to sleep

I should hear him fly with the high fields
 And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
 Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means.
 Time held me green and dying
 Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

NEVER until the mankind making
 Bird beast and flower
 Fathering and all humbling darkness
 Tells with silence the last light breaking
 And the still hour
 Is come of the sea tumbling in harness

And I must enter again the round
 Zion of the water bead
 And the synagogue of the ear of corn
 Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
 Or sow my salt seed
 In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn

The majesty and burning of the child's death.
 I shall not murder
 The mankind of her going with a grave truth
 Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
 With any further
 Elegy of innocence and youth.

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter.
 Robed in the long friends.
 The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
 Secret by the unmourning water
 Of the riding Thames.
 After the first death, there is no other.

FERN HILL

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
 About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
 The night above the dingle starry,
 Time let me hail and climb
 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
 And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
 And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
 Trail with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the windfall light.
 And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
 About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
 In the sun that is young once only,
 Time let me play and be
 Golden in the mercy of his means,
 And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
 Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
 And the sabbath rang slowly
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.
 All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
 Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air.
 And playing, lovely and watery
 And fire green as grass.
 And nightly under the simple stars
 As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,

Dylan Thomas was a product of this clash or tension. His love for words and language was inspired by nursery-rhymes, folk tales, ballads, hymns, the rhythms of the Bible, Blake's Songs of Innocence, and Shakespeare. With his love of rhetoric he played the game of language with a romantic sincerity, a dazzling brilliance, and a baffling theatricality, which just fell short of achieving the vision of the mature poet which is focused on life within and beyond language.

Like Lord Byron and D. H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas had become a legendary figure in his lifetime. He made poetry a performing art. His poetry was lyrical and sometimes enigmatic in a challenging manner about sex, death and religion.

The most conscious craftsman after Eliot, he allowed a dream-like association of images, many of them taken from childhood memories, to form the connecting thread on which a poem was to be hung. His innovations, like Hopkins's, are verbal and textural more than structural.

But his pride in his talent was mitigated by his sense of humour and irony. He loved acting and showing off. A celebrated broadcaster and a fascinating reader of poems, he was a forerunner of the Angry young men of the fifties. He was believed to have led a guerrilla attack on the classicism of Eliot and Auden and on the intellectual dominance of London, Oxford Cambridge and Harvard. His romantic revolt unleashed a coarseness and richness of language, a revelling in comedy and bawdry, an affirmation of the holy myths rather than a snivelling at God, and an orgy of the irrational. He celebrates life in his poetry. In the famous Author's Prologue to his Collected Poems, he said that he wrote "for the love of man and in praise of God"

However, his status as a poet remained controversial for about two decades after his death. Donald Davie accused him of abandoning the task of articulation and indulging in pseudo-syntax. C. H. Sisson found the obscurity of his poetry a willed effect and described his supposed lack of development as boring. According to him, Thomas is historically important as the prototype of much of the literary pretensions of the 1940s. David Holbrook also noticed a disabling amorality in his poetry leading towards the trivial and ultimately the inarticulate. His verbal impotence reflected his failure to grow up and accept adult potency. But John Wain argued that the open emotionalism, the large verbal gestures which seemed mere rant, the rapt pleasure in elaborate craftsmanship and above all the bardic tone of Thomas's poetry derived from his Welshness. Louis Simpson preferred this bardic tone to the dry discourse of later Auden. Thomas's physicality, his musical sounds and visual imagery, and his contempt for respectability magnetised American poetry leading to the legendary success of Ginsberg's reading of Howl in San Francisco in 1955. C.B.Cox maintained: "Thomas's rhetoric drives forward, often in anguish and rage, in a desperate attempt to overcome the fact of personal extinction. His bardic gestures are deliberate acts of defiance". Dylan Thomas passionately wanted to believe "in the magic of this burning and bewildering universe, in the meaning and the power of symbols, in the miracle of myself and of all mortals, in the divinity that is so near us and so longing to be nearer, in the staggering, bloody, starry wonder of the sky I can see above and the sky I can think of below".

