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Some Aspects of Cognitive Poetics

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Aspects of Cognitive Poetics

This chapter purports to be a short introduction to Cognitive Poetics.¹ After a short introductory section, it will present some aspects of Cognitive Poetics, focussed on a few brief case studies.

When one considers the perceived qualities of poetry, one cannot escape facing a rather disconcerting issue. Words designate “compact” concepts, whereas some poetry at least is said to evoke diffuse emotions, vague moods, or varieties of mystic experiences. Furthermore, as brain-research of the last few decades seems to suggest, language is a predominantly *sequential* activity, of a conspicuously *logical* character, typically associated with the left cerebral hemisphere; whereas diffuse emotional processes are typically associated with the right cerebral hemisphere. Thus, while we can *name* emotions, language does not appear to be well suited to convey their unique *diffuse* character. Accordingly, *emotional poetry*, or *mystic poetry* ought to be a contradiction in terms. We know that this is not the case. But this presentation of the problem emphasises that we have all too easily accepted what ought not to be taken for granted. The major part of this paper will discuss some ways poetry has found to escape, in the linguistic medium, from the tyranny of clear-cut conceptual categories. The case studies to be presented will illustrate how emotional qualities can be conveyed by poetry; and, as a more extreme instance, how “altered states of consciousness” are displayed by strings of words. One of the key-words in this respect is “precategorical information”; or, perhaps, “verbal imitation of precategorical information”. Two additional key-words will be “thing-free” and “gestalt-free”. Psychologists distinguish “rapid” and “delayed categorisation”. “Precategorical information” is more accessible through the latter. It will be pointed out that the reader’s decision style may be decisive here. Persons who are intolerant of uncertainty or ambiguity may seek rapid categorisation and miss some of the most crucial aesthetic qualities in poetry, including emotional as well as grotesque qualities.

During the past fifty years or so, the word *cognition* has changed its meaning. Originally, it distinguished the rational from the emotional and impulsive aspect of mental life. Now it is used to refer to all information-processing activities of the brain, ranging from the analysis of immediate stimuli to the organisation of subjective experience. In contemporary terminology, cognition includes such processes and phenomena as perception, memory, attention, problem-solving, language, thinking, and imagery. In the phrase *Cognitive Poetics*, the term is used in the latter sense.

For my purpose, the term “poetics” may be defined as follows:

The actual objects of poetics are the particular regularities that occur in literary texts and that determine the specific effects of poetry; in the final analysis--the human ability to produce poetic structures and understand their effect--that is, something

which one might call *poetic competence* (Bierwisch, 1970: 98-99).

Cognitive Poetics comes in precisely here: it offers cognitive hypotheses to relate *in a systematic way* “the specific effects of poetry” to “the particular regularities that occur in literary texts”. I shall illustrate this in a moment, with relation to a Hebrew and an English text. But first let us proceed by mentioning a few central assumptions of Cognitive Poetics.

One major assumption of cognitive poetics is that poetry exploits, for aesthetic purposes, cognitive (including linguistic) processes that were initially evolved for non-aesthetic purposes, just as in evolving linguistic ability, old cognitive and physiological mechanisms were turned to new ends. Such an assumption is more parsimonious than postulating independent aesthetic and/or linguistic mechanisms. The reading of poetry involves the modification (or, sometimes, the deformation) of cognitive processes, and their adaptation for purposes for which they were not originally “devised”. In certain extreme but central cases, this modification may become “organised violence against cognitive processes”, to paraphrase the famous slogan of Russian Formalism. Quite a few (but by no means all) central poetic effects are the result of some drastic interference with, or at least delay of, the regular course of cognitive processes, and the exploitation of its effects for aesthetic purposes. In this respect, one should point out that emotions are efficient orientation devices; and that much manneristic poetry is, precisely, poetry of **disorientation**. The cognitive correlates of poetic processes must be described, then, in three respects: the normal cognitive processes; some kind of modification or disturbance of these processes; and their reorganisation according to different principles.

Cognitive Poetics may be interested in two complementary issues regarding the creativity and novelty manifested in poetic language. 1: Given that this creative use of language results in the intricacies and complexities of poetic language, what are the *unique* cognitive processes which this complex use of language requires. 2. Given the fact that despite its complexity, poetic language is, in principle, interpretable, what are the general (i.e., non-specific to the poetic use of language) cognitive constraints, the adherence to which, guarantees the interpretability of poetic language.

Poetry and Emotional Qualities

In the first paragraph of this paper I claimed that language is a highly differentiated logical tool by its very nature, and that it requires special manipulations to convey or evoke with its help low-differentiated, diffuse emotional qualities. Cognitive Poetics investigates a variety of ways in which poets overcome this problem. One efficient means for this investigation is to apply to poetry knowledge gained by psychologists concerning the nature of emotions (cf. Tsur, 1978).

Psychologists have discerned the following elements in emotions:

1. Cognitive situation appraisal (“cognitive”, in the first sense);
2. Deviation from normal energy level: increase (gladness, anger), or decrease of energy (sadness, depression, calm);
3. Diffuse information in a highly activated state that is less differentiated than conceptual information;
4. Such information is active in “the back of one’s mind”, without pre-empting everything else.

Let us consider the first stanza of a short lyric poem by the great Hebrew poet Hayim Lensky (who wrote Hebrew poetry in Soviet Russia, and found his death in Stalin’s concentration camps):

טצריב היום על האגם,
 הגה ירדה לגום בעמק,
 קבר שבתו עושות שלהגם...
 מה עגום ברשדושו הנגאם

ma'ariv hajom 'al ha'agam,
 hadaga jarda lanum ba'omēk,
 kvar šavtu 'ofot milahagam...
 mē 'agum berišušo hagomē.

- (1) The day is setting over the lake,
 The fish have gone down to sleep in the depth,
 Birds have ceased from their chatter...
 How sad is the rustling of the reeds!

We may make two preliminary observations about this stanza. First, it is only in the fourth line that it *names* an emotion (“sad”); in the first three lines it describes *facts* of the landscape that have no explicit emotional contents. In other words, the emotion appears to be there only by way of “telling”, not “showing”. Intuitively, however, this is not true, and we should attempt to account for this intuition in a systematic way. Second, the four descriptive sentences in the four lines relate to one another in two different ways: in one way, they refer to *parts* of the situation, *complete* one another to constitute the description of a *whole* landscape; in another way, they parallel one another in an important sense. The latter relationship is reinforced by the rhyme pattern.

The reader is inclined to extract from parallel entities their common ingredients. When the first three lines are read out to students, they abstract from these lines such abstractions as “going down”, “decrease of activity”. When asked whether this description has any emotional quality, they more often than not suggest the emotional quality “calm”. We may recall that emotions are typically associated with some deviation from normal energy level, and that the lowering of energy is typically associated with sadness, depression, or calm. It is only the fourth line that supplies the “cognitive situation appraisal”, and resolves the emotional quality of the landscape description in favour of “sadness”.

There is convincing experimental evidence that the superordinate categories of parallel entities is present, simultaneously though subliminally, in active memory. This can be demonstrated with the help of the Stroop test. The Stroop test has revealed an involuntary and subliminal cognitive mechanism of some interest for our present inquiry. In this test, colour names (e.g., “yellow”) are written in different-coloured ink (e.g., “blue”). If the subject is required to read the word, he has little interference from the ink colour, but if he is required to name the ink colour, he has great difficulty because of interference from the colour name (Posner, 1973: 26). The findings of this experiment suggested a further study, concerning the automatic activation of superordinates. In this study, subjects were presented with lists of three words which they were to remember. The three words came from the same category (e.g., “maple”, “oak”, “elm”). The subjects were then shown one of the words in the list (e.g., “oak”), the name of the category (e.g., “tree”), or a neutral word unrelated to the list. These visually presented words were written in coloured ink. The subjects were asked to name the colour of the ink as rapidly as possible. Based on the Stroop effect, it was expected that if the word shown to the subject was in activated memory, the subjects would have greater trouble inhibiting a tendency to vocalise the word name. Such a tendency would slow their response to naming the ink colour. The experimental data showed that words from the list (“maple”, “oak”, “elm”) and the category name (“tree”) produced greater interference with colour naming than control words. This study suggests that the category name is activated

when a list word is presented, without any requirement to do so (Posner, 1973: 86). One might perhaps cautiously suggest that the same principle may be extended to *ad hoc* categories too: that when the first three lines of Lensky's poem are read, the superordinate categories "going down", "decrease of activity" are activated too. Such an assumption, however, requires further experimental testing.

