

Smarr Publishers  
English  
for  
Classical Studies



Studies in Poetry  
by  
Robert W. Watson

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## Introduction

THE first book of this series, *Moping Melancholy Mad: An Introduction to Poetry*, gives the student a cursory view about the major elements that comprise poetry. This book will go into a little more detail towards the appreciation of poetry. The student will be given more examples and exercises to help overthrow some misconceptions regarding this “stupid stuff” called poetry. In these pages, I will attempt to help eliminate the biggest cause of many students’ frustration with poetry—that is, poetry is too difficult to understand.

Hopefully, from your previous studies, you have already learned that poetry is not necessarily mysterious. You have been shown some things to look for when reading and analyzing poetry. However, the emphasis in this book will be simply this: to understand poetry—and in order to understand poetry well, you *must* read carefully and thoughtfully. Each chapter in this book has only a few selections so that you may read the poems several times. You cannot successfully understand a poem if you read it like you would a magazine. Look at the choice of words carefully. Why did the poet choose this word rather than another? What is the overall purpose of the poem? Who is the narrator? The answer to these questions will help you along to understanding the poem.

Remember, poetry is art and art is to delight. Do not merely read the poems as a mental exercise; let your soul experience the poetry.

ROBERT W. WATSON



## Chapter One

## Understanding Literature and Poetry

THE following essay is written by Arlo Bates. Professor Bates was an English professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Among his many works were some ghost stories, the most famous being “The Intoxicated Ghost.” However, Bates reputation as a writer centers on his ability to take difficult ideas and express them very simply. His lectures regarding teaching are second to none. Below is reproduced a chapter from his book, *Talks on the Teaching of Literature*.

What I like about Bates is that while his audience is teachers, he writes from a student’s view point. With this essay, Bates unlocks a few mysteries that have puzzled students (and, alas! teachers) regarding the proper role of literature in our lives.

## Foundations of Work

From *Talks on the Teaching of Literature*

Arlo Bates

THE foundation of any understanding or appreciation of literature is manifestly the power of reading it intelligently. A truth so obvious might seem to be taken for granted and to need no saying; but any one who has dealt with entrance examination papers is aware how many students get to the close of their high-school life without having acquired the power of reading with anything even approaching intelligence. Primary as it may sound, I cannot help emphasizing as the foundation of all study of literature the training of students in reading, pure and simple.

The practical value of simple reading aloud seems to me to have been too often overlooked by teachers of literature. Teachers read to their pupils, and this is or should be of great importance; but the thing of which I am now speaking is the reading of the students to the teacher and to the class. In the first place a student cannot read aloud without making evident the degree of his intelligent comprehension of what he is reading. He must show how much he understands and how he understands it.

The odd freaks in misinterpretation which come out in the reading of pupils are often discouraging enough, but they are amusing and enlightening. Any teacher can furnish absurd illustrations, and it is not safe to assume of even apparently simple passages that the child understands them until he has proved it by intelligent reading aloud. The attention which oral reading is at present receiving is one of the encouraging signs of the times, and cannot but do much to forward the work of the teacher of literature.

Of so much importance is it, however, that the first impression of a class be good, that the instructor must be sure either to find a reasonably good reader among the pupils for the first rendering or must give it himself. In plays this is hardly wise or practicable; but here the parts are easily assigned beforehand, and the pride of the students made a help in securing good results. In any work a class should be made to understand that the first thing to do in studying a piece of literature is to learn to read it aloud intelligently and as if it were the personal utterance of the reader.

In dealing with a class, it is often a saving of time and an easy method of avoiding the effects of individual shyness to have the pupils read in concert. In dealing with short pieces of verse this is, moreover, a means of getting all the class into the spirit of the piece. The method lacks, of course, in nicety; but it is in many cases practically serviceable.

Above everything the teacher must be sure, before any attempt is made to do anything further, that the pupil has a clear understanding at least of the language of what he reads. My own experience with students who come from secondary schools even of good grade has shown me that they not infrequently display an extraordinary incapability of getting from the sentences and phrases of literature the most plain and obvious meaning, especially in the case of verse; while as to unusual expressions they are constantly at sea. On a recent entrance-examination paper I had put, as a test of this very power, the lines from *Macbeth*: "And with some sweet oblivious antidote / Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff." The play is one which they had studied carefully at school, and they were asked to explain the force in these lines of "oblivious." Here are some of the replies:

*"Oblivious," used in this quotation, means that the person speaking was not particular as to the kind of antidote that was chosen.*

*A remedy that would not expose the lady to public suspicion.*

*The word "oblivious" implies a soothing cure, which will heal without arousing the senses.*

*An antidote applied in a forgetful way, or unknown to the person.*

*"Oblivious" here means some antidote that would put Lady Macbeth to sleep while the doctor removed the cause of the trouble.*

*"Oblivious antidote" means one that is very pleasing.*

*The word "oblivious" is beautifully used here. Macbeth wishes the doctor to administer to Lady Macbeth some antidote which will cure her of her fatal illness, but which will not at all be any bitter medicine.*

*"Oblivious" here means relieving.*

*"Oblivious" means some remedy the doctor had forgotten, but might remember if he thought hard enough.*

Of course many of the replies were sensible and sound, but those hardly better than these were discouragingly numerous.

In my own second-year work, in which the students have had all the fitting-school training and the freshman drill besides, I am not infrequently confounded by the inability of students to understand the meaning of words which one uses as a matter of course. The statement that Raleigh secretly married a Lady in Waiting, for instance, reappeared in a note-book in the assertion that Sir Walter ran away with Queen Elizabeth's waiting-maid; and a remark about something which took place at Holland House brought out the unbelievable perversion that the event happened "in a Dutch tavern." Personally I have never discovered how far beyond words of one syllable a lecturer to students may safely go in any assurance that his language would be understood by all the members of his class; but this is one of the things which must be decided if teaching is to be effective.

It must always be remembered that the vocabulary of literature is to some extent different from that employed in the ordinary business of life. The student is confronted with a set of terms which he seldom or never uses in common speech; he must learn to appreciate fine distinctions in the use of language; he must receive from words a precision and a force of meaning, a richness of suggestion, which is to be appreciated only by special and specific training. It will be instructive for the teacher to take any ordinary high-school class, for instance, and examine how far each member gets a complete and lucid notion of what Burke meant in the opening sentence of the "Speech on Conciliation:" "I hope, Sir, that notwithstanding the austerity of the Chair, your good nature will incline you to some degree of indulgence toward human frailty." An

instructor is apt to assume that the intent of a passage such as this is entirely clear, yet I apprehend that not one high-school pupil in twenty gets the real force of this unaided.