48.2.1 A Brief Life Sketch

Dylan Marlais Thomas (1914-53) was born on 27th October, 1914 at Swansea in South Wales where his father, D. J. Thomas was a teacher of English in Swansea grammar school. Fern Hill and Poem in October, two of his famous poems, suggest that his childhood was happy. The sea and the woods provided a pastoral setting to his mind and imagination. He wrote:

I was born in a large Welsh industrial town at the beginning of the great war : an ugly, lovely town (or so it was, and is, to me), crawling strawling, slummed, unplanned, jarry villa'd, and smug-suburbed by the side of a long and splendid curving shore where truant boys and anonymous old men, in the tatters and hang

All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the night-jars
 Flying with the ricks, and the horses
 Flashing into the dark.
 And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
 With the dew, came back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
 Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
 The sky gathered again
 And the sun grew round that very day.
 So it must have been after the birth of the simple light
 In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
 Out of the whinnying green stable
 On to the fields of praise.
 And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
 Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
 In the sun born over and over,
 I ran my heedless ways,
 My wishes raced through the house high hay
 And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
 In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
 Before the children green and golden
 Follow him out of grace,
 Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would like me
 Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
 In the moon that is always rising,
 Nor that riding to sleep
 I should hear him fly with the high fields
 And wake to the farm forever field from the childless land.
 Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
 Time held me green and dying
 Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

'A REFUSAL TO MOURN THE DEATH, BY FIRE, OF A CHILD IN LONDON'

Never until the mankind making
 Bird beast and flower
 Fathering and all humbling darkness
 Tells with silence the last light breaking
 And the still hour
 Is come of the sea tumbling in harness.

And I must enter again the round
 Zion of the water bead
 And the synagogue of the ear of corn
 Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
 Or sow my salt seed
 In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn.

The majesty and burning of the child's death.
 I shall not murder
 The mankind of her going with a grave truth
 Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
 With any further
 Elegy of innocence and youth.

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
 Robed in the long friends,
 The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
 Secret by the unmourning water
 Of the riding Thames.
 After the first death, there is no other.

II
POEMS OF PHILIP LARKIN

I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER¹

Coming up England by a different line
For once, early in the cold new year,
We stopped, and, watching men with number-plates
Sprint down the platform to familiar gates,
'Why, Coventry!' I exclaimed, 'I was born here.' 5

I leant far out, and squinted for a sign
That this was still the town that had been 'mine'
So long, but found I wasn't even clear
Which side was which. From where those cycle-crates
Were standing, had we annually departed 10

For all those family hols?... A whistle went:
Things moved. I sat back, staring at my boots.
'Was that,' my friend smiled, 'where you "have your roots"?'
No, only where my childhood was unspent.
I wanted to retort, just where I started: 15

By now I've got the whole place clearly charted.
Our garden, first: where I did not invent
Blinding theologies of flowers and fruits,
And wasn't spoken to by an old hat.
And here we have that splendid family 20

I never ran to when I got depressed,
The boys all biceps and the girls all chest.
Their comic Ford, their farm where I could be
'Really myself'. I'll show you, come to that.
The bracken where I never trembling sat, 25

Determined to go through with it, where she
Lay back, and 'all became a burning mist'.
And, in those offices, my doggerel
Was not set up in blunt ten-point, nor read
By a distinguished cousin of the mayor, 30

Who didn't call and tell my father *There*
Before us, had we the gift to see ahead --
'You look as if you wished the place in Hell.'
My friend said, 'judging from your face.' 'Oh well,
I suppose it's not the place's fault.' I said. 35

'Nothing, like something, happens anywhere.'

¹ This is an unconventional poem on childhood. The title ironically refers to Thomas Hood's account of an idyllic childhood in "Past and Present." Larkin remembers his childhood as a drab, uneventful period.

TOADS²

Why should I let the toad *work*
Squat on my life?
Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork
And drive the brute off?

Six days of the week it soils
With its sickening poison --
Just for paying a few bills!
That's out of proportion.

Lots of folk live on their wits:
Lecturers, lispers,
Losels,³ loblolly-men,⁴ louts --
They don't end as paupers;

Lots of folks live up lanes
With fires in a bucket,
Eat windfalls and tinned sardines --
They seem to like it.

Their nippers have got bare feet,
Their unspeakable wives
Are skinny as whippets -- and yet
No one actually *starves*.

Ah, were I courageous enough
To shout *Stuff your pension!*
But I know, all too well, that's the stuff
That dreams are made on.⁵

For something sufficiently toad-like
Squats in me, too;
Its hunkers are heavy as hard luck,
And cold as snow,

And will never allow me to blamey
My way to getting
The fame and the girl and the money
All at one sitting.

