

## CHAPTER 4

### FIGURES OF SPEECH AND STYLISTIC DEVICES

#### الصور البلاغية والحيل الأسلوبية

*"Figures be the instruments of ornament in every language."*

Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesie* (1589).

*"Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another."*

ROBERT FROST

Let us assume that your brother has just come in out of a rainstorm and you say to him, "Well, you're a pretty sight! Got slightly wet, didn't you?" And he replies, "Wet? I'm drowned! It's raining cats and dogs, and my raincoat's like a sieve!"

You and your brother probably understand each other well enough; yet if you examine this conversation literally, that is to say unimaginatively, you will find that you have been speaking nonsense. Actually you have been speaking figuratively. You have been saying less than what you mean, or more than what you mean, or the opposite of what you mean, or something other than what you mean. You did not mean that your brother was a pretty sight but that he was a wretched sight. You did not mean that he got slightly wet but that he got very wet. Your brother did not mean that he got drowned but that he got drenched. It was not raining cats and dogs; it was raining water. And your brother's raincoat is so unlike a sieve that not even a child would confuse them.

If you are familiar with Moliere's play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, you will remember how delighted M. Jourdain was to discover that he had been speaking prose all his life. Many people might be equally surprised to learn that they have been speaking a kind of subpoetry all their lives. The difference between their figures of speech and the poet's is that theirs are probably worn and trite, the poet's fresh and original.

On first examination, it might seem absurd to say one thing and mean another. But we all do it — and with good reason. We do it because we can say what we want to say more vividly and forcefully by figures than we can by saying it directly. And we can say more by figurative statement than we can by literal statement. Figures of speech offer another way of adding extra dimensions to language.

Broadly defined, a **figure of speech** is any way of saying something other than the ordinary way, and some rhetoricians have classified as many as 250 separate figures. For our purposes, however, a figure of speech is

more narrowly definable as a way of saying one thing and meaning another, and we need to be concerned with no more than a fraction of that huge number. Figurative language – language using figures of speech – is language that cannot be taken literally (or should not be taken literally only).

Figurative language often provides a more effective means of saying what we mean than does direct statement. What are some of the reasons for that effectiveness?

**First**, figurative language affords us imaginative pleasure. Imagination might be described in one sense as that faculty or ability of the mind that proceeds by sudden leaps from one point to another, that goes up a stair by leaping in one jump from the bottom to the top rather than by climbing up one step at a time. The mind takes delight in these sudden leaps, in seeing likenesses between unlike things. We all probably have taken pleasure in staring into a fire and seeing castles and cities and armies in it, or in looking into the clouds and shaping them into animals or faces, or in seeing a man in the moon. We name our plants and flowers after fancied resemblances: jack-in-the-pulpit, babies'-breath, Queen Anne's lace. Figures of speech are therefore satisfying in themselves, providing us with a source of pleasure in the exercise of the imagination.

**Second**, figures of speech are a way of bringing additional imagery into verse, of making the abstract concrete, of making poetry more sensuous. When Tennyson's eagle falls "like a thunderbolt", his swooping down for his prey is charged with energy, speed, and power; the simile also recalls that the Greek god Zeus was accompanied by an eagle and armed with lightning. When Emily Dickinson compares poetry to prancing coursers, she objectifies imaginative and rhythmical qualities by presenting them in visual terms.

**Third**, figures of speech are a way of adding emotional intensity to otherwise merely informative statements and of conveying attitudes along with information. If we say, "So-and-so is a rat" or "My feet are killing me;" our meaning is as much emotional as informative. When a man compares books to "a load of crap", the vulgar language not only expresses his distaste for reading, but intensifies the characterization of him as a man whose intellectual growth was stunted. When a writer compares a soldier caught in a gas attack to a man drowning under a green sea, he conveys a feeling of despair and suffocation as well as a visual image.

**Fourth**, figures of speech are an effective means of concentration, a way of saying much in brief compass. Like words, they may be multidimensional. Consider, for instance, the merits of comparing life to a candle, as Shakespeare does in a passage from *Macbeth* when the queen's death is

reported to him: "Out, out, brief candle!" Life is like a candle in that it begins and ends in darkness: in that while it burns, it gives off light and energy, is active and colorful; in that it gradually consumes itself, gets shorter and shorter: in that it can be snuffed out at any moment; in that it is brief at best, burning only for a short duration. Possibly your imagination can suggest other similarities. But at any rate, Macbeth's compact, metaphorical description of life as a "brief candle" suggests certain truths about life that would require dozens of words to state in literal language. At the same time it makes the abstract concrete, provides imaginative pleasure, and adds a degree of emotional intensity.

Now, let get to the nuts and bolts of the matter under hand. But note that the following devices are much like salt and spices which when added to the food in moderation make it tasty and delicious; added in excess, they spoil your cuisine.

### 1. Simile (sim'i-le) التشبيه

(L., neut. of *similis*, like)

A definite expression of a likeness between different objects, or events. Words as "Like", "as" and "similar to", "than", "resembles", or "seems" are used in forming similes. Of such a kind are those contained in the following passages:

- (a) "Then felt I **like** some watcher of the skies,  
When a new planet swims into his ken."
- (b) A prize poem is **like** a prize sheep.
- (c) The gap caused by the fall of the house had altered the aspect of the street, **as** the loss of a tooth changes that of a face.
- (d) "So in his pride he stood.  
Towering upon a rock, and plying swift  
His pitiless archery; **as** when the sun  
Upon some crag of cloud at morning stands  
Crested with fire exultant, and his shaft  
Speeds over the earth's levels, while the star  
Of dawning, faint in the blue air above  
**Like** the last lingering lamp of night, looks down  
Envious of that great glory."

As the above examples show, similes are either simple or complex. The student should observe that in example (d) the simile is not only enlarged far beyond its strict function, i.e. that of comparing the archer with the dawning sun, but also itself contains a lengthy, subordinate simile.

Such similes are common in poetry; in prose, however, they should be introduced more sparingly. Trite مبتذل similes, and they are only too numerous, are very objectionable. Everyone is weary of being told that a man fought like a lion, or that he ran like a hare. If you make use of a simile, make sure that it is not hackneyed مبتذل, and that it adds force to the description or statement.

## 2. Metaphor (met'a-for) الاستعارة.

(Gr. *metaphora* - *metapherein* - *meta*, over, *pherien*, to carry)

Metaphor and simile are both used as a means of comparing things that are essentially unlike. A metaphor is an implied simile, that is, the figurative term is substituted for or identified with the literal term. Thus a sentence such as: "They sailed upon a sapphire sea," is a condensed form of the complex sentence, "They sailed on a sea that was as blue as sapphire." The adjective clause in the complex sentence is a simile, which in the simple sentence is suggested by the adjectival use of the noun "sapphire."

The following are examples of well-worn metaphors:

He is a modern Croesus.

They proved lions in battle.

Men are schooled by adversity.

Metaphors, like similes, may be simple, as in the above examples, or sustained. The following familiar quotation from Shakespeare's *Richard II* is a wonderful specimen of a sustained metaphor:

"Music do I hear ?

Ha, ha! keep time: how sour sweet music is,  
When time is broke and no proportion kept!

So is it in the music of men's lives.

And here have I the daintiness of ear

To check time broke in a disorder'd string;

But, for the concord of my state and time,

Had not an ear to hear my true time broke.

I wasted time, and now doth time waste me;

For now hath time made me his numbering clock:

My thoughts are minutes; and with sighs they jar

Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch

Where to my finger, like a dial's point,

Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.

Now, sir, the sounds that tell what hour it is,

Are clamorous groans that strike upon my heart,

Which is the bell; so sighs, and tears, and groans,

Show minutes, times, and hours: but my time  
Runs posting on in Bolingbroke's proud joy,  
While I stand fooling here, his Jack o' the clock."

Do not introduce excessively long and detailed metaphors. As a rule, they are wearisome, and more ingenious than effective. You must also avoid those that are far-fetched, because, unless an implied simile can be grasped at once, you will only perplex your audience, and, temporarily at least, interrupt the link of thought established between you.

