

POETIC RENEWAL AND REPARATION IN THE CLASSROOM: POETRY
THERAPY, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND PEDAGOGY WITH THREE VICTORIAN
POETS

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by

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Introduction: Poetry Therapy and its Relevance to the Classroom

From poetry therapy's emergence as a field in the late 1960s, its practitioners have applied poetry to psychotherapy and used it in therapeutic practice. I propose the application of therapy to the way we understand and teach poetry. The work of poetry therapists, along with psychoanalytic theorists, offers important insights into the power of poetic language for the reader, which could prove useful to teachers and scholars of literature. Though therapy has different goals than literary studies, if we can integrate these goals of therapy with our goals as writers and teachers, we can make literary studies more beneficial to our students. The work and insights of poetry therapists can help us maximize the potentially beneficial dynamics of the relationship between reader and text. While our goals in academia will not coincide completely with those of therapists, and while we can only rarely, if ever, offer the kind of individual attention that therapists can offer their clients, we do share a belief in the value of literary works for people and for society as a whole.

This approach to poetry necessarily involves a shift from the traditional focus on the meaning of a text toward a focus on the experience of a text. Arleen McCarthy Hynes and Mary Hynes-Berry point out that while poems and other literary works seek universal appeal, individual responses are not completely predictable (48). For the therapist, understanding the exact meaning of a work of literature carries no importance; only the

reader's personal response matters. Arthur Lerner explains, "In poetry therapy the accent is on the person. In a poetry workshop the accent is on the poem" (81). In poetry therapy, "literature is a *catalyst*. . . . The therapeutic effect depends on the *response to the literature* as it is facilitated through the dialogue, and the change takes place in the *respondent*" (Hynes 44). While we, as scholars, should remain concerned with context, structures, vocabulary, and other formal aspects of poetry, in order to understand how poetry works, we should emphasize the exploration of the experience of a poetic text on a more individual level, since this will prove valuable in aiding students in personal development and mental well-being.

Teachers can make use of several of the various elements of poetry therapy in the classroom. In his introduction to the field, Nicolas Mazza describes three components of poetry therapy that we may consider. What he calls the "receptive/prescriptive" component is of primary concern to those in literary studies. This refers to the introduction of a pre-existing literary work into therapy; here we observe the value of a particular text for a particular reader. Mazza's second component, the "expressive/creative" element, deals with clients writing poetry as a personal expression—akin to the loosening of speech, where inhibitions are released allowing for the free expression that ideally takes place in a psychoanalytic session. Teachers should encourage expressive writing in the classroom because it is extremely beneficial for students to respond creatively to the creative works of others. Mazza's final component contains a possible element of the reader/text relationship. Mazza calls this the "symbolic/ceremonial," focusing on the value of ritual, metaphor, and storytelling as they

can function as helpful ceremonies and symbolic acts for the client (17). After a loss, for example, one may read out loud a poetic elegy that may serve as a symbolic statement of acceptance.

In terms of what we hope to achieve with this approach, Hynes and Hynes-Berry give an overview of the goals of poetry therapy, which provides a foundation for our goals in the classroom: improve individuals' capacity to respond to texts through images, concepts, and feelings about them; increase self awareness; increase awareness of interpersonal relationships; and improve reality orientation (24). In relation to these goals, I focus on the concepts of personal renewal through heightened awareness and reparation of relationship schemas, which will serve as our ultimate goals for what we help students achieve through the study of poetry. By renewal, I mean helping students to develop strong but flexible egos. They can use poetry both to increase self awareness so that a new self emerges and to open up the self so that they may always continue to renew and discover new elements of themselves. By reparation, I mean using poetry to become more aware of the other and to develop empathy, which will lead to more productive social relations.

Poetry offers readers recognition of emotional states, particularly negative ones that they may find uncomfortable or shameful. It offers heightened awareness of one's self and one's interpersonal objects, enabling more positive and efficient functioning within one's environment. It helps people to "discover the truth of their own existence, enhance their creative and problem solving abilities, communicate and relate better to others, and experience the healing properties of beauty" (Gorelick 117-118).