The abstractions extracted from parallel entities have considerable adaptation value. As Posner suggested, such abstractions may contribute to a parsimonious hierarchical organisation of semantic memory. One might add that they also facilitate the preservation of such parallel entities in active memory. As suggested above, one major assumption of cognitive poetics is that poetry exploits, for aesthetic purposes, cognitive processes that were initially evolved for non-aesthetic purposes. In the present instance, the abstractions that typically serve to alleviate the load on active memory (or contribute to the efficient organisation of semantic memory) receive exceptionally strong emphasis and are perceived as aspects of the emotional quality pervading the landscape described. As aspects of the emotional quality pervading the landscape described, such abstractions conform with the description of emotions above: they constitute diffuse information in a highly activated state that is less differentiated than conceptual information, and are active in "the back of one's mind", without pre-empting everything else. This is how this stanza evokes some diffuse emotion or vague mood. But these are attributed to the physical behaviour of animals and lifeless physical reality, not to human emotions. This, however, seems to bother very few--if any--poetry readers. They all seem to have acquired the basic convention of "literary competence", formulated by Jonathan Culler as *the rule of significance*: "read the poem as expressing a significant attitude to some problem concerning man and/or his relation to the universe" (Culler, 1975: 115).

I have alluded above to brain-research which seems to suggest that language is a predominantly *sequential* activity, of a conspicuously *logical* character, typically associated with the left cerebral hemisphere; whereas diffuse emotional processes are typically associated with the right cerebral hemisphere. I have also mentioned the problem generated by this state of affairs: while we can *name* emotions, language does not appear to be well suited to convey their unique *diffuse* character. In our foregoing discussion, I have suggested that poets attempt to overcome this problem by creating some verbal equivalent of the structure of emotions. Here we may add yet another, highly favoured way of the poets to generate the unique *diffuse* character of emotions: to evoke in the reader's imagination a landscape in which orientation may take place. The nature of orientation in particular is illustrated by the two hemispheres' different ways of processing input:

The right side of the cortex processes its input more as a "patterned whole", that is, in a more simultaneous manner than does the left. This simultaneous processing is advantageous for the integration of diffuse inputs, such as for orienting oneself in space, when motor, kinesthetic and visual input must be quickly integrated. This mode of information-processing, too, would seem to underlie an "intuitive" rather than "intellectual" integration of complex entities (Ornstein, 1975: 95).

In what I shall call below "delayed categorisation", the phrase "integration of diffuse inputs" undergoes a slight shift of emphasis, from "*integration* of diffuse inputs" to "integration of *diffuse inputs*". In the reading of landscape descriptions by way of "delayed categorisation", inputs are perceived as more diffuse.

Let us now have a look at a short lyric, "A Song" by Shelley; it poses similar problems with similar solutions, suggesting that our foregoing discussion is far from *ad hoc*; at the same time, it

raises some additional issues.

(2) A widow bird sate mourning for her love
 Upon a wintry bough;
 The frozen wind crept on above,
 The freezing stream below.

There was no leaf upon the forest bare,
 No flower upon the ground,
 And little motion in the air
 Except the mill-wheel's sound.

The first thing that one notices in this short lyric is its exquisite musicality. The second thing that one notices is its intense emotional quality, its intense *atmosphere*. Yet, except for the first line, all the poem gives us merely a catalogue of physical facts, of what there is, or is not in the concrete reality presented. There are three barely noticeable, interrelated metaphors in the first line, if we assume that only human beings may have loves and become widows when they die, and mourn for them. However, the attribution of these notions to a bird is not very bold. The only other formal metaphor in the poem is *crept on*, in the sense of “moved on slowly”; this is not a very bold metaphor either. The rest of the poem contains plain, non-metaphorical language. By what means does, then, the poem generate the intense emotional atmosphere? Hardly by these metaphors alone.

There is contiguity between the bird and the bough upon which it is sitting; and there is contiguity between the bough and the tree, of which presumably it is a part. Furthermore, there is contiguity between the tree, the wind, the stream, the forest, the ground, and the mill-wheel's sound: they all combine to a coherent landscape. In other words, all these items are *parts*, “metonymies”, of the *whole* scene. However, the poem also projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of similarity to the axis of contiguity: lines three and four are **similar** in that both the stream and the wind have low temperature (are freezing, or frozen), and that both are “creeping on”. Likewise, lines five and six are similar in that they both describe the *absence* of vegetation that has vitality (flower or leaf). Now how does all this affect the abstract emotional quality of the poem? One important ingredient in emotions involves *deviation from the normal level of energy*. Joy, mirth or, for that matter, anger, consist in heightened psychic energy, whereas calm, sorrow or depression consist in a lowered level of energy. Thus, emotions also involve a lowered or heightened level of *vitality*.

However, whatever the energy levels mentioned in the landscape description, they do not concern human *emotions*, but only lifeless or growing things. There *is* a lowering of energy when the wind and the stream are *freezing* or *frozen* (in the cold ~ hot opposition, cold designates the low-energy pole, hot the high-energy pole); and slowness is implied by the verb *crept* instead of *moved*. There appears to be some analogy between the bird which *sate* upon the *wintry bough*, and the wind and the stream: all of them manifest some drastically *reduced activity*. Now the reduced activity of the wind and the stream could also suggest calm, for instance. It is the widow bird which “sate mourning for her love”, that gives the emotional direction of distress to the reduced activity of physical reality. Lines five and six contribute the components [+deprivation] and [vitality] to this emotional quality. Now consider the techniques for introducing “overtones of human emotion” into this poem. The song both stresses “the great likeness between man and nature in terms of sympathies and feeling”, and lays an “emphasis on qualitative comparison between objects in terms of sense perception”. The former technique consists in the analogy between the bird (rather

than some human being) and its environment; the latter in the analogies between the pairs of items present or absent in the landscape. But both are instances of the principle formulated by Roman Jakobson (1960) as *The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination*.

Thus, the emotional quality is present in the poem not only by way of *telling* but also by way of *showing*. It should also be noticed that this emotional quality being spread over the whole scenery, the information is perceived as **diffuse**, very much in the way information is held in a diffuse state in affects and emotions. It is precisely this that turns the **notion** of an emotion into an emotional **quality**; or, in other words, into an **emotional atmosphere**. It is in this way that *atmosphere* in the sense of “the gaseous fluid surrounding the earth” becomes a metaphor for an emotional quality pervading a work of art: the air is felt to be everywhere, yet cannot be perceived by any of the senses. The last two lines of the poem have, then, a rather complex function within the whole. *Little* as a part of the sequence *There is no ... No... And little...* suggests “none at all”; in this sense, “And little motion in the air” is one more item in the list of analogous items suggesting **deprivation**. In this sense, it seems to herald an unqualified statement that generates a psychological atmosphere of great certainty. The subsequent preposition *except*, however, makes a substantial qualification to this statement, substituting “a very small amount of” for total exclusion; that is, there is an exclusion from the total exclusion: a mill-wheel’s sound. The relation of the *mill-wheel* to its sound is like the relation of a thing to a thing-free quality. What seems to be emphasised by this is that only the thing-free quality, but not the thing itself is introduced into the description. This perturbation of the air becomes another item in the list of items with reduced activity; by the same token, it emphasises the presence of the air, *the* thing-free quality *par excellence* pervading the scene. This shift of the meaning, qualifying the unqualified statement, performs a “poetic sabotage” against the determined, purposeful quality of the poetic closure, replacing the psychological atmosphere of great certainty with a psychological atmosphere of *uncertainty*, contributing to the emotional quality of the poem. This emotional atmosphere has been generated by the abstraction of certain qualities from parallel concrete items in the description. This quality seems to be reinforced by another aspect of the mill-wheel’s sound, which I wish to point out through an idea borrowed from Joseph Glicksohn. Gestalt psychology speaks of figure-ground relationship. The undifferentiated mill-wheel’s sound typically serves as ground to some aural figure. By forcing to the reader’s attention a percept that typically serves as ground, the poem increases the emotional quality of the perception, and emphasises that *there is no* figure to be contemplated, reinforcing the quality of deprivation.