### **The Guitarist Tunes Up**

With what attentive courtesy he bent  
Over his instrument;  
Not as a lordly conqueror who could  
Command both wire and wood,  
But as a man with a loved woman might,  
Inquiring with delight  
What slight essential things she had to say  
Before they started, he and she, to play.

Frances Cornford (1886—1960)

### **QUESTION**

Explore the comparisons. Do they principally illuminate the guitarist or the lovers or both? What one word brings the figurative and literal terms together?

### **The Hound**

Life the hound  
Equivocal  
Comes at a bound  
Either to rend me  
Or to befriend me.  
I cannot tell  
The hound's intent  
Till he has sprung  
At my bare hand  
With teeth or tongue.  
Meanwhile I stand  
And wait the event.

Robert Francis (1901—1987)

### **QUESTION**

What does “equivocal” (2) mean? Show how this is the key word in the poem. What is the effect of placing it on a line by itself?

Metaphors may take one of four forms, depending on whether the literal and figurative terms are respectively named or implied. In the **first form** of metaphor, as in simile, both the literal and figurative terms are named. In Francis’s poem, for example, the literal term is “life” and the figurative term is “hound.” In the **second form**, the literal term is named and the figurative term is implied.

### Bereft

Where had I heard this wind before  
Change like this to a deeper roar?  
What would it take my standing there for,  
Holding open a restive door,  
Looking downhill to a frothy shore?           5  
Summer was past and day was past.  
Somber clouds in the west were massed.  
Out in the porch’s sagging floor  
Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,  
Blindly struck at my knee and missed.           10  
Something sinister in the tone  
Told me my secret must be known:  
Word I was in the house alone  
Somehow must have gotten abroad,  
Word I was in my life alone,                   15  
Word I had no one left but God.

Robert Frost (1874—1963)

### QUESTIONS

1. Describe the situation precisely. What time of day and year is it? Where is the speaker? What is happening to the weather?
2. To what are the leaves in lines 9—10 compared?
3. The word “hissed” (9) is onomatopoeic (see onomatopoeia). How is its effect reinforced in the lines following?
4. Though lines 9-10 present the clearest example of the second form of metaphor, here re there. o hat s he ind “it”) ompared n ine ? Why is the door (4) “restive” and what does this do (figuratively) to the door? To what is the speaker’s “life” compared (15)?
5. What is the tone of the poem? How reassuring is the last line?

In the **third form** of metaphor, the literal term is implied and the figurative term is named. In the **fourth form**, both the literal and figurative terms are implied. The following poem exemplifies both forms:

### **It sifts from leaden sieves**

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 5  
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 10  
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, 15  
Recordless, but for them unrecorded

It ruffles wrists of posts  
As ankles of a queen,  
Then stills its artisans like ghosts,  
Denying they have been. 20

Emily Dickinson (1830—1886)

### **QUESTIONS**

1. This poem consists essentially of a series of metaphors having the same literal term identified only as "It." What is "It"?
2. In several of these metaphors the figurative term is named — "alabaster wool" (3), "fleeces" (11), "celestial veil" (12). In two of them, however, the figurative term is left unnamed. To what is "It" compared in lines 1-2? In lines 17-18?
3. Comment on the additional metaphorical expressions or complications contained in "leaden sieves" (1), "alabaster wool" (3), "even face" (5), "unbroken forehead" (7), "a summer's empty room" (14), "artisans" (19).

Beware of introducing a *Mixed Metaphor* استعارة معيبة. This name is given to a succession of similes all used with reference to the same idea, though no similarity exists between them. Shakespeare himself was sometimes guilty of this error, e.g.:

"By Bushey, Bagot, and their complices,  
The caterpillars of the commonwealth,  
Which I have sworn to weed and pluck away."

Caterpillars can be plucked away but not weeded. The mistake is due to a suppressed simile, which likened "Bushey, Bagot, and their complices" to noxious weeds.

The following are gross examples of the same error produced by careless thinking:

- (a) Or to take arms against a sea of troubles. (Hamlet).
- (b) Gentlemen! If we pursue these tactics, we shall shear the sheep that lays the golden eggs, and drain it dry.
- (c) He gave it to me straight from the shoulder, in the plainest black and white.
- (d) Baited by the hecklers, the orator dived through one cul-de-sac to another, and at last threw up the sponge.

A metaphor is superior to a simile in that it is more suggestive and compressed. Its use, however, requires discrimination.

### 3. Personification التخصيص.

A name given to a special kind of metaphor, wherein abstract ideas, or inanimate objects, are spoken of as though they were persons. Examples of this device are in common use. Thus we say:

- (a) The sun rose from his bed.
- (b) The moon veiled her face.
- (c) Crime skulks in the streets.
- (d) "Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,  
Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?" (Thomas Gray)

Compare *personification* (things spoken of as persons) with: *prosopopoeia* (things speak), *pathetic fallacy* (things feel) and *apostrophe* (things are spoken to).

### 4. Prosopopoeia (Pros'o-po-pe" a) حديث الجمادات.

(Gr. *prosopopoiia* - *prosopon*, a person, *poiein*, to make)

This is a further development of Personification, in which abstract qualities, or things, are endowed with speech, as in:

- (a) But Patience, to prevent that murmur, soon replies . . .

- (b) England was calling to me.
- (c) Faith whispers consolation.

Akin to Prosopopoeia, is what has been termed the *Pathetic Fallacy*, that is, the conception of natural objects as being friendly or hostile to mankind, or having human emotions:

- (a) The wind was weeping about the grave.
- (b) The cruel reefs thrust their fangs into the doomed ship.
- (c) Wrapt in the mantle of the kindly snow.
- (d) "They rowed her across the rolling foam -  
The cruel, crawling foam."

Skilfully employed, this device is useful, but it too often degenerates into mere sentimentality and artificial pathos.

### 5. Apostrophe (A-pos'tro-fe) مخاطبة الجمادات

(Gr. *apo*, from, *strophe*, a turning)

A sudden turning away from the ordinary course of speech to address some person or thing present or absent. The thing, or quality, is not only regarded as a person, but also addressed as such, so it is a development of personification:

- (a) "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean-roll!"
- (b) "Hail to thee, blithe singer,  
Bird thou never wert!"
- (c) Western wind, when wilt thou blow,  
The small rain down can rain?  
Christ! if my love were in my arms,  
And I in my bed again!

Anonymous (c. 1500)

Used in moderation, this device is useful and effective.

### 6. Vision رؤية العيان أو المعاينة

A variety of the Apostrophe. The writer writes of himself as if he were an eye-witness of events, or scenes, in circumstances impossible to a human being:

- (a) "Homer! I hear thee raise thy voice to sing."
- (b) "Before me rode the haughty conquerors  
Even Alexander, Caesar, Tamerlane,  
Cortez, Pizarro, and, with marble brows,  
Napoleon; underneath their horses' hoofs  
The road moaned, paved with victims."

## 7. The Historic Present استحضار الماضي.

A device akin to Vision. The term is applied to the practice of using the Present Tense, instead of the Past, when dealing with bygone events, as though both the writer and the reader were eye-witnesses. It is a common trick in some languages, notably French, but is unusual in English. Carlyle, however, introduced it freely in his French Revolution, e.g.:

"Every street musters its crowds as he passes; the Hall of the Hotel de Ville, the Place de la Grève itself will scarcely hold his escort and him, etc."

N.B.: Beginners are strongly advised not to employ the Historic Present too freely.

## 8. Prolepsis (Pro-lep'sis) توقع الأحداث.

(Gr., *pro*, before, *lambanein*, to take)

This means the use of a descriptive term before it is really applicable. A famous example is the following from Keats:

"So these two brothers and their *murdered* man  
Rode past fair Florence."

By applying the adjective *murdered* to a living and unsuspecting victim, the gruesome design of the murderers is made more vivid and detestable. So artificial a device must, obviously, be employed very seldom.

Another example:

"Horatio, I am *dead*;  
Thou livest; report me and my cause aright  
To the unsatisfied." (Hamlet)

## 9. Metonymy (Met-on'-e-me) الكناية.

(Gr., *meta*, expressing change, *onoma*, a name)

This signifies that the name of one of the attributes of a thing has been substituted for the name of the thing itself:

(a) The pen is mightier than the sword.