Engagement with poetry may aid one in integrating one's self and one's experiences within emotional, imaginary, and symbolic registers—one's visceral feelings, sensory mental images, and linguistic means to express them. Poetry also "integrates past-present-future states of being, challenges thought, [and] stimulates physiological and muscular response" (117). It can bring about productive change by challenging various existing mental schemas and offering alternatives. And poetry provides a vehicle to move one toward the ultimate goal of transcending negative and debilitating emotions, thoughts, and schemas by offering one possibilities for renewal of self and reparation of personal relationship schemas.

A consideration of the therapeutic value of literature brings with it a variety of implications for the profession of literary studies, both in the classroom and for scholarship, particularly in terms of value judgments. The basis of value judgments of literary works necessarily shifts when one focuses on psychological benefits for readers and students. We would have to consider literature for its potential value for students in terms of personal development rather than in terms of traditional canonical criteria. But even poetry therapists disagree on what kinds of poems work best for their patients. Kenneth Gorelick writes that "effective literature is not abstruse, is culturally sensitive, finds hope in the human condition, is life-affirming, and presents possible solutions without being prescriptive" (127). Jack Leedy favors "poems that are close in feeling to the mood of the patient," offering recognition first, while ultimately offering hope to those experiencing negative emotions. Therapeutically useful poems, according to Leedy, should not encourage guilt or silence; rather, they should give meaning to

experience and bring optimism for renewal (67-8). Other therapists, however, have warned of the danger that overly hopeful poems may present. Mazza warns that such poems may actually increase one's sense of despair by invalidating the depth of the reader's emotional experience (19). Allan Cole also favors poems that offer accurate recognition of grief and sadness over those that compensate the reader and offer false hope. In his specific dealing with elegiac poetry, Cole finds the elegy to be "a valuable resource for helping to experience the magnitude of loss precisely by affirming it" (200). Exploring a poem should allow readers to deal realistically with emotions; it should not invalidate emotions by offering false hope. However, readers can, at times, incorporate positive images or expressions found in poems that help them in achieving reparation once the poem has dealt with and validated their negative emotions. Genuine reparation can only occur after readers have become aware of their emotions, accept their validity, and take responsibility for them.

Locating the effect that a specific poem will have on a specific reader, of course, is an inexact practice. What one reader finds validating, another may find alienating. What affects one reader very profoundly may leave another cold. The purpose of introducing poetry into therapy, Charles Crootof insists, is to find personal meaning for the patient (44). We cannot expect, and even less insist on, a particular experience that a reader should have; we must focus on each individual's process of exploring the self through exploring poems. Thus, Crootof finds non-didactic poetry most valuable, since didactic poetry limits possibilities for personal renewal and almost always raises hostility from readers (47-48). Mazza, similarly, favors open-ended poetry, since it may operate

as a catalyst for self-exploration (19). Poetry that demands response and interpretation is of specific value for the classroom. While scholarship in this area can and should speculate on the value of specific poems for specific or even general readers, introducing poetry into the classroom will elicit a variety of responses and serve a variety of purposes for individuals.

We in the field of literary studies should focus on the potential benefits of poetry, as well as other literary forms, for encouraging students and readers toward positive development. When approaching poems, we should ask what value they can have for readers in these terms. Poetry therapy provides us with a useful model for pursuing this goal. This approach must consider what emotional states or thought processes a particular poem gives recognition to. It must ask how a poem can lead toward greater internal and external awareness through intense observation and disarming beauty. It should consider how poems elicit reflection and response that will help one to integrate experience. It should look at what possibilities or alternative perspectives are offered by a poem that could aid one in reassessment of negative or faulty thought processes. Such an approach must also look at how poems can either lead toward or provide personal symbolic expression that will serve one in achieving the goals of renewal and reparation. This approach must necessarily deal in uncertainty, while embracing the possibility and potential of poetic language to provide important psychological benefits to individuals that could ultimately have a positive effect on our society at large.

