ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE

POETRY

SUPPORT MATERIAL

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Grade 12 Prescribed Poetry 2014

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Musée des Beaux Arts – W. H. Auden

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well, they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life, and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone

"Fall of Icarus" by Breughel

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Type: Lyric

Theme: Showing that humanity has a legacy of suffering, which is intensified by his fellowman's callous indifference.

Background to the poem:

Pieter Brueghel (1520 -1569)

- One of the great painters of the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.
- He was a Flemish painter.
- He lived in terrible times: the Low Countries (Holland and Flanders) were under Spanish rule. The Dutch and Flemish people were subjected to the most terrible political oppression and to a frightful religious persecution by the Spanish Inquisition, the official Roman Catholic organization whose task it was to discover and punish people who had other religious beliefs.
- His work must be viewed against this tragic background: he reveals a deeply pessimistic concern with the eventual lot of humanity – man is bound to suffer sooner or later and nothing can prevent it.
- Many of his paintings illustrate the simple life of the Flemish peasants of his time.

Daedalus and Icarus

- The centre-piece of Auden's poem is Brueghel's painting, "Landscape with the fall of Icarus".
- Icarus was a legendary figure in Greek mythology. His father, Daedalus, a famous architect, angered King Minos of Crete after having completed a building project for him.
- Daedalus and Icarus were imprisoned, but the master craftsman made a pair of wings for both himself and his son to fly with. These were attached to their bodies with wax.
- Father and son escaped by flying out of the prison, but during their flight Icarus flew too near the sun despite his father's warnings. Consequently the wax melted from the heat and his wings dropped off, causing him to plummet into the sea from a great height and drown.

Structure of the poem:

- The poem consists of two stanzas of varying length.
- The rhyme is irregular but well-controlled: only line 3 of stanza 1 is unrhymed.
- The tone is relaxed and conversational, but behind this casualness Auden makes a close and deeply moving analysis of human suffering.

Stanza 1

According to the poet, the Old Masters, exemplified by Brueghel, fully understood suffering. They knew all about the different mental attitudes of the various types of persons to human distress. Misery has been such an integral part of man's existence throughout the ages that he has come to endure it passively.

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They also succeeded in capturing man's utter indifference to his fellow-humans' anguish: while one person is in great agony from some cause or other, those around him mindlessly go about their business, such as eating, opening a window or just walking along uncomprehendingly.

"Musée des Beaux Arts"

- Irony indicated by the title of the poem: The museum of the arts, which was built to house the products of man's highest talent for creating beauty: paintings, pieces of sculpture etc, also displays one of his most sordid qualities: his selfish indifference to the sad lot of his suffering fellow-man, as reflected in and exemplified by Brueghel's paintings.

"About suffering they were never wrong, The Old Masters...."

- The rhetorical opening statement involves the reader directly, immediately and intimately with the main topic that is uppermost in the poet's mind: Human suffering.
- Note the inversion of the sentence – the subject 'the Old masters' is placed after its verb "were never wrong" and the object "about suffering" before the verb – this increases its dramatic effect.

"....How well they understood ....walking...."

- The repetition of the "How" clauses (Lines 2, 3 and 5) links up with the adverb "anyhow" in line 11 to accentuate the inevitability of human suffering.
- In this context the phrase "human position" means the way one thinks about or reacts to a matter – passive acceptance of pain.
- The sustained irony of the poem mirrors the bitterly satirical themes of the paintings: Humanity's callous disregard of and indifference to the anguish of his fellow-man / Man is so engrossed in the ordinary things of life that the most pathetic and or the most extra-ordinary events go completely unnoticed by him.

Lines 5 – 8

The Old Masters knew all about the desperate longing of the old people to witness the miraculous birth of Christ before they died. In contrast to their feverish anticipation, a group of children who are completely disinterested in the eagerly awaited event, skate heedlessly on a frozen pond at the edge of the wood.

"How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, where always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond....."

- For many hundreds of years the Jewish prophets have been foretelling the coming of the Messiah, the New Earthly King of the Jews, who would free them from oppression.
- Each generation of Jews has hoped earnestly that the Messiah would be born in their lifetime, but as time passed their hopes of His coming faded.
- The suffering: the distress of the old generation is caused by their anxiety that they may die before their King is born, something which they are powerless to prevent.

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- The indifference: The belief that the Messiah will be born and grow up to be their earthly saviour, is instilled into Jewish children all their lives from the time they begin to understand things. Yet the children in the painting do "not want..... the miraculous birth ... to happen": they display a callous apathy to the earthshaking event awaited so eagerly by their elders.

Lines 9 – 13

As a result of their intimate insight into all man's virtues and weaknesses gained over the centuries by the one generation of artists after the other, the Old Masters knew everything about the diversity of human destiny.

That was why they never forgot that even such a frightful deed as the cold-blooded slaughter of innocent children, the martyrs of a merciless religious persecution, must go on relentlessly to the bitter end, in any kind of manner in some untidy spot or other.

Brueghel depicts the scene of the massacre in realistic and deeply ironic detail: amid the carnage dogs rush about playfully and the horse of one of the butchers idly scratches its hindquarters on a tree.

"........The Old Masters never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree."

- In the Brueghel canvass the terrible tragedy of the bloodbath at Bethlehem (in its Flemish setting) is depicted in horrifying detail, which is mirrored most vividly by the casual conversational tone of Auden's poem.
- The poet again stresses the fact that the Old Masters strip away all the illusions about human fate: to them misery has always been fundamental part of human existence.
- The suffering: The infants and the martyrs are both represented in Brueghel's paintings.

".... even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course..."

- Notice how the adverb 'even' reinforces the adjective 'dreadful' thereby highlighting the infanticide at Bethlehem as the absolute extreme of human suffering.
- This metaphor ("The dreadful martyrdom") is deeply touching as it pictures the bloody, totally unnecessary slaying of innocent babies on behalf of others.
- The verb "must" shows compulsion: once man has been overtaken by misfortune, there is no let-up.
- Tragedy is certain to run its course: this image underlines the implacability of humanity's legacy of misery; there is to be no release from pain and distress before the bitter end.

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Stanza 2

The poet now turns to Brueghel's canvass, "Landscape with the fall of Icarus", the only painting which he mentions specifically, in order to reinforce the statements he has made in Stanza 1.

He finds it unbelievable that every figure in the painting turns away quite leisurely from the boy's tragic fall.

The peasant who ploughed his field beside the sea may have heard Icarus's last despairing cry before he plummeted into the sea, but the ploughman remained utterly disinterested in the failure of the boy to achieve what he had set out to do: his only concern was the future success of the crops he intended to plant.

While on his daily round, according to the laws of the universe, the sun shone unconcernedly on Icarus's white legs disappearing into the green water.

Similarly, the people on board the ornate, graceful ship leaving the harbour must have witnessed the astonishing spectacle of a boy falling out of the sky. The ship had a distant destination to reach and sailed on leisurely with bellying sails.

Note how the great mythological hero, the first man to fly, is reduced to a mere detail. - a pair of white waving legs sticking out from the water in the bottom right-hand corner of the painting.

The sun is another disinterested spectator – while fulfilling the dictates of creation, the sun shone in its detached manner on the last view of Icarus: his legs disappearing into the sea.

Note the vivid visual impact of the colours depicted in this image: the white legs, the green water – the pictorial effect is enhanced by the bright sunlight illuminating the tragic scene.

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"Batter my heart, three- personed God; for, you" – John Donne

Batter my heart, three- personed God; for, you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due, *5*
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue,
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy, *10*
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthral me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

The speaker asks the "three-personed God" to "batter" his heart, for as yet God only knocks politely, breathes, shines, and seeks to mend. The speaker says that to rise and stand, he needs God to overthrow him and bend his force to break, blow, and burn him, and to make him new. Like a town that has been captured by the enemy, which seeks unsuccessfully to admit the army of its allies and friends, the speaker works to admit God into his heart, but Reason, like God's viceroy, has been captured by the enemy and proves "weak or untrue." Yet the speaker says that he loves God dearly and wants to be loved in return, but he is like a maiden who is betrothed to God's enemy. The speaker asks God to "divorce, untie, or break that knot again," to take him prisoner; for until he is God's prisoner, he says, he will never be free, and he will never be chaste until God ravishes him.

Type

This simple **sonnet** follows an ABBAABBACDDCEE rhyme scheme and is written in a loose iambic pentameter. In its structural division, it is a Petrarchan sonnet rather than a Shakespearean one, with an octet followed by a sestet.

Commentary

This poem is an appeal to God, pleading with Him not for mercy or clemency or benevolent aid but for a violent, almost brutal overmastering; thus, it implores God to perform actions that would usually be considered extremely sinful—from battering the speaker to actually raping him, which, he says in the final line, is the only way he will ever be chaste. The poem's metaphors (the speaker's heart as a captured town, the speaker as a maiden betrothed to God's enemy) work with its extraordinary series of violent and powerful verbs

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(batter, o'erthrow, bend, break, blow, burn, divorce, untie, break, take, imprison, enthral, ravish) to create the image of God as an overwhelming, violent conqueror. The bizarre nature of the speaker's plea finds its apotheosis in the paradoxical final couplet, in which the speaker claims that only if God takes him prisoner can he be free, and only if God ravishes him can he be chaste.

As is amply illustrated by the contrast between Donne's religious lyrics and his metaphysical love poems, Donne is a poet deeply divided between religious spirituality and a kind of carnal lust for life. Many of his best poems, including "Batter my heart, three-personed God," mix the discourse of the spiritual and the physical or of the holy and the secular. In this case, the speaker achieves that mix by claiming that he can only overcome sin and achieve spiritual purity if he is forced by God in the most physical, violent, and carnal terms imaginable.

Section I (lines 1-6) Summary

Lines 1-2

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;

- The speaker begins by asking God (along with Jesus and the Holy Ghost; together, they make up the "three-personed God") to attack his heart as if it were the gates of a fortress town.
- If you are caught up on the word "batter," note that back in medieval times, in order to break down the door of a fortress or castle, you'd have to use a battering ram. It's a huge pole of wood, possibly with a ram carving on the front.
- He asks God to "batter" his heart, as opposed to what God has been doing so far: just knocking, breathing, shining, and trying to help the speaker heal.
- Those actions are nice and all, but Donne wants something a little more intense. Scholars focus a lot on these verbs, and the words are certainly stressed in the line (notice how you accent these verbs and pause between them when you read the poem out loud), so let's break them down a bit.
- First of all, none of the verbs are particularly active. God asks to come in by knocking, which is nice, but he also just breathes and shines, two things that he might do out of necessity — not choice. When we breathe, it's normally not because we choose to, and the same applies to things that shine.
- The "mending" seems nice, but note that Donne says "seek to mend," and not just "mend." Does God really "seek to" do anything? Doesn't He just do it, if he's all-powerful?
- So, what about the specific actions? Are they particularly significant? Well lots of scholars think that the three verbs mirror the set-up of a "three-personed God" (the Christian notion of the Trinity). Thus, they associate the Father with power as he knocks but ought to break, the Holy Ghost with breath as he breathes but ought to blow like a strong wind, and the Son with light as he shines but ought to burn like fire.
- These actions make some sense as representative actions of each part of God, but other scholars argue that, based on the Bible, it isn't clear which member of the

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Trinity should be understood to do which of the actions. The confusion about which aspect of God does what appears to be purposeful.
- If the speaker wants to make things easier, he can very well put the verbs in the traditional order in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are normally described.
- But, the Trinity isn't the only way to read those verbs. Some scholars point out that these terms (especially when combined with the other series of three verbs in line 4) all make sense in the context of metal- or glass-blowing (the process of shaping glass and metal objects). In this way, scholars see the speaker as making God into a craftsman who can, like a glassblower, "blow" life into the object (the speaker).

Lines 3-4

That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

- Lines 3-4 continue much like lines 1-2, with the speaker asking God to treat him violently.
- He asks God to "bend your force," which may mean to "make use of your power."
- More importantly, even though it takes him four full lines, the speaker finally gets to the point of *why* he's telling God to do all this. His goal, as he puts it, is to "rise" and "stand" and become "new."
- This can work in two ways. First, there's the born-again angle, where the speaker asks to have a moment of religious epiphany. He wants to recognize God's power, but he worries that the only way God will get through to him is by doing something violent and completely overthrowing his life.
- On the other hand, "make me new" is probably a reference to the Christian idea that true happiness and salvation come only after death, and that, in order to get into Heaven, earthly life must be a continual act of suffering. That may be why our speaker wants to be abused and broken in the earthly world — so that he will be worthy for the afterlife.
- A quick note on the language here: read these lines aloud, and notice how the word "o'erthrow" makes you take a big pause and change the rhythm of your speaking, and how violent and intense those alliterated b-words are ("break, blow, burn"). These words get a lot of attention verbally, and it's a cool example of words' sounds reflecting their meaning. Onomatopoeia anyone?