(b) "Sceptre and Crown  
Must tumble down,  
And in dust be equal made  
With the poor crooked scythe and spade."

(James Shirley)

Observe that, though you may say, *The Crown has lost much of its ancient power*, you should not say, *The Crown is suffering from a slight attack of influenza*, because, in the first sentence, the word *Crown* conveniently and briefly expresses a very complex idea, whereas, in the second sentence, *Crown* stands for a king, or queen, as a person, without

reference to the royal authority. No advantage is gained by the substitution; indeed, we lose in precision, as *Crown* does not indicate the sex of the sovereign referred to.

- (c) "fellows whom it hurts to think"  
Look into the pewter pot  
To see the world as the world's not," (Terence)

By "pewter pot" he means the ale in the pot, not the pot itself, and by "world" he means human life and the conditions under which it is lived.

- (d) "Paper and ink cut the throats of men, and the sound of a breath may shake the world."

Most expressions of this kind are trite, but they have the merit of brevity.

### 10. Synecdoche (Si-nek'-do-ke) المجاز المرسل.

(Gr., *syn*, with, *ekdechesthai*, to receive)

Synecdoche (the use of the part for the whole) and metonymy (the use of something closely related for the thing actually meant) are alike in that both substitute some significant detail or aspect of an experience for the experience itself. Thus Shakespeare uses synecdoche when he says that the cuckoo's song is displeasing to a "married ear", for he means a married man. Kay uses synecdoche when she refers to "catalogues of domes", because what she means is "enough domed buildings to fill a catalogue." Robert Graves uses synecdoche when he refers to a doctor as a "Hippocratic eye," and Terence uses synecdoche when he declares that:

"Malt does more than Milton can  
To justify God's ways to man,"

for "malt" means beer or ale, of which malt is an essential ingredient.

Here are some other examples:

- (a) Give us this day our daily *bread*.  
(b) I have a fine *canvas* by Reynolds.  
(c) All *hands* to the pumps!

*Bread, canvas, hands* are actual parts of *food, picture, crew*.

Many synecdoches and metonymies, of course, like many metaphors, have become so much a part of the language that they no longer strike us as figurative; this is the case with hands for manual workers, highbrow for a sophisticate, tongues for languages, and a boiling kettle for the water in the kettle. Such figures are often referred to as dead metaphors (where the word metaphor is itself a metonymy for all figurative speech).

Synecdoche and metonymy are so much alike that it is hardly worthwhile to distinguish between them, and the latter term is increasingly used for both.

**11. Antonomasia (An-to-no-ma'-shia) الاستبدال البلاغى.**

(Gr., *anti*, instead, *onomazein*, to name, *onoma*, a name)

The substitution of the name of a distinguished person for the class he, or she, typifies, e.g.:

(a) The modern *Samson*, Every local *Cicero*, Our village *Hercules*, A new *Semiramis*.

(b) "Some mute inglorious *Milton* here may rest,  
Some *Cromwell* guiltless of his country's blood." (Thomas Gray)  
This device has the merit of being picturesque and brief, as it vividly recalls, characters famous in religion, legend, or history. On the other hand, many of these expressions have degenerated into worthless clichés.

**12. Transferred Epithet, or Hypallage (Hi-pal'la-je) إنتقال الصفة.**

(Gr., *hypallassein*, to interchange - *hypo*, under, *alssein*, to change)

The transference of a descriptive word, from the noun to which it properly belongs, to another noun closely connected. Thus we may speak of:

(a) A windy flow of rhetoric, i.e. a flow of windy rhetoric.

(b) John passed a sleepless night; it was John who was sleepless, not the night.

(c) "And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
*The murmurous haunt of flies* on autumn eves."  
Generally speaking, little advantage is gained from this artifice.

**13. Hyperbole (Hi-per'bo-le) المبالغة أو الإغراق.**

(Gr., *hyper*, beyond, *ballein*, to throw)

Exaggeration intended to produce a more striking effect than a plain statement:

(a) Rivers of blood.

(b) I do honour the very flea of his dog. (Ben Johnson)

(c) "I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love,  
Make up my sum." (Hamlet)

**14. Litotes (Li'to-tez) التهوين أو الإثبات بالنفى.**

(Gr., *litotes*, simplicity)

The opposite of Hyperbole. It is a deliberate under-statement; or else a positive assertion made in a negative form:

- (a) He is no coward. (meaning he is very brave.)
- (b) They are by no means diffident.
- (c) That girl is far from being shy.

### 15. Irony (I'ron-i) التورية الساخرة.

(L., *ironia*, Gr., *eironeia*, dissimulation - *ieron*, a dissembler)

A name given to a sarcastic statement that is intended to convey a meaning opposite to its literal one:

- (a) It must be delightful to find one's self in a foreign country, without a penny in one's pocket!
- (b) Her morning dress was of the simplest kind; merely a fifty-guinea frock.
- (c) "For Brutus is an honourable man;  
So are they all, all honourable men." (Julius Caesar)
- (d) "Is it the fashion that discarded fathers  
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?"

### 16. Innuendo التعريض بالتلميح أو الغمز.

(L., the ablative gerund of *innuere* - *in*, in, *nuere*, to nod)

Indirectly suggested irony, as in the following:

- (a) There are no brigands in this country now; they have all become hotel-keepers.
- (b) My three brothers all ended miserably. Joe was drowned, Edward was killed in a train accident, and William is married.
- (c) "Pursue your trade of scandal picking,  
Your innuendoes, when you tell us  
That Stella loves to talk with fellows." (J. Swift)

Innuendo requires considerable wit; properly employed, and in moderation, it adds life to a composition.

### 17. Euphemism (U'fem-izm) التلطيف.

(Gr., *euphemismos* - *euphemos* - *eu*, well, *pheme* - *phanai*, to speak)

This is the use of indirect expressions to describe unpleasant facts, instead of stating them plainly. Too often, it degenerates into mere circumlocution, pomposity, clichés, and defects of a similar nature. Little can be said in its favour, save that a judicious employment of it softens unpleasant news.

- (a) It is my painful duty to inform you that our dear friend quitted this vale of tears yesterday evening.

(b) We fear that no inconsiderable part of your savings is involved in the shipwreck of this bank.

### 18. Repetition التكرار.

The practice of repeating a word for the sake of emphasis, or of rhythm. This is a very effective device, when properly used.

(a) For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return.

(b) Oh! to see the linstock lighting,  
Téméraire! Téméraire!

Oh! to hear the round shot biting,  
Téméraire! Téméraire!

Even insignificant words like *and*, *or*, may be thus used with advantage, especially to secure rhythm:

(a) Weary he was, *and* full of years, *and* grief.

(b) Seasons *return*, but not to me *returns*  
Day, *or* the sweet approach of even *or* morn,  
*Or* sight of vernal bloom, *or* summer's rose,  
*Or* flocks, or herds, *or* human face divine.

Compare with (b) another passage from Milton:

(c) Through *many* a dark and dreary vale  
They passed, and *many* a region dolorous;  
O'er *many* a frozen, *many* a fiery Alp,  
Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of *death*-  
A universe of *death*!

Note the effective repetition of *many* a in lines one to three; note also the omission of conjunctions in line four, an omission that gives energy and liveliness to the narrative. The other italicised repetitions in (b) and (c) are worthy of the student's attention.

### **Syntactical repetition:**

A variety of Repetition, from which it differs in that, instead of a word, a whole construction is repeated:

(a) Bow not the knee to gilded insolence;  
Pay not respect to ancient tyranny !

(b) Hope is a cheery companion on a journey;  
Faith a good lantern on the way.

### 19. Omission الحذف.

Certain words, especially connectives, may sometimes be omitted effectively:

(a) The day was bleak, cheerless, gloomy.

(b) A good worker! All show; no performance - that is how he strikes me.

See also the quotation (c) from Milton above.