I don't say, one bodies the other
One's spiritual truth:
But I do say it's hard to lose either,
When you have both.

² The subject of "Toads" and "Toads Revisited" is the necessity and value of work, even of the humdrum kind. Life, for a majority of the people, is without any surprises, so why should one romanticize it?

³ Worthless persons.

⁴ Useless men.

⁵ An ironic reference to Shakespeare's line from The Tempest: the "stuff / That dreams are made on."

TOADS REVISITED

Walking round in the park Should feel better than work: The lake, the sunshine, The grass to lie on.	
Blurred playground noises Beyond black-stockinged nurses -- Not a bad place to be -- Yet it doesn't suit me,	5
Being one of the men You meet of an afternoon: Palsied old step-takers. Hare-eyed clerks with the jitters.	10
Waxed-fleshed out-patients Still vague from accidents, And characters in long coats ⁶ Deep in the litter-baskets --	15
All dodging the toad work By being stupid or weak. Think of being them! Hearing the hours chime,	20
Watching the bread delivered, The sun by clouds covered, The children going home: Think of being them,	
Turning over their failures By some bed of lobelias. Nowhere to go but indoors, No friends but empty chairs --	25
No, give me my in-tray, My loaf-haired secretary, My shall-I-keep-the-call-in-Sir: What else can I answer,	30
When the lights come on at four At the end of another year? Give me your arm, old toad, Help me down Cemetery Road.	35

MR BLEANEY

⁷This was Mr Bleaney's room.⁸ He stayed
The whole time he was at the Bodies,⁹ till
They moved him. Flowered curtains, thin and frayed,
Fall to within five inches of the sill,

Tramps, rag-pickers.

ll. 1-3. 6-7: This is Mr Bleaney's landlady speaking.

⁶ Mr Bleaney's character is deduced from the details of the room he lived in.

⁷ Larkin to Alan Bold in a letter dated 16 August, 1972: "I was brought up in Coventry, a great car-making town, and there used to be works there which were referred to rather by what they produced than by the names of the makers. 'The Bodies' was a fictitious example of this.

Whose window shows a strip of building land, 5
 Tussocky, littered. Mr Bleaney took
 My bit of garden properly in hand.
 Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook
 Behind the door, no room for books or bags --
 'I'll take it.' So it happens that I lie 10
 Where Mr Bleaney lay, and stub my fags
 On the same saucer-souvenir, and try
 Stuffing my ears with cotton-wool, to drown
 The jabbering set¹⁰ he egged her on to buy.
 I know his habits -- what time he came down, 15
 His preference for sauce to gravy, why
 He kept on plugging at the four aways --
 Likewise their yearly frame:¹¹ the Frinton folk
 Who put him up for summer holidays,
 And Christmas at his sister's house in Stoke, 20
 But if he stood and watched the frigid wind
 Tossling the clouds, lay on the fusty bed
 Telling himself that this was home, and grinned,
 And shivered, without shaking off the dread
 That how we live measures our own nature, 25
 And at his age having no more to show
 Than one hired box¹² should make him pretty sure
 He warranted no better, I don't know.¹³

CHURCH GOING¹⁴

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
 I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
 Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
 And little books: sprawlings of flowers, cut
 For Sunday, brownish now: some brass and stuff 5
 Up at the holy end: the small neat organ:
 And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
 Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
 My cycle-clips in awkward reverence.
 Move forward, run my hand around the font, 10
 From where I stand, the roof looks almost new --
 Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
 Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
 Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
 'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant. 15
 The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
 I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,¹⁵
 Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

¹⁰ Radio set.

¹¹ His annual routine.

¹² Coffin.

¹³ Mr Bleaney, when compared with the speaker, seems to have enjoyed a more meaningful life.

¹⁴ A pun on the word "going" which may be interpreted as either a visit to the church or the decline of churches.