Lines 5-6

I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.

- Here comes the explanation of that whole "battering" business. The speaker compares himself to a town that is captured or "usurped."
- The phrase "to another due" suggests that the town belongs to someone else, but it's tricky because we don't know who this "someone" could be.
- Whose was it originally, and who took over? The likely possibility is that it was originally God's, and it was subsequently taken over by another, but that doesn't help us figure out who the "other" is.
- In any case, the speaker wants to let God in, but he's unsuccessful so far.
- These lines are interesting in part because, unlike anywhere else in the rest of the poem, Donne actually uses a simile here instead of a metaphor. Instead of saying, "I

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am a usurped town," he leaves more room between himself and the town by only saying that they're similar.

- What's the big deal? Well, it suggests that the speaker is conscious of how unrealistic his requests are. Where, in the first few lines he directs God to overthrow, break, blow, and burn him, it's not until this line that we know he's being metaphorical (instead of actually wanting to be broken, burned, and so forth).
- The "oh" in line 6 is another linguistic choice worth mentioning. There are two ways we might see this:
- First, we can read it as the only moment of truly honest self-expression in the poem, where the speaker lets his words go without careful control. In other words, the "oh" is the only word in the poem that isn't actually a word – it's more of a sound, a sigh, or an exclamation. It's a different kind of language, and one we don't see elsewhere in the poem.
- If we read it as a sigh, it might lend this line some extra emotional pull if he seems sad that he can't let God in.
- On the other hand, you might think the "oh" is theatrical and overly dramatic, like a "woe-is-me!" moment.

Section II (lines 7-14) Summary

Lines 7-8

Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.

- Our bet is that these are the trickiest lines in the poem for you. They're weird, but it helps to put them into simple English: "Reason, my local ruler who works for you, should be defending me, but he was captured, and revealed himself to be weak or unfaithful."
- We assume that the "you" to whom Reason is supposed to report is God.
- The whole idea guiding these lines is that God gave us reason (rationality) to defend ourselves from evil, but now the speaker's reason seems to have turned on God (or is just incapable of warding off evil), so the speaker is having trouble showing his faith in God.
- As we discuss in the "Speaker" section, the sense of entitlement is interesting. Check out the back-to-back "me's" and the "should" in "Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend." It's all about the speaker's self-interest, and he sounds like a spoiled little kid: "Me! Me! You should defend me!"
- And, if we zoom out a bit, why on earth is he treating his ability to reason as if it were a real person? The answer may be: so that he can pass the buck and blame this other person (who's really God's responsibility, according to the speaker).
- If you think about it, the speaker actually blames God, through his representative (Reason) for the speaker turning over to the enemy's side.

Lines 9-10

Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy;

- When you get to line 9 of a sonnet, you know that you have to do a little extra work, since the ninth line of a sonnet traditionally marks the "turn" in the poem, where the problem set up in the first 8 lines begins to move towards a solution.

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- To be honest, though, this line doesn't make for much of a turn at all. The simile of the fortress ends here (until it's picked up again at "imprison"), but this line, like those before it, mainly furthers the development of the speaker's desired relationship with God.
- He hints at no solution, but the line *does* mark a shift in tone. The speaker seems to be a bit more candid and personal here, and he abandons some of the similes and metaphors that he uses before. "Yet dearly I love you" is the most straightforward line we've had so far.
- "And would be loved fain," though, is a continuation of the kind of self-centeredness we see in lines 7-8. He's saying "I'd be happy to be loved," just like you'd tell a friend "I'd be happy to help" – he makes it sound a little like he's doing God a favour.
- What's more, the speaker quickly drops the straight-talk, and goes back into another metaphor: he says he's "betrothed," or engaged to marry, the "enemy."
- This word "enemy" is troublesome, because we don't know who it is. There's no one right answer here, but our speaker may be referring to Satan.
- The question is, why did the speaker choose the metaphor of a wedding engagement? Why didn't he just say, "I'm under the Devil's control, so help free me?"
- Perhaps an engagement implies that the speaker is cool with the whole thing and isn't forced into this relationship with the enemy. Unlike in lines 5-8, where the speaker blamed Reason for losing touch with God, here he seems to suggest that it is actually kind of his fault, since he agrees to an engagement with the "enemy."

Lines 11-12

Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,

- Line 11 continues the train of thought in line 10, asking God to help him get out of this close engagement with the enemy. He wants God to help him break the wedding "knot" he tied when he was "betrothed," and take him away from the enemy.
- What's absolutely key here is the word "again" – does it mean this isn't the first time the speaker needed to ask God for help in getting away from the Devil?
- All of a sudden, we learn that these pleas to God may be a frequent occurrence. This can have a major impact on our understanding of the poem. The speaker begins to look less like a poor guy who's all-of-a-sudden blurting out his love for God the only way he knows how -- and more like a con-artist who makes it seem like he's desperately in need, when, in fact, he's been down this road a number of times.
- But, instead of thinking that the speaker has wanted a wedding knot broken before, we might read "again" as referring to another time when God had to break a knot. (As if the speaker were saying, "Sorry, God, you have to go through that whole knot-breaking thing again.")
- By this logic, "again" could be a reference to the moment in Genesis (in the Old Testament) when God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden because they follow Satan's advice. This way, when the speaker says, "Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again," he seems to say "either divorce/untie me from Satan, or you'll have to break the knot between us, just as you did with Adam."
- In line 12 (and on into line 13), the speaker seems to bring back the castle siege metaphor one last time with "imprison," and rekindles the earlier debate about who had captured (or imprisoned) the town in the first place.
- Here, again, the speaker refuses to make things clear, first asking God to imprison him, but only so that he can be free. This all goes back to the Christian idea that a human must to suffer in order to get to Heaven, and reminds us again that violence and aggressive behaviour aren't necessarily bad things in this poem, so long as God is in the driver's seat.

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Lines 13-14

Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

- These last two lines make it clear that the speaker loves those paradoxes and double meanings that we struggle with all along. Both lines take the form of "If you don't ______, I can't be ______," but the speaker fills in that first blank with double entendres (words or phrases with two possible meanings).
- The first can be read as "If you don't excite me, I can't be free." If we read it that way, it's possible that "excite" has sexual connotations, and this makes sense in light of the following line.
- But, we can also read line 13 as, "If you don't enslave me, I can't be free." Back in the day, "enthrall" would also mean "enslave," so we should be aware of that possibility.
- We can read line 14 as, "If you don't fill me with delight, I will never be able to refrain from sex." Like "excite" in line 13, "fill me with delight" in this reading might carry some sexual connotations.
- These lines leave us with some major paradoxes, refusing to pin down exactly what the speaker wants from God.
- As we see it, it seems that the speaker wants better access to God, and having been unsuccessful in the past, demands that God reveal himself forcefully and powerfully.
- In other words, the only way the speaker and his stubborn "reason" will be convinced of God's power is to see an epic example of it. What's more, the speaker desperately *wants* to be convinced, so he can be “saved.”
- Still, it's hard to make the last line fit, mainly because you can't really *become* chaste. The speaker has either always been chaste, in which case he wouldn't have to worry about it, or he's had sex but now wants to abstain.
- But, if he wants to abstain, is more sex really the prescription?
- In the end, then, we might come to the conclusion that talking about God in human terms and metaphors actually doesn't make sense. The kinds of rewards and interactions that God can provide simply can't be described properly in human language, and that's why the speaker gets so caught up in paradox and mixed metaphors.

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The world is too much with us – William Wordsworth

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathéd horn.

Type: Sonnet

Theme: Man has become too caught up in the pursuit of money and material possessions and has lost his sensitivity to nature. It expresses a protest against the materialistic industrialization of their age (1807), and pleads for a return to a closeness with nature.

Setting: Industrial Revolution in Britain 1807

The speaker complains that "the world" is too overwhelming for us to appreciate it. We're so concerned about time and money that we use up all our energy. People want to accumulate stuff, so they see nothing in Nature that they can "own."
According to the speaker, we've sold our souls.

We should be able to appreciate beautiful events like the moon shining over the ocean and the blowing of strong winds, but it's like we're on a different wavelength from Nature.

The speaker would rather be a pagan who worships an outdated religion so that when he gazes out on the ocean (as he's doing now), he might feel less sad. If he were a pagan, he'd see wild mythological gods like Proteus, who can take many shapes, and Triton.

Lines 1-8 Summary

Lines 1-2

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

- The poem opens with a complaint, saying that the world is out of whack and that people are destroying themselves with consumerism ("getting and spending").
- "The world is too much with us" sounds odd, and could mean several things. It could mean that the world – life in the city, contemporary society – is just too much, as in "This is too much for me, and I can't take it anymore."

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- The "world" might refer to the natural world instead of the city, in which case it would mean that humanity is so busy that they don't have time for the natural world because "it's too much."
- It could also mean mankind or society is a burden on the world, as in "there's not enough space for both man and the earth" or "mankind has upset a delicate balance."
- "Late and soon" is a strange phrase. It could mean "sooner or later," or it could mean we've done this recently or in the past ("late") and will do it in the future as well ("soon").

Lines 3-4

Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

- The poem's tone of complaint continues as the speaker describes a rift between nature and humanity.
- We get a potential clue as to the identity of at least one of those "powers" described in line 2: the ability to feel, which we've lost because we've given our hearts away.
- The phrase "little we see in Nature that is ours" is tricky, and can mean several, related things. We've become so absorbed in consumerism – in another world – that we no longer seem a part of nature.
- Alternatively, "Nature" can't be "got" or "spent" – because it is isn't a commodity that is manufactured – so it doesn't seem like it has anything to offer us.
- A "boon" is a reward, a benefit, or something for which to be thankful. "Sordid" means "base" or "vile." The speaker is being sarcastic here, almost as if he were saying "wow it's so great that we've handed over our hearts…not!"

Lines 5-8

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon,
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

- The poet elaborates on man's alienation from nature, claiming that humanity is no longer susceptible to the influence of the "Sea," the "winds," and basically everything else in nature.
- "Tune" is interesting. It can mean "out of tune," in the sense that we're out of touch with nature, but it also suggests something like "attuned."
- The sea isn't literally taking her shirt off here; the speaker is elegantly describing the ways in which ocean-tides are affected by the moon, or just how the sea appears to him in its relationship with the moon.
- The speaker describes the winds at rest; they are "sleeping flowers" that will howl when they wake up.
- "For" is more complicated than it looks. It can mean both that we're not in the right tune "for" the natural world, in the right frame of mind to "get it."
- It could also mean "because," as in "because of these things we're out of tune." The plot thickens…

Lines 9-14 Summary

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Lines 9-10

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

- In some sonnets, including this one, important things happen in the ninth line; there is a shift or "turn" that moves the poem in another direction.
- While the speaker reiterates the claim he's been making all along – humanity and nature are alienated from one another – he also tells us how he wishes things were, at least for him, personally.
- He appeals to the Christian God (the capitalization means he has a specific, monotheistic deity in mind) and says he'd rather be a pagan who was raised believing in some antiquated ("outworn"), primitive religion ("creed").
- To wish to be a pagan in 1807 – when the poem was published – would be like saying, "I wish I could wear clothes or do things that were in fashion a thousand years ago."
- "Suckled" just means "nursed at a breast" or "nourished."

Lines 11-12

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;

- The speaker explains why he would rather be a pagan. If he were, then he could look at the land in front of him and see something that wouldn't make him feel so lonely and sad ("forlorn").
- A "lea" is a meadow or open-grassland.
- The speaker wants "glimpses" of something, but we don't know what; he suggests that if he were a pagan he would only see things in snatches, for a brief moment, in the blink of an eye.
- And this isn't even guaranteed; he says he "might" have "glimpses."