**20. Climax (Kli'maks) التصاعد.**

(Gr., *klimax*, a ladder- from *klinein*, to slope)

A series of statements made in ascending order of importance, or of impressiveness; as in:

(a) The glancing of the leaves, the silvery shimmer of the stream, the swift alternations of light and shadow, the brilliant shafts of fire leaping through a rent in the thunderclouds, made this a most impressive spectacle.

(b) "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. (Francis Bacon)

(c) The stars shall fade away, the sun himself  
Grow dim with age, and nature sink in years;  
But thou shalt flourish in immortal youth,  
Unhurt amid the war of elements,  
The wreck of matter, and the crash of worlds.

**21. Bathos (Ba'thos) or Anticlimax الهبوط الساهى.**

(Gr., bathos, depth), (Gr., *anti*, against, *klimax*, a ladder- from *klinein*, to slope)

An intentional, or unintentional, descent from the elevated to the commonplace, from the solemn to the ridiculous, or from the impressive to the trivial. The examples given below, will show you how ludicrous is the effect thus produced:

(a) The explosion completely destroyed a church, two houses, and a flowerpot.

(b) Not louder shrieks by dames to heaven are cast,  
When husbands die, or lapdogs breathe their last.

(c) That warlike speech received with many a cheer,  
Had filled them with desire of fame, and beer.

(d) The soldier fights for glory, and a shilling a day.

**22. Oxymoron (Ok-si-mo'ron) الإرداف الخلفى أو التناقض الظاهرى.**

(Gr., *oxys*, sharp, *moron*, foolish)

A name applied to the device of combining in one sentence contradictory terms or ideas. At first sight, the resulting statement seems irrational, but, on closer examination, we find that this artifice heightens the effect, or expresses a truth in a subtle manner. Thus, when Shelley wrote:

"They pursued their serious folly as of old,"

he conveyed the idea that the people in question were lamentably unaware of the foolishness of their pursuits; a fact that made their earnestness very tragic.

Other examples are:

- (a) "A little noiseless noise among the leaves,  
Born of the very sigh that silence heaves."
- (b) "I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not honour more."
- (c) "His honour rooted in dishonour stood,  
And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."

### 23. Antithesis (An-tith'e-sis) المقابلة - الطباق - المطابقة.

(Gr., *anti*, against, *tithemi*, to place)

Akin to Oxymoron, in that it means the pitting of one idea against another, and thus gaining force by means of contrast:

- (a) He would haggle over a penny, but cheerfully give ten thousand pounds for a picture.
- (b) They are utter sceptics in religion, yet put off going to market if they meet a magpie.
- (c) They speak like saints, and act like devils.
- (d) "Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;  
Oft she rejects, but never once offends" (Alexander Pope)
- (e) I was fascinated by the freshness of her artificial complexion.

### 24. Paradox (Par'a-doks) التناقض الظاهري.

(Gr., *para*, contrary to, *doxa*, an opinion)

A seemingly self-contradictory statement, that is startling, because, if taken literally, it is illogical or is contrary to accepted opinions.

Aesop tells the tale of a traveler who sought refuge with a Satyr on a bitter winter night. On entering the Satyr's lodging, he blew on his fingers, and was asked by the Satyr why he did it. "To warm them up," he explained. Later, on being served a piping hot bowl of porridge, he blew also on it, and again was asked why he did it. "To cool it off" he explained. The satyr thereupon thrust him out of doors, for he would have nothing to do with a man who could blow hot and cold with the same breath. When we understand all the conditions and circumstances involved in a paradox, we find that what at first seemed impossible is actually entirely plausible and not strange at all. The paradox of the cold hands and hot porridge is not strange to anyone who knows that a stream of air directed upon an object of different temperature will tend to bring that object closer to its own temperature.

Here are other examples:

(a) "The man who does not know fear cannot claim to be truly brave."  
This apparently absurd statement is true, if we grant that the highest form of courage is conquering fear.

(b) "Except you enthrall me, never shall be free  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me." (John Donne)

(c) **Much madness is divinest sense**

Much madness is divinest sense  
To a discerning eye,  
Much sense, the starkest madness.  
'Tis the majority  
In this, as all, prevail: 5  
Assent, and you are sane;  
Demur, you're straightway dangerous  
And handled with a chain.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

## QUESTIONS

1. This poem presents the two sides of a paradoxical proposition: that insanity is good sense, and that good sense is insane. How do the concepts implied by the words "discerning" (2) and "majority" (4) provide the resolution of this paradox?
2. How do we know that the speaker does not believe that the majority is correct? How do the last five lines extend the subject beyond a contrast between sanity and insanity?

The value of paradox is its shock value. Its seeming impossibility startles the reader into attention and, by the fact of its apparent absurdity, underscores the truth of what is being said. Remember, however, that even such a master of brilliant paradox as G. K. Chesterton occasionally palls *يصبح مملا* on his readers, and, what is worse, irritates them.

## 25. Epigram (Ep'i-gram) *الحكمة الساخرة*.

(Gr., *epi*, upon, *gramma*, a writing)

A short, witty saying that embodies a shrewd reflection. Look how Coleridge defines it:

"What is an Epigram? A dwarfish whole!  
Its body brevity, and wit its soul."

Here are some examples:

(a) Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern. One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly.

(b) Vulgarity is the conduct of other people.

(c) The only possible society is one's self.

(d) "Thy flattering picture Phryne, is like thee,  
Onely in this, that you both painted be." (John Donne)

It should be observed that, at best, an epigram expresses only half a truth. Take the examples above. There is, undoubtedly, a measure of truth in the sayings, but, taken literally, the statements are false.

**26. Asyndeton** (A-sin'de-ton) حذف حروف العطف.

(Gr., *a*, neg., *syndetos*, bound together, *syn*, together, *dein*, to bind)

The omission of certain conjunctions; this adds speed and energises the composition:

(a) I washed, shaved, dressed, and went out.

(b) "So spake the Seraph Abdiel, faithful, found  
Among innumerable false, unmoved,  
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified  
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal." (Paradise Lost)

**27. Periphrasis** (Pe-rifra-sis) الإطناب or **Circumlocution** التطويل والحشو.

(Gr., *peri*, about, *phrasis*, a speaking)

An indirect method of speaking about a thing or person:

(a) A succulent bivalve = an oyster.

(b) The Lord of the Day = the sun.

(c) The unruly member = the tongue.

(d) "Close by those meads, forever crowned with flowers,  
Where the Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,  
There stands a structure of majestic frame,  
Which from the neib'ring Hampton takes its name."  
(Alexander Pope)

As a rule, this is a feeble device, even when the expression is original; but it has its uses.

**28. Anacoluthon** (An'-a-kol-u'thon) الفصل أو فقدان التتابع.

(Gr., *anakolouthos* - *a*, *an*, neg., and *akolouthos*, following)

A break, or inversion, in the structure of a sentence:

(a) Those who agree, let them stand up.

(b) Him who transgresses, we shall punish.

**29. Hendiadys** (Hen-di'-a-dis) تشبيه الواحد.

{Gr., *hen*, one, *dia*, by, *dyoin*, two)

There are various forms of this device. The commonest is that in which we find two nouns employed in place of a noun + adjective:

- (a) He passed the time in *amusements and pleasures* = pleasurable amusements.
- (b) The work was upset by *delays and disappointments* = disappointing delays.
- (c) "The *heaviness and guilt* within my bosom  
Takes off my manhood." = the heavy guilt (Cymbeline)

### 30. Apparent Interrogation or Rhetorical Questions الاستفهام البلاغي.

These are negative statements disguised as questions:

- (a) "You unselfish! You, who never think of others! Can I be expected to approve of your conduct? Who could do so?"

The sentences of which the example is composed are not real interrogations. The whole might be rewritten as follows: You are (not un-) selfish. You never think of others. I cannot be expected to approve of your conduct. No one could do so.

- (b) "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" (Shelley)
- (c) "Can storied urn or animated bust  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?" (Thomas Gray)

This apparently interrogative form serves to emphasise the statements, and to enliven the style.