¹⁵ The poem was written in Ireland.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do.
 And always end much at a loss like this, 20
 Wondering what to look for: wondering, too,
 When churches fall completely out of use
 What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
 A few cathedrals chronically on show,
 Their parchment, plate and pyx¹⁶ in locked cases, 25
 And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
 Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

 Or, after dark, will dubious women come
 To make their children touch a particular stone:
 Pick simples¹⁷ for a cancer: or on some 30
 Advised night see walking a dead one?
 Power of some sort or other will go on
 In games, in riddles, seemingly at random:
 But superstition, like belief, must die,
 And what remains when disbelief has gone? 35
 Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

 A shape less recognizable each week,
 A purpose more obscure. I wonder who
 Will be the last, the very last, to seek
 This place for what it was: one of the crew 40
 That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts¹⁸ were?
 Some ruin-bibber,¹⁹ randy²⁰ for antique,
 Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
 Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?²¹
 Or will he be my representative, 45

 Bored, uninformed,²² knowing the ghostly silt²³
 Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
 Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
 So long and equably what since is found
 Only in separation -- marriage, and birth, 50
 And death, and thoughts of these -- for which it was built
 This special shell? For, though I've no idea
 What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
 It pleases me to stand in silence here:

 A serious house on serious earth it is, 55
 In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,²⁴
 Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
 And that much never can be obsolete,
 Since someone will forever be surprising
 A hunger in himself to be more serious, 60
 And gravitating with it to this ground,
 Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
 If only that so many dead lie around.

16 Box which holds the communion wafers.

17 Remedies.

18 Gallery above the choir.

19 Someone obsessed with ruins.

20 Lusting for.

21 Christmas celebrations of the past.

22 In reality the speaker is neither bored nor uninformed.

23 Religious associations.

24 Needs are fulfilled.

THE WHITSUN²⁵ WEDDINGS

That Whitsun, I was late getting away:
 Not till about
 One-twenty on the sunlit Saturday
 Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out.
 All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense 5
 Of being in a hurry gone. We ran
 Behind the backs of houses, crossed a street
 Of blinding windscreens, smelt the fish-dock: thence
 The river's level drifting breadth began,
 Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet. 10

All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept
 For miles inland.
 A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.
 Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and
 Canals with floatings of industrial froth: 15
 A hothouse flashed uniquely: hedges dipped
 And rose: and now and then a smell of grass
 Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth
 Until the next town, new and nondescript.
 Approached with acres of dismantled cars. 20

At first, I didn't notice what a noise
 The weddings made
 Each station that we stopped at: sun destroys
 The interest of what's happening in the shade.
 And down the long cool platforms whoops and skirls²⁶ 25
 I took for porters-larking with the males.
 And went on reading. Once we started, though,
 We passed them, grinning and pomaded, girls
 In parodies of fashion, heels and veils.
 All posed irresolutely, watching us go. 30

As if out on the end of an event
 Waving goodbye
 To something that survived it. Struck, I leant
 More promptly out next time, more curiously,
 And saw it all again in different terms: 35
 The fathers with broad belts under their suits
 And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;
 An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms.
 The nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes.
 The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres that 40

Marked off the girls unreally from the rest.
 Yes, from cafés
 And banquet-halls up yards, and bunting-dressed
 Coach-party annexes, the wedding-days
 Were coming to an end. All down the line 45
 Fresh couples climbed aboard: the rest stood round.
 The last confetti and advice were thrown,
 And, as we moved, each face seemed to define
 Just what it saw departing: children frowned
 At something dull: fathers had never known 50

25 Whitsunday, the seventh Sunday after Easter.,

26 Shrieks.

Success so hugely and wholly farcical;
 The women shared
 The secret like a happy funeral,
 While girls, gripping their handbags tighter, stared
 At a religious wounding. Free at last. 55
 And loaded with the sum of all they saw,
 We hurried towards London, shuffling gout of steam.
 Now fields were building-plots, and poplars cast
 Long shadows over major roads, and for
 Some fifty minutes, that in time would seem 60

Just long enough to settle hats and say
I nearly died.
 A dozen marriages got under way.
 They watched the landscape, sitting side by side
 -- An Odcon²⁷ went past, a cooling tower. 65
 And someone running up to bowl -- and none
 Thought of the others they would never meet
 Or how their lives would all contain this hour.
 I thought of London spread out in the sun,
 Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat: 70

There we were aimed. And as we raced across
 Bright knots of rail
 Past standing Pullmans,²⁸ walls of blackened moss
 Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail
 Travelling coincidence; and what it held 75
 Stood ready to be loosed with all the power
 That being changed can give. We slowed again,
 And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
 A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
 Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain. 80

AT GRASS²⁹

The eye can hardly pick them out
 From the cold shade they shelter in,
 Till wind distresses tail and mane;
 Then one crops grass, and moves about
 - The other seeming to look on -- 5
 And stands anonymous again.

Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps
 Two dozen distances sufficed
 To fable them: faint afternoons
 Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps, 10
 Whereby their names were artficed
 To inlay faded, classic Junes --

²⁷ A movie-house.

²⁸ Railcars.

²⁹ A poem about race-horses in old age. Their days of glory over, they slip into a life of anonymity with no regret. According to David Timms, Larkin was inspired by a newsreel film on Brown Jack, the race-horse, in his retirement.

Silks at the start: against the sky
Numbers and parasols: outside,
Squadrons of empty cars, and heat, 15
And littered grass: then the long cry
Hanging unhusked till it subside
To stop-press columns on the street.

Do memories plague their ears like flies?
They shake their heads. Dusk brims the shadows. 20
Summer by summer all stole away.
The starting gates, the crowds and cries --
All but the unmolested meadows.
Almanacked, their names live: they

Have slipped their names, and stand at ease. 25
Or gallop for what must be joy,
And not a fieldglass sees them home,
Or curious stop-watch prophecies:
Only the groom, and the groom's boy,
With brides in the evening come. 30

III
POEMS OF SYLVIA PLATH

THE COLOSSUS²

I shall never get you put together entirely,
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.
Mule-bray, pig-grunt and bawdy cackles
Proceed from your great lips.³⁰
It's worse than a barnyard. 5

Perhaps you consider yourself an oracle.
Mouthpiece of the dead, or of some god or other.
Thirty years now I have labored
To dredge the silt from your throat.
I am none the wiser. 10

Scaling little ladders with gluepots and pails of Lysol
I crawl like an ant in mourning
Over the weedy acres of your brow
To mend the immense skull-plates and clear
The bald, white tumuli³¹ of your eyes. 15

A blue sky out of the Oresteia³²
Arches above us. O father, all by yourself
You are pithy and historical as the Roman Forum.³³
I open my lunch on a hill of black cypress.
Your fluted³⁴ bones and acanthine³⁵ hair are littered 20

In their old anarchy to the horizon-line.
It would take more than a lightning-stroke
To create such a ruin.
Nights, I squat in the cornucopia³⁶
Of your left ear, out of the wind, 25

Counting the red stars and those of plum-color.
The sun rises under the pillar of your tongue.
My hours are married to shadow.
No longer do I listen for the scrape of a keel
On the blank stones of the landing.³⁷ 30

³⁰ The imagery brings to mind Gulliver in the land of Lilliputians.

³¹ Mound, swelling.

³² A Greek tragedy by Aeschylus. Elektra and her brother, Orestes, avenge the murder of their father, Agamemnon, by their mother, Clytemnestra.

³³ The Colosseum (amphitheatre) at Rome.

³⁴ Hollow.

³⁵ Prickly.

³⁶ Horn of plenty (in Greek mythology) belonging to the goat that suckled Jupiter.

³⁷ A possible reference to the mythical ship of Orestes which would never land again.

overs of a hundred charity suits, beach – combed, idled and paddled, watched the dock bound boats, and threw stones into the sea for barking, outcast dogs.

Thomas



Dylan Thomas

Notice, incidentally, the infatuation with words, and the stylistic peculiarity of fondness for epithets and compounds.

At the age of 17 he began writing and joined the staff of South Wales Evening Post as a reporter. He wrote mainly on literary subjects and published poems as well. In 1933 he wrote the poem (The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower) which, published in 1934, won him instant fame.

DADDY

You do not do, you do not do
 Any more, black shoe³⁸
 In which I have lived like a foot
 For thirty years, poor and white,
 Barely daring to breathe or Achoo. 5

Daddy, I have had killed you.
 You died before I had time --
 Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,
 Ghastly statue with one grey toe
 Big as a Frisco seal 10

And a head in the freakish Atlantic
 Where it pours bean green over blue
 In the waters off beautiful Nauset.
 I used to pray to recover you.
 Ach, du.³⁹ 15

In the German tongue, in the Polish town⁴⁰
 Scraped flat by the roller
 Of wars, wars, wars,
 But the name of the town is common.
 My Polack friend 20

Says there are a dozen or two.
 So I never could tell where you
 Put your foot, your root,
 I never could talk to you.
 The tongue stuck in my jaw. 25

It stuck in a barbed wire snare.
 Ich, ich, ich, ich,⁴¹
 I could hardly speak.
 I thought every German was you.
 And the language obscene 30

An engine, an engine
 Chuffing me off like a Jew.
 A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.⁴²
 I began to talk like a jew.
 I think I may well be a Jew. 35

The snows of Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
 Are not very pure or true.
 With my gypsy ancestress and my weird luck
 And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
 I may be a bit of a Jew. 40

³⁸ These two lines parody the nursery rhyme: "There was an old woman who lived in a shoe / She had so many children that she didn't know what to do."