If this example seems in its diction too remote from everyday speech to be a fair example, the teacher may try the experiment with the sentence in "Books" in which Emerson speaks of volumes that are "So medicinal, so stringent, so revolutionary, so authoritative." Every word is of common, habitual use, but most young people would be well-nigh helpless when confronted with them in this passage.

The use in literature of allusion, of figures, of striking and unusual employment of words, must become familiar to the student before he is in a condition to deal with literature easily and with full intelligence. The process must be almost like that of learning to read in a foreign tongue. For a teacher to ignore this fact is to take the position of a professor in Italian or Spanish who begins the reading of his pupils not with words and simple sentences, but with intricate prose and verse.

It must be remembered, moreover, that if the diction of literature is removed from the daily experience of the pupil, the ideas and the sentiments of literature are yet more widely apart from it. Literature must deal largely with abstract thoughts and ideas, expressed or implied; it is necessarily concerned with sentiments more elevated or more profound than those with which life makes the young familiar. They must be educated to take the point of view of the author, to rise to the mental plane of a great writer as far as they are capable of so doing. Until they can in some measure accomplish this, they are not even capable of reading the literature they are supposed to study.

Fortunately it is with reading literature as it is with reading foreign tongues. Often the context, the general tone, the spirit, will carry us over passages in which there is much that is not clear to our exact knowledge. Children are constantly able to get from a story or a poem much more than would seem possible to their ignorance of the language of literature. They are helped by truth to life even when they are far from realizing what they are receiving; so that it would be manifestly unjust to assume that the measure of a child's profit in a given case is to be gauged too nicely by his acquaintance with the words, the phrases, the tropes, the suggestions in which the author has conveyed it. The fact remains, however, that in attempting to do anything effective in the way of instruction, the teacher has first of all to train his pupil in the language of literature.

The student, having learned to read the work which is to be studied, must approach it through some personal experience. The teacher who is endeavoring to assist him must therefore discover what in the child's range of knowledge may best serve as a point of departure. In all education, no less than in formal argument, a start can be made only from a point of agreement, from something as evident to the student as it is to the instructor. Consciously or unconsciously every teacher acts upon this principle, from the early lessons in addition which begin with the obvious agreement produced by the sight of the blocks or apples or beads which are before the child. In literature, too, the fact is commonly acted upon, if not so universally formulated. If young pupils are having "The Village Blacksmith" read to them, the teacher instinctively starts with the fact that they may have seen a blacksmith at work at his forge. The difficulty is that teachers who naturally do this in simple poems fail to see that the same principle holds good of literature of a higher order, and that the more complex the problem, the greater the need of being sure of this beginning with some actual experience.

With this finding, some safe and substantial foundation in the pupil's own experience has connected the necessity of speaking of literature, as of anything else one tries to teach, in the language of the class addressed. Of all that we say to our pupils, very little, if any, of all our

careful wisdom really impresses them or remains in their minds except that portion which we have managed to phrase in terms of their language and so put that it appeals to emotions of their own young lives. They can have no conception of the characters in fiction or poetry except in so far as they are able to consider these shadows as moving in their own world. They should be told to make up their minds about Lady Macbeth, or Robin Hood, or Dr. Primrose as if these were persons of their own community about whom they had learned the facts set forth in the books read. They cannot completely realize this, but they get hold of the fictitious character only so far as they are able to do it. They will at least come to have a conception that people they see in the flesh and those they meet in literature are of the same stuff fundamentally, and should be judged by the same laws. They will receive the benefit, moreover, whether they realize it or not, of being helped by fiction to understand real life, and they will be in the right way of judging books by experience.

The principle of speaking to pupils only in the language of their own experience is of universal application, but it is to be applied with common sense. Nothing is more unfortunate in teaching than to have pupils feel that they are being talked down to or that too great an effort is being made to bring instruction to their level. A friend once told me of a professor who in the days of the first period of tennis enthusiasm in this country made so great an effort to take all his illustrations from the game that the class regarded the matter a standing joke. Yet if care be exercised it is not difficult to mix with the childish, the familiar, and the commonplace, the dignified, the unusual, and the suggestive. Starting with a daily experience, the teacher may go on to states of the same emotion which are far greater and higher than can have come into the actual life of the child, but which are imaginatively intelligible and possible because although they differ in degree, they are the same in kind. Nothing is lost of the dignity of a play of Shakespeare's dealing with ambition if the teacher starts with ambition to be at the head of the school, to lead the baseball nine, or to excel in any sport; but from this the child should be led on through whatever instances he may know in history, and in the end made to feel that the ambition of Macbeth is an emotion he has felt, even though it is that emotion carried to its highest terms. So the small and the great are linked together, and the use of the little does not appear undignified because it has been a stepping-stone to the great.

The aim in teaching literature is to make it a part of the student's intimate and actual life; a warm, human, personal matter, and not a thing taken up formally and laid aside as soon as outside pressure is removed. To this end is the appeal made to the pupil's experience, and to this end is he allowed to make his own estimates, to formulate his own likes and dislikes. Any teacher, it must be remembered, is for the scholar in the position of a special pleader. The student regards it as part of the pedagogic duty to praise whatever is taught, and instinctively distrusts commendation which he feels may be only formal and official. He forms his own opinion independently or from the judgment of his peers—the conclusions of his classmates. He may repeat glibly for purposes of recitation or of examination the criticisms of the teacher, but he is likely to be little influenced by them unless they are confirmed by the voice of his fellows and his own taste. If young people do not reason this out, they are never uninfluenced by it; and this condition of things must be accepted by the teacher.

It follows that it is practically never wise to praise a book beforehand. The proper position in presenting to the class any work for study is that it is something which the class are to read together with a view of discovering what it is like. Of course the teacher assumes that it has merit or it would not be taken up, but he also assumes that individually the members of the class may or may not care for it. The logical and safe method is to set the students to see if they can discover why good judges have regarded the work as of merit. The teacher should say in effect:

“I do not know whether you will care for this or not; but I hope you will be able to see what there is in it to have made it notable.”

When the study of poem or play is practically over, when the pupils have done all that can be reasonably expected of them in the way of independent judgment, the teacher may show as many reasons for praising it as he feels the pupils will understand. He must, however, be honest in letting them like it or not. He must recognize that it is better for a lad honestly to be bored by every masterpiece of literature in existence than to stultify his mind by the reception of merely conventional opinions got by rote.

Much the same thing might be said of the drawing of a moral, except that it is not easy to speak with patience of those often well-meaning but gravely mistaken pedagogues who seem bound to impress upon their scholars that literature is didactic. In so far as a book is deliberately didactic, it is not literature. It may be artistic in spite of its enforcing a deliberate lesson, but never because of this. My own instinct would be, and I am consistent enough to make it pretty generally my practice, to conceal from a class as well as I can any deliberate drawing of morals into which a writer of genius may have fallen. It is like the fault of a friend, and is to be screened from the public as far as honesty will permit. Certainly it should never be paraded before the young, who will not reason about the matter, but are too wholesome by nature and too near to primitive human conditions not to distrust an offering of intellectual jelly which obviously contains a moral pill.