Lines 13-14

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

- The speaker elaborates on those potential "glimpses." He says he might see Proteus coming out of the ocean or Triton blowing his horn.
- Proteus is a sea god in Greek mythology. He had the ability to prophesy the future, but didn't like doing it. If someone grabbed a hold of him and tried to make him predict the future, he would change his shape and try to get away. The modern word "protean" – meaning variable or changing a lot – comes from his name.
- Triton was a son of Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea. He had a conch shell that he blew into in order to excite or calm the waves.
- "Wreathed" means something like twisted, sinewy, having coils; the "wreathed horn" is a reference to Triton's conch shell.

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Sonnet 146 – William Shakespeare

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
[Feeding] these rebel pow’rs that thee array,
Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?w
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servants’ loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more:
So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on men,
And death once dead, there's no more dying then.

Type: Shakespearean sonnet

- **First quatrain:** The poem is an internal monologue, essentially the poet's persona speaking to himself. The speaker addresses his "soul," comparing the soul to someone who languishes and pines away within a big house while going to great expense to make the house look beautiful and happy on the outside.
- **The second quatrain:** The house metaphor is expanded. Why, the soul is asked, does it invest so much in things of the temporal world - the fading mansion - when life is short and things of the world are temporary, ephemeral? Just at the end of the quatrain, the poet jumps out of the mansion metaphor to drive home the point that the body came from the earth and will return to the earth, with the help of the worms.
- **Third quatrain:** Here, at the point where the sonnet form generally turns, the soul is exhorted to invest within, not without: to trade the false, costly facades of the world for the inner "divine" values that will not fade with time. Let the outside wither ("pine") so that the inner soul can prosper.
- **Rhyming couplet:** The feeding metaphor from the 3rd quatrain is continued and expanded. The couplet finishes the metaphor from the 1st quatrain of the starving person within the mansion. The ironic juxtaposition of death that feeds on men, being fed on, and further Death itself being dead is typical Shakespearean irony. So too is the use, in two lines, of the words "death" (twice), "dead" and "dying," when the final image points to eternal life.

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Sonnet 146 as Proof of Shakespeare's Religion

Many readers view Sonnet 146 as proof of Shakespeare's religious fervor. The poem sets up a body/soul dichotomy. Several words within the poem are religiously loaded - "soul" and "sinful" in the first line, "divine" in the 3rd quatrain. Further, the entire concept of abandoning the things of the world for the "greater" goal of eternal life - the crux of the poem's argument - is distinctly religious. Such sentiment would have been typical of much poetry of the time.

However, several arguments can be made against this reading of Sonnet 146:

- In very few places in the rest of Shakespeare do we find any unequivocally religious overtones. He often is dark and brooding - think Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth - and it is often due to reflections upon the transience of youth and the temporality of life, yet he seldom turns to the afterlife for consolation.

- The subject and metaphors in the sonnet would have been regularly heard by Shakespeare's readers in their weekly sermon, so the poem wasn't groundbreaking in its themes or images. Given the unpublished, epistolary nature of the sonnets, it's possible that Sonnet 146 was composed for a priest or other cleric. In most of his poetry and in the plays, Shakespeare's religion is so general as to be non-denominational and noncommittal, thus avoiding taking a stand in his troubled times, when the rift between the Church of England and Roman Catholicism was still relatively new and raw.

- Throughout his works, Shakespeare often refers to the power of art to "immortalize" its subjects, without implying any religious belief in actual eternal life. In Sonnet 18, for example, the speaker alludes to the power of poetry to give eternal "life" to his beloved, without suggesting that the beloved would actually enjoy any such benefit, spiritual or otherwise.

Readers are entitled to their own conclusions, of course, and Sonnet 146 lends itself to religious interpretation. Critics have argued that Shakespeare was a catholic, a protestant, an atheist, a secularist. A fuller study of the sonnets, however, and of Shakespeare as a whole will produce little support for any particular view, other than that religion and the Bible were part and parcel of Shakespeare's milieu and that, as with politics and history, he used them to good artistic effect.

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Piano – D. H. Lawrence

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour
With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

Relevant Background

- D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) was born on 11 September 1885 in Eastwood, a coal-mining village in Nottinghamshire England.
- He was the fourth child of a struggling coal miner who was a heavy drinker.
- His mother was a former school teacher, greatly superior in education to her husband.
- Lawrence's childhood was dominated by poverty and friction between his parents.
- He was educated at Nottingham High School, to which he had won a scholarship. He briefly became a teacher.
- Despite his hard background he grew up to become a writer that wrote about the relationships between men and women and between human beings and the natural world.
- He became one of the greatest figures in 20th-century English literature.
- In 1912 he met Frieda von Richthofen, a professor's wife and fell in love and eloped [ran away] with her.
- As a result he led a nomadic or wandering existence.
- DH Lawrence became a novelist, storywriter, critic, poet and painter.
- D.H. Lawrence died from Tuberculosis on March 2, 1930.
- D. H. Lawrence was close to his mother as he grew up.
- When she was ill in 1910, he assisted her death by giving her sleeping medicine.
- He wrote several poems about his close relationship mother. 'Piano' is one such poem.

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Summary

- In the first stanza, the speaker places himself in a romantic situation. A woman is performing and singing for him. The speaker creates an interesting atmosphere by using the word 'softly' and setting the action at dusk.
- The woman's singing opens up the speaker's memory. He then sees himself as a child playing with his mother's feet as she sings for him at a piano. He remembers the great noise made by the strings of the piano.
- Thus a conflict is suggested. The woman in the present is set against the woman from his past, his mother. His mother smiles warmly at him as he sings.
- Lawrence has established a conflict between a lover and his mother.
- In the second stanza, the speaker admits he tries to stay focused on the present. But the emotional power of the song drags him back to his past. The song's intensity has a secret influence on him. He ignores the singer and travels back to his childhood.
- In his heart he longs for the secure and cosy Sunday evenings of his childhood with his mother singing to him.
- He fondly remembers the wintry scene outside as the family group sang hymns to the tune of the piano.
- In the third stanza, the speaker shows the battle between the powerful singing in the present and the irresistible draw of his memories. He is aware of the woman reaching the climax of her song. She plays the black piano with powerful feeling.
- The memory of the past is more glamorous than the present. As a man he should pay attention to the powerful singing of the woman who sings so passionately. But memory conquers his manhood. He remembers his mother's singing with floods of tears. He becomes his childlike self again.

Themes

Memory
Lawrence shows that memory has a more powerful grip on him than the scene that he is part of as the woman sings to him. He gives into to the temptation to travel back in time to relive the secure feelings he had with his mother. As he remembers, he misses his childhood feelings so much that he forgets he is a man and weeps like a child. The poem is a conflict between present experience and memory. Memory wins. Childhood has more glamour than a woman singing passionately to him in the present. The theme of memory could be expressed here as a conflict between the present and the past. The past wins.

Relationships
The poem shows the strength of relationship between a man and his mother. For an adult, he has a somewhat unhealthy craving for his mother. There is a conflict in his heart between affection for his mother and passion for his lover. The smiles, sound and touch of his mother mean more to him than the passion that his lover is expressing through her song in the present. The mother and son relationship seems to be the main relationship in the speaker's case. The discussion on relationships could also take place under the heading 'Emotions'.

Music
The poem explores the powerful influence of music. The poet's lover is carried away by her own performance. She expresses her inner passion. Yet the very song she sings transports the speaker down memory lane. Her singing reminds the speaker of music and song that mattered a lot to him at another time. The music, which should have appealed to him in the present, brought him back to charming childhood scenes with his mother. Music reconnected

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him with a happier time—a time when he was close to his mother. He focuses a lot on the sounds made by the piano: ‘tinkling’ and ‘tingling’, ‘boom’ and ‘appassionato’.

Childhood in Conflict With Adulthood
This theme can be discussed in the same terms as the theme ‘Memory’, explored above. Childhood was a time of intimate moments with the speaker’s mother. This childhood intimacy is more appealing to him than an adult relationship. It shows that Lawrence was not a balanced adult. He was dominated by a relationship that had been removed both by death and by the sheer fact of his growing up. His heart ruled where his mind should have. Sentiment, or soft hearted feelings, defeated passion.

Style

- **Repetition -** The piano is repeated in each stanza. The word ‘tinkling’ is nearly a repetition of ‘tingling’. The repetition of ‘weeps’ emphasises the speaker’s emotional need for his mother, even though she is dead. ‘Appassionato’ echoes ‘boom’.
- **Imagery -** The poem provides two clear images of women playing a piano; one a mother to a child, the other an adult to an adult. The poet provides clear word pictures, especially of the cosy scene in the parlour on a musical winter’s evening.
- **Metaphor -** Memory is compared to a vista, which usually means a view across a landscape. Memory is also compared to a flood.
- **Personification -** The piano is compared to a guide.
- **Simile -** The poet compares his emotional self to a child.
- **Language -** The language is intimate and conversational. It is also the language of narrative as the speaker is telling it like a story, building up to the climax of the last sentence. The words ‘boom’ and ‘appassionato’ capture the increasingly loud sound of the well-played pianos. The words show the difference between the speaker’s ordinary mother and the polished, classically trained woman in the present.
- **Metonymy -** Feet represent the speaker’s mother.
- **Contrast -** The past is contrasted to the present, a mother to a lover, a childhood self to an adult self. There is a clear contrast between the cosy parlour and the wintry scene outside.
- **Tone -** Overall the tone is intimate and revealing. Note the opening word: ‘softly’. There is an emotional longing for the past, known as nostalgia. The word ‘betrays’ indicates a tone of guilt at ignoring the singer’s personal effort. The poet also feels sorry for himself, referring to memory as a flood and giving in to a desire to weep. There is also a tone of inner conflict when the speaker finds himself battling against his desire to remember the past at the start of the second stanza. There is a warm tone where the poet describes cosy childhood scenes. The tone is passionate when the speaker describes the passion of the young adult female singing to him in the present.
- **Atmosphere -** A romantic atmosphere is created by the words of the opening line. The description of the climax of the singer rising to a crescendo is also passionate. The memories of his childhood create a warm, secure atmosphere. The words ‘parlour’ and ‘hymns’ create an old fashioned atmosphere. The words ‘flood’ and ‘weep’ create a sad atmosphere.
- **Paradox -** [apparent contradiction] the music played so powerfully in the present, draws the listening speaker back into the past. The more the performer tries to appeal to the speaker, the more he loses focus in the present. As the piano reaches its climax ‘appassionato’, the speaker is ironically flooded in remembrance.
- **Alliteration -** The ‘b’ in ‘betrays me back’ emphasises the sense of helpless guilt experienced by the speaker as memory begins to dominate. The repeating ‘p’ sound

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in the fourth line of the first stanza highlights the contact between son and mother and the rhythm of the piano playing.

- **Assonance -** The repeating long ‘o’ sounds of the first two lines of the last stanza show the musical climax of the singer’s performance. The repeated ‘i’ sounds in ‘smiles as she sings’ create the facial effects of a smile as one reads those lines.
- **Sibilance -** [repetition of‘s’ sound] The repeating ‘s’ of the opening line deepen the feelings of intimacy and romance.
- **Type -** The poem is a simple lyric in three stanzas. The present dominates the first two lines of each stanza. Childhood memories intrude in the third and fourth lines of each stanza.
- **Rhyme -** There is a simple and repeated rhyme scheme. The first and second lines rhyme in each stanza. The third and fourth lines rhyme in each stanza. For example in the second stanza the endings are: ‘ong’, ‘ong’, ‘ide’ and ‘ide’. This simple rhyming fits the poem well. It expresses the simplicity of childhood. It also creates an obvious music that matches the music of the piano, which is the subject of the poem. Not the internal rhymes created by similar words: ‘clamour’ and ‘glamour’ and ‘tingling’ and ‘tinkling’.

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Allegiances – William Stafford

It is time for all the heroes to go home
if they have any, time for all of us common ones
to locate ourselves by the real things
we live by.

Far to the north, or indeed in any direction,
strange mountains and creatures have always lurked-
elves, goblins, trolls, and spiders:-we
encounter them in dread and wonder,

But once we have tasted far streams, touched the gold,
found some limit beyond the waterfall,
a season changes, and we come back, changed
but safe, quiet, grateful.

Suppose an insane wind holds all the hills
while strange beliefs whine at the traveller's ears,
we ordinary beings can cling to the earth and love
where we are, sturdy for common things.