### 31. Aposiopesis (Ap'-o-si-o-pe-sis) السكوت أو الارتجاج الفجائي.

(Gr., *apo-siopa-ein*, to keep silent)

A sudden break in a narrative. It is used to suggest violent emotion, or unwillingness to continue the sentence:

- (a) Four hours ago the child was alive and well, but now ---!
- (b) If you continue your intemperate way of living, in six months' time---
- (c) Do you think I could betray my country, and that money would ---! But why discuss the matter further!

### 32. Onomatopoeia (On'o-ma-to-pe'a) محاكاة اللفظ للمعنى.

(Gr., *onoma*, -*atos*, a name, *poiein*, to make)

The use of words that imitate a natural sound, or that, by their sound, suggest some mood or condition. The proper use of this device is one of the hardest problems in literature; failure is peculiarly disastrous.

The following will give you some idea of this artifice:

- (a) The low slow roll of surges on the beach.

- (b) A hammering clatter of hoofs beating the hard road.
- (c) And languid murmurs of the weary leaves.
- (d) White jagged lightning, followed by the brazen clash and deep rumble of thunder.

Many good writers, especially poets, are fond of effects of this kind. It is essential, however, that the attempt should neither be too obvious nor too continuous. An unbroken series of such imitative sounds becomes very monotonous, and is, therefore, not satisfactory.

### 33. Chiasmus (Ki-az'-mus) *التصالب الكلام أو المقابلة العكسية*

(Gr., *chiasma*, two lines crossed as in the letter x)

When the second of two consecutive sentences or phrases resembles the first, except that the order of the component parts is inverted, we have the arrangement known as Chiasmus. This inversion often enables us to secure a pleasing result:

- (a) Strong in attack, and in defence unrivalled.
- (b) The melody was old; old also were the words.
- (c) "But Tom's no more- and so no more of Tom." (Byron)
- (d) "Flowers are lovely; love is flowerlike." (Coleridge)

### 34. Hyperbaton (Hi-par-bat-on) *التقديم والتأخير*

(Gr., *hyper*, beyond, *bainein*, to go)

The transposition of words from their usual order to achieve emphasis or to fit the rhyme.

- (a) Crashed the waves against the shore.  
Which should read: "The waves crashed against the shore."
- (b) "Yet I'll not shed her blood,  
Nor scar *that whiter skin of hers than snow*." (Otello)
- (c) "John Gilpin's spouse said to her dear,  
Though *wedded we have been*  
These twice ten tedious years; yet *we*  
*No holiday have seen*."

### 35. Alliteration (Al-lit'-er-a-shen) *المجانسة الاستهلاكية*

The repetition of the initial letter or sound in two or more closely associated words or stressed syllables. This device is used for its musical effect as well as an aid to memory, particularly with oral traditions and poetry. Examples:

- (a) And as I lay, and leaned, and looked on the water,  
I slumbered in a sleep, it sounded so soothing."  
"I hear *lake water lapping* with *low* sounds by the *shore*."

(Yeats)

Here the (*l*) sounds represent the liquid sounds of little waves, and the (*s*) and (*sh*) sounds help.

(b) "A **r**eeling road, a rolling road, that **r**ambles **r**ound the shire."  
(Chesterton)

The (*r*) sounds help the description of a wandering road.

"The **p**lowman homeward **p**lods his weary way."

"I **w**as weary of **w**andering, and **w**ent me to rest  
Under a **b**road **b**ank **b**y a **b**rook side,

### 36. Consonance التناغم

(L., from: *consonare*, to harmonise - *con*, with, *sonare*, to sound)

This is the repetition of the same consonant after different vowels in words next to, or near to, one another. E.g.: (click, flock, black); (reader, rider, ruder, raider).

(a) "Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our **f**aces-  
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-**d**azed,  
Deep into grassier ditches, So we drowse, sun-**d**ozed,  
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird **f**usses."  
(Wilfred Owen)

**F**aces and **f**usses are consonant, also, *d*azed and *d*ozed.

### 37. Assonance تجانس الحركات

(L., *assonare*, as=*ad*-, to, *sonare*, to sound)

This is repetition of similar vowel sounds. *Made* and *Mate* are not rhymes, but they have a similar vowel sound, thus giving music:

(a) "For she is such a smart little craft,  
Such a **n**eat little, sweet little craft,-  
Such a **r**ight little.  
**T**ight little,  
**S**light little,  
**L**ight little,  
Trim little, slim little craft!"

(b) "The closer I **m**ove  
To death, one man through his sundered hulks,  
The louder the sun **b**looms  
And the tusked, ramshackling sea exults..." (Dylan Thomas)  
*M*ove and *b*looms are assonant, also *h*ulks and *e*xults.

### 38. The Pun التلاعب بالألفاظ

This device, though it cannot properly be classed with the foregoing, deserves a passing mention. It is usually defined as: "A play on words"; two different meanings are drawn out of a single word, usually for comic, playful or witty purposes.

As a striking example we quote the saying of the jester who, on looking at a corpse, observed that the sight recalled to him "The Diet of Worms", which most people will understand as meaning "the food of worms", while more sophisticated people will understand the allusion to a famous historical event when the legislative council (Diet) met at the city of Worms.

To be successful a pun must be brilliant. If it is not, no form of wit is more feeble, or so detestable. Oliver Wendell Holmes says:

"Hard is the job to launch the dangerous pun,  
A *pun-job*<sup>1</sup> dangerous as the Indian one."

Here is a good pun:

"O Nelly Gray! O Nelly Gray!  
Is this your love so warm?  
The love that loves a scarlet coat<sup>2</sup>,  
Should be more *uniform*."

And lastly, here are two good puns by that great wit, G. K. Chesterton:

"When Robin Hood in Sherwood shot,  
(Though prigs pretend to know  
That not the bowman but the bard  
Was drawing the long bow),  
In Lincoln green he gaily trod,  
With sword and arrows keen,  
(Some say only the bard was sharp<sup>3</sup>,  
Only the hearers green<sup>4</sup>).

### 39. Denotation المعنى and Connotation الإيحاء والدلالة

A primary distinction between the practical use of language and the literary use is that in literature, especially in poetry, a fuller use is made of individual words. To understand this, we need to examine the composition of a word.

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<sup>1</sup> Punjab is district in India which was in revolt at that time.

<sup>2</sup> British soldier (used to wear a scarlet uniform)

<sup>3</sup> clever

<sup>4</sup> naive

The average word has three component parts: sound, denotation, and connotation. It begins as a combination of tones and noises, uttered by the lips, tongue, and throat, for which the written word is a notation *بتوين*. But it differs from a musical tone or a noise in that it has a meaning attached to it. The basic part of this meaning is its **denotation** *المعنى* or denotations: that is, the dictionary meaning or meanings of the word. Beyond its denotations, a word also may have **connotations** *تضمين أو إحياء*. The connotations are what it suggests beyond what it expresses: its overtones of meaning. It acquires these connotations from its past history and associations, from the way and the circumstances in which it has been used. The word *home*, for instance, by denotation means only a place where one lives, but by connotation it suggests security, love, comfort, and family. The words *childlike* and *childish* both mean “characteristic of a child,” but *childlike* suggests meekness, innocence, and wide-eyed wonder, while *childish* suggests pettiness, willfulness, and temper tantrums. If we list the names of different coins — nickel, peso, lira, shilling, sen, doubloon — the word *doubloon*, to four out of five readers, immediately will suggest pirates, though a dictionary definition includes nothing about pirates. Pirates are part of its connotation. Connotation is very important in poetry, for it is one of the means by which the poet can concentrate or enrich meaning — say more in fewer words. Consider, for instance, the following short poem:

**There is no frigate like a book**

There is no frigate like a book  
 To take us lands away,  
 Nor any coursers like a page  
 Of prancing poetry.  
 This traverse may the poorest take     5  
 Without oppress of toll.  
 How frugal is the chariot  
 That bears the human soul!