Morals are as a rule drawn by teachers who feel that they must teach something, and something tangible. They themselves lack the conception of any office of art higher than moralizing, and they deal with literature accordingly. They are unable to appreciate the fact that the most effective influence which can be brought to bear upon the human mind is never the direct teaching of the preacher or the moralizer, but the indirect instruction of events and emotions. Personally I have sufficient modesty, moreover, to make me hesitate to assume that I can judge better than a master artist how far it is well to go in drawing a moral. If the man of genius has chosen not to point to a deliberate lesson, I am far from feeling inclined to take the ground that I know better, and that the sermon should be there. When Shakespeare, or Coleridge, or Browning feels that a vivid transcript of life should be left to work out its own effect, far from me be the presumption to consider the poet wrong, or to try to piece out his magnificent work with trite moralizing.

The tendency to abuse children with morals is as vicious as it is widespread. It is perhaps not unconnected with the idea that instruction and improvement must alike come through means not in themselves enjoyable. It is the principle upon which an old New England country wife rates the efficacy of a drug by its bitterness. We all find it hard to realize that as far as literature, at least, is concerned, the good it does is to be measured rather by the pleasure it gives. If the children entirely and intelligently delight in it—we need bother about no morals. We need as far as the question of its value in the training of the child's mind goes—have no concern about examinations. Art is the ministry of joy, and literature is art or it is the most futile and foolish thing ever introduced into the training of the young.

## Chapter Two

### The Objective Approach to Poetry

THE title of this chapter suggests that there is an objective standard for determining the quality of poetry. An objective standard is one that exists independently from one's own mind or opinions. For an example, if I want to measure one foot, I do not just draw a line and call it "one foot." I must take an objective standard, in this case, a ruler. I can then measure the line accurately. Everyone will recognize my line as being one foot because I used the accepted standard. It makes not a bit of difference that I do not think that it is one foot or that I think that the one-foot length should be a different measure. I can try to change the standard, but I have to convince everyone else to accept my standard over the accepted one.

On the other hand, you have often heard that "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." This standard suggests that every individual mind and soul is the final authority as to what is beautiful and what is not. Therefore, there would be as many definitions of beauty as there are human beings in this present world. However, I am not of such an opinion. Our God created a universe of order. Everything in life points to precision and order. Mathematics, physics, biology, and music reflect a structure that allows for predictability. Even language has an ordered structure; otherwise, the study of grammar would be a most senseless endeavor.

So it is with poetry. A poem should not be seen as an ambiguous writing where millions of different interpretations are possible. Also, the greatness of a poem is not left to the whims and preferences of individual readers. I find it amusing whenever a student remarks that he thinks a particular poem is "stupid," even though the poem has been recognized by millions as a great poem. When I ask him why he dislikes the poem, I receive a response that is either, "I don't know; I just don't like it," or "I can't understand it." But judging poetry is like anything else: you must have some knowledge about the subject before you can offer an intelligent opinion. If I were to ask you to give me your opinion about the strength and durability of a bridge that we were going to build across a river, you would be unable to tell me what I need to know unless you are familiar with the engineering required to construct a bridge. I am not saying that you should like every classical piece of literature or poetry. However, you should at least make a concentrated effort to understand why people throughout the years have considered certain works to have enduring value.

As you have read in chapter one, the key to an appreciation of literature and poetry is understanding the work. It is paramount that you first understand the poem before you can evaluate whether the poem is a "good one" or a "stupid one." This especially means that if you do not know the meaning of a word, look the word up in the dictionary. Always keep a dictionary by you whenever you read poetry.

Frankly, much of what passes off as poetry is not poetry at all. Beware of calling any verse "poetry" that is sentimental (for an example, greeting cards), that is didactic (primarily teaches a moral or a lesson), or that is rhetorical (using bombastic language and cliches). While these may have rhyme and rhythm, these verses fail to offer anything new or fresh. Great poetry expresses human experiences in unconventional ways. Also, do not fall into the trap of trying to find a moral lesson in every poem you read. Chances are there is none. You will save yourself a lot of frustration by rejecting the idea that poetry contains a hidden moral that is bitter to the taste, only to be made sweet by pleasant sounds and rhyme.

Edgar Allan Poe stated that the sole domain for beauty is in poetry. Of course Poe expands the definition of beauty that could also include things that may not be so beautiful, such as the death

of a young woman. Nevertheless, if you wish to convey information that teaches and edifies, then prose is the best method to communicate your ideas to others. However, beauty cannot be described like a mathematical formula; it must be experienced. Therefore, good poetry is about meaningful experiences. The poem does not describe to us the experience, but rather allows us to participate in the experience. Good poetry challenges our souls, not just our intellect. Of the two following poems, which one is the better one?

### The Eagle

I saw the golden eagle glide  
 Across on every windy breath;  
 Majestic with outstretched wings,  
 Like stretched out arms in shameful death.  
  
 Above he hovered o'er his realm—  
 A lord who views his earth below—  
 Reminding me of heaven's King,  
 From Whom all wondrous pleasures flow.

### The Eagle

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
 Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
 Ringed with the azure world, he stands.  
  
 The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
 He watches from his mountain walls,  
 And like a thunderbolt he falls.

So, how do we determine the good from the bad, and the great from the good? First, determine the main purpose of the poem. By determining the purpose of the poem, you will be trying to understand the poem. Make sure that you avoid the common mistake that many readers make by assuming that the poet is talking about himself in the poem. More often than not, the narrator of the poem is someone other than the poet. By knowing who the speaker is, the purpose of the poem may be easier to see. In the first poem, "The Eagle," the speaker is someone who sees the flight of an eagle that reminds him of Christ. The second poem is narrated by a person who tells us a lot about an eagle. Both poems have a purpose to relate an experience concerning eagles.

This brings us to the second point, that is, has the purpose been accomplished? One can argue that both poems fulfill the purpose, which is to convey something about eagles, allowing the reader to experience a new insight into life. However, which poem does it more effectively? The first poem uses bland expressions and the imagery of the outspread wings of a bird representing the cross of Christ has become trite. There is nothing really fresh about the poem and it borders on sentimentality, even though the subject matter is lofty. On the other hand, the second poem uses interesting word combinations such as "crooked hands," "ringed with the azure world," and "wrinkled sea." The first poem offers some skill with literary devices, but the second uses alliteration nicely, has an interesting simile, and provides a good contrast in lines three and six; that is, "stands" and "falls." Also, there is a contrast in stanza one and two. The first stanza is centered on the eagle's exalted position. The second stanza describes the dominions below. In stanza one, "sun" is mentioned, while in stanza two the "thunderbolt" contrasts with sun.