Rapid and Delayed Categorisation

The shortest way to illustrate rapid and delayed categorisation is the following story. As is well known, Helen Keller was deaf, mute, and blind. She began to acquire the basic skills of communication as late as at the age of six. Before that age, she tells us in her book, she had no word for, e.g., ice cream. When she felt like eating ice cream, she felt an intense cold feeling all over her tongue, and drew her mother to the fridge. Later, after having acquired the word *ice cream*, the peculiar sensation on her tongue disappeared, and she was incapable of reviving it by conscious effort. ² Most normal adults delay categorisation for fractions of seconds, so as to gather information required for making adequate judgments about reality. This is a requirement for satisfactory adaptation. In Helen Keller’s case, categorisation was delayed for over six years; and the story can demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages of rapid and delayed categorisation. A category with a verbal label constitutes relatively small load on one’s cognitive system, and is easily manipulable; on the other hand, it entails the loss of important sensory information, that might be crucial for the process of accurate adaptation. Delayed categorisation, by contrast, may

load too much sensory load on the human memory system; this overload may be available for adaptive purposes and afford great flexibility, but may be time-and-energy consuming, and occupy too much mental processing space. Furthermore, delayed categorisation may involve a period of uncertainty that may be quite unpleasant, or even intolerable for some individuals. Rapid categorisation, by contrast, may involve the loss of vital information, and lead to maladaptive strategies in life. In Helen Keller's case, we see an opposition between a precategoric sensation on her tongue, and a word. The former constitutes delayed, the latter rapid categorisation. The diffuse sensations are recoded into a compact, focussed concept, and labelled with a verbal label. Different categorisation strategies may generate different poetic qualities. Different poetic texts may require different categorisation strategies. In the instances considered shortly, the particular poetic characteristics of poetic passages is missed, if treated by way of rapid categorisation. This, however, is not necessarily always the case: we have found experimentally that the poetic potential of, e.g., Omar Khayyam's Rubáiyáths may not be fully realised by readers who are too tolerant of delayed categorisation (cf. Tsur et al., 1990; 1991).

In what follows, I shall dwell on rapid and delayed categorisation with reference to a variety of issues related to poetry: understanding poetic metaphors, the implied critic's decision style, and poetry and altered states of consciousness.

Let us consider, first, an exquisite literary example. In an undergraduate seminar on Alterman's poetry, I isolated the following line from its context, and asked the students to make any comments that seemed relevant to them, without asking them any specific questions.

min hakfar hatove'a binhi haparim

מִן הַכִּפּוּר הַתּוֹבֵעַ בִּנְחֵי הַפָּרִים

(3) From the village drowning in the moan of the oxen

The first responses received from the students represented the view that one may not refer to an isolated line, without relating it to its context. This is an academically approved, well-proven strategy of avoiding the need to experience evasive, "perceptual", poetic qualities, that cannot be subsumed under some clearly-defined, conceptual category. When I promised them that after discussing the peculiar qualities of the isolated verse line we shall examine it in its wider context, students began making such remarks as that the words *drowning* and *moan* have sinister connotations. This too is a well-proven strategy, with full academic backing, to avoid the direct experiencing of unevaluated and unclassified stimuli. So I asked the students whether the image really evoked unpleasant, or sinister feelings. The students were surprised to discover that the image was experienced as quite pleasant. The students had troubles in answering my question, how can we explain that a verse line in which two of the key terms have sinister connotations arouses pleasurable feelings. So I began a second round of disconcerting questions: "What do we feel when taking a warm bath?" Here it is more difficult to find academic legitimisation for avoiding immediate sensations. The first answer I received was "purification". This is an excellent example of shifting the focus of discussion from immediate, unevaluated--possibly nameless--sensations to some stable concept with a venerable spiritual history. The next answer was "wetness", which is tautological, and quite uninformative. Both answers are perfectly true, but involve a kind of "breaking the rules", reserved for cases in which it is difficult to find some respectable academic justification for evading the need to face evasive, nameless sensory experiences. Eventually, the following account began to emerge: There is an undifferentiated, diffuse sensation all over the outer surface of the skin, with an heightened feeling of unity of the various parts of the body, and a kind of harmony between the body and its immediate

environment, even an abolition of the separateness of the body from its environment. This account was found acceptable by most seminar members.

Returning now to Alterman's metaphor, the village is perceived as if immersed in some gestalt-free and thing-free entity, wrapping as it were the whole village or person, enhancing the unity of the parts of the village (or of the person), or transcending the split between the person and his environment. There is here a kind of regression of the perceiving consciousness from a state of cognitive stability that discriminates between the physical objects themselves, as well as between ego and the physical objects perceived. Hence the pleasant relaxation experienced through the metaphor, in spite of the sinister connotations of several key terms in it.

Consider now the noun *moan*. The Randomhouse College Dictionary defines it as follows: "prolonged, low, inarticulate sound uttered from or as from physical or mental suffering". Such a definition has two parts; one part gives a description of the sensory information of "moan", the other suggests its human significance and evaluation. Rapid categorisation will concentrate only on its second part; delayed categorisation will linger on its first, sensuous, part for as long as possible, and proceed only later, if at all, to its latter part. In Alterman's verse line, there is a logical contradiction between the prepositional phrase "in the moan of the oxen", and the verb suggesting immersion in water. *Drown* and related verbs transfer the transfer feature <+liquid> to their abstract indirect objects. Sounds are perceived as thing-free entities, that have no material mass. Consequently, they cancel the material ingredient in the transfer feature <+liquid>, and retain such ingredients as "slight touch, diffuse and undifferentiated, all over the outer surface of the body; the abolition of the separateness of the body from its environment". At the same time, the immersion of a solid body in a thing-free entity arouses a feeling of condensation of that wrapping entity (cf. Tsur, 1988b).

In a symposium on cognitive poetics (Tel Aviv University, 30.3.1993), I told the audience the story of this seminar session. One of the questions in the ensuing discussion concerned the "death" ingredient of *drown*. My answer referred to the feature-cancellation theory of metaphor: metaphoric contradiction deletes those features of the metaphoric term that are irrelevant to the frame, and foreground the relevant ones. *Moan* in Alterman's verse line foregrounds the peculiar sensuous quality of the oxen's lowing, and has nothing to do with "physical or mental suffering". *Drowning* suggests here immersion in this peculiar sensuous quality, and the death ingredient is irrelevant here. Such an analysis, however, ignores any possible differences between "the village *drowning* in the moan of the oxen", and "the village *immersed* in the moan of the oxen". A graduate student, member of the Cognitive Poetics workshop, suggested that the death ingredient may suggest here a state wherein individuality seems "to dissolve and fade away into boundless being"--to use the phrase of one of William James's informants; and, I think, this is the better answer.

Sensuous Metaphors and the Grotesque

Romantic poetry is a poetry of integration and orientation that makes ample use of rich pre-categorical, or low-categorised information. In the instances discussed in the preceding section, an interference with the operation of the orientation-mechanism was exploited for poetic effects. This, however, is not necessarily the case in all poetry. To show what I mean, let me begin with an extensive discussion of two lines by the Hebrew poet Abraham Shlonsky:

תָּם קָם תְּלוּי עַל בְּלִי-מָה
 בְּשֵׁר לִבָּן וּזְלֵף אֶת הַלָּבָן.

yareah met taluy 'al bli-ma,
 kašad lavan zolef 'Et h'alavo

- (4) A dead moon is hanging on nothingness
 Like a white breast shedding its milk.