Emily Dickinson (1830—1886)

In this poem Emily Dickinson is considering the power of a book or of poetry to carry us away, to take us from our immediate surroundings into a world of the imagination. To do this she has compared literature to various means of transportation: a boat, a team of horses, a wheeled land vehicle. But she has been careful to choose kinds of transportation and names for them that have romantic connotations. “Frigate” suggests exploration and adventure; “coursers,” beauty, spirit, and speed; “chariot,” speed and the ability to go through the air as well as on land. (Compare “Swing Low,

Sweet Chariot” and the myth of Phaethon, who tried to drive the chariot of Apollo, and the famous painting of Aurora with her horses, once hung in almost every English school.) How much of the meaning of the poem comes from this selection of vehicles and words is apparent if we try to substitute steamship for “frigate,” horses for “coursers,” and streetcar for “chariot.”

#### QUESTIONS

1. What is lost if miles is substituted for “lands” (2) or cheap for “frugal” (7)?
2. How is “prancing” (4) peculiarly appropriate to poetry as well as to coursers? Could the poet without loss have compared a book to coursers and poetry to a frigate?

Just as a word has a variety of connotations, so may it have more than one denotation. If we look up the word spring in the dictionary, for instance, we will find that it has between twenty-five and thirty distinguishable meanings: It may mean (1) a pounce or leap, (2) a season of the year, (3) a natural source of water, (4) a coiled elastic wire, and so forth.

This variety of denotation, complicated by additional tones of connotation, makes language confusing and difficult to use. Any person using words must be careful to define precisely by context the meaning that is desired. But the difference between the writer using language to communicate information and the poet is this: the practical writer will always attempt to confine words to one meaning at a time; the poet will often take advantage of the fact that the word has more than one meaning by using it to mean more than one thing at the same time. Thus when Edith Sitwell in one of her poems writes, “This is the time of the wild spring and the mating of the tigers,” she uses the word spring to denote both a season of the year and a sudden leap (and she uses tigers rather than lambs or birds because it has a connotation of fierceness and wildness that the other two lack).

#### 40. Symbol الرمز.

##### The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

5

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same, 10

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back. 15

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference. 20

Robert Frost (1874 — 1963)

## QUESTIONS

1. Does the speaker feel that he has made the wrong choice in taking the road “less traveled by”? If not, why will he sigh? What does he regret?
2. Why will the choice between two roads that seem very much alike make such a big difference many years later?

**A symbol** may be roughly defined as something that means more than what it is. “The Road Not Taken,” for instance, concerns a choice made between two roads by a person out walking in the woods. He would like to explore both roads. He tells himself that he will explore one and then come back and explore the other, but he knows that he will probably be unable to do so. By the last stanza, however, we realize that the poem is about something more than the choice of paths in a wood, for that choice would be relatively unimportant, while this choice, the speaker believes, is one that will make a great difference in his life and is one that he will remember with a sigh “ages and ages hence.” We must interpret his choice of a road as a symbol for any choice in life between alternatives that appear almost equally attractive but will result through the years in a large difference in the kind of experience one knows.

Image, metaphor, and symbol shade into each other and are sometimes difficult to distinguish. In general, however, an image means only what it is; the figurative term in a metaphor means something other than what it is; and a symbol means what it is and something more, too. A symbol, that is, functions literally and figuratively at the same time. If I say that a shaggy brown dog was rubbing its back against a white picket fence, I am talking about nothing but a dog (and a picket fence) and am therefore

presenting an image. If I say, "Some dirty dog stole my wallet at the party," I am not talking about a dog at all and am therefore using a metaphor. But if I say, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," I am talking not only about dogs but about living creatures of any species and am therefore speaking symbolically. Images, of course, do not cease to be images when they become incorporated in metaphors or symbols. If we are discussing the sensuous qualities of "The Road Not Taken," we should refer to the two leaf-strewn roads in the yellow wood as an image; if we are discussing the significance of the poem, we talk about the roads as symbols.

The symbol is the richest and at the same time the most difficult of the poetic figures. Both its richness and its difficulty result from its imprecision. Although the poet may pin down the meaning of a symbol to something fairly definite and precise, more often the symbol is so general in its meaning that it can suggest a great variety of specific meanings. It is like an opal that flashes out different colors when slowly turned in the light. The choice in "The Road Not Taken," for instance, concerns some choice in life, but what choice? Was it a choice of profession? A choice of residence? A choice of mate? It might be any, all, or none of these. We cannot determine what particular choice the poet had in mind, if any, and it is not important that we do so. It is enough if we see in the poem an expression of regret that the possibilities of life experience are so sharply limited. The speaker in the poem would have liked to explore both roads, but he could explore only one. The person with a craving for life, whether satisfied or dissatisfied with the choices he has made, will always long for the realms of experience that he had to forego. Because the symbol is a rich one, the poem suggests other meanings too. It affirms a belief in the possibility of choice and says something about the nature of choice — how each choice narrows the range of possible future choices, so that we make our lives as we go, both freely choosing and being determined by past choices. Though not a philosophical poem, it obliquely comments on the issue of free will and determinism and indicates the poet's own position. It can do all these things, concretely and compactly, by its use of an effective symbol.

Symbols vary in the degree of identification and definition given them by their authors. In this poem Frost forces us to interpret the choice of roads symbolically by the degree of importance he gives it in the last stanza. Sometimes poets are much more specific in identifying their symbols. Sometimes they do not identify them at all. Consider, for instance, the next two poems.

### **A Noiseless Patient Spider**

A noiseless patient spider,

I marked where on a little promontory it stood isolated,  
Marked how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,  
It launched forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,  
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

5

And you, O my soul where you stand,  
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,  
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,  
Till the bridge you will need be formed, till the ductile anchor hold,  
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul. 10

Walt Whitman (1819—1892)

In the first stanza the speaker describes a spider's apparently tireless effort to attach its thread to some substantial support so that it can begin constructing a web. The speaker reveals his attentive interest by the hinted personification of the spider, and his sympathy with it is expressed in the overstatement of size and distance – he is trying to perceive the world as a spider sees it from a “promontory” surrounded by vast space. He even attributes a human motive to the spider: exploration, rather than instinctive web-building. Nevertheless, the first stanza is essentially literal – the close observation of an actual spider at its task. In the second stanza the speaker explicitly interprets the symbolic meaning of what he has observed: his soul (personified by apostrophe and by the capabilities assigned to it) is like the spider in its constant striving. But the soul's purpose is to find spiritual or intellectual certainties in the vast universe it inhabits. The symbolic meaning is richer than a mere comparison; while a spider's actual purpose is limited to its instinctive drives, the human soul strives for much more, in a much more complex “surrounding.” And of course, the result of the soul's symbolized striving is much more open-ended than is the attempt of a spider to spin a web, as the paradoxical language (“surrounded, detached,” “ductile anchor”) implies. Can the human soul connect the celestial spheres?

#### QUESTIONS

1. In “The Hound” Robert Francis compares unpredictable human life to a hound. Whitman compares the striving human soul to a spider. Why is Francis's comparison a metaphor and Whitman's a symbol? What additional comparison does Whitman make to the soul's quest? What figure of speech is it?
2. In what ways are the spider and the soul contrasted? What do the contrasts contribute to the meaning of the symbol?
3. Can the questing soul represent human actions other than the search for spiritual certainties?

## The Sick Rose

O Rose, thou art sick!  
The invisible worm  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm,  
                    Has found out thy bed                      5  
                    Of crimson joy,  
                    And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.

William Blake (1757—1827)

### QUESTIONS

1. What figures of speech do you find in the poem in addition to symbol? How do they contribute to its force or meaning?
2. Several symbolic interpretations of this poem are given below. Do you think of others?
3. Should symbolic meanings be sought for the night and the storm? If so, what meanings would you suggest?

In “A Noiseless Patient Spider” the symbolic meaning of the spider is identified and named. By contrast, in “The Sick Rose” no meanings are explicitly indicated for the rose and the worm. Indeed, we are not compelled to assign them specific meanings. The poem is validly read as being about a rose that has been attacked on a stormy night by a cankerworm.