By looking at the way therapists use poetry in their practices we can find new approaches to teaching and exploring poetry that will make the study of poetry more

valuable to students. While the work of poetry therapists provides the foundation for this project, I draw on a number of other theoretical and therapeutic paradigms that either deal directly with the interface of therapy and poetic language or are applicable in less direct ways. Along with poetry therapy, this study draws from classical and contemporary psychoanalytic theory, cognitive science, neuropsychology, and other therapeutic practices. The first part of the project presents the theoretical foundation for this pedagogy. I attempt to lay out the many aspects of poetry in relation to their therapeutic value in a logical and more or less developmentally chronological order, but many aspects overlap and build upon each other. The second part deals with practical applications in the classroom, and some specific poets and poems. I focus on Pre-Raphaelite poets here because I find in them many of the qualities that poetry therapists find most useful.

PART I

Poetic Renewal and Reparation

CHAPTER I

Overcoming Defenses: Poetic Confrontation with the Ego

Awareness through Poetry

Jacques Lacan describes psychoanalysis as “absolutely inseparable from a fundamental question about the way truth enters into the life of man” (*Seminar III* 214). Nancy McWilliams likewise argues that “the overarching theme among psychodynamic approaches to helping people is that the more honest we are with ourselves, the better our chances for living a satisfying and useful life” (1). One of the primary goals of literary studies, like psychoanalytic therapy, should be to increase self awareness and awareness of others by encouraging a more honest approach to the world. The benefits of greater awareness to people and to society as a whole are immeasurable. Deeper awareness exposes faulty motives and actions that cause suffering to both the self and others. In poetry, we find a particularly powerful literary tool for enhancing awareness on various levels. Poetry offers mental and imaginative stimulation in a condensed form requiring concentrated focus, and demanding emotional and mental, if not verbal, response. In the process of reading poetry, we become open to the details of experiences and their implications. We learn to become more alert to the details of our environment, as well as

our inner being, and we learn to carefully contemplate these details in terms of what they mean to our selves and to others. Hirsch Silverman writes, “Truth is unquestionably one of the purest and truest of poetical themes, and through truth in poetry we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before” (24). Hynes and Hynes-Berry explain that readers of literary works “must go outside of themselves to react to an externalized expression of an image, a tale, an emotion, a value. . . . Sustaining focus on a single train of thought often helps the participants clarify their reactions” (28).

McWilliams gives some insight to this phenomenon as it relates to the therapeutic relationship when she explains, “In current analytic writing, there is more acknowledgment that participation in a therapeutic partnership requires *both* analyst and patient to become progressively more honest with themselves in the context of that relationship” (3). Likewise, as we explore the complex elements of a poetic text, analyzing them so that the text reveals itself, we as readers also reveal our own selves in all of our complexity and contradiction. This deep, intense focus that poetic works demand makes poetry the ideal genre for raising general awareness of both internal and external realities.

Defenses as Obstacles

In order to move toward a more honest, fulfilling, and productive life, one must overcome one’s self-restricting immature or neurotic defense mechanisms while maintaining a strong but realistic sense of self. Many personal defense mechanisms,

serving fragile and rigid ego structures, can create major obstacles for the attainment of awareness and the achievement of a renewed self. Lacan sees the self as conflicted and the ego as imaginary; the subject must recognize this unavoidable internal division in order to open the self up to creative potential, otherwise the subject becomes trapped by an imaginary ego with various defenses designed to keep itself intact. Our goal is to lead the subject to realize a fluid and relative self, what Julia Kristeva calls the “unsettled, questionable subject-in-process of poetic language” (*Desire* 140). This subject has a deep connection with the inner, visceral self and a deep understanding of external reality that certain defense mechanisms can only block. “By approaching life as a process and becoming aware of how one tampers with the flow of that process,” Silverman writes, “we take a major step toward unifying our split with life” (22). This approach to life creates an open self—open to constant change and renewal. The subject-in-process avoids rigid ego structures, allowing new possibilities for the self as posited within the field of language.