- "The purpose of life is a life of purpose" -Robert Byrne.
- This quote sums up the idea that Stafford is making in the poem "Allegiances".
- This is a strong message that many people don't realize until their old age.
- The younger people in this world have many opportunities that they do not take but really should utilize.
- People need to learn to take every opportunity that is given to them and live life with meaning.
- "Allegiances" is written to tell people to let go of the familiar, and see everything this world has to offer, because we can.
- In "Allegiances" Stafford writes about the need for humans to explore undiscovered land, see undiscovered things, and live life to the fullest.
- People have the freedoms to live their lives for many reasons, one being all the wars fought for freedom.
- War is a very real subject.
- In lines 1 through 4, Stafford talks about this.
- He speaks of fighting a war. Once the war is won, it is time to bring home the men fighting.
- Stafford expresses this belief in line 1 **"It is time for all the heroes to go home" .** Sometimes when men come back from fighting they have lost their friends, family and even loved ones. In line 2 he addresses that the heroes should come home **"if**

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they have any". When people are out fighting a war defending the people back home and lose everything in the process, sometimes even losing their homes, it then becomes the civilians jobs to love the simple things in life.

- People should find purpose for living and live as strongly and passionately as possible **"Time for all of us common ones to locate ourselves by the real things we live by" (2-4**). People need to find the reason they are living and live for it; this is what Stafford is saying in lines 2-4.
- There is so much in the world people have not yet explored.
- There are jungles in other countries with creature's humans couldn't even envision.
- Stafford says through his poem that it is time for people to go explore these far-off places with lands untouched and creatures unseen by humans**. "Strange mountains and creatures have always lurked-- elves, goblins, trolls, and spiders: we-- encounter them in dread and wonder" (6-8).** It is the duty of the people to find these creatures, and broaden their horizon, discover the frightening unknown and embrace it.
- Once people are able to see these differences, and see these far off lands it will change them.
- Those people are able to see things outside of their own backyard they could not see before, and many times it is a humbling experience.
- Stafford states in line 12**, "a season changes, and we come back, changed, but safe, quiet, grateful" (11-12).**
- When the lands are discovered people see the beauty all the world holds for the humans inhabiting it. Stafford writes **"But once we have tasted far streams, touched the gold, found some limit beyond the waterfall…we come back changed" (9-11).**
- The beauty of the world and the people in it can change a person, and help them realize what they are on earth to live for.
- Stafford wraps up his poem with the idea that people have this, nagging inside them, pushing them to explore the unknown, **"while strange beliefs whine at the traveler's ears" (14).**
- In line 14 Stafford is talking about the slight belief that maybe there is more out there than just the United States, and just their home, a whole world that is outside of our comfort zone.
- He finishes with **"we ordinary beings can cling to the earth and love, where we are, sturdy for common things" (15-16).**
- This is saying that it is easy to hold on to the familiar, ignoring the yearning inside to explore the unknown.

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- People cling to what they know, and don't want to let go, it is hard to let go. Once someone is able to let go they will see that the world holds amazing things in store for them and they can go find these wonders.
- There is so much truth behind this poem.
- People are afraid to move out of their bubble and see what else lies out there.
- People cling to the things they know and thrive off routines, but William Stafford is trying to tell us to let go of the familiar, and the mundane, and go see the world.
- It will change your life. Unlike the heroes who died for people to have the freedom to see all these astonishing creations of the world, people are able to see these, so don't waste a life, people should do everything they possibly can in the world, and see everything they possibly can, there is so much more out there that people couldn't even dream of.

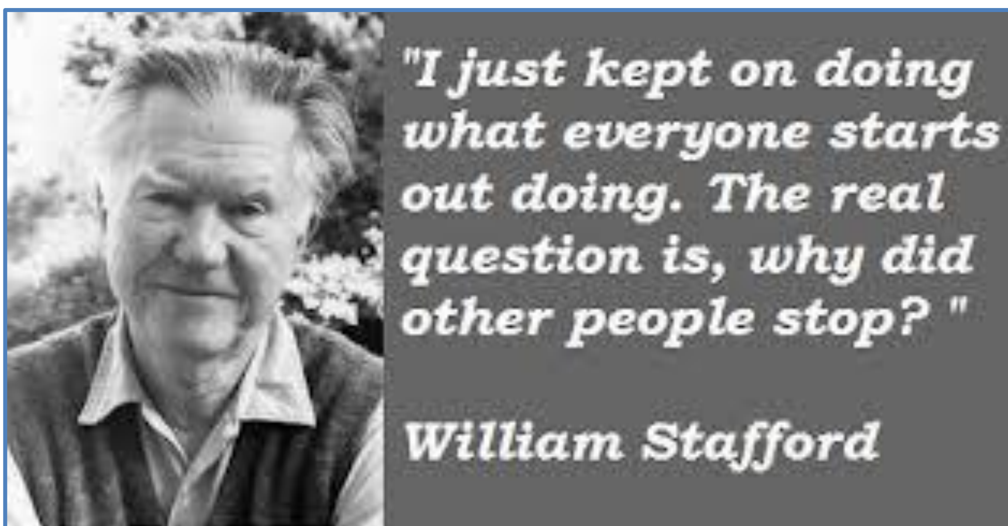
Vocabulary:

- **lurked –**to skulk in a hidden place / to lie in wait
- **goblins –** an ugly, mischievous gnome or elf
- **trolls –** a Scandinavian folk-tale goblin
- **dread –** a fear of what may happen
- **sturdy –** hardness, strength and firmness

Structure:

- 4 stanzas of 4 lines each.

The lines are of unequal length



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Poppies in July – Sylvia Plath

Little poppies, little hell flames,
Do you do no harm?

You flicker. I cannot touch you.
I put my hands among the flames. Nothing burns

And it exhausts me to watch you
Flickering like that, wrinkly and clear red, like the skin of a mouth.

A mouth just bloodied.
Little bloody skirts!

There are fumes I cannot touch.
Where are your opiates, your nauseous capsules?

If I could bleed, or sleep! -
If my mouth could marry a hurt like that!

Or your liquors seep to me, in this glass capsule,
Dulling and stilling.

But colorless. Colorless.

Rhyme & Tone: Everyday speech; Vile, vivid and numb. Seven irregular un-rhyming two line couplets followed by a single line.

Imagery: Image of fire. Metaphors, similes, apostrophe

Themes: Struggles (failed relationship), Inspiration (exhausted), Depression (drugs).

Poetic Techniques: Apostrophe: speaker addresses a dead or absent person, or inanimate object.

- The poem begins with a nice image of summer flowers, yet the end of the first line suggests something sinister and dangerous.
- When compared with her earlier images of fire and light bringing forth inspiration we can draw some parallels but note the evil tone of *'little hell flames'*.

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- Yet these fiery flowers do no harm to Plath as she says *‘I put my hands among the flames. Nothing burns.’*
- Even if Plath is able to touch these poppies, as she first said, they would do her no harm; she is not affected by the flowers in any way. For Plath to put her hands among these flames suggest self-harm, this notion will ultimately lead to her suicide.
- She goes on to say that it is exhausting for Plath to look at these poppies, *‘A mouth just bloodied. Little bloody skirts!’*
- Plath has finally caught on to Ted Hughes’ cheating and perhaps this line is a dig at her husband, the *‘skirts’* he had been chasing has tarnished his mouth.
- Poppies have been known to harvest effects that come from some drugs; “**Opium**, or **opium** is a narcotic analgesic drug which is obtained from the unripe seed pods of the opium poppy.”
- Note Plath’s following statements and we can be sure she knew of these effects also: *‘…fumes that I cannot touch…nauseous capsules…sleep…dulling and stilling…”*
- It seems as though Plath is longing for this almost comatose state that she can derive from the poppy. She asks for the *‘opiates’* and longs to *‘bleed, or sleep’* and the next line *‘If my mouth could marry a hurt like that!’* suggests an intimacy that she desires with something so hurtful.
- She is sick of life and tired of love and Hughes, in the end everything is colourless – she longs for the poppies to take her away from this world and it looks as though suicide is imminent.
- It is important to note Plath’s usage of the exclamation mark: in line two it reveals her fascination with the poppies; she is repulsed in line eight and in desperation in line ten, finally an intense longing in lines eleven and twelve.
- The biography of Sylvia Plath shows that she suffered in her life and that she tried to commit suicide twice the first she failed but almost succeeded .she ate sleeping pills the next time she killed herself by a cooking gas.
- We know from her many references to 'red' and 'blood-red' ("the blood-jet is poetry") that Sylvia Plath associated this colour with dynamic life forces, creative forces, even violent forces--released from restriction or confinement.

Little poppies, little hell flames,

Do you do no harm?
In an earlier draft, Plath wrote *"at the edge of my eye you burn."* Now let us think of connection: fire, touch, burned fingers. But if you are mentally unhinged, you feel nothing.

I put my hands among the flames. Nothing burns.

And in Sylvia's draft:
"My heart is very quiet. The world is a curtain."
Talking to the poppies, she says:

And it exhausts me to watch you
Flickering like that, wrinkly and clear red, like the skin of a mouth.
A mouth just bloodied

(and the draft Plath added: *"a mouth just left by a fist")*
Metaphorically, if not literally, the betrayed victim has been hit in the face, yet she finds herself passive, yearning for a poppy-derived opiate just so she can sleep:

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The Second Coming – William Butler Yeats

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

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

Summary

The speaker describes a nightmarish scene: the falcon, turning in a widening "gyre" (spiral), cannot hear the falconer; "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold"; anarchy is loosed upon the world; "The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned." The best people, the speaker says, lack all conviction, but the worst "are full of passionate intensity."

Surely, the speaker asserts, the world is near a revelation; "Surely the Second Coming is at hand." No sooner does he think of "the Second Coming," then he is troubled by "a vast image of the *Spiritus Mundi,* or the collective spirit of mankind: somewhere in the desert, a giant sphinx ("A shape with lion body and the head of a man, / A gaze as blank and pitiless as the sun") is moving, while the shadows of desert birds reel about it. The darkness drops again over the speaker's sight, but he knows that the sphinx's twenty centuries of "stony sleep" have been made a nightmare by the motions of "a rocking cradle." And what "rough beast," he wonders, "its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

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Form

“The Second Coming” is written in a very rough iambic pentameter, but the meter is so loose, and the exceptions so frequent, that it actually seems closer to free verse with frequent heavy stresses. The rhymes are likewise haphazard; apart from the two couplets with which the poem opens, there are only coincidental rhymes in the poem, such as “man” and “sun.”

Commentary

Because of its stunning, violent imagery and terrifying ritualistic language, “The Second Coming” is one of Yeats’s most famous and most anthologized poems; it is also one of the most thematically obscure and difficult to understand. (It is safe to say that very few people who love this poem could paraphrase its meaning to satisfaction.) Structurally, the poem is quite simple—the first stanza describes the conditions present in the world (things falling apart, anarchy, etc.), and the second surmises from those conditions that a monstrous Second Coming is about to take place, not of the Jesus we first knew, but of a new messiah, a “rough beast,” the slouching sphinx rousing itself in the desert and lumbering toward Bethlehem. This brief exposition, though intriguingly blasphemous, is not terribly complicated; but the question of what it should signify to a reader is another story entirely.

Yeats spent years crafting an elaborate, mystical theory of the universe that he described in his book *A Vision.* This theory issued in part from Yeats’s lifelong fascination with the occult and mystical, and in part from the sense of responsibility Yeats felt to order his experience within a structured belief system. The system is extremely complicated and not of any lasting importance—except for the effect that it had on his poetry, which is of extraordinary lasting importance. The theory of history Yeats articulated in *A Vision* centers on a diagram made of two conical spirals, one inside the other, so that the widest part of one of the spirals rings around the narrowest part of the other spiral, and vice versa. Yeats believed that this image (he called the spirals “gyres”) captured the contrary motions inherent within the historical process, and he divided each gyre into specific regions that represented particular kinds of historical periods (and could also represent the psychological phases of an individual’s development).

“The Second Coming” was intended by Yeats to describe the current historical moment (the poem appeared in 1921) in terms of these gyres. Yeats believed that the world was on the threshold of an apocalyptic revelation, as history reached the end of the outer gyre (to speak roughly) and began moving along the inner gyre. In his definitive edition of Yeats’s poems, Richard J. Finneran quotes Yeats’s own notes:

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The end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to its place of greatest contraction... The revelation [that] approaches will... take its character from the contrary movement of the interior gyre...