The organization of “The Sick Rose” is so rich, however, and its language so powerful that the rose and the worm refuse to remain merely a flower and an insect. The rose, apostrophized and personified in the first line, has traditionally been a symbol of feminine beauty and of love, as well as of sensual pleasures. “Bed” can refer to a woman’s bed as well as to a flower bed. “Crimson joy” suggests the intense pleasure of passionate lovemaking as well as the brilliant beauty of a red flower. The “dark secret love” of the “invisible worm” is more strongly suggestive of a concealed or illicit love affair than of the feeding of a cankerworm on a plant, though it fits that too. For all these reasons the rose almost immediately suggests a woman and the worm her secret lover – and the poem suggests the corruption of innocent but physical love by concealment and deceit. But the possibilities do not stop there. The worm is a common symbol or metonymy for death; and for readers steeped in Milton (as Blake was) it recalls the “undying worm” of Paradise Lost, Milton’s metaphor for the snake (or Satan in the form of a snake) that tempted Eve. Meanings multiply also for the reader who is familiar with Blake’s other writings. Thus “The Sick Rose” has been variously interpreted as referring to the destruction of

joyous physical love by jealousy, deceit, concealment, or the possessive instinct; of innocence by experience; of humanity by Satan; of imagination and joy by analytic reason; of life by death. We cannot say what specifically the poet had in mind, nor need we do so. A symbol defines an area of meaning, and any interpretation that falls within that area is permissible. In Blake's poem the rose stands for something beautiful, or desirable, or good. The worm stands for some corrupting agent. Within these limits, the meaning is largely "open." And because the meaning is open, the reader is justified in bringing personal experience to its interpretation. Blake's poem, for instance, might remind someone of a gifted friend whose promise has been destroyed by drug addiction.

Between the extremes exemplified by "A Noiseless Patient Spider" and "The Sick Rose" a poem may exercise all degrees of control over the range and meaning of its symbolism. Consider another example.

#### 41. Allegory المجاز.

Allegory is a narrative or description that has a second meaning beneath the surface. Although the surface story or description may have its own interest, the author's major interest is in the ulterior meaning. When Pharaoh in the Bible, for instance, has a dream in which seven fat kine<sup>5</sup> are devoured by seven lean kine, the story does not really become significant until Joseph interprets its allegorical meaning: that Egypt is to enjoy seven years of fruitfulness and prosperity followed by seven years of famine. Allegory has been defined sometimes as an extended metaphor and sometimes as a series of related symbols. But it is usually distinguishable from both of these. It is unlike extended metaphor in that it involves a system of related comparisons rather than one comparison drawn out. It differs from symbolism in that it puts less emphasis on the images for their own sake and more on their ulterior meanings. Also, these meanings are more fixed. In allegory there is usually a one-to-one correspondence between the details and a single set of ulterior meanings. In complex allegories the details may have more than one meaning, but these meanings tend to be definite. Meanings do not ray out from allegory as they do from a symbol.

Allegory is less popular in modern literature than it was in medieval and Renaissance writing, and it is much less often found in short poems than in long narrative works such as *The Faerie Queene*, *Everyman*, and *Pilgrim's Progress*. It has sometimes, especially with political allegory, been used to disguise meaning rather than reveal it (or, rather, to disguise it from

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<sup>5</sup> cows

some people while revealing it to others). Though less rich than the symbol, allegory is an effective way of making the abstract concrete and has occasionally been used effectively even in fairly short poems.

## Peace

Sweet Peace, where dost thou dwell? I humbly crave,  
Let me once know.

I sought thee in a secret cave,  
And asked if Peace were there.

A hollow wind did seem to answer, "No, 5  
Go seek elsewhere."

I did, and going did a rainbow note.

"Surely," thought I,

"This is the lace of Peace's coat;

I will search out the matter." 10

But while I looked, the clouds immediately  
Did break and scatter.

Then went I to a garden, and did spy A gallant flower,

The Crown Imperial. "Sure," said I, 15

"Peace at the root must dwell."

But when I digged, I saw a worm devour

What showed so well.

At length I met a reverend good old man,

Whom when for Peace 20

I did demand, he thus began:

"There was a prince of old

At Salem dwelt, who lived with good increase

Of flock and fold.

"He sweetly lived; yet sweetness did not save 25

His life from foes.

But after death out of his grave

There sprang twelve stalks of wheat;

Which many wondering at, got some of those

To plant and set. 30

"It prospered strangely, and did soon disperse

Through all the earth,

For they that taste it do rehearse

That virtue lies therein,  
A secret virtue, bringing peace and mirth                    35  
By flight of sin.

“Take of this grain, which in my garden grows,  
And grows for you;  
Make bread of it; and that repose  
And peace, which everywhere    40  
With so much earnestness you do pursue,  
Is only there:’

George Herbert (1593—1633)

## QUESTIONS

1. Vocabulary: gallant (14), rehearse (33), virtue (34). “Crown Imperial” (15) is a garden flower, fritillary; “Salem” (23) is Jerusalem.
2. If the “prince” (22) is Jesus Christ, then identify: the old man’s “flock and fold” (24), the “twelve stalks of wheat” (28), the “grain” (37), and the “bread” (39).
3. Should the “secret cave” (stanza 1), the “rainbow” (stanza 2), and the “flower garden” (stanza 3) be understood merely as places where the speaker searched or do they have more precise meanings?
4. Who is the “reverend good old man” (19), and what is his garden (37)?

\*            \*            \*

## Fire and Ice

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I’ve tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.

But if it had to perish twice,    5  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

Robert Frost (1874—1963)

## QUESTIONS

1. Who are “some” 1—2)? To what two theories do lines 1—2 refer? (In answering, it might help you to know that the poem was published in 1920.)
2. What do “fire” and “ice” respectively symbolize? What two meanings has “the world”?

3. The poem ends with an understatement. How does it affect the tone of the poem?

42. **Allusion** (إشارة (إلى حدث أو شخصية تاريخية أو أدبية)

The famous English diplomat and letter writer Lord Chesterfield once was invited to a great dinner given by the Spanish ambassador. At the conclusion of the meal the host rose and proposed a toast to his master, the king of Spain, whom he compared to the sun. The French ambassador followed with a health to the king of France, whom he likened to the moon. It was then Lord Chesterfield's turn. "Your excellencies have taken from me," he said, "all the greatest luminaries of heaven, and the stars are too small for me to make a comparison of my royal master; I therefore beg leave to give your excellencies – Joshua!"<sup>6</sup>

For a reader familiar with the Bible – that is, for one who recognizes the biblical allusion – Lord Chesterfield's story will come as a stunning revelation of his wit. For an **allusion** – a reference to something in history or previous literature – is, like a richly connotative word or a symbol, means of suggesting far more than it says. The one word "Joshua," in the context of Chesterfield's toast, calls up in the reader's mind the whole biblical story of how the Israelite captain stopped the sun and the moon in order that the Israelites might finish a battle and conquer their enemies before nightfall. The force of the toast lies in its extreme economy; it says so much in so little, and it exercises the mind of the reader to make the connection for himself.

The effect of Chesterfield's allusion is chiefly humorous or witty, but allusions also may have a powerful emotional effect. The essayist William Hazlitt writes of addressing a fashionable audience about the lexicographer Samuel Johnson. Speaking of Johnson's great heart and of his charity to the unfortunate, Hazlitt recounted how, finding a drunken prostitute lying in Fleet Street late at night, Johnson carried her on his broad back to the address she managed to give him. The audience, unable to face the picture of the famous dictionary-maker doing such a thing, broke out in titters and expostulations, whereupon Hazlitt simply said: "I remind you, ladies and gentlemen, of the parable of the Good Samaritan."<sup>7</sup> The audience was promptly silenced.

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<sup>6</sup> (Joshua 10:12)

<sup>7</sup> (Luke 10: 33-38)

The following poem is choke-ful with allusions, in fact there are allusions within allusions. Try first to read it and discover them for yourself.

### Five Ways to Kill a Man

There are many cumbersome ways to kill a man.  
You can make him carry a plank of wood  
To the top of a hill and nail him to it. To do this  
Properly you require a crowd of people  
Wearing sandals, a cock that crows, a cloak                    5  
To dissect, a sponge, some vinegar and one  
Man to hammer the nails home.

Or you can take a length of steel,  
Shaped and chased in a traditional way,  
And attempt to pierce the metal cage he wears.                    10  
But for this you need white horses,  
English trees, men with bows and arrows,  
At least two flags, a prince and a  
Castle to hold your banquet in.