To really differentiate great poetry from good poetry, we must ask ourselves another question: Is the purpose of the poem very important? Even though a poem may achieve its purpose, the purpose may not be all that important. Many poems are written in order to commemorate an event, such as a battle. The poem may be good in that it allows us to experience something new, but it may not be great. Years ago, I was told that small minds discuss people, average minds discuss events (like the weather and current news), but great minds discuss ideas. So it is with good and great poetry. A good poem will help you to experience a freshly fallen snow, or to soar with an eagle, or to discover something new about a common object or event. But truly great poetry centers of universal themes on human existence, like love and death.

In short, great poetry should affect the soul as well as the mind, the imagination as well as the intellect. Poetry should not be seen merely as a diversion for pleasure, although it can be. More importantly, poetry should cause a new awareness about yourself and about humans in general. What makes the Psalms of the Bible poetical is the fact that these Scriptures communicate the experience of humanity—fear, joy, praise, love, and hope.

Therefore, good poetry is not for the lazy. I mean this in two senses. First, good poetry is written by careful poets, not by lazy ones. And second, the reader must have some genuine character that includes the traits of patience and consideration. Anyone can write doggerel, such as “Roses are red; violets are blue; / Sugar is sweet and so are you.” But true genius with verse requires great care and a better than normal appreciation for words. Poetry cannot be appreciated with one or even two readings. The nature of good poetry requires patience on the part of the reader who thoughtfully reads and spends extended periods of time to muse over the words. The selections in this book are considered good poetry by people throughout many generations. Once again, you may not personally like some of the selections. But do try to determine why these poems have endured the test of time and are still meditated over and enjoyed by millions of people even today.



## Chapter Three

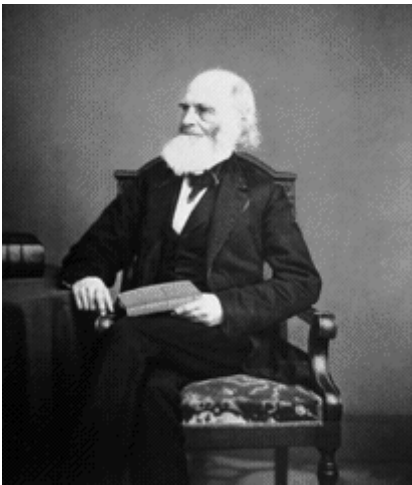
### Meaning in Poetry

**M**ANY are the disappointed readers who think that poetry contains some obscure or even occult meaning. Please learn the following lesson well: *most poems mean exactly what the words say*. Sometimes a poet may employ a symbol as figurative language. But generally, a poem ought to be understood in the plain sense of the words.

This may be an eye-opener to you. Poets are not trying to hide secret meanings within the lines of their verse. The poet is trying to write about an experience for you to enjoy with him. The reason why a particular poem appeals to you or me is that the poet succeeded in allowing us to experience a freshness in life, which tends to become stale and dull. Life is not a twenty-four-hour party. Your life is mainly composed of day-to-day obligations and duties and is rather routine. You sleep, you eat, you work, you rest; then you sleep again only to repeat the cycle. I am not saying that you cannot enjoy yourself while you eat or work, but you are in a routine that can become monotonous.

You will naturally be inclined to enjoy and to readily accept poems with which you can relate. If you have ever seen a field of daffodils in springtime, you will love poems about daffodils. If you have been in love, then Shakespeare's sonnets will undoubtedly strike a responsive chord in your soul. If you are interested in the legends about king Arthur, then *The Idylls of the King* will hold your attention and fascination.

The poem is first and foremost about experiences. Therefore, do not try to read something into the words of the poet that probably is not there.



To a Waterfowl  
**William Cullen Bryant**  
 American lawyer and poet  
 1794–1878

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 sing  
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.

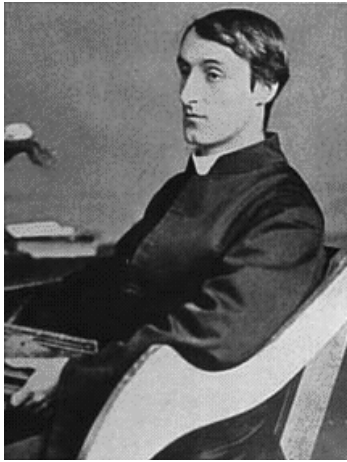
All day thy wings have fanned,  
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere,  
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,  
Though the dark night is near.

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.





**God's Grandeur**  
**Gerard Manley Hopkins**  
**English Jesuit priest**  
**1844–1889**

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 Caged Skylark**  
**Gerard Manley Hopkins**

As a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage  
Man's mounting spirit in his bone-house, mean house, dwells—  
That bird beyond the remembering his free fells;  
This in drudgery, day-laboring-out life's age.  
Though aloft on turf or perch or poor low stage,  
Both sing sometimes the sweetest, sweetest spells,  
Yet both drop deadly sometimes in their cells  
Or wring their barriers in bursts of fear or rage.  
Not that the sweet-fowl, song-fowl, needs not rest—  
Why, hear him, hear him babble and drop down to his nest,  
But his own nest, wild nest, no prison.  
Man's spirit will be flesh-bound when found at best,  
But uncumbered: meadow-down is not distressed  
For a rainbow footing it nor he for his bones risen.



Nature the gentlest mother is

**Emily Dickinson**

**American poet**

**1830–1886**

Nature the gentlest mother is,  
Impatient of no child,  
The feeblest of the waywardest.  
Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill  
By traveller be heard,  
Restraining rampant squirrel  
Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation  
A summer afternoon,  
Her household her assembly;  
And when the sun go down,

Her voice among the aisles  
Incite the timid prayer  
Of the minutest cricket,  
The most unworthy flower.

When all the children sleep,  
She turns as long away  
As will suffice to light her lamps,  
Then bending from the sky

With infinite affection  
An infiniter care,  
Her golden finger on her lip,  
Wills silence everywhere.

## Chapter Four

### Imagery in Poetry

**I**F I were to ask you how you personally experienced the world, you would tell me by your senses. We know that our senses include seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling. Since poetry is about experiences, the poet must transfer his emotions to the reader, or he will fail. While talking with a friend, you are able to communicate your emotions because your speech is accompanied by body language and intonation in your voice. However, the poet must work with written words alone. For this reason, you will find the words in poetry to be more sensuous than in ordinary conversation.