³⁹ German: "Ah, you!"

⁴⁰ Sylvia Plath's father, Otto Plath, was born in Grabow, Poland.

⁴¹ German: "I."

⁴² Concentration camps for the Jews.

I have always been scared of you,
 With your Luftwaffe,⁴³ your gobbledygoo.
 And your neat mustache
 And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
 Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You -- 45

Not God but a swastika
 So black no sky could squeak through.
 Every woman adores a Fascist,
 The boot in the face, the brute
 Brute heart of a brute like you. 50

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
 In the picture I have of you,
 A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
 But no less a devil for that, no not
 Any less the black man⁴⁴ who 55

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
 I was ten when they buried you.
 At twenty I tried to die
 And get back, back, back to you.⁴⁵
 I thought even the bones would do. 60

But they pulled me out of the sack,
 And they stuck me together with glue.
 And then I knew what to do.
 I made a model of you,
 A man in black with a Meinkampf⁴⁶ look 65

And a love of the rack and the screw.
 And I said I do, I do.
 So daddy, I'm finally through.
 The black telephone's off at the root,
 The voices just can't worm through. 70

If I've killed one man, I've killed two --
 The vampire who said he was you
 And drank my blood for a year,
 Seven years, if you want to know.
 Daddy, you can lie back now. 75

There's a stake in your fat black heart
 And the villagers never liked you.
 They are dancing and stamping on you.
 They always *knew* it was you.
 Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.⁴⁷ 80

⁴³ German airforce.

⁴⁴ The poet's husband who becomes a surrogate father.

⁴⁵ A reference to the poet's earlier suicide attempt.

⁴⁶ The title of Adolf Hitler's book.

⁴⁷ This stanza enacts a ritual of exorcism to shake off the father's spirit.

LADY LAZARUS⁴⁸

I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it --

A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade.⁴⁹
My right foot

5

A paperweight,
My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin
O my enemy.
Do I terrify? --

10

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?
The sour breath
Will vanish in a day.

15

Soon, soon the flesh
The grave cave ate will be
At home on me

And I a smiling woman.
I am only thirty.
And like a cat I have nine times to die.

20

This is Number Three.
What a trash
To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments.
The peanut-crunching crowd
Shoves in to see

25

Them unwrap me hand and foot --
The big strip tease.
Gentlemen, ladies

30

These are my hands
My knees.
I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.
The first time it happened I was ten.
It was an accident.

35

⁴⁸ John 11:14. Lazarus was raised from the dead by Christ. Plath on the poem: "The speaker is a woman who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn. The only trouble is she has to die first. She is the Phoenix, the libertarian spirit, what you will. She is also a good, plain, very resourceful woman."

⁴⁹ The Nazis were said to make lampshades out of the skin of Jews.

The second time I meant
 To last it out and not come back at all.
 I rocked shut

As a scashell. 40
 They had to call and call
 And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.

Dying
 Is an art, like everything else.
 I do it exceptionally well. 45
 I do it so it feels like hell.
 I do it so it feels real.
 I guess you could say I've a call.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.
 It's easy enough to do it and stay put. 50
 It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day
 To the same place, same face, the same brute
 Amused shout:

"A miracle!" 55
 That knocks me out.
 There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
 For the hearing of my heart --
 It really goes. 60

And there is a charge, a very large charge
 For a word or a touch
 Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.
 So, so, Herr Doktor.
 So, Herr Enemy.⁵⁰ 65

I am your opus,
 I am your valuable,
 The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek. 70
 I turn and burn.
 Do not think I underestimate your great concern.

Ash, ash --
 You poke and stir.
 Flesh, bone, there is nothing there -- 75

A cake of soap,
 A wedding ring,
 A gold filling.