Let me begin, again, by reporting intuitions that some of my students had about these lines. In a seminar group, some of the students tended to interpret the “breast shedding its milk” as the embodiment of the principle of **giving**, of the life principle, having a contradictory relationship to the moon as “hung” and “dead” in the preceding line. The moon is associated here, paradoxically, with the principles of both life and death, with the principles both of passivity and of “giving”. Running into difficulties, one of the students changed his interpretation and said that “shedding its milk” implies waste rather than feeding. All these interpretations, however, were incompatible with the intuitions of other participants in the seminar, including myself. Before going into a possible other interpretation, it should be noted that the above kind of interpretation is far from illegitimate. It relies on one of the most important principles of **literary competence**, formulated thus: “The primary convention is what might be called the rule of significance: read the poem as expressing a significant attitude to some problem concerning man and/or his relation to the universe” (Culler, 1975: 115). The interpretation is further corroborated by one of the fundamental aesthetic principles, viz., that good poetry is paradoxical, that is, it consists in the fusion of incompatible or discordant qualities. The “rule of significance”, peculiar as it may seem from a literary point of view, is an operating instruction realising, in the literary domain, a principle that has much wider cultural applications. This principle is formulated by D’Andrade (1980) as follows: “In fusing fact and evaluational reactions, cultural schemata come to have a powerful directive impact as implicit values”.

The above interpretation of Shlonsky’s lines also relies on “the convention of metaphorical coherence—that one should attempt through semantic transformations to produce coherence on both levels of tenor and vehicle” (Culler, 1975: 115). There is an attempt to produce coherence on the level of the tenor, associating the moon with the principles of life and death, through the appropriate semantic transformations. The level of the vehicle, however, is “incoherent”: there is a “mixed metaphor” here. The moon as hung and dead (like the head of a hanged man?) is conflicting with the moon as a white breast. This line of thought may lead us to an alternative way to handle such metaphors. The first step in this direction goes *via* Christine Brooke-Rose’s work (1958). “Very broadly speaking, metaphors can be divided, from the point of view of idea-content, into functional metaphors (A is called B by virtue of what it does), and sensuous metaphors (A is called B by virtue of what it looks like, or more rarely, sounds like, smells like, feels like, tastes like)” (Brooke-Rose, 1958: 155).

Now, let us use Brooke-Rose’s categories here to apply explicit structural descriptions to the conflicting intuitions. It is clear that the above interpretation of Shlonsky’s image treated it as a functional metaphor, whereas in the emerging reading, “the moon [...] like a white breast shedding its milk” is treated as a conspicuous sensuous metaphor. Hence the conflicting intuitions. The moon is called “a white breast shedding its milk”, not by virtue of its life-giving activity, but by virtue of what it looks like: the moon is a round object, near which a white mass, “the Milky Way” is seen (pouring forth from it, as it were). Now, why should a poet bother to provide such rich imagery, if it were not to obtain some human significance? For the precision of description, some critics say. But the precision-explanation breaks down when one considers the incompatible details that the various images lump together. By contrast, one of the major assumptions of cognitive

poetics is able to explain the conflict. Such sensuous metaphors as Shlonsky's interfere with the normal process of orientation; the conflict delays the appraisal of the human significance of the image.

I have elsewhere claimed that a psychoanalytic discussion of puns and caricatures may illuminate certain aspects of figurative language (Tsur, 1987b: 19-32).³ On first approximation, it seems obvious that the image in (4) fuses two visual images into one, while preserving their warring identity. The visual conflict on the one hand, and the saving of mental energy resulting from the fusion on the other hand, generate the particular witty effect typically associated with caricature. On a closer look, however, such an explanation cannot account for the intuitive difference between a "functional" and a "sensuous" construal of the images involved. At most, we may say that the saving of mental energy intensifies the reader's involvement in whatever quality is generated by the metaphor, whether construed as "functional" or "sensuous".

More generally speaking, the urgency to evaluate the significance of a stimulus appears to be a deeply rooted biological response.

Most emotions involve an intuitive appraisal of a stimulus as good (beneficial) or bad (harmful). [...] It is very unlikely that organisms can unequivocally evaluate all stimuli with which they make contact. Some period, extended or brief, is necessary before tissue damage occurs, or internal injury develops, or pleasurable sensations occur. During this critical period of direct contact with an unevaluated object, a pattern of behavior apparently develops which, at the human level, is usually called surprise (Plutchik, 1968: 72).

Sensuous metaphor may, then, be regarded as another literary device to delay the smooth cognitive process consisting in the contact with some unevaluated image; the device's function is thus to prolong a state of disorientation and so generate an aesthetic quality of surprise, startling, perplexity, astounding, or the like.⁴ Thus, Shlonsky's simile generates, under the pretence of precise description, a perceived effect of startling, or even emotional, disorientation. But the two lines contain additional devices of emotional disorientation, which will be discussed in the following.⁵

The "sensuous" reader lingers at the visual images, without appraising their significance. These images, in spite of their common elements, are visually incompatible. The moon, the female breast, and the head of a dead person may be similar in their round shapes, but they are different in many details. The reader can join them visually only by the essentially comic technique of caricature, thereby demonstrating that the intolerable, inextricable mixture of incompatibles is a fact of life, perhaps the most crucial one. No wonder that such a reader perceives the image as grotesque, in an essentially divided response, which conveys the notion of something that is simultaneously laughable and horrifying or disgusting. Both laughter and horror or disgust are defence mechanisms in the presence of threat, the latter allowing the danger its authority, the former denying it (cf. Burke, 1957: 51-56). The grotesque is *the experiencing of emotional disorientation* when both defence mechanisms are suddenly suspended (cf. Thomson, 1972: 58). Shlonsky's image contains additional components of the grotesque. Some writers on the grotesque claim that "the grotesque is essentially physical, referring always to the body and bodily excesses and celebrating these in an uninhibited, outrageous but essentially joyous fashion" (Thomson, 1972: 56). "Our laughter at some kinds of the grotesque and the opposite response--disgust, horror, etc.--mixed with it, are both reactions to the physically cruel, abnormal or obscene" (ibid., 8). There is in the grotesque a kind of "delight in seeing taboos flouted". The white breast of cosmic

dimension represents such an obscenity, or bodily excess.

The quotation from Shlonsky presents us with yet another device of emotional disorientation, the 'realisation of the idiom' "Milky Way" that is, the unexpected use of the idiomatic expression in its literal sense. Such sudden shifts of meaning may produce in the reader "a strange sensation--making one suddenly doubt one's comfortable relationship with language--not unlike the sense of disorientation and confusion associated with the grotesque" (Thomson, 1972: 65).

The grotesque, then, makes use of poetic devices that produce an emotional disorientation which is experienced as a shock, perplexity, surprise, or the like. It is, indeed, this quality that enables the various devices to combine and be integrated into a whole.

If one looks for an aesthetic justification of the above process, a sufficient answer will be: emotional disorientation is an intensive human quality perceived by the reader. One may justify one's positive evaluation of an aesthetic object with reference to three general canons: unity, complexity, and some intensive human quality (cf. Beardsley, 1958: 465-469). It is obvious from the above analysis that Shlonsky's two lines are quite complex from the viewpoint of figurative language. Insofar as this complexity is achieved by means of what Neo-Classical critics would call "mixed metaphors", these lines appear to be deficient from the point of view of unity. Notice, however, this: the various kinds of poetic devices, each in its own way, are aimed at giving a shock and arousing a sense of emotional disorientation. This generates an intense human quality of perplexity and emotional disorientation. This quality, in turn, bestows perceptual unity upon the diverse images. In this respect, the role of cognitive poetics is to describe the mechanisms of defence and orientation, the disturbance of which has generated the intense human quality. It also helps to define the nature of this quality and to relate it, systematically, to the poetic structures.