In other words, the world's trajectory along the gyre of science, democracy, and heterogeneity is now coming apart, like the frantically widening flight-path of the falcon that has lost contact with the falconer; the next age will take its character not from the gyre of science, democracy, and speed, but from the contrary inner gyre—which, presumably, opposes mysticism, primal power, and slowness to the science and democracy of the outer gyre. The "rough beast" slouching toward Bethlehem is the symbol of this new age; the speaker's vision of the rising sphinx is his vision of the character of the new world.

This seems quite silly as philosophy or prophecy (particularly in light of the fact that it has not come true as yet). But as poetry, and understood more broadly than as a simple reiteration of the mystic theory of *A Vision,* "The Second Coming" is a magnificent statement about the contrary forces at work in history, and about the conflict between the modern world and the ancient world. The poem may not have the thematic relevance of Yeats's best work, and may not be a poem with which many people can personally identify; but the aesthetic experience of its passionate language is powerful enough to ensure its value and its importance in Yeats's work as a whole

Yeats was a master of the visual symbol. In the poem, "The Second Coming", by the Irish poet William Butler Yeats, the emotional element and the symbols that drive this emotional element are critical to consider upon first reading it.

The first image with which we are presented in the poem is an image of disaster; a falcon cannot hear the call of safety, and begins to spiral wider and wider, more out of control. "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold". What is the centre of the spiral? Yeats could be referring to a society out of control. "Mere anarchy" could mean a couple of things; perhaps nothing more than confusion, or a confusion that was once held back by civilization, but is now free, and ironically, binding at the same time. When some commit anarchy, others are bound by the consequences of the anarchist's actions and are paradoxically not free to be anarchic themselves.

Other images include seas full of blood and drowning. Those who are "the best" of this society are apathetic, and those who are "the worst" are in your face with "passionate intensity". Yeats is picturing in this poem a society turned upside-down and headed toward self-destruction and chaos.

In the midst of such conditions, it is man's nature to look for change. Yeats is living in anticipation of a great change in the poem, which he encapsulated in the Christian concept

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of "the second coming". The phrase, "the second coming", stands as a symbol of its own, gathered from the history and consciousness of humankind back to the beginning of recorded time, referred to in the poem as "Spiritus Mundi".

However, Yeats' own feelings of such a change are ambivalent, to say the least. Even if change is good, it is uncomfortable. Yeats himself points to an image of a fearsome creature, part man and part animal, that moves inexorably slowly towards its destination, and will not die for the "indignant desert birds".

The lion with the head of the man is an interesting image in his poem, almost seeming to come straight out of the Book of Revelation in the Bible, where such images abound. The lion has the predatory power, with royal strength and authority, and the head (meaning the intellect) is that of a man, but a man with "a gaze blank and pitiless as the sun". There is no love, no personification that we can be drawn to or admire. We feel somehow repelled from this inhuman thing that moves closer and closer, like death. There will be a death when it arrives to its destination; the death of old ideas, and the destiny of man shot in another direction, from which it may then spiral again in yet another "widening gyre".

Nature cannot stop this change. Time cannot stop it. Nothing can stop what's "slouching towards Bethlehem to be born". Would Yeats prefer the unconsciousness of "stony sleep" to the "nightmare" created by the "rocking cradle", which perhaps represents a newness that will cause the vexation of the old ways? At least he is familiar with "stony sleep", or the way things have always been.

Yeats' use of rich and vivid symbols in this poem creates a feeling of disaster, turning to dread at the thought of facing a change, even when such change could be an improvement.

The poem begins with the image of a falcon flying out of earshot from its human master. In medieval times, people would use falcons or hawks to track down animals at ground level. In this image, however, the falcon has gotten itself lost by flying too far away, which we can read as a reference to the collapse of traditional social arrangements in Europe at the time Yeats was writing.

In the fourth line, the poem abruptly shifts into a description of "anarchy" and an orgy of violence in which "the ceremony of innocence is drowned." The speaker laments that only bad people seem to have any enthusiasm nowadays.

At line 9, the second stanza of the poem begins by setting up a new vision. The speaker takes the violence which has engulfed society as a sign that "the Second Coming is at hand." He imagines a sphinx in the desert, and we are meant to think that this mythical animal, rather than Christ, is what is coming to fulfill the prophecy from the Biblical Book of Revelation. At line 18, the vision ends as "darkness drops again," but the speaker remains troubled.

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Finally, at the end of the poem, the speaker asks a rhetorical question which really amounts to a prophecy that the beast is on its way to Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ, to be born into the world.

Lines 1-2

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

- The falcon is described as "turning" in a "widening gyre" until it can no longer "hear the falconer," its human master.
- A gyre is a spiral that expands outward as it goes up. Yeats uses the image of gyres frequently in his poems to describe the motion of history toward chaos and instability.
- In actual falconry, the bird is not supposed to keep flying in circles forever; it is eventually supposed to come back and land on the falconer's glove. (Interesting fact: falconers wear heavy gloves to keep the birds from scratching them with their claws.)

Line 3

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

- The "notion" that "things fall apart" could still apply to the falcon, but it's also vague enough to serve as a transition to the images of more general chaos that follow.
- The second part of the line, a declaration that "the centre cannot hold," is full of political implications (like the collapse of centralized order into radicalism). This is the most famous line of the poem: the poem's "thesis," in a nutshell.

Lines 4-6

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

- These three lines describe a situation of violence and terror through phrases like "anarchy," "blood-dimmed tide," and "innocence [. . .] drowned." (By the way, "mere" doesn't mean "only" in this context; it means "total" or "pure.")
- Overall, pretty scary stuff.
- Also, with words like "tide," "loosed," and "drowned," the poem gives the sensation of water rushing around us. It's like Noah's flood all over again, except there's no orderly line of animals headed two-by-two into a boat.
- What's Yeats referring to here? Is this a future prophecy, the poet's dream, or maybe a metaphor for Europe at war? There's really no way to be sure – Yeats doesn't seem to want us to know too much.

Lines 7-8

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

- Who are "the best" and "the worst"?

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- One way of deciphering them is that Yeats is talking about "the good" and "the bad." But he doesn't use those words in the poem, and these lines are a clue as to why not.
- For one thing, if "the best lack all conviction," can they really be that good? Believing in something enough to act on it is kind of what being good is all about.
- On the other hand, "the worst" have all the "intensity" on their side, which is good for them, but definitely not for everyone else.
- Think about that time you dropped your lunch in the cafeteria and all the people you hate laughed really hard, and all your friends were too embarrassed to do anything about it. According to Yeats, Europe after the war is kind of like that. Things are so messed up that you can't tell the good and the bad apart.

Lines 9-10

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

- Notice how these two lines are almost exactly the same. This is where the speaker tells us what he thinks is going on, but the repetition means that he's maybe not so sure and is slowly trying to figure things out.
- It's a revelation, he says, which is when the true meaning of something is revealed.
- Not only that, but it's a revelation according to the most reputable source for these kinds of things: the Book of Revelation.
- Apparently, all this violence and moral confusion means "the Second Coming is at hand." According to the Bible, that means Christ is going come back and set everything straight, right?
- We'll see. For now, the poem is about to take another turn.

Lines 11-13

The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert

- So maybe we're not saved.
- The words "Second Coming" seem to have made the speaker think of something else, so that he repeats the phrase as an exclamation. It's like, "Eureka!" It makes him think of a "vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*."
- To know what this means, you have to know that Yeats was very interested in the occult and believed that people have a supernatural connection to one another. It's in the same ballpark as telepathy or a psychic connection, but not quite as kooky as those other things. It's more like we're all connected to a big database of communal memories going back all the way through human history, which we can get in contact with when we're feeling truly inspired.
- Literally, *Spiritus Mundi* means "spirit of the world."
- The speaker, through his sudden, revelatory connection to the world, is given access to a vision that takes him "somewhere in the sands of the desert."

Line 14

A shape with lion body and the head of a man,

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- Here, he is describing the sphinx, a mythical beast "with lion body and the head of a man."
- You might have seen the picture of the ancient sphinx in Egypt: it's pretty famous. But Yeats isn't talking about that sphinx, per se. He's talking about the original, archetypal symbol of the sphinx that first inspired the Egyptians to build that big thing in the desert, and which is now inspiring him.

Lines 15-17

A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.

- In these lines he describes the sphinx's expression and what it is doing.
- By calling its gaze "pitiless," he doesn't mean "evil" or "mean-spirited." In fact, the sphinx really seems to have an inhuman expression that is as indifferent as nature itself. It is "blank," statuesque, and incapable of having empathy with other humans.
- This might not tell us much, but now we know that the sphinx doesn't jibe at all with the way most people think of Christ. In other words, this "Second Coming" doesn't seem to have at lot in common with the descent of Christ from Heaven as described in the Book of Revelation.
- Nor does it seem to be in any big hurry to get here, as it moves "its slow thighs."
- But, strangely, this slowness only seems to add to the suspense and terror, like Michael Myers chasing Jamie Lee Curtis in the movie *Halloween*.
- Even the birds are ticked-off, or "indignant," but it's not clear why. Their circling is similar to the gyres of the falcon from the beginning of the poem, but from what we know about desert birds, like vultures, when they fly in circles it's often because they think something will die soon.

Lines 18-20

The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

- The vision from *Spiritus Mundi* ends as "darkness drops again," like a stage curtain, but it has left the speaker with a strong prophetic impression. He knows something that he didn't before, namely, that this strange sphinx is a symbol that will bear on the future.
- Thinking outside the poem, it's safe to say that he is talking about Europe's future, and perhaps the world's in general.
- What exactly does the speaker claim to "know"? "Twenty centuries" refers to roughly the amount of time that has passed since the "first coming" of Christ. But we have already seen that the Second Coming is not going to be anything like the first.
- Although 2,000 years seems like a long time to us, Yeats compares it to a single night of an infant's sleep, which is suddenly "vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle."
- The cradle reinforces the image that something has recently been "born," and its motion also serves as a metaphor for social upheaval.
- It's interesting that the infant doesn't wake up because of the rocking. It instead begins to have nightmares, much like the recent nightmares afflicting European society, whose long history amounts to no more than the first stages of childhood. It's the terrible two's of an entire continent.

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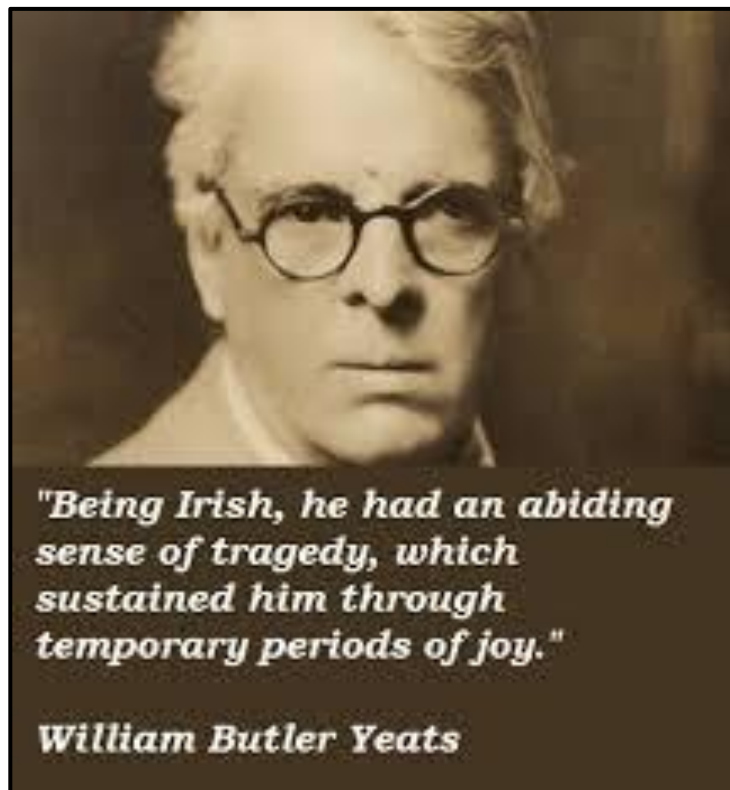
Lines 21-22

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

- The object of Yeats's vision, which was formerly symbolized as a pitiless sphinx, is now described as a "rough beast" on its way to Bethlehem – the birthplace of Christ – "to be born."
- The "slouching" of this beast is animalistic and similar to the slow gait of the sphinx in the desert. It sounds more than a little menacing.
- Yeats is using the birth at Bethlehem as a metaphor of the passage of this malevolent beast from the spirit world –*Spiritus Mundi* – to the real, everyday world, where its effects will be visible to everyone.
- By phrasing these lines as a question, Yeats tantalizes us with all the possibilities of what he might be describing. In the time since Yeats wrote the poem, the beast has been interpreted as a prediction of everything bad that the twentieth century has wrought, particularly the horrors of World War II: Hitler, fascism, and the atomic bomb.
- It is the "nightmare" from which society would not be able to awake. Of course, Yeats would not have known about these specific things. However, he did seem to have a sense that things were still getting worse while most people around him thought things were getting better.
- Some readers have thought that the birth at the end was an ironic vision of the Antichrist, an embodiment of evil as powerful as Christ was an embodiment of goodness.
- Others believe that the beast, even though it is described as "rough," might not be evil, but merely a manifestation of the kind of harsh justice that society as a whole deserves. In other words, things have become so violent and decadent that God's only solution is to deploy his all-purpose cleanser.