Dispensing with nobility, you may, if the wind                    15  
Allows, blow gas at him. But then you need  
A mile of mud sliced through with ditches,  
Not to mention black boots, bomb craters,  
More mud, a plague of rats, a dozen songs  
And some round hats made of steel.                    20

In an age of aeroplanes, you may fly  
Miles above your victim and dispose of him by  
Pressing one small switch. All you then  
Require is an ocean to separate you, two                    25  
Systems of government, a nation's scientists,  
Several factories, a psychopath and  
Land that no one needs for several years.

These are, as I began, cumbersome ways  
To kill a man. Simpler, direct, and much more neat  
Is to see that he is living somewhere in the middle                    30  
Of the twentieth century, and leave him there.                    (Edwin Brock)

Without understanding the allusions referred to in “Five ways to kill a man”, much of its impact will be lost. The first stanza alludes to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; the second to the medieval wars between the English and the French, particularly the battles of Crecy and Poitiers when the English archers, armed with long bows made from yew, defeated the French cavalry; while the third alludes to the World War I; and the fourth to World War II, and particularly to the dropping of the first atomic bomb. The concluding stanza is open for interpretation. Does he refer to pollution? Or the stress of living under capitalistic democracies that care nothing for the individual? Or to Communism stamping on the souls of men? Or to Cold War threatening to erupt into a World War III? Or whatever?

### QUESTIONS

1. What are the meanings of the following: “plank of wood” in line 2, “crowd of people wearing sandals” in lines 4 and 5, “length of steel” in line 8, “metal cage” in line 10, “English trees” in line 12, “gas” in line 16, “round hats made of steel” in line 20,
2. To what person or incident does the poet allude to when he says: “him” in line 2, “a cock that crows” in line 5, “psychopath” in line 26.
3. What is the poet’s view regarding life in the twentieth century?

Allusions are a means of reinforcing the emotion or the ideas of one’s own work with the emotion or ideas of another work or occasion. Because they may compact so much meaning in so small a space, they are extremely useful to the poet.

### “Out, Out ...”

The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard  
 And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,  
 Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.  
 And from there those that lifted eyes could count  
 Five mountain ranges one behind the other    5  
 Under the sunset far into Vermont.  
 And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,  
 As it ran light, or had to bear a load.  
 And nothing happened: day was all but done.  
 Call it a day, I wish they might have said    10  
 To please the boy by giving him the half hour  
 That a boy counts so much when saved from work.  
 His sister stood beside them in her apron  
 To tell them “Supper.” At the word, the saw,

As if to prove saws knew what supper meant, 15  
 Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap —  
 He must have given the hand. However it was,  
 Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!  
 The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh,  
 As he swung toward them holding up the hand 20  
 Half in appeal, but half as if to keep  
 The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all —  
 Since he was old enough to know, big boy  
 Doing a man's work, though a child at heart—  
 He saw all spoiled. "Don't let him cut my hand off— 25  
 The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!"  
 So. But the hand was gone already.  
 The doctor put him in the dark of ether.  
 He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.  
 And then— the watcher at his pulse took fright. 30  
 No one believed. They listened at his heart.  
 Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.  
 No more to build on there. And they, since they  
 Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

Robert Frost (1874—1963)

## QUESTIONS

1. How does this poem differ from a newspaper account that might have dealt with the same incident?
2. To whom does "they" (33) refer? The boy's family? The doctor and medical attendants? Casual onlookers? Need we assume that all these people - whoever they are - returned immediately "to their affairs"? Does the ending of this poem seem to you callous or merely realistic? Would a more tearful and sentimental ending have made the poem better or worse?
3. What figure of speech is used in lines 21—22?

Allusions vary widely in the burden put on them by the poet to convey meaning. Lord Chesterfield risked his whole meaning on his hearers' recognizing his allusion. Robert Frost in "'Out, Out -'" makes his meaning entirely clear even for the reader who does not recognize the allusion contained in the poem's title. His theme is the uncertainty and unpredictability of life, which may be ended accidentally at any moment, and the tragic waste of human potentiality that takes place when such premature deaths occur. A boy who is already "doing a man's work" and gives every promise of having a useful life ahead of him is suddenly wiped



are always in danger of being misunderstood. What appeals powerfully to one reader may lose another reader altogether. But poets must assume a certain fund of common experience in readers. They could not even write about the ocean unless they could assume that readers have seen the ocean or pictures of it. In the same way poets assume a certain common fund of literary experience, most frequently of classical mythology, Shakespeare, or the Bible – particularly the King James Version. Poets are often justified in expecting a rather wide range of literary experience in readers, for the people who read poetry for pleasure are generally intelligent and well-read. But, obviously, beginning readers will not have this range, just as they will not know the meanings of as many words as will more mature readers. Students should therefore be prepared to look up certain allusions, just as they should be eager to look up in their dictionaries the meanings of unfamiliar words. They will find that every increase in knowledge broadens their base for understanding both literature and life.

1. Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves
  2. Jack and the Beanstalk
  3. Puss in Boots
  4. Abdullah the Merman and Abdullah the Landman
  5. Theseus and the Minotaur
  6. Three Golden Hairs
  7. Perseus and the Medusa
  8. Aladdin and the Magic Lamp
  9. Prince Wicked
  10. Ivan the Ninny
  11. The Ungrateful Dwarf
  12. Abusir and Abukir
  13. Hansel and Gretel
  14. Fearless John
  15. The Water of Life
  16. Snow White
  17. Sindbad Rides a Whale
  18. Cinderella
  19. Sindbad in the Valley of Snakes
  20. The Black Knight of Arabia
  21. Beauty and the Beast
  22. Sleeping Beauty
  23. Sindbad in the Islands of Terror
  24. Sindbad Is Buried Alive
  25. Tom Thumb
  26. The Brave Tailor
  27. The Magic Stick
  28. Sindbad and the Old Man of the Sea
  29. Sindbad in the River of darkness
  30. The Golden Horse
  31. The Enchanted Horse
  32. The Seventh Voyage of Sindbad
  33. Prince Charming
  34. The Donkey Cabbage
  35. The Hare Herd
  36. The Goose-Girl
  37. Ghost Soup
  38. The Adventurous Princess
  39. Long Nose
  40. Kamar Al-Zaman and Princess Bedour
- ١- على بابا والأربعين حرامي
  - ٢- جاك والبقول
  - ٣- القط يرتدى الحذاء
  - ٤- عبد الله البرى وعبد الله البحرى
  - ٥- المصارع والوحش
  - ٦- الثلاث شعرات الذهبية
  - ٧- برسيسوس والمرأة الأفعى
  - ٨- علاء الدين والمصباح السحري
  - ٩- الأمير الشرير
  - ١٠- إيفان الأبله
  - ١١- القزم الجاحد
  - ١٢- أبو صير وأبو قير
  - ١٣- الكوخ العجيب
  - ١٤- قلعة الرعب
  - ١٥- ماء الحياة
  - ١٦- الأميرة والأقزام السبعة
  - ١٧- السندباد يمتطى الحوت
  - ١٨- سندريللا
  - ١٩- السندباد فى وادى الأفاعى
  - ٢٠- فارس بنى عبس
  - ٢١- الجميلة والوحش
  - ٢٢- الأميرة النائمة
  - ٢٣- السندباد فى جزر الرعب
  - ٢٤- السندباد يُدفن حيا
  - ٢٥- عقلة الإصبع
  - ٢٦- الخياط الشجاع
  - ٢٧- العصا المسحورة
  - ٢٨- السندباد وشيخ البحر
  - ٢٩- السندباد فى نهر الظلمات
  - ٣٠- الحصان الذهبى
  - ٣١- الحصان المسحور
  - ٣٢- رحلة السندباد السابعة
  - ٣٣- الأمير الشجاع
  - ٣٤- الكرنب العجيب
  - ٣٥- راعى الأرانب
  - ٣٦- راعية الإوز
  - ٣٧- حساء الأشباح
  - ٣٨- الأميرة المغامرة
  - ٣٩- طويل الأنف
  - ٤٠- قمر الزمان والأميرة بدور