Decision Style

Our discussion of "Rapid and Delayed Categorisation", and of "Sensuous Metaphors and the Grotesque" may have suggested that readers may differ from one another in their tolerance of delayed categorisation, or of sensuous metaphors, or of the Grotesque. Such differences in tolerance may affect their critical decisions too. When confronted with a critical decision, some readers or critics may prefer those options which require less tolerance of delayed categorisation, or of sensuous metaphors, or of the Grotesque; in short, less tolerance of uncertainty or of emotional disorientation. When in a piece of criticism, or in the output of a critic, certain cognitive devices are consistently deployed in a way that is characteristic of a certain cognitive style, I call this "the implied critic's decision style". Paraphrasing Booth (1961: 71-76) on "the implied author", *the implied critic* can be defined as the person whose decisions are reflected in a given piece of criticism. "We infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his choices" (74-75). Such differences in decision style sometimes result in legitimate variant readings; in some other instances, however, some readers may display a tendency to avoid readings that exert too much uncertainty or emotional ambivalence, and prefer readings that appear less legitimate than the avoided ones.

Poetry and Altered States of Consciousness

One of man's greatest achievements is personal consciousness. ⁶ At a very early age he learns to construct stable categories that make a stable world from streams of sensory information that flood his senses. We have already encountered the relative advantages and disadvantages of rapid and delayed categorisation. Stable, well-organised categories constitute a relatively easily manipulable

small load of information on one's cognitive system; on the other hand, they entail the loss of important sensory information, that might be crucial for the process of accurate adaptation. Exposure to fluid precategory information, by contrast, may load too much sensory load on the human memory system; this overload may be available for adaptive purposes and afford great flexibility, but may be time-and-energy consuming, and occupy too much mental processing space. Delayed categorisation may involve a period of uncertainty that may be quite unpleasant, or even intolerable for some individuals. The solution to this catch appears to be what Ehrenzweig (1970: 135) describes as "a creative ego rhythm that swings between focussed Gestalt and an oceanic undifferentiation".

The London psychoanalysts D.W. Winnicott and Marion Milner, have stressed the importance for a creative ego to be able to suspend the boundaries between self and not-self in order to become more at home in the world of reality where the objects and self are clearly held apart (ibid).

Seen in this way, the oceanic experience of fusion, of a "return to the womb", represents the minimum content of all art; Freud saw in it only the basic religious experience. But it seems now that it belongs to all creativity (ibid).

In some people's responses to Alterman's metaphor in quote 3 one may detect precisely such an element of the suspension of boundaries between self and not-self, of immersion in a thing-free and gestalt-free quality. Altered states of consciousness are states in which one is exposed for extended periods of time to precategory, or low-categorised information of varying sorts. These would include a wide range of states in which the actively organising mind is not in full control, ranging from hypnagogic states (when one is half-awake, half-asleep), through hypnotic state, to varieties of religious experience, most notably mystic and ecstatic experiences. In the creative process, moments of "inspiration" or of "insight" too may involve such altered state of consciousness, though less readily recognised as such.

Since much Romantic and Symbolist poetry on the one hand and religious poetry of most styles on the other seek to be exposed to rich precategory information, we might expect to find in these styles and genres poems that seek to achieve, or to display as a regional quality, some altered state of consciousness.

In what follows, I am going to discuss at some length Keats's sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles".⁷

(5) My spirit is too weak -- mortality
 Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
 And each imagined pinnacle and steep
 Of godlike hardship, tell me I must die
 Like a sick Eagle looking at the sky.
 Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep
 That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
 Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
 Such dim-conceivèd glories of the brain
 Bring round the heart an indescribable feud;
 So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
 That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
 Wasting of old Time -- with a billowy main --

A sun -- a shadow of a magnitude.

This sonnet is quite remarkable in the poetry of altered states of consciousness. This is one of the exquisite instances in which Keats achieves one of his “many havens of intensity”. This is a kind of “peak experience”, similar to ecstasy; and it is, definitely, a prominent kind of “altered state of consciousness”. A unique feature of this poem is that it begins with a direct reference to a rather common kind of altered state of consciousness, “unwilling sleep”, whether unwilling to come or to go, usually called “hypnagogic”. In what follows I shall try to trace, briefly, the cumulative impact of elements that contribute to this effect of peak experience.

I would point out two aspects of this emotional state: passive emotional receptivity, far away from the “actively organising mind”; and a state describable as “awe”: an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, fear, produced by that which is grand, sublime, extremely powerful, or the like. In Keats’s sonnet, “My spirit is too weak” is a straightforward enough conceptual statement of an emotional state suggesting a relaxation of volitional control; while the landscape descriptions “each imagined pinnacle and steep / Of godlike hardship... / a billowy main / A sun a shadow of a magnitude”, as well as “wonders... Grecian grandeur” can be characterised as “grand, sublime, extremely powerful”.

This sonnet contains a considerable number of abstractions and thing-free qualities which are the source of emotionally loaded, undifferentiated qualities. Here, I want to point out that *mortality* in line 1 makes an impression that may be described as a diffuse though intense essence or quality. The sonnet begins in a way that could be perceived as almost plain conceptual language. “My spirit is too weak” is, as I said, a straightforward enough conceptual statement of an emotional state suggesting a relaxation of volitional control. “Weighs heavily on me” is, in ordinary language, a dead metaphor, in the sense ‘troubles me’. Nevertheless, the first two lines are rather perceived as undifferentiated and non-conceptual. Why? One reason could be the peculiar tension between the abstract and the concrete in the sentence “Mortality weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep”. Another reason may be the peculiar nature of the concrete element in this tension. Finally, the perceived quality generated in this way is reinforced by the relation of this phrase to the surrounding phrases.

If one may speak of relatively more and less abstract nouns, *mortality* is more abstract than *death*, in the sense that the potential is more abstract than the actual. Besides, we are accustomed to personifications of *Death* in poetry, myth, and even our every-day thought, to the extent that we no longer associate such personifications with pure abstractions; by contrast, *mortality* is shape-free in our awareness. In this sense, *mortality* stretches the expression into the abstract direction. *Weighs*, on the other hand, attributes to *mortality* a property which is the exclusive property of physical objects. Now, when an abstraction is associated with a physical object that has a characteristic visual shape, the typical result is a figurative expression in which the abstraction has a compact, differentiated, conceptual character. When, however, the abstraction is associated with a physical quality that belongs to the domain of one of the least differentiated senses, such as the tactile or thermal sense, or the sense of weight it tends to be registered as a diffuse, undifferentiated though intense and saturated percept. By attributing weight to *mortality*, one endows it with potency, or power. In this way, the present metaphor joins a highly abstract (differentiated) noun with a very low-differentiated predicate; there is a “hole” left at what Wimsatt (1954) calls **the substantive level** (that is to say, the expression suggests the kind of feeling for which our vocabulary has no name). In the present case, inasmuch as the metaphor is immediately preceded by a direct expression “My spirit is too weak” on the substantive level, it serves as a standard for deviation in either direction. Notice that the analysis depends on a certain

mental performance: it takes for granted that the predicate *weighs* is not taken in the straightforward idiomatic sense of “troubles me”. But the qualities that are suggested here as inherent in the predicate can be detected only if one understands *weighs* as a physical attribute proper, and conceives of the term as allowing, at one and the same time, for a more abstract and a more concrete interpretation of the expression on the substantive level than it, taken by itself, would suggest. Here, such a reading is encouraged by the sequel, “like unwilling sleep” (meaning either unwilling to come or to vanish), which metonymically transfers an undifferentiated sense of heaviness from the limbs to *mortality*, the abstraction being related to the speaker from the outside, as it were.