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Rivonia Road 2 - Adam Schwartzman

without words

Crouching on the roof of your neighbour's garage that slopes
over the garden and your mother's rosery, we watch a squall
drub and clobber the Magaliesberg foothills from far away.

In the suburbs though, it is a dumb-show. We count
the long seconds between flash and wallop and try
to remember the formula to link sight and sound by distance.

What we see is the storm, small and entire in the wide sky and neatly
defined between two tilted parallels. As they open up nearer,
we will smell them cleanly. We will see through rain-shade.

Things will be darker, not dimmer. When it comes to us,
we will be inside, safely, until, afterwards, we clear the garden table
and find the wine-glasses brimmed and level.

The poet

- He was born in Johannesburg in 1973.
- He had not been born when the Rivonia treason trial took place in 1963.
- His poem is an almost apocalyptic examination of the political storm that waited the country as a result of the trial.
- It views the crisis of the “liberation struggle” in the 1980s as if still something of the future.
- The poet, an academic, who worked for a time at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town, has been described as having “a strong sensual perception of South Africa, wrestling with the heritage of segregation and violence in this country.
- He is looking at the metaphorical road which led from the Rivonia trial of 1963 and culminated in the armed struggle of the 1970s and the 1980s.
- On trial were 19 ANC leaders who had been arrested at Liliesleaf Farm in July 1963.
- These included Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba.
- Originally the death penalty had been requested but this was changed due to world-wide protests.
- Instead, 8 defendants – including Nelson Mandela – were sentenced to life imprisonment.
- The trial would be a pivotal point in the history of the liberation movement in South Africa.
- The ANC evolved from an organization that had been trying to achieve change through negotiation into one which sought the absolute overthrow of the racist regime through an armed struggle.

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Theme:

- At face value, the poem is a description of a thunderstorm raging far away over the Magaliesberg mountains beyond Pretoria.
- The poet watches the lightning flash, hears the thunder rumble and tries to determine from the time that has elapsed just how far the storm really is.
- There is, however, a deeper meaning.
- The thunderstorm is a reference to the oncoming revolutionary storm that was heading South Africa's way, an onslaught of discontent caused by the racist attitudes of the people and the unjust laws of the country.
- From the poet's point of view, this storm was still far away but he knew it was getting closer.
- He could only hope that everyone would be safe, huddled away within the seclusion of their homes.

Structure:

- 4 stanzas of 3 lines each.

Title:

- The poet uses the image of a thunderstorm as a foundation to highlight the reality of a massive political storm about to overtake South Africa.
- The poet takes the Rivonia treason trial of 1963 as the starting point of this maelstrom: in other words, "the road from Rivonia would be the great political storm or revolution.
- The subtitle: although the poet does indeed use words to write his poem, he nevertheless wishes to put across his message in the form of an image. His poem describes that image but he wishes us to remember the picture rather than the words.

Stanza 1

Crouching on the roof of your neighbour's garage that slopes
over the garden and your mother's rosery, we watch a squall
drub and clobber the Magaliesberg foothills from far away

- The poem would appear to be a description of a thunderstorm through the eyes of a couple of children.
- The poet doesn't specifically say that they are children but he does imply that this is so – they are sitting on the roof of the neighbour's garage.
- Although adults sometimes do that – or they might be repair men – the probability is that they are children playing up there.
- Put this together with the word 'mother' and the idea of it being a couple of children is reinforced.
- The word 'we' indicates that there are more than 1 child involved.
- The poet uses the word 'rosery' instead of rose garden to fit the metre – 'rosery' flow more smoothly than rose garden. It also indicates a deliberate play with words, toying with the idea of it being a 'rosary'

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- A rosary is a set of religious beads usually used by Catholics as an aid to their prayers.
- It contains many coloured beads – usually 58 of them.
- If the rose bushes are in bloom, it could also give the appearance of a mass of coloured beads when the children are looking down upon them from the roof.
- There is also another use to this play on words: because the rosary is used for purposes of prayer, the poet is hinting that the time had come for South Africans to start praying for God to intervene and avert the great political storm heading their way.
- The words “drub” and “clobber” are colloquial – there is also a certain onomatopoeic sound to them, an imitation of the sound of the as yet far away thunder.
- The poet refers to the thunderstorm at this time as a “squall” – a squall has been defined as “a sudden disturbance or commotion, a brief and sudden violent storm”. The emphasis is on the suddenness and the brevity of the disturbance. In the wider political context it was hoped that the Rivonia trial would be a sudden commotion but brief and soon over, and that everything would then quickly return to normality. The poet, however, is referring to the fact that, although apparently a ‘squall’ at hte moment, it would grow inexorably stronger and that ultimately everything would be engulfed in its fury.
- A ‘squall’ is also defined as a harsh scream – there would be loud and harsh screaming when the eventual political storm engulfs the whole country.
- The Magaliesberg Mountains are situated in the Rustenburg area of South Africa, about an hour’s drive from Pretoria and Johannesburg.
- The storm was literally far away from the garage roof on which the children were playing. The metaphorical storm that threatened to engulf South Africa was also still far away back in 1963 when the Rivonia trial took place.

Stanza 2:

In the suburbs though, it is a dumb-show. We count
the long seconds between flash and wallop and try
to remember the formula to link sight and sound by distance.

- A dumb-show is described as “part of a dramatic representation given in pantomime or gestures without speech.
- The thunderstorm was still so far away that it was making little noise, and nobody except the children on the roof would perhaps even have noticed it.
- On the other hand, the suburbs were the parts of town where white people lived.
- In relation to the other storm – the Rivonia trial – the probability is that few of them were even following it.
- They knew it was happening but were not particularly concerned with its result.
- In other words, there was little noise coming out of the Rivonia trial – it was almost as if it wasn’t true.
- A ‘flash’ is the flash of lightning whereas the ‘wallop’ is the rumble of thunder.
- “long seconds’ – counting the seconds between the lightning flash and the rumble of thunder was a way of determining how far away the storm was.

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- The implication of them being 'long' seconds – children were often inclined to count seconds too fast, they were often taught the technique of saying something like "one crocodile, two crocodile etc.
- This would have appeared very slow and long within the hectic life of na child.
- The formula was this: every 14 seconds between the flash of lightning and the rumble of thunder represented one mile (1.6km) distance. So 28 seconds meant that the storm was two miles away (3.2km).

Stanza 3:

What we see is the storm, small and entire in the wide sky and neatly
defined between two tilted parallels. As they open up nearer,
we will smell them cleanly. We will see through rain-shade.

- The horizon from the roof was vast but the children were focussing entirely on the storm, which looked quite small at that distance away.
- They could witness the entire storm within that wide panorama of sky.
- The poet uses the words 'neatly defined' to describe the storm – it looked neat because they were so far away. Once the storm came closer, however, it would have ceased to look so neat but rather filled the entire sky.
- The Rivonia trial, which is what inspired the poet, also looked so neat when confined to the courtroom but the political mayhem that was due to be unleashed could certainly not be said to look in any way neat and under control.
- "As they open up nearer, we will smell them cleanly" – the poet is literally referring to the very clean smell of ozone released by lightning and figuratively that we will understand once the political upheaval starts.

Stanza 4:
Things will be darker, not dimmer. When it comes to us,
we will be inside, safely, until, afterwards, we clear the garden table
and find the wine-glasses brimmed and level.

- "Darker" means the light is fading whereas "dimmer" means that is no longer bright, that something can no longer be seen clearly or distinctly.
- The term 'darker' carries a threatening tone, as in, "They were dark times" – politically, therefore South Africa was heading for dark times when revolution and bloodshed might happen.
- "It" could be referring to either the thunderstorm or to the growing political unrest.
- "When it comes to us, we will be inside, safely...." – in the literal sense, everyone would be safely inside their houses when the thunderstorm hits. On the other hand, in the political sense, the whites hoped that they would be protected by the South African police or military forces if or when the political unrest was unleashed. Their "house" was the apartheid state with its military walls and roofs.
- When the storm is over, the wine glasses left outside on the table are filled to the brim. In other words, there was a heavy downpour indeed. In the political sense, it was also likely to be a metaphorical downpour.
- Wine – especially red wine – is often a metaphor for blood. In that sense, the wine glasses would be overflowing with bloodshed in the revolution.
- Back in the 1980s it seemed that a revolution was inevitable in South Africa. The apartheid government appeared to have no solution other than to use the might of its army. That very might, however, was beginning to show cracks and when even the army failed, the full onslaught of political upheaval and bloodshed would ravage the country.

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In Praise of the Shades – Chris Mann

Hitching across a dusty plain one June,
down one of those dead-straight platteland roads,
I met a man with rolled-up khaki sleeves
who told me his faults and then his beliefs.
It's amazing, some people discuss more
with hitch-hikers than even their friends.

His bakkie rattled a lot on the ruts
so I'm not exactly sure what he said.
Anyway, when he'd talked about his church
and when the world had changed from mealie-stalks
to sunflowers, which still looked green and firm,
he lowered his voice, and spoke about his shades.

This meant respect, I think, not secrecy.
He said he'd always asked them to guide him,
and that, even in the city, they did.
He seemed to me a gentle, balanced man,
and I was sorry to stick my kit-bag
onto the road again and say goodbye.

When you are alone and brooding deeply,
do all your teachers and loved ones desert you?
Stand on a road when the fence is whistling.
You say, *It's the wind*, and if the dust swirls,
***Wind again*, although you never see it.**
The shades work like the wind, invisibly.

And they have always been our companions,
dressed in the flesh of the children they reared,
gossiping away from the books they wrote,
a throng who even in the strongest light
are whispering, *You are not what you are,*
remember us, then try to understand.

They come like pilgrims from the hazy seas
that shimmer at the borders of a dream,
not such spirits that they can't be scolded
not such mortals that they can be profaned,
for scolding them, we honour each other,
and honouring them, we perceive ourselves.

When all I seem to hear about these days
is violence, injustice and despair,
or humourless theories, from cynical hearts,
to rescue us all from our human plight,
those moments in a bakkie on a plain
make sunflowers from a waterless world.

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- The opening stanzas of this poem create an authentic picture of the situation in which the poet was introduced to the concept of the shades.
- In a conversation with the poet he describes the shades as a memory and influences of other people that become part of you.
- Much of who you are is determined by your shades who if you do not repress them become a spiritual presence in your life.
- This notion of shades is an ancient one.
- It can be traced back to classical Greece although it forms a significant part of African spirituality and belief too.
- Throughout the poem there is thoughtfulness and a contemplated atmosphere.
- In the light of the concept of the shades this seems very appropriate.
- The images of a rural setting and travelling along a farm road are created simply yet effectively.
- You can identify numerous details from the poem all of which are shared in a quiet intimate way.
- His tone is chatty and he uses poetic devices sparingly but with significant effect for example the hard "r's" and the bouncy rhythms in the first lines of the second stanza "rattled a lot on the road" help to create the image of a bakkie bouncing on a rough road.
- Physical details of the landscape can be related to the more spiritual elements of the poem for example the landscape changes from dry fields of mealie stalks to sunflowers which he describes as green and firm, symbolic of the effect of the subject matter on the poet.
- The circumstances of the introduction to the shads are rather ironic: it is an unlikely character, a farmer, who alerts the poet to the idea of shades.
- In addition it is a chance encounter being picked up as a hitchhiker that makes the conversation possible.
- It seems incongruous that the poet whose style and register makes him seem a practical person, judges the farmer as a balanced man.
- When he was speaking about the shades the farmer spoke quietly out of respect rather than secrecy.
- This unexpectedly respectful attitude and the quiet approach add something to the mystery of the shades and the need to sit in quiet contemplation to access them as well as to grasp the idea.
- From stanza four to the end of the poem the poet focuses on the shades and makes an appeal to the reader to consider accessing his or her shade.
- The tone changes to one that is more philosophical.
- These shades are rather paradoxical in that there are obvious and readily understood elements in the link with our ancestors.
- Simultaneously, we have to try and understand them because they have more mysterious qualities than that.
- The sixth stanza presents some images that help to define the mystery and the paradoxical nature of the shade.
- Not such spirits that they can't be scolded not such mortals that they can be profaned.
- You can criticize them but you cannot disrespect them.