The way that poetical language becomes sensuous is through **imagery**. Generally, poetry will produce “thought pictures.” However, while poetry relies upon visual imagery, images may be represented by any of the senses. If I state “hot chocolate,” all sorts of images should come to mind. My experiences with hot chocolate may be different than yours. Perhaps you are thinking about the taste, or marshmallows on top in a big mug, or dark, crisp evenings by a fireplace. On the other hand, maybe you remember the time when you dropped the hot chocolate on your leg. Different image, right?

The poet will try to use words that are rich with imagery in order that you can experience what he feels. Usually, the success of a poem depends upon the ability of the poet to use vivid details and the use of concrete words. However, imagery is only one of the many ways that a poem can relate the poet’s experience to us.



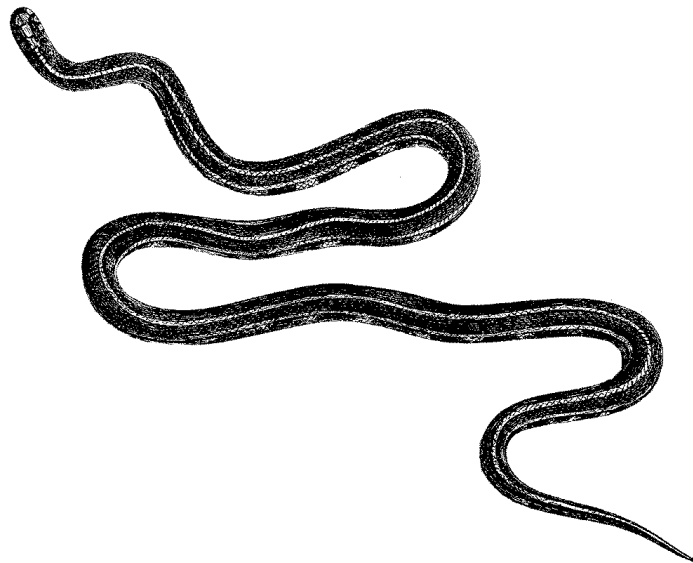
### Parting at Morning

**Robert Browning**  
**English poet**  
**1812–1889**

Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,  
And the sun looked over the mountain’s rim:  
And straight was the path of gold for him,  
And the need of a world of men for me.

A narrow Fellow in the Grass  
Emily Dickinson

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 Boy, and Barefoot—  
I more than once at noon  
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.





To Autumn  
John Keats  
English Poet  
1795–1821

1

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.

2

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  
Spare 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 cyder-press, with patient look,  
Thou watchest the last oozyngs hours by hours.

3

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 shallows, 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.

## Chapter Five

### Metaphor, Personification and Metonymy in Poetry

**T**HE next three chapters will present various poetic devices called figurative language. When we use language according to its standard usage, we are said to be using **literal language**. However, if we use language in order to achieve a special effect, we are using **figurative language**.

In this chapter, we will be looking at three **figures of speech**: metaphor, personification, and metonymy. Metaphors compare objects that are dissimilar. If the comparison is expressed, that is, the words “like” or “as” are used, then the comparison is called a **simile**. For an example: “I’m as hungry as a bear.” Notice that you are comparing yourself to a bear, at least the bear’s eating habits.

If the comparison is implied, then the comparison is simply called a **metaphor**. If you say, “Life is a grand drama,” then you are implying that life is like a play. The Lord Jesus Christ used metaphors quite often. The Lord stated that He was the way, the truth, the life, the good shepherd, and the door to name a few.

**Personification** is the attributing of human qualities to animals or inanimate objects. In the poem, “To Autumn,” you may have noticed in stanza 2 that John Keats gives Autumn the ability to sit carelessly and to sleep in a furrow. Keats personifies Autumn as a reaper of grain.

**Metonymy** is a term used for identifying one thing with something that is closely related or associated with it. For an example, often we hear that the White House made a statement today. Of course, the White House did no such thing; but the White House is closely associated to the President of the United States and we understand that the president made a statement. In *Ivanhoe*, after receiving a message saying that king Richard had left France, Prince John states, “It is France’s own hand and seal.” John means that the message came from the king of France.

**Synecdoche** is the describing of something with one of its parts. Shakespeare in his play, *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, speaks of the cuckoo’s song as “unpleasing to a married ear.” Married ear refers to a married man. Current usage of synecdoche is to include it with metonymy.

Metaphor, personification, and metonymy are related in that these figures of speech involve comparisons.



It sifts from Leaden Sieves  
**Emily Dickinson**

It sifts from Leaden Sieves—  
It powders all the Wood.  
It fills with Alabaster Wool  
The Wrinkles of the Road—  
It makes an Even Face  
Of Mountain and of Plain—  
Unbroken Forehead from the East  
Unto the East again—  
It reaches to the Fence—  
It wraps it Rail by Rail  
Till it is lost in Fleeces—  
It deals Celestial Veil  
To Stump and Stack—and Stem—  
A Summer's empty Room—  
Acres of Joints where Harvests were,  
Recordless, but for them—  
It Ruffles Wrists of Posts  
As Ankles of a Queen—  
Then stills its Artisans—like Ghosts,  
Denying they have been—

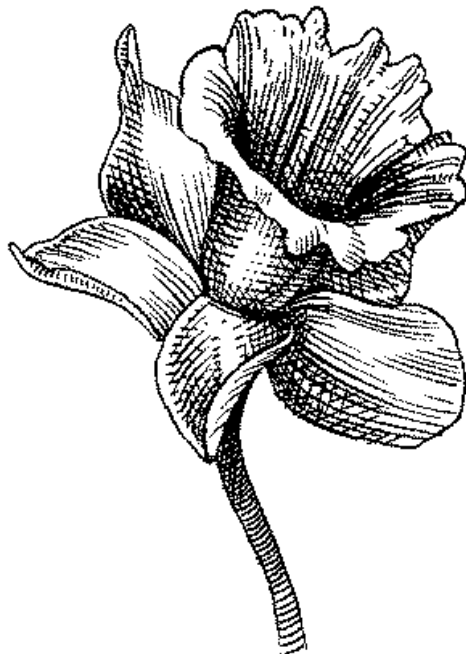




To Daffodills  
**Robert Herrick**  
English poet  
1591–1674

Fair Daffodills, 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 Even-song;  
And, having prayed 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 any thing.  
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.





A Valediction:  
Forbidding Mourning  
**John Donne**  
Anglican minister and poet  
1572–1631

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,  
T'were prophanation 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.