In the following, I shall propose a few comments on the poem’s ensuing landscape description. According to our foregoing assumption concerning the relationship between landscape descriptions and emotional qualities in poetry, one might expect that the “pinnacles and steeps” amplify the emotional quality of *mortality*, by increasing its diffuseness. This, however, is not necessarily the case. Alternative mental performances may be involved, and the reader may switch back and forth between them. Horizontally, “Each imagined pinnacle and steep” may be conceived of as of part of an actual, continuous landscape; vertically, as of strikingly representative examples of “godlike hardship”, that is, of a circumstance in which excessive and painful effort of some kind is required. Qua *exemplary*, the landscape tends to bring the conceptual nature of *hardship* into sharp focus. Now, the more emphasis is placed on the *actual* (rather than the exemplary) nature of the landscape, the softer (the more diffuse) becomes the soft focus of perception of the abstraction *hardship*. Alternatively, the more our awareness is focused on the *shapes* of the “pinnacles and steeps”, the sharper the definition gets of the conceptual quality; and, conversely, the more one’s awareness is focussed on **locating oneself in space and time** with reference to the pinnacles and steeps, the more diffuse (the more ‘perceptual’) the concept becomes. All this is implied by our foregoing discussion of orientation.

The line “Like a sick eagle looking at the sky” has a multiple relationship to the preceding utterance. First, the eagle reinforces connotations of loftiness in “pinnacles and steeps”. Second, the eagle enacts the sense of desperate helplessness; it combines in one visual image impending death with what the eagle *might* be in the sky, and thus reinforces a tragic feeling. Third, the mere appearance of the eagle enhances the suggestion that the “pinnacles and steeps” may constitute an actual landscape. Fourth, the eagle “looking at the sky” represents a consciousness in the very act of locating itself with reference to space, that is, it emphasizes the aspect of spatial orientation, rather than the exemplary aspect in “each pinnacle and steep”, and thus increases the diffuse, rather than the compact perception of *mortality* and also, possibly, of *hardship*.

Our discussion of the two aspects of “each imagined pinnacle and steep” upon which awareness may be focused, raises an additional issue of the utmost importance. The theoretical equipment introduced here can help to discern some crucial respects in which allegory is distinguished from symbol. Traditionally, both suggest a kind of ‘double-talk’: talking of some concrete entities and implying some abstract ones. But whereas in allegory the concrete or material forms are considered as the “mere” guise of some well-defined abstract or spiritual meaning, the symbol is conceived to have an existence independent from the abstractions, and to suggest, “somehow”, the ineffable, some reality, or quality, or feeling, that cannot be expressed in ordinary, conceptual language. The landscape in Keats’s sonnet can be perceived as an allegorical landscape, strikingly representative of “godlike hardship”, or as a symbolic landscape, suggesting certain feelings that tend to elude words. Now, ineffable experiences are ineffable precisely because they are related to right-hemisphere brain activities, in which information is diffuse, undifferentiated, global, whereas

the language which seeks to express those experiences is a typical left-hemisphere brain-activity, in which information is compact, well-differentiated, and linear. Traditional allegory bestows well-differentiated physical shapes and human actions upon clear-cut ideas, which can be represented in clear, conceptual language as well; by contrast, the symbol manipulates information in such a way that some (or most) of it is perceived as diffuse, undifferentiated, global. The symbol does this by associating information with the cognitive mechanism of spatial orientation, or by treating it in terms of the least differentiated senses, or by presenting its elements in multiple relationships (cf. Tsur, 1987a: 1-4); all these techniques can be reinforced by what I have called “divergent structures”.

One might further highlight the peculiar semantic nature of the present sonnet by comparing its lines 9-10 to three lines from Marlowe’s tragedy “Tamburlaine”.

(6) Such dim-conceivèd glories of the brain
Bring round the heart an indescribable feud ...

(7) Nature that framed us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds.

In spite of Tamburlaine’s and Faustus’ notorious craving for infinite things in Marlowe’s tragedies, we may expect, from a common, sweeping generalization, Keats’s poetry to be of a more romantic, more affective mood than Marlowe’s poetry. It would be interesting to see whether and how the two passages bear out such pieces of “common knowledge”.

The two passages have a considerable number of elements in common. Both refer, in a fairly direct way, to an undifferentiable feeling, in terms of a “gestalt-free” quality, by linguistic terms that are near-synonyms: a *war* “within our breasts”, and a *feud* “round the heart”, and its relation to what happens in our minds (or in the brain). For Keats, as a true Romantic, this is an intense passion at unique moments. It is set in a specific setting which also indicates the immediate cause of the intense passion: “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles”. This passion is so intense that it cannot be sustained for a considerable period. For Marlowe, this feeling is rather a permanent disposition. Some readers report that they perceive a heightened affective quality in (6), as compared to (7). One possible explanation for this may rely on the different connotations of *warring* and *feud*. But far more significant seems to be the fact that whereas in Marlowe’s passage it is the clearly differentiated “four elements” that are “warring within our breasts”, Keats’s “feud” around the heart is not only undifferentiated and gestalt-free, but *thing-free* too: in ordinary referential language we expect to be told the feud is taking place *between whom* or *what*. Moreover, the location “*round* the heart” is clearly included in “*within* our breasts”; but as for their psychological atmosphere, the former phrase is perceived as vague, indistinct, whereas the latter as contained within clear boundaries. Thus, the more passionate impact of Keats’s lines has to do with the fact that they are focused on violent actions, stripped of things that might carry them. Furthermore, although both metaphors seem to refer to some kind of emotional turbulence, Marlowe uses rhetorical devices to heighten its conscious “linear” quality, whereas Keats uses devices to mute, or obscure, this conscious quality. Marlowe’s “warring within our breasts” is endowed with the psychological atmosphere of *patent purpose*, generated by the purposive ingredient in the words and phrases “for regiment”, “teach”, “aspiring minds”, as well as by the conclusive nature of *all*. One interesting contrast between the two passages concerns the explicit use of the personal pronoun “our” by Marlowe, and the conspicuously impersonal constructs in Keats’s two verses, de-emphasising the involvement of a purposeful agent (I shall return to this

point).

Keats, on the other hand, emphasizes the undifferentiated character of the passion by the adjectives “*indescribable feud*”, and “*dim-conceivèd glories*”. I shall refrain from discussing all the aspects relevant to this comparison. I only want to discuss here the phrase “glories of the brain”. Consider such sentences as “the brain has glories” and “the brain is glorious”. In these two phrases, *brain* is the referring expression, and *glories* or *glorious* denote a property attributed to the brain. The phrase “glories of the brain” can be thought of in a somewhat antiquated framework, as derived from the other two phrases through two transformations: the nominalization of the “deep” predicate, and its permutation into the referring position in the surface phrase. We may call such genitive phrases “nominalized predicates”. They shift the focus of attention from “things as bundles of properties” to their “sensed properties”, dissociated to some degree from the things. In the present context, this can be regarded as a kind of regression to a “pre-thing” state, reinforcing the thing-free quality encountered in *feud*.

This comparison of the two passages does not greatly differ from the usual techniques of close reading. Nonetheless, our discussion of consciousness and of the categorization of information conveys several significant contributions. Theories of metaphor explore, typically, such issues as how to furnish the best possible paraphrase for a metaphor, or how people understand novel metaphors. Here we have two metaphors that do not differ significantly in their meanings, but rather in their perceived effects. The cognitive frame of reference has contributed to an explanation of this difference: It has explained the relationship between certain linguistic structures and the “regression” to a low-category mode of perception; it has also explained, in turn, the relationship of such regression to the affective quality of the text, as well as to our cognitive characterization of poetry. We have also indicated how these relationships can be further pursued, so as to relate the texts to the effects of period and style, such as Classic/Romantic. In the present context, it also suggests how this difference may contribute to a distinction between some permanent mood and an altered state of consciousness. One may, further, claim that it was the cognitive framework that suggested these linguistic tools for description; in a different frame of reference these descriptions would have appeared little more than trivial.