⁵⁰ The oppressors.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer Beware Beware.	80
Out of the ash I rise with my red hair And I eat men like air.	
PURDAH⁵¹	
Jade ⁵² -- Stone of the side . The agonized	
Side of green Adam, I Smile, cross-legged, Enigmatical,	5
Shifting my clarities. So valuable! How the sun polishes this shoulder!	
And should The moon, my Indefatigable cousin	10
Rise, with her cancerous pallors. Dragging trees -- Little bushy polyps.	15
Little nets, My visibilities hide. I gleam like a mirror. ⁵³	
At this facet the bridegroom arrives Lord of the mirrors! It is himself he guides	20
In among these silk Screens, these rustling appurtenances. ⁵⁴ I breathe, and the mouth	
Veil stirs its curtain My eye Veil is	25
A concatenation ⁵⁵ of rainbows. I am his. Even in his	30

⁵¹ The bridal veil which may be lifted only by the "master" (here the oppressor).

⁵² The poem was inspired by the jade figurine of a woman.

⁵³ Like a mirror, she reflects her master's glory without revealing herself.

⁵⁴ Instruments, accessories.

⁵⁵ Interconnected; linked together like a chain.

Absence, I
Resolve in my
Sheath of impossibles,

Priceless and quiet
Among these parakeets, macaws!
O chatters⁵⁶ 35

Attendants of the eyelash!
I shall unloose
One feather, like the peacock.

Attendants of the lip!
I shall unloose 40
One note

Shattering
The chandelier
Of air that all day flies 45

Its crystals
A million ignorants.
Attendants!

Attendants!
And at his next step 50
I shall unloose

I shall unloose --
From the small jeweled
Doll he guards like a heart --

The lioness, 55
The shriek in the bath,
The cloak of holes.⁵⁷

ARIEL⁵⁸

Stasis in darkness.
Then the substanceless blue
Pour of tor⁵⁹ and distances.

God's lioness,⁶⁰
How one we grow, 5
Pivot of heels and knees! -- The farrow

Splits and passes, sister to
The brown arc
Of the neck I cannot catch,

⁵⁶ This is the turning point of the poem, marking the transformation of the veiled bride into a lioness.

⁵⁷ A reference to Agamemnon's murder by Clytemnestra.

⁵⁸ The spirit in Shakespeare's The Tempest. Ariel was also the name of Plath's horse.

⁵⁹ Rocky terrain.

⁶⁰ Biblical reference: Isaiah 29: 1-3, 5-7. Ariel is also Jerusalem, the city where David lived.

Texts

Nigger-eye Berries cast dark Hooks --	10
Black sweet blood mouthfuls, Shadows. Something else	15
Hauls me through air -- Thighs, hair; Flakes from my heels.	
White Godiva, I unpeel -- Dead hands, dead stringencies.	20
And now I Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas. The child's cry	
Melts in the wall. And I Am the arrow,	25
The dew that flies Suicidal, at one with the drive Into the red	30
Eye, the cauldron of morning.	

**SUPPLEMENTARY
READINGS**

I
WHAT TO SAY ABOUT A POEM
W. K. WIMSATT

What to say about a poem. How to say something special about a poem, different from what is said by the ordinary reader, different quite likely from what would be said by the poet himself. Our professional preoccupation as teachers, scholars, critics, sometimes conceals from us the fact that our kind of interest in poems is after all a very special thing – a vocational or shop interest, somewhat strained perhaps at moments, even somewhat uncouth. Poems, a cultivated person might suppose, are made to be read and enjoyed. If I read a poem and enjoy it, why should I then proceed to dwell on it as an object about which something deliberate and elaborate has to be said – unless in a surreptitious effort to borrow or emulate some of the self-expression enjoyed by the poet? What a critic or a teacher does with a poem is not, certainly, the main thing the poem is intended for or fit for. The poem is not the special property of these professionals. What they do with it in any deeper sense, what their purpose and methods are, we had better not try to say too quickly. It is the problem of this essay.