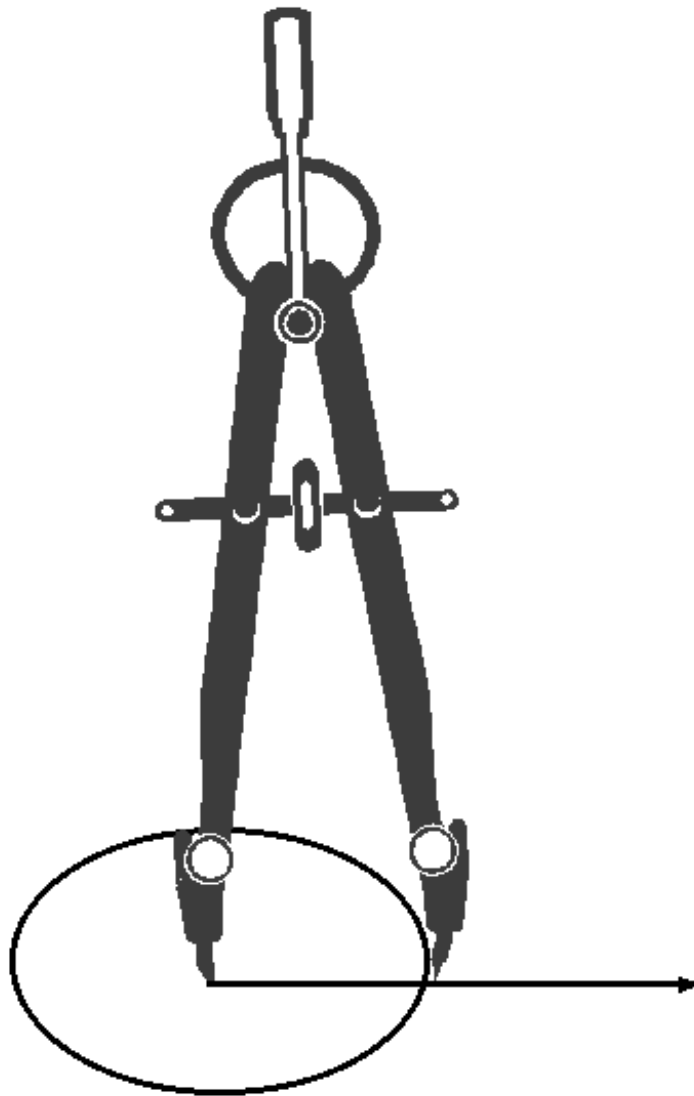
But we by a love, so much refin'd,  
That our selves know not what it is,  
Inter-assured of the mind,  
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

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 are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two,  
Thy soul the fixt foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth come,  
It leans, and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness draws my circle just,  
And makes me end, where I begun.



## Chapter Six

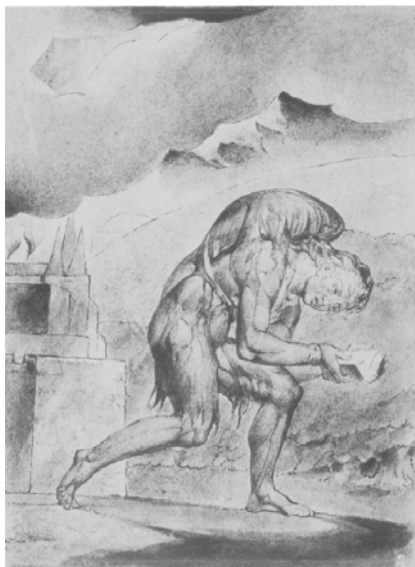
### Symbol and Allegory in Poetry

**A** **symbol** is a word or set of words that represent a deeper meaning than the literal meaning. We are familiar with many symbols in our daily lives. We see the American flag as a symbol for freedom and liberty. We understand the Cross to represent much more than a literal wooden cross. The Cross is redemption and salvation to the believer. Whenever a sea captain saw an approaching ship with the skull and crossbones on the “Jolly Roger,” he knew his ship was in danger.

Symbols can be powerful and, when used in poetry, can be very significant. What makes the symbol interesting is its imprecision. It is this point that causes many readers to get sidetracked by reading into a poem something that may not be there. Sometimes even the Bible suffers from this “reading between the lines.” Once I heard a preacher state that the five loaves and two fishes in Matthew chapter 14 were symbols for the five doctrines of grace and the old and new testaments. After the service, someone asked me whether I agreed with the symbolism. I stated that I did not and then was prompted immediately to give my opinion. I merely stated, “I believe that the five loaves represented five loaves of bread and the two fishes, two fishes.” I grant that this is not as profound as the visiting preacher’s explanation, but I do think it closer to the reading and that nothing symbolical is intended.

Symbols can be allusive because the symbol may be very general, and not specific. Sometimes we may not know exactly what the poet meant specifically. While a multitude of meanings is not bad, good sense is required. Poetry is about experience, and good poetry will allow us to read into the poem our own experiences. But we are not at liberty to imagine something that is not in the poem. It is very probable that the poet did not use any words that are symbolic. Symbolism is only one device that the poet can use to create a great poem and a great poem can be created without symbolism.

**Allegory** is a narrative when the characters and settings represent not only themselves, but signify a secondary meaning as well. The surface meaning of the story has its own independent interest, but generally, the poet is more concerned about the meaning beneath the surface. Of course, the best example of allegory is John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Christian represents a fellow named Christian, but he also pictures every Christian who is striving toward the Celestial City. Allegory was very popular during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.



**Drawing by William Blake showing his interpretation of Christian with his burden from the *Pilgrim’s Progress***



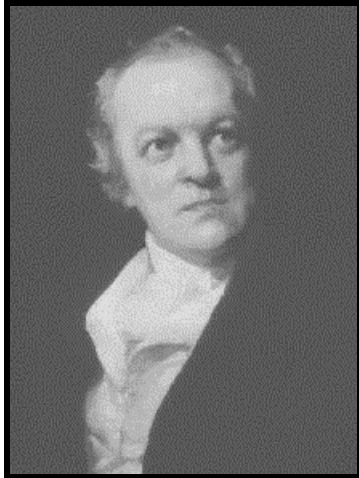
## The Wood-Pile

**Robert Frost**  
**American poet**  
**1874–1963**

Out walking in the frozen swamp one grey day  
 I paused and said, "I will turn back from here.  
 No, I will go on farther—and we shall see."  
 The hard snow held me, save where now and then  
 One foot went down. The view was all in lines

Straight up and down of tall slim trees  
 Too much alike to mark or name a place by  
 So as to say for certain I was here  
 Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.  
 A small bird flew before me. He was careful  
 To put a tree between us when he lighted,  
 And say no word to tell me who he was  
 Who was so foolish as to think what *he* thought.  
 He thought that I was after him for a feather—  
 The white one in his tail; like one who takes  
 Everything said as personal to himself.  
 One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.  
 And then there was a pile of wood for which  
 I forgot him and let his little fear  
 Carry him off the way I might have gone,  
 Without so much as wishing him good-night.  
 He went behind it to make his last stand.  
 It was a cord of maple, cut and split  
 And piled—and measured, four by four by eight.  
 And not another like it could I see.  
 No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.  
 And it was older sure than this year's cutting,  
 Or even last year's or the year's before.  
 The wood was grey and the bark warping off it  
 And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis  
 Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.  
 What held it though on one side was a tree  
 Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,  
 These latter about to fall. I thought that only  
 Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks  
 Could so forget his handiwork on which  
 He spent himself, the labour of his axe,

And leave it there far from a useful fireplace  
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could  
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.