Presenting semantic elements in multiple relationships is the favorite object of New Criticism’s ambiguity-hunting. Consider, for instance, “Such dim-conceivèd glories of the brain”. “Glory” is a fairly clear-cut notion, denoting, for our purpose, ‘exalted or adoring praise’, or ‘an object of pride’, or ‘splendour, brilliance, halo’. “Glories of the brain” may mean, accordingly, either ‘adoring glories given to the object of Greek Art’ (the glories of the onlooker’s brain); or “‘The Elgin Marbles’ are objects of pride, the glories of the creator’s brain’. “Dim” as a muting adjective brings out the brilliance aspect of “glory”. Thus, again we have a sensuous presentation of the irrational response: sight is the most differentiated of the senses, hence serving conventionally as metaphor for rational faculties. Though “dim” turns “glories”, implicitly, into light, it is “dim” that makes the light less distinct, less differentiable. Similarly, the “dim-conceivèd glories” of the creator’s brain stem from the *dark layers* of the unconscious mind. Now consider “*dim-conceivèd*”. Which one of its possible meanings would be relevant to the poem? “To conceive of” means ‘To comprehend through the intellect something not perceived through the senses’. “To conceive” means ‘to relate ideas or feelings to one another in a pattern’; or, in a different sense, ‘to become pregnant’ yielding a fairly physical metaphor for irrational *bringing forth*. At any rate, “dim” and “glories” *foreshadow*, as it were, the more objectively presented “sun” and “shadow” in the last line. Thus, to put it in Arthur Mizener’s terms (1964: 142) echoing Bergson on “metaphysical intuition”, no single meaning of these words will these lines work out

completely, nor will the language allow any one of the several emergent figures to usurp our attention. Thus, the blurred meanings contribute to the diffuse perception of the sonnet. In cognitive terms we might speak of overloading the cognitive system with these rival meanings. In terms of figure-ground relationship we might say that we handle the potentially well-defined meanings by “dumping” them in an undifferentiated “ground”. The process is not unlike that in the visual mode, where well-defined shapes, when endlessly repeated or superimposed one upon the other, are perceived as undifferentiated ground.

The adjective in “Of *godlike* hardship” means ‘like, or befitting a god’; and it may suggest either ‘hardship that only a god can endure’, or ‘hardship that only a god can inflict’. In this way, the word *godlike* fuses two plains of reality: that of the experiencing subject, and of the external object. There is a similar ambiguity in *wonders* in line 11, meaning either ‘something that *causes* astonishment, admiration, or awe’, or ‘the emotion *excited* by what is strange, admirable or surprising’. In such ambiguities (of which there are quite a few in this sonnet) the various meanings tend to blur each other, preventing each other from usurping the entire available mental space. In my discussion of “each imagined pinnacle and steep” I suggested two alternative mental performances, a vertical and a horizontal one: the former suggesting strikingly representative examples of “godlike hardship”, the latter suggesting an actual, continuous landscape; in the present context one might suggest a third kind of mental performance, in which the various meanings are simultaneously active, blurring each other and preventing each other from usurping the whole available mental space. That is how a soft, integrated focus of meanings is achieved in this poem, underlying its intense emotional quality. In order to appreciate how this process works, compare, for instance, the following two passages:

(8) And each *imagined* pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship, tell me I must die

and

(9) At the round earth’s *imagined* corners blow
Your trumpets, Angels ...

In the latter quotation, the referents of two incompatible geometrical terms (*round* and *corners*) are superimposed upon one another, generating a sharp conflict. The term *imagined* is meant here to mitigate the conflict, but, by the same token, it creates another impossibility: The angels are *really* standing at the *imagined* corners. Thus, rather than blurring one another, the conflicting elements strive to establish themselves in the reader’s perception, creating a split, sharp focus, generating a *witty* quality.

I have described the synchronic effect of images hovering between a subjective and an objective existence. They have, however, a diachronic aspect too. The octet is dominated by first person singular pronouns; they disappear in the sestet all in all. Most conspicuous are the impersonal constructs “glories of *the* brain” and “round *the* heart”, in stead of “glories of *my* brain”, and “round *my* heart”. *Pain* (in line 11) too is a psychological abstraction which, again, seems to be unrelated to any individual consciousness. The above ambiguous phrases serve as transition from the “I”, the enduring, conscious element that knows experience to a less conscious state; that is, they serve as transition from a state of individual consciousness to an altered state of consciousness. In this state there is an awareness of a stream of images, but no awareness of the self as thinking, feeling, and willing, and distinguishing itself from selves of others and from objects of its thought. It concerns an “ability to make up one’s mind about nothing to let the mind

be a thoroughfare for all thoughts” (Keats, 1956: 26). This stream of images, dissociated from the self as thinking, feeling, and willing, and distinguishing itself from selves of others and from objects of its thought, leads to a state of consciousness designated as “a most dizzy pain”. “Pain” merely names an acute but undifferentiated feeling. While not diminishing the intensity of pain, “dizzy” blurs its contours. “Dizzy” refers to a whirling state of uneasy feeling, sometimes extremely intense, blurring one’s perception of the external world. The last tercet gives us the “chemical makup” of this “dizzy pain”: it “mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude wasting of old Time--with a billowy main--a sun--a shadow of a magnitude”. In an attempt to understand the poetic significance of such a structure, let us quote Bergson on “metaphysical intuition”, as quoted by Ehrenzweig who regards it as a gestalt-free vision:

“When I direct my attention inward to contemplate my own self [...] I perceive at first, as a crust solidified at the surface, all the perceptions which come to it from the material world. These perceptions are clear, distinct, juxtaposed or juxtaposable one with another; they tend to group themselves into objects. [...] But if I draw myself in from the periphery towards the centre [...] I find an altogether different thing. There is beneath these sharply cut crystals and this frozen surface a continuous flux which is not comparable to any flux I have ever seen. There is a succession of states each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it. In reality no one begins or ends, but all extend into each other” (Ehrenzweig, 1965: 34-35).

In Keats’s sonnet, the constituents of the “dizzy pain” are expressed by syntactically juxtaposed phrases; but the referents of those phrases are said to be “mingled”. What is more, with the exception of “A sun”, they don’t “group themselves into objects”, into “sharply cut crystals and [...] frozen surface”; all the rest are thing-free and gestalt-free entities, which have no clear-cut solid boundaries, so that they don’t resist entering the “succession of states” in which “no one begins or ends, but all extend into each other”. The notorious 18th-century diction embodied in “billowy main” has in this context a special effect. This kind of diction makes use, as Wimsatt pointed out, of a general term as “main” (in the sense of ‘broad expanse’) with an epithet denoting one of its concrete attributes, “billowy”, skipping the straightforward term on the “substantive level”, “ocean” or “high sea”, generating tension between the more than usually abstract and the more than usually concrete. Both terms of the phrase designate gestalt-free entities, and in the present context suggest enormous energy.

Grandeur and *magnitude* are etymologically synonymous. Nonetheless, they have acquired different senses: the former applies to the impressive, the latter to the measurable qualities of things (in this sense, too, the sonnet moves from the subjective towards the more objective). Their sublime effect is cumulative. The sun and the shadow are clear opposites fit for a forceful ending of a sonnet dominated by indistinct--though sublime--passions. Nonetheless, “a shadow of a magnitude” intimates some essence beyond the perceptible realm. Both shadow and magnitude are attributes of physical objects. The shadow is but a reflection of an object; magnitude is an abstraction from an object; the “object” itself, which remains unnamed, has been skipped--generating high metaphoric tension between both sides of the omitted “substantive level”. The magnitude is here a *thing-free* abstraction--casting a visible shadow; and here we have the sun that gives the light--to make the shadow-casting more real. Does this not suggest, even make us visualise, so to speak, a most intense, supersensuous reality beyond the “cave” we are bound to live in?

Thus, Keats’s sonnet begins with a rather trivial kind of altered state of consciousness, suggested by the low-differentiated predicate “weighs” applied to the abstract subject “mortality” on the one

hand, and the hypnagogic state “unwilling sleep” on the other hand. It moves through successions of sublime entities beginning with a concrete landscape and culminating in a most intense low-differentiated, diffuse “peak experience” affording an insight into an iperceptible world “beyond”. The peculiar rhyme-structure of the sestet in this sonnet makes a unique contribution to this diffuse “open” ending. The so-called Italian Sonnet may have a variety of rhyme-patterns in its sestet; in this sonnet the rhyme pattern is: **ababab**. Suppose the sonnet ended with an **abab** quatrain, say

(10) Such dim-conceivèd glories of the brain
 Bring round the heart an indescribable feud;
 So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
 A sun -- a shadow of a magnitude.