II

Many centuries of literary theory have equipped us with a large array of now more or less standard topics, handles of labels, for the analysis of poems. We are disciplined to speak of the *theme* (the most abstractive and assertive kind of meaning which the poem has), and we wish to distinguish this from its realization or more concrete definition in various expressive features conceived as denser, more real, than theme, and yet translucent with meaning. We speak of *diction*, *imagery*, *metaphor*, *symbol* (above all symbol); we sometimes resurrect such older terms as *personification*, *allegory*, *fable*. And in our most ambitious, or in our vaguer and more portentous moments, we sum up such terms and magnify them into the name of *myth*. At the same time, we speak of the movement of the poem in time, its *rhythm*, and more precisely its *metre*, its *lines*, *stanzas* *rhymes*, *alliteration* and *assonance*, its echoes, turns, agnominations [plays on words], and puns, and also the more directly imitative qualities of its sound, the *onomatopoeia*, representative meter, and sound symbolism, the orchestration, and all that. Sound tangles with meaning. A whole poem has a *pattern*, both of meaning and of sound, interacting. It is an act of speech and hence a *dramatization* of a meaning; it is set in a landscape or a *décor*, an *atmosphere*, a world, a place full of flora and fauna, constellations, furniture, accoutrements, all 'symbolic' of course. It is spoken by some person, fictitious, or fictive, if we rightly conceive him, a *persona*, a mask, a mouthpiece, and hence it has a point of view and a variety of emotive endowments, an attitude towards its material, and towards the speaker himself, a self-consciousness, and a *tone* of voice towards you and me the readers or *audience*. And often we too, if we rightly conceive ourselves, are a part of the fiction of the poem. Or at least we read only over the shoulder of some person or group that is the immediate and fictive audience. The poem is furthermore (especially if we are historical critics) a poem of a certain type or *genre* (tragic, comic, epic, elegiac, satiric, or the like) and this conception implies certain rules, a tradition, a decorum, convention, or expectancy. The genre and its aspects are in truth a part of the language of the sophisticated poet, a backdrop for his gestures, a sounding board against which he plays off his effects. Often enough, of perhaps always, the exquisite poem presents a sort of finely blended or dramatically structured opposition of attitudes and of the meanings which lie behind them – their *objective correlatives*. Hence the poem has *tension* (stress and distress), it lives in conflict; its materials are warped, its diction strained, dislocated, Catachresis [improper use of words] is only normal. That is to say, the poem is metaphoric. The metaphoric quality of the meaning turns out to be the inevitable counterpart of the mixed feelings. Sometimes this situation is so far developed as to merit the name of *paradoxical ambiguities*.

ironic. The poem is subtle, elusive, tough, *witty*. Always it is an indirect stratagem of its finest or deepest meaning.

Wimsatt

I have been running over some of the main terms of our inherited grammar of criticism and attempting just a hint at some of their relationships - the pattern, if not of the poem, at least of criticism itself. I hope it is evident that I am in no sense unfriendly to this grammar of criticism or to any one of the terms of which it is composed. I am all in favour of a grammar of criticism and of our making it as sober, tight, accurate, and technically useful as may be possible. The grammar, for instance, must be especially firm in the areas of syntax and prosody, where the poet himself has, at various times in various languages and poetic traditions, been compelled to be, or has allowed himself to be, most tight and technical. It is important, for instance, to know that *Paradise Lost* is written in iambic pentameter, and if we let ourselves be pushed around at the whim of random musical or linguistic theory into finding three, four, or seven or eight metrical beats in a Miltonic line of blank verse, we are making sad nonsense of literary history and of what this particular poet did and said. An analogous difficulty would be the enterprise of talking about the poet John Donne without the use of any such terms at all as paradox, metaphysical wit, irony.

On the other hand, grammar is grammar. And I will confess to a decided opinion that the kind of technical and quasi-technical matters which I have been naming ought to be discussed mainly at the level of generalization - they ought to be taken mainly as the preliminaries, the tuning-up exercises, the calisthenics of criticism. An essay on the theme of metaphor, of symbol, of lyrical dramatics, of irony, of metre, of rhyme or pun, is one sort of thing - it is likely to be extremely interesting and useful. But an interpretation or appreciation of a specific poem by the means mainly of an appeal to categories expressed by such terms is another sort of thing - this is likely in my opinion to be somewhat less interesting.

The purpose of any poem cannot be simply to be a work of art, to be artificial, or to embody devices of art. A critic or appreciator of a poem ought scarcely to be conceived as a person who has a commitment to go into the poem and bring out trophies under any of the grammatical heads, or to locate and award credits for such technicalities - for symbols, for ironies, for metre. These and similar terms will likely enough be useful in the course of the critic's going into and coming out of a given poem. But that is a different thing. To draw a crude analogy: It would be an awkward procedure to introduce one human being to another (one of our friends to another) with allusions to commonplaces of his anatomy, or labels of his race, creed, or type of neurosis. The analogy, as I have said, is crude. Poems are not persons. Still there may be a resemblance here sufficient to give us ground for reflection.