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- An interesting and revealing challenge would be to attempt a paraphrase of the last two lines of the sixth stanza.
- The sincerity of the final stanza suggests that the poet has been significantly changed by his experience and by his introduction to and experience of the shades shown vividly in the final metaphor of the moments in that bakkie that have made sunflowers from a waterless world.

The poet’s use of typical South African terms is effective:

- It gives the poem a feeling of familiarity if you are South African.
- The reader can identify with the language and landscape, and therefore identify with the issues the poet deals with.

The poem has a casual / conversational tone:

- Expressions such as “It’s amazing” (line 5) and “anyway” (line 9) contribute to the tone.

Line 36 “honouring them, we perceive ourselves”.

- If we respect our shades, in a sense we acknowledge ourselves; we are the living product of our ancestors.

The metaphor “sunflowers in a waterless world” in the final line of the poem:

- The world in which we live appears to be barren and hostile.
- It is full of ‘violence, injustice and despair’. The poet says.
- When he speaks about his encounter with the man in the bakkie, the memory seems to turn his world into one filled with sunflowers – a positive pleasant one.

The theology of the shades:

- A sense of continuity, of belonging, of bringing your immortalities with you.
- A sense of community with those who went before and are the keepers of your conscience.
- One is biologically connected to them as well as by soul and mind.
- Mann also feels the spirits of those dead and gone and can provide guidance for using the present, and that the wisdom of the past and simple values keep us in touch with common humanity.
- The free verse of the poem reflects the colloquial conversation in the bakkie and the personal thoughts this gives rise to.

The three topics of conversation in the bakkie:

- The driver’s faults.
- His beliefs.
- His shades.

Characteristics of the driver:

- Ordinary working man, possibly a farmer; khaki sleeves rolled up; not wealthy – bakkie rattles a lot.
- He seems like a gentle, balanced person – not a crackpot – so one can believe him.
- Open-shared beliefs.

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The role that this man played in the poet's life:

- He gave him a lift (literally). But also gave him a lift (figuratively) – taught him about shades and acted as one for him.
- Last stanza: this man rescued him from his human plight – being a shade to him.

The poet was sorry to get out of the bakkie:

- The driver was a gentle, friendly man.
- He had enjoyed talking and listening to him.

Mann is trying to tell us the following with his description of the changing landscape and crops:

- He is describing different stages/phases in our lives – mealie stalks: dry, dusty – barren/ dead/ infertile; sunflowers still green and firm – life – vibrancy, potential for growth.

Stanza 3, line 15 "even in the city":

- Even in the manmade, insensitive area shades are present, but more powerful/ readily available in rural, natural settings.

How do these shades appear to us?

- They are largely invisible – in wind and dust.
- Often we are alone i. e. more susceptible.
- Also through books / companions in whom they live on.

How do we have to behave to receive guidance from the shades?

- We have to be quiet.
- We have to be sensitive to their presence – they whisper (stanza 5).

The importance of the last line of the poem:

- Make sunflowers (life, growth potential) future / energy (food source) – in a waterless world – dead, drought ridden – no potential or future.

The shades:

- They preceded us / reared us / made us into what we are now.
- They live in our persons.
- They are not visible: stanza 6 – hazy, shimmer at the edge / borders of a dream, like pilgrims – spiritual beings.
- Despite their spiritual dimensi9on, they still have a strong human quality: they are so human that we can treat them as such – scold them, but must respect them, therefore of spirituality – treat them better than we treat others / ourselves.

Who is the poet praising in this poem?

- Both the shades that make him what he is (his own ancestors) and the driver's who'd acted as a shade to him.

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Examples of colloquial language:

- Dead straight platteland roads.
- Bakkie.
- It's amazing.
- Anyway....

There is a distinct change in stanza 4:

- The poet turns to the reader and addresses him / her, whereas he's spoken about himself earlier.

Vocabulary:

- Shades – spirits
- ruts – uneven places in the road
- brooding – thinking
- profaned – cursed
- perceive – understand
- humourless theories – ideas
- plight – problem, situation

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Scatterlings of Africa – Johnny Clegg

Copper sun sinking low
Scatterlings and fugitives
Hooded eyes and weary brows
Seek refuge in the night

They are the scatterlings of Africa
Each uprooted one
On the road to Phelamanga
Where the world began

I love the scatterlings of Africa
Each and every one
In their hearts a burning hunger
Beneath the copper sun

Ancient bones from Olduvai
Echoes of the very first cry
"Who made me here and why
Beneath the copper sun?"

African idea, African idea
Make the future clear
Make the future clear

And we are the scatterlings of Africa
Both you and I
We are on the road to Phelamanga
Beneath a copper sky

And we are the scatterlings of Africa
On a journey to the stars
Far below, we leave forever
Dreams of what we were

- The song celebrates the fact that all of us trace our roots to Africa.
- This was written during the peak of the anti-apartheid protest.

Vocabulary:

- Copper – reddish brown metal
- Fugitive – a fleeing person
- Hooded – covering the head
- Refuge – place of protection or shelter
- Scatterlings – spread widely in all directions
- Uprooted – to remove from its normal place
- Phelamanga – direct translation: “Place at the end of lies or where the lies finish” – it’s an imaginary place that lies beyond the imagination where only truth prevails
- Ancient – very old

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- Olduvai – this gorge is one of the most important paleoanthropical sites in the world and has been instrumental in furthering the understanding of early human evolution. It is situated in northern Tanzania.
- Echoes – to repeat the opinions or words of others

Structure:

- Song
- 7 verses of 4 lines each
- Tone: conversational and informal

The songwriter employs several poetic devices to convey his message:

- Alliteration – "sun sinking" **–** this refers to the setting sun which is reddish brown at dusk.
- "Copper sun" is a metaphor describing the setting sun.
- The poet refers to fugitives – people fleeing because of the liberation struggle.
- The people are tired and have to cover their faces as to not being caught.
- They have to look for shelter / protection at night against their oppressors.
- The word "scatterlings" is repeated several times in the song.
- They are described as uprooted because they are scattered all over as a result of the liberation struggle – are not living at home.
- Their ideals take them to Phelamanga – their ideal where they will be free from persecution.
- The poet employs repetition throughout the song – this is to emphasize his message.
- A "burning hunger" is a metaphor for their struggle for freedom.
- "Ancient bones" refer to the beginning of civilization – could also be a reference to their ancestors.
- Their struggle has been their forever – an ideal worth dying for.
- The poet uses a rhetorical question in lines 15 & 16 to emphasize their ideals and their struggle for freedom.
- "African idea" – is repeated to stress the fact that Africans want to be free from colonial oppression and apartheid oppression.
- The phrase "Make the future clear" is also repeated – this emphasizes the message that all of them must unite and fight for their freedom under the African sky.
- "Both you and I" – this emphasizes that there is a common goal that must be achieved – everyone is involved in this liberation struggle.
- "copper sky" refers to sunset.
- The "journey to the stars" – refers to their journey to freedom.
- The last two lines once again emphasize the fact that people have been uprooted and on the run away from the apartheid police, away from normality and this will be so until such a day as freedom from oppression has been achieved.

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The Cape of Storms – Thomas Pringle

O Cape of Storms! Although thy front be dark,
And bleak thy naked cliffs and cheerless vales,
And perilous thy fierce and faithless gales
To staunchest mariner and stoutest bark;
And though along thy coasts with grief I mark
The servile and the slave, and him who wails
An exile's lot – and blush to hear thy tales
Of sin and sorrow and oppression stark: -
Yet, spite of physical and moral ill,
And after all I've seen and suffered here,
There are strong links that bind me to thee still,
And render even thy rocks and deserts dear;
Here dwell kind hearts which time nor place can chill –
Loved Kindred and congenial Friends sincere.

The poet:

- He spent only six years in South Africa but has the reputation for being the father of South African poetry because he was the first successful English speaking poet and author to describe this country.
- He was born in 1789 in Blakelaw in Scotland and was educated at Kelso Grammar School before continuing to the University of Edinburgh.
- It was there that he developed his love for writing which would guide his future life.
- He began work as a clerk before taking up a career in the editing of journals and newspapers.
- During this time he also developed his talent for writing poetry.
- When one of his poems caught the attention of the great novelist, Sir Walter Scott, a friendship sprang up between the two men.
- Conditions were harsh in the United Kingdom at that time as the country struggled under a recession following the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars.
- When Pringle saw an offer for free passage to the Eastern Cape as part of what became known as the 1820 Settlers, he decided to apply.
- Although the settlers were meant to be frontier farmers, Pringle saw an opportunity to continue his career in newspapers.
- He therefore settled amongst the growing urban community at Graham's Town where he founded South Africa's first newspaper, The Graham's Town Journal.
- He was soon lured by the greater opportunities offered in Cape Town, and there he founded another newspaper called The South Africa Commercial Advertiser.
- His continual criticism of Governor Lord Charles Somerset, however, saw his newspapers quickly suppressed, thus starting the first battle for freedom of the press in South Africa.
- In the meantime, with no prospect of earning an income in Cape Town, Pringle returned to England.
- He settled in London where an article he had written while at the Cape caught the eye of the Anti-Slave Society who appointed him as their secretary.
- It was then that he published much of his poetry and sketches which he had drafted while in South Africa.
- Pringle did not see the eventual liberation of slavery.
- He died of TB in 1834 – he was only 45 years of age.

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- Although he was buried in Bunhill Fields near London, his bones were exhumed in 1970 and re-buried at the Pringle Family Church at Eildon in the Baviaan's River Valley in the Eastern Cape.
- He had only spent six years in South Africa and has been described as a man "of distinctly limited ability who died a material failure".

Theme:

The poet considers the harshness of the Cape Colony: its bleak mountains, its gales and shipwrecks, and its slavery and other civil crimes. He nevertheless concludes that there are some strong links which hold him to the Cape, links of family and friends.

Structure:

- This is a Petrarchan or Italian sonnet.
- Its 14 lines are broken up into an octave and sestet, each with its own theme.
- Octave: the octave deals with the harshness of the Cape's climate and weather, as well as the immoral ordering of its society.
- Sestet: the sestet gives positive values of the Cape, of the warmth of kindred (family) and friends which made the place attractive to the poet.

"O Cape of Storms! Although thy front be dark,
And bleak thy naked cliffs and cheerless vales"

- The poet chooses to direct his sonnet directly at the Cape of Storms as though it were a god or a very important person.
- He therefore uses archaic language: "thy" and "thee" instead of you and your.

"thy front be dark"

- Table Mountain itself is a giant fortress of dark grey stone – in gloomy weather it looks dark.
- The Cape sometimes has 'dark' weather – gale force winds, gloomy skies and rain – but its moral status was also dark: being the home of slaves and brutalised servants.

"And perilous thy fierce and faithless gales
To staunchest mariner and stoutest bark;"

- A bark is a type of sailing ship.
- Why would the gales be 'faithless' and the mariners 'staunchest'? – The gales can't be 'faithless' but a religious person could believe that the crew of a ship needed faith. A faithless crew would be at the mercy of every gale whereas those with faith would have God on their side. At the same time, a person really did put his life at risk to sail on those old sailing vessels. They were always at risk of being wrecked and killed in a gale. The mariners really did need to be 'staunch', dedicated and brave.

"And though along thy coasts with grief I mark
The servile and the slave, and him who wails
An exile's lot – and blush to hear thy tales
Of sin and sorrow and oppression stark."

What point is the poet making about the Cape in these lines?