Irrespective of the illogical linking of the last line to the preceding ones, such a structure generates a symmetrical, stable ending. The fourth line of the unit constitutes a highly *required* closure. Now when you have not four but six lines, in an **ababab** pattern, in stead of a stable closure, you obtain a fluid pattern. The fluidity of this pattern is further heightened by the tense enjambment “with the rude / Wasting of old Time”. If the closed ending of (10) has a highly-differentiated symmetrical shape, inducing a rational perceptual quality, the open ending of (5) has a fluid, low-differentiated, diffuse quality, reinforcing the low-differentiated, diffuse state of consciousness indicated at the semantic and thematic level of the sonnet.

Now consider this. The present sonnet is exceptional in an important sense even among Keats’s “ecstatic” poems. In the best of romantic ecstatic poetry, we find sometimes that inactivity through death is counterbalanced by some intense activity, or immense sublimity (connoting intensity). Thus we find that in some of Keats’s poems ecstasy is achieved by using death-imagery in a context of intense passion. Consider the endings of some of the sonnets in which Keats achieves his “many havens of intensity”.

(11) ...then on the shore
 Of the wide world I stand alone and think
 Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.
 (Keats, “When I have fears”)

(12) Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
 And so live ever--or else swoon to death.
 (Keats, “Bright Star”)

(13) Love, Fame and Beauty are intense indeed,
 But death intenser; Death is Life’s high meed.
 (Keats, “Why did I laugh?”)

According to Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, the mention of death or nothingness at the end of such a poem constitutes a “closural allusion”, arousing a vague feeling that there is nothing after this. The couplet following the quatrains reinforces this feeling of closure. Thus, in these sonnets, the mention of death (coupled with intense passion) generates a feeling of ecstasy, or “peak experience”; this feeling of “peak” is reinforced by the structural closure of the couplet, generating a *conclusive* tone. In Keats’s Elgin-Marbles sonnet, by contrast, there is no such mention of death, or structural closure. On the contrary rather, the **ababab** rhyme-pattern commits a “sabotage” against the symmetrical **abab** grouping, while the run-on line toward the end commits another

“sabotage”, against the two-line groupings of **ab**. In this way, in spite of the rigorous rhyme pattern, there is here a feeling of dissolving shapes reinforcing any impression of dissolving consciousness suggested by the contents and the semantic structure. The possible Platonic allusion in “a shadow of a magnitude” suggests the possibility of having caught a glimpse into some world inaccessible to the senses.

Now a final comment on this sonnet and other similar ones. According to the conception propounded here, it does not *arouse* an ecstatic experience in the reader; it displays a regional quality which the reader recognises as ecstatic. We have followed at some length the verbal means which contribute to the perception of such an ecstatic regional quality.

This paper expounded some aspects of Cognitive Poetics. Its main object was to present some ways in which cognitive theories can be used systematically to relate the perceived affects of poetry to poetic structures. It explored some poetic techniques by which nonconceptual experiences can be conveyed, or displayed, by the use of language which is conceptual in nature. By the same token, it briefly considered the influence of personality style on the reader’s or the critic’s ability to respond to the poetic qualities.

Notes

1. [This paper](#) was intended to be one of two introductory chapters to a collection of essays by members of the Cognitive Poetics Workshop run for over 15 years at the Katz Research Institute, Tel Aviv University, directed by David Gil, Yeshayahu Shen and myself (in an alphabetical order). Eventually we had to abandon the publication project, because we could not raise the necessary funds. I have omitted the section on metre (see now my [“book in progress”](#)).
2. [I am indebted](#) to Professor Pinchas Noy for the Helen Keller story.
3. [Ernst Kris](#), in his contributions to the psychology of the comic (partly written in collaboration with Gombrich), assigns the source of comic pleasure to the following: “a part of the pleasure derives from a saving of mental energy, another from the relation to infantile life” (Kris, 1965: 174). Saving mental energy is the effect of puns and caricatures, too. They give two things in one. Kris and Gombrich mention caricatures in which politicians or types are presented as animals, or a series of four caricatures showing the “metamorphosis” of Louis Philippe into a pear. In addition, caricatures and puns can be considered as a regression to infantile life. They also resemble in some respects dreams, and thus can be suspected of having direct access to the pre-conscious mind. The authors explain these ideas as follows:

Conscious logic is out of action, its rules have lost their forces. One of the mechanisms now in action can cause, in a dream, two words to become one, or merge two figures in one. This peculiarity of the psychic apparatus is sometimes exploited in jokes. If, for instance, we describe the Christmas vacations as “Alcoholidays”, we understand that the new word, the pun word, is obviously composed of two parts: of “alcohol” and “holidays”: they are united or--as we say--“condensed”. An analogous condensation could also have arisen in a dream. But unlike the dream, the pun is thought out, created. We make use intentionally--which is not synonymous with consciously--of a primitive mechanism in order to achieve a particular aim”.

In fact--as Freud has shown us--in all play with words, in puns as well as nonsense

talk, there is a renewal of the child's pleasure when it just learns to master language. [...] At bottom caricature, too, renews infantile pleasure. Its simplicity [...] makes it resemble the scribbling of the child. [...] Caricatures like those of Louis Philippe as a pear are at bottom nothing but visual puns, and the taste in puns may change but their mechanism remains the same (Kris and Gombrich, 1965: 196-197).

4. [Such a prolongation](#) may cause a feeling of unease that may be intolerable for some readers. Not all people are equally capable of enduring the contact with uncategorized or meaningless objects or stimuli; this depends, to a considerable extent, on personality style. "The leveler is more anxious to categorize sensations and less willing to give up a category once he has established it. [...] For him the unique, unclassifiable sensation is particularly offensive" (Ohmann, 1970: 231; cf. Tsur, 1975a; 1987a: 1-59; 1992: 367-373, 471-500).

5. [This usage](#) of sensuous metaphors is highly sophisticated and rather exceptional. Gardner, Winner and their associates have produced ample evidence that preschool children are highly creative in producing metaphors; but all the metaphors they create are sensuous. Only at later stages of their development do children produce functional metaphors, or metaphors whose tenor is conceptual or pertaining to psychological dispositions. As understanders, young children tend to prefer sensuous metaphors, whose grounds are similar shapes or, later, similar colors. Only at later stages, after a so-called "literal period", they develop a taste for the other kinds of metaphors (cf. Gardner, 1982: 158-167; Gardner & Winner, 1979: 125-134; Silberstein et al., 1982). In the years preceding adolescence, when children have begun to allow a metaphoric renaming, their practice is characterized by "a greater awareness that tension has been overridden" (Gardner and Winner, 1979: 134); not so the preschool child whose practice is characterized by a "more carefree experimentation" (ibid.).

I have elsewhere (Tsur, 1987c: 154-158; 1992: 370) attempted to show that Mediaeval Hebrew poets, especially in the genre of garden-descriptions, indulged in sensuous metaphors in a manner that is closer to a "more carefree experimentation" than to the arousal of surprise or to the creation of perplexity, startling, astounding. To be sure, in this manner, too, they often achieved enormous complexity, but still in a relatively "more carefree experimentation". It is interesting to note that critics are reluctant to acknowledge sensuous metaphors in either the carefree, or the disorienting version, and that they presumably do this for different, or even opposite, reasons: while the disorienting use of sensuous metaphors may be painful to face, effects of the "carefree" use of sensuous metaphors may be experienced as too naive, or even too childish, for their sophisticated taste. I am still collecting information in order to work out this distinction between the two uses of sensuous metaphors in greater detail.

6. [I have elsewhere](#) discussed poetry and altered states of consciousness at very great length (Tsur, 1992: 411-470).

7. [I have discussed](#) rhythmic problems of this poem and some solutions offered to them in Douglas Hodge's performance in Tsur (in press).

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