**The Tyger**  
**William Blake**  
**English artist, printer, and poet**  
**1757–1827**

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright,  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

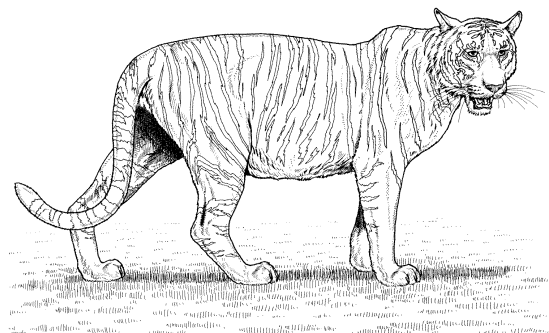
In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? & 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?

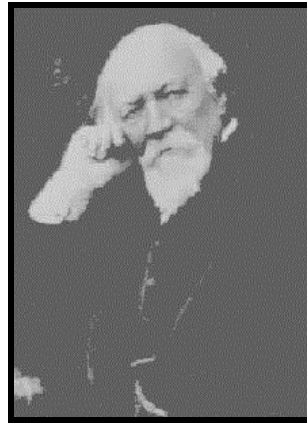
When the stars threw down their spears,  
And water'd heaven with their tears,  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



**My Star**  
**Robert Browning**

All that I know  
Of a certain star  
Is, it can throw  
(Like the angled spar)  
Now a dart of red,  
Now a dart of blue;  
Till my friends have said  
They would fain see, too,  
My star that dartles the red and the blue!  
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower hangs furled:  
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.  
What matter to me if their star is a world?  
Mine has opened its soul to me, therefore I love it.



**Ulysses**  
**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**  
**English poet**  
**1809–1892**

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 suffer'd 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 honour'd 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 untravell'd world whose margin fades  
 For ever and forever 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.



**Ulysses and his men escaping from Polyphemus**

## Chapter Seven

### Paradox and Irony in Poetry

**A**S a statement, a **paradox** appears to be self-contradictory or even absurd, but actually has a valid meaning. You will find examples of paradox in almost every work, but the metaphysical poets used the paradox as a focal point. Perhaps of the best-known paradox in literature occurs in the last line of John Donne's "Death, Be Not Proud." After humiliating Death by humanizing him, Donne tells Death, "One short sleep past, we wake eternally, / And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die." The paradox is that this dreaded thing called death will die itself.

The **oxymoron** is a special kind of paradox. An oxymoron is formed whenever two words that are contrary in normal usage are combined together. Everyone has fun trying to make up or discovering examples of the oxymoron; such as "jumbo shrimp" and "student athlete." The master of the oxymoron was William Shakespeare. In "Romeo and Juliet," Romeo offers this example,

"O loving hate,  
O anything, or nothing first created!  
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,  
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms,  
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,  
Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!"

In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Theseus remarks about the choices for the evening's entertainment,

"'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus,  
And his love Thisby; very tragical mirth.'  
Merry and tragical? Tedious and brief?  
That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow.  
How shall we find the concord of this discord?"

**Irony** has the sense of disguise, or dissemblance. In their comedies, the Greek playwrights used a character who acted to be less intelligent than he actually was. The *eiron* would outwit supposedly, brighter fellows, because the *eiron* could circumvent the other characters who were living under the delusion of the *eiron*'s lack of intelligence.

While there are several kinds of irony, you will probably encounter only three within poetry: **verbal irony**, **sarcasm**, and **invective**. Verbal irony is an implied meaning that is quite different from the expressed statement. Sarcasm is similar to verbal irony, but is often reserved for ostentatious praise when actually scorn is meant. Invective is a direct condemnation with the use of belittling remarks; however, the intent is one of affection and friendship. In a sense, the poet who employs irony is complimenting his readers by acknowledging their intelligence to be smart enough by not being fooled with the expressed statements—but rather that the readers possess the keen insight to understand the true meaning.

Two good examples of irony are found in the Bible. Job makes a very memorable remark in Job 12:2—"No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you." The expressed

meaning is that Job's friends embodied all of mankind and contained total wisdom. Of course, Job does not believe this for a moment.

Even the Lord Jesus Christ was not above using irony. After telling the parable about the unjust steward, the Lord says, "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9). The irony is clear. The Lord is emphasizing that one should not waste his time by making friends with the unrighteous, since unrighteous mammon will never befriend anyone who is "down on his luck," much less provide anyone with a perpetual dole.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austin begins her novel with a delightful, ironic statement: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." Of course, what is implied is that a single woman wants a wealthy man to marry.

In *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, Caesar is appreciative to Brutus, who gives him the time. Caesar states, "I thank you for your pains and courtesy." Caesar meant one thing; to the audience, which knows that Caesar will soon be killed, the statement means something entirely different.

Like symbolism, irony can be easily misunderstood. If you see the statement, "You, poor fool," you could have several interpretations. One could be derogatory; another could be sympathetic. This only points out again that you must read poetry very carefully in order to understand any poem well.



To Lucasta,  
Going to the Wars  
**Richard Lovelace**  
**English soldier and poet**  
**1618–1657**

Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind  
That from 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 embrace  
A sword, a horse, a shield.  
Yet this inconstancy is such  
As you too shall adore;  
I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not honor more.



Ozymandias  
**Percy Bysshe Shelley**  
 English poet  
 1792–1822

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 still 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 despair!”  
 Nothing else remains. Round the decay  
 Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
 The lone and level sands stretch far away.

My Last Duchess  
**Robert Browning**

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
 Looking as if she were alive. I call  
 That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf’s hands  
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
 Will’t please you to sit and look at her? I said  
 “Fra 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  
 Fra 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 favor at her breast,  
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 Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

## The Chimney Sweeper

William Blake

When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry "'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"  
So your chimneys I sweep, & in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,  
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd: so I said  
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when you head's bare  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, & that very night,  
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!  
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,  
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
And he open'd the coffins & set them free;  
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,  
And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;  
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
He'd have God for his father, & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,  
And got with our bags & our brushes to work,  
Tho the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm,  
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.