- The poet witnessed the Cape in the 1820s at a time when the British Empire was moving away from slavery.
- There were no slaves in England or Scotland, and so it must have been a shock to the poet when he arrived in Cape Town to find servants in shackles.

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- It disturbed him so much that he took to writing articles for the newspaper in which he condemned slavery, and once back in England, he took a leading role in ending this form of brutality.

The poet "blush to hear tales of sin and sorrow and oppression stark"

- Slavery was an extremely savage form of oppression. The slaves had no rights and had to accept whatever oppression their slave masters inflicted on them.
- There were stories of how a slave mistress would disfigure her female slave by slicing off her nose if she was pretty and might be sexually attractive to the woman's husband. The slave master in turn might rape any female slave.
- For a person such as the poet who had only heard of slaves, it must indeed have come as a shock to witness such brutality – the ultimate sin of one human against another.
- His mood would be one of anger, disgust and shame.

"And after all I've seen and suffered here,
There are strong links that bind me to thee still,
And render even thy rocks and deserts dear;"

Rewrite "spite of physical and moral ill" in your own words to make the meaning clear.

Despite the gloomy landscape and the gale force winds, and despite the moral decline of the society in that they accepted slavery.

When the poet speaks of **"And after all I've suffered here",** to what would he have been referring?

- The poet had come to South Africa from the United Kingdom where such things as freedom of the press were already taken for granted.
- Since he had been a newspaper man in Scotland, he decided to dedicate himself to that career in both Grahams Town and Cape Town.
- He also started a school to help children be educated.
- In both these ventures, however, he found himself at odds with the Governor.
- Lord Charles Somerset was a military man who believed in barking orders and being obeyed.
- When Thomas Pringle began to criticise his actions in the press, the Governor's response was simply to close down the newspaper, and also close down the school.
- Although this initiated a fight for freedom of the press in the Cape Colony, the poet was out of work and therefore reduced to punery.
- It must have been a very stressful time for him, eventually causing him to return to London where he would have fewer restrictions on what he wrote.

When the poet says **"And render even thy rocks and deserts dear"** what does he mean?

- The poet is saying that thoughts of his beloved family and friends would make living in the Cape worthwhile.
- Although he does exaggerate somewhat – he probably had never been far north enough to witness the desert. He could be referring to the Great Karoo which is actually beautiful and not a desert at all.

"Here dwell kind hearts which time nor place can chill –
Loved Kindred and congenial Friends sincere."

When the poet says **"which time nor place can chill"**, he is omitting an essential word for the sake of having only ten syllables in this line. What word has been omitted?

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The line should read "which neither time nor place can chill".

What reference is he making to the Cape in these lines?

- The poet is in fact making a desperate criticism of the Cape.
- The place is so despicable because of its weather and its slavery; that it is hardly worth living there.
- However, he also says that there are some people who somehow have managed to remain honest human beings despite this.
- The poet must have been a very bitter man indeed – although his bitterness is perfectly understandable.

Why has the poet used the upper case for **'Kindred' and 'Friends"**?

- The upper case turns ordinary nouns into Proper nouns.
- By doing so, the poet draws special attention to these words. And makes these people very important.

The poem was written in 1825. What word in these lines tells us that the poet was still in Cape Town when he penned it?

- The poet says "<u>Here</u> dwell kind hearts"
- If he were already back in England, he would have said "<u>There</u> dwell kind hearts".

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Glossary

Alliteration	The repetition of consonant sounds – the 'd' sounds in "dancing daffodils"
Anapest	A metrical foot consisting of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable – da-da-daah
Apostrophe	An exclamatory passage addressed to a particular person
Assonance	The repetition of vowel sounds – the 'o' sounds in "bones grow slowly"
Ballad	Traditionally a song that told a story, with much rhyme and repetition – stanzas in a ballad are usually four lines long with the rhyme in the second and forth line. A ballad was told over many generations.
Colloquial	Colloquial language is casual and ordinary, not formal
Couplet	Two lines of poetry next to each other. The two lines usually rhyme and are usually the same length. A Shakespearian sonnet always ends with a rhyming couplet.
Dramatic monologue	A speech made by one person that tells some sort of a story.
Elegy	A sad poem or song, usually written for someone who has died.
Ellipses	Words left out.
End rhyme	The most common kind of rhyme, where the last syllable of each line rhymes.
Extended or sustained metaphor	The use of comparison through a number of lines.
Figurative	(As opposed to literal) words or phrases used in a non-literal way to create a desired effect. Literary texts often make concentrated use of figurative language (e.g. simile, personification, metaphor).
First, second, third person	When a text is written from the perspective of the speaker using 'I' and 'me', it is written in the first person. Second person is when the text is written from the 'you' perspective. Third person is when a text is written from a 'he'/ she', or 'they' point of view.
Half rhyme	Where only the last consonants of each line sound the same (e.g. bent/ ant)
Hyperbole	Extreme exaggeration (e.g. "I want to kiss you a thousand times")
Iambic	A kind of metre (fixed rhythm) where each foot is made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (an iamb: 'da-daah')
Imagery	The pictures created by the poet (imagery often refers to figurative language)
Internal rhyme	Where words inside lines rhyme, not just words at the end of lines.
Irony	Saying the opposite of what you mean (e.g. saying to someone who has left something behind, 'That's clever of you'
Juxtaposition	Putting two things next to each other. When a poet puts one image next to another image, they are 'juxtaposing' the images. Juxtaposition is usually very obvious when the two juxtaposed things are very different. (e.g. 'She roared like a lion. He squeaked like a mouse')
Literal	When something is absolutely true, there is no comparison being made. (e.g. if you say 'It was literally freezing', then it must have been below 0°C
Litotes	A deliberate understatement. A figure of speech in which the affirmative is expressed by its opposite, accompanied by a negative (e.g. the use of 'not bad' to describe something that is good.
Lyric poetry	Until about the 1700s, 'lyric poetry' was poetry meant to be sung. At the height of Romantic poetry, 'lyric poetry' often sounded musical, but 'lyric poetry' usually means poetry that expresses the poet's thoughts and feelings.

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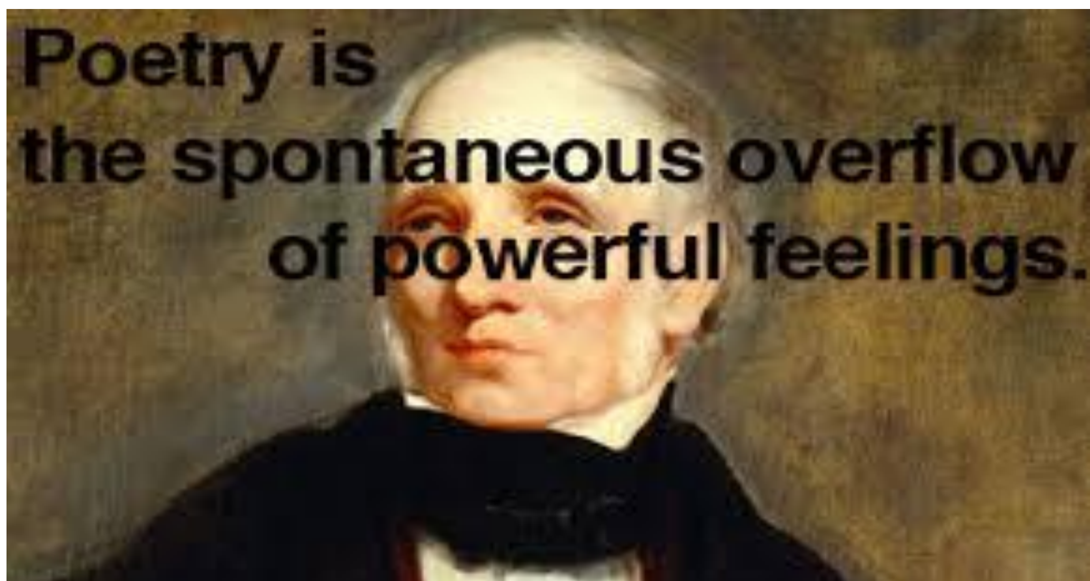
Metre	The arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables in the lines of a poem. These stresses are arranged into sets called 'feet' (e.g. iambs, anapaests, trochees).
Ode	A kind of formal and elaborate (detailed) lyrical verse. It is usually a poem in praise of something, and tells us all about the thing being praised.
Oxymoron	Two words that are usually opposites used together ('bitter sweet')
Pun	Using a word with two meanings, usually to be funny. (e.g. a pun on the word 'point': "To write with a broken pencil is pointless"
Quatrain	A stanza of four lines.
Rhetorical question	A question not really meant to be answered, just there to make you think.
Rhythm	The pattern of 'beats' in a line.
Rhyme	When words at the ends of lines of poetry sound the same
Romantic poetry	A style of poetry written mostly in the 1800s, especially by poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Blake. Romantic poetry emphasizes emotion and individual experience. Romantic poetry emphasizes emotion and emotional experience. Romantic poetry often draws on nature for inspiration. For romantic poets, nature represented what was pure and ideal about the world.
Satire	Making fun of something in order to make a point.
Sestet	A stanza of six lines.
Simile	When two things are compared, using the words 'like' or 'as'.
Sonnet	A form of poetry where the poem has 14 lines and regular rhythm. There are two kinds of sonnets - Shakespearian and Petrarchan or Iralian sonnets.
Style	The way something is written (e.g. formal / chatty / dramatic / informal)
Synecdoche	A figure of speech in which a part of something stands for the whole of it, or vice versa (e.g. in 'I like your wheels', wheels means the whole car, not just the wheels).
Tone	The feeling of words. The poet can't give expression in his/her own voice, so the words have to tell you what tone to use.
Villanelle	A pastoral or lyrical form of poem that usually has 19 lines which are in six stanzas, only two rhymes, and certain lines are repeated.



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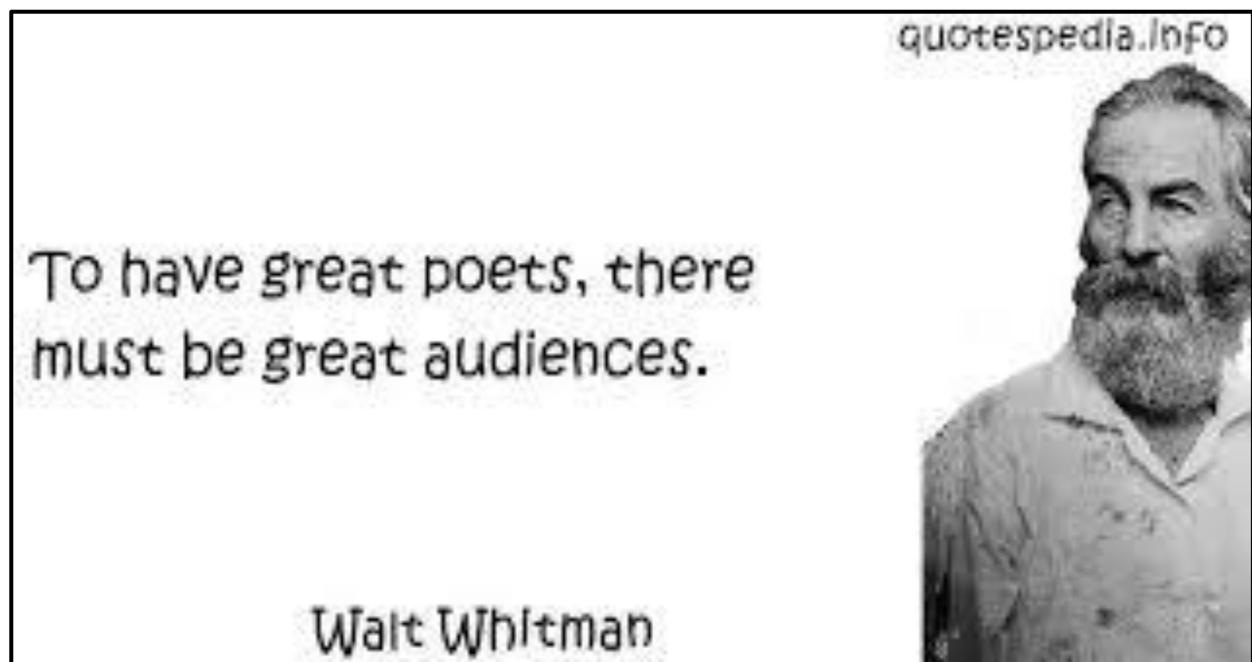

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