## Chapter Eight

### Allusion in Poetry

**A**N **allusion** is a brief reference to a person, place or event, or to another work of literature, generally the Bible or Greek mythology. Anyone who reads the Bible often will not have as much difficulty with many allusions that poets use from the Scriptures. Also, the chief reason for studying Greek mythology is to have a better foundation to understand the allusions found in literature and poetry.

The wonderful thing about allusions is that the poet can economize. A reference to another work of literature can pack a lot of meaning in a few words. For an example, this story is told about Samuel Johnson, the best known author of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. One night while walking home, Johnson found a drunken harlot asleep on the street. Feeling compassion for her, Johnson learned where she lived, lifted her upon his shoulders, and carried her to her home. The audience reacted negatively to the story, since the ladies and gentlemen refused to believe that the great Samuel Johnson could ever do such a thing, and began to voice their disapproval. The speaker, William Hazlitt, replied, “I remind you, ladies and gentlemen, of the parable of the Good Samaritan.” All opposition ceased.

Hazlitt did not have to quote or even paraphrase the passage found in Luke chapter 10. Like most people, the audience was familiar enough with the story about the Good Samaritan that the men and women realized that Johnson was only following the example found in the Bible.

While economy of words is the chief use of allusion, a good allusion can evoke strong emotions and allows the reader to connect the poet’s meaning himself. Like works that have irony, a poem that has an allusion is for the reader who is above average in intelligence with a good education. Sometimes, a poet like John Milton really tests the reader’s ability concerning the recognition of allusions. When you read *Paradise Lost*, you will know what I am talking about. The poet is complimenting the reader since he is certain that you will understand the allusion without telling you the connection. Nevertheless, as a young student, you must be willing to look up many allusions that you do not understand, much in the same way you would with a new word in a dictionary.



### On His Blindness

#### John Milton

#### English statesman, essayist, and poet

#### 1608–1674

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  
 Lodged 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-labor, light denied?  
 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.

The Lotos-Eaters  
**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

“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 thro' 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-flush'd: and, dew'd with showery drops,  
Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.  
The charmed sunset linger'd low adown  
In the red West: thro' mountain clefts the dale  
Was seen far inland, and the yellow down  
Border'd with palm, and many a winding vale  
And meadow, set with slender galingale;  
A land where all things always seem'd the same!  
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 seem'd, 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 seem'd the sea, weary the oar,  
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.  
Then some one 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

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 tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;  
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.  
Here are cool mosses deep,  
And thro' 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 weigh'd 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 harken 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 woo'd from out the bud  
 With winds upon the branch, and there  
 Grows green and broad, and takes no care,  
 Sun-steep'd at noon, and in the moon  
 Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow  
 Falls, and floats adown the air.  
 Lo! sweeten'd 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 labour 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 whisper'd 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  
Heap'd 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 suffer'd 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 hard to settle order once again.  
There is confusion worse than death,  
Trouble on trouble, pain on pain,  
Long labour unto aged breath,  
Sore task to hearts worn out by 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 eyelid 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 thro' the thick-twined vine—  
 To watch the emerald-colour'd water falling  
 Thro' many a wov'n acanthus-wreath divine!  
 Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,  
 Only to hear were sweet, stretch'd 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:  
 Thro' 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,  
 Roll'd to starboard, roll'd 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 hurl'd  
 Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curl'd  
 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 centred in a doleful song  
 Steaming up, a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,  
 Like a tale of little meaning tho' 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 whisper'd—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 labour in the deep mid-ocean, wind and wave and oar;  
 O, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more.



**Hymn to Diana**  
**Ben Jonson**  
**English playwright and poet**  
**1572–1637**

Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,  
 Now the sun is laid to sleep,  
 Seated in thy silver chair,  
 State in wonted manner keep:  
 Hesperus entreats thy light,

Goddess excellently bright.  
 Earth, let not thy envious shade  
 Dare itself to interpose;  
 Cynthia's shining orb was made  
 Heaven to clear when day did close:  
 Bless us then with wishèd sight,  
 Goddess excellently bright.  
 Lay thy bow of pearl apart,  
 And thy crystal-shining quiver;  
 Give unto the flying hart  
 Space to breathe, how short soever;  
 Thou that mak'st a day of night,  
 Goddess excellently bright.

**And when the townclerk had  
 appeased the people, he said, Ye  
 men of Ephesus, what man is there  
 that knoweth not how that the city  
 of the Ephesians is a worshipper of  
 the great goddess Diana, and of the  
 image which fell down from  
 Jupiter?—Acts 19:35**



## Chapter Nine

### Tone in Poetry

**G**ENERALLY speaking, **tone** is the speaker's attitude to his listeners. In everyday speech, we use tone to express ourselves. The same sentence can have different meanings when used with tone. If you were to win a trip to Hawaii, you could be very excited about it: "This is great! I won a trip to Hawaii!" On the other hand, what if you already had plans to go to Europe, and the trip to Hawaii was scheduled for the same time. Your enthusiasm would be greatly diminished and your voice would reflect a hint of disappointment: "Oh, no. I won a trip to Hawaii." What if you have been to Hawaii many times and do not care to see the islands again? Your winning the trip would be very nonchalant. "That's just great. I won a trip to Hawaii."

The tone of a work can represent a host of emotions or feelings: loving or angry, obscure or plain, formal or informal, condescending or fawning. Discovering the tone of a poem is important because it is necessary for complete understanding. If you read a poem that is meant to be humorous, but you read it as being serious, then you will have an enormous misunderstanding of the meaning. However, discovering the tone is more difficult than with speech. We simply do not have the inflection of the voice to help us to know the tone. What helps us to determine the tone is the sum of all of the other elements that make up the poem: figurative language, irony, rhythm and other devices. In short, the tone of the poem is not an separate means used in the poem, but rather is the end itself.

### Because I could not stop for Death— Emily Dickinson

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 labour and my leisure too,  
 For His Civility—

We passed the School, where Children strove  
 At Recess—in the Ring—  
 We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain—  
 We passed the Setting Sun—

Or rather—He passed Us—  
 The Dews drew quivering and chill—  
 For only Gossamer, my Gown—  
 My Tippet—only Tulle—

We paused before a House that seemed  
A Swelling of the Ground—  
The Roof was scarcely visible—  
The Cornice—in the Ground—  
Since then—'tis Centuries—and yet  
Feels shorter than the Day  
I first surmised the Horses Heads  
Were toward Eternity—

Crossing the Bar  
**Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,  
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound or foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.  
Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell;  
When I embark;  
For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my pilot face to face  
When I have crossed the bar.

The Solitary Reaper  
from Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803  
**William Wordsworth**

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?

Whate'er 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.