Students will often limit themselves by rejecting texts that challenge the ego and induce anxiety. We need to approach poems in such a way that attempts to thwart this rejection based on ego defenses, and use the challenge to the ego for positive growth. One important step is to understand how and why students and readers enact various defenses. As Phebe Cramer writes of attaining necessary therapeutic compliance, “it is highly beneficial to know something about the patient’s defenses” (“Defense Mechanisms” 641). While the French theorists, specifically Lacan, launch often vehement attacks on the school of ego psychology, Anna Freud’s classic and still

influential book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* offers valuable insight into defense mechanisms. Anna Freud lists “three powerful motives for the defense against instinct:” superego anxiety (based on internalized guilt from parental censure), objective anxiety (being restraints from the outside world), and anxiety due to the strength of the instincts (where the ego fears being overwhelmed by their strength) (60). She refers to the superego, with all of its guilt and social censure, as “the mischief-maker which prevents the ego’s coming to a friendly understanding with the instincts” (55). While we seek to control and contain our instincts, we must first come to an understanding of our inner world. Understanding allows our higher mental functions to deal with primal negative instincts in ways that avoid neurotic defenses or stifling anxiety. Thus we should pass on to our students an understanding and an honest assessment of human instincts, so that they learn to devalue the social constructs that cause them to experience instincts and emotions with fear and shame.

Anna Freud examines a number of specific defense mechanisms that we may consider in terms of their relevance in the classroom. Each of these mechanisms involves the avoidance of one’s genuine self and/or a retreat from external reality. When a text invokes anxiety, students have a number of defense mechanisms in place to repress or avoid that anxiety rather than face it and use it as a catalyst for growth and learning. One common mechanism is the denial of affect or experience. Another, closely related, is reaction formation, which turns an experience into its opposite. Many students will treat a text that is deeply moving or relevant to them dismissively as if it is actually ineffective and irrelevant. Other times, a text that a student understands too deeply is treated as if it

is not understood or is incomprehensible—particularly when the poetic text, as is often the case, is difficult or somewhat ambiguous. In such cases, texts that offer a potentially positive regression to the primal self that could lead to increased awareness instead bring about an intellectual regression where the reader becomes unable to process the material. Any progress made can quickly come undone. These defense mechanisms can turn the positive potential effects of a poetry class for the reader into a strong negative rejection of a work, a poet, a class, or a teacher. Students can potentially fall into defenses of isolation, avoidance, and inhibition where they cut themselves off from the class or any material that evokes shame or other anxious feelings.

Another major theorist who can help us in our understanding of defenses is Harry Stack Sullivan with his concept of the self-system. In Sullivan's interpersonal model, defenses find their roots in early infantile interaction with the primary caregiver. From early infancy, he says, "grades of anxiety first become of great importance in learning. . . . Behavior of a certain unsatisfactory type provokes increasing anxiety, and the infant learns to keep a distance from, or to veer away from, activities which are attended by increasing anxiety" (159). Children initially learn from the parent through a system of rewards and anxiety-inducing punishments. From this early learning the subject constructs a basic good-me concept of self along with a bad-me concept of self. "The essential desirability of being good-me," Sullivan says, "is just another way of commenting on the essential undesirability of being anxious" (165). Guilt and other forms of anxiety come about when the good-me concept of self is violated. More recently, Roy Baumeister et al. have taken a similar view that humans struggle to sustain

“favorable views of self,” and defenses arise in order to “protect self-esteem” when something “violates the preferred view of self” (1082). The avoidance of such anxiety stifles development by closing off the subject into a preset self-system. Sullivan explains, “The self-system is . . . an organization of educative experience called into being by the necessity to avoid or to minimize incidents of anxiety” (165). Therefore, “it is anxiety which is responsible for a great part of the inadequate, inefficient, unduly rigid, or otherwise unfortunate performances of people” (160). We become detached from our true inner selves by the constraints of parents and society in general. “The origin of the self-system can be said to rest on the irrational character of culture or, more specifically, society,” writes Sullivan (168). Although the self-system serves a valuable purpose in preventing unfavorable changes that would involve the unlearning of important lessons in childhood and throughout life, Sullivan maintains that “the self-system is the principle stumbling block to favorable changes in personality” as well (169). While we must create some concept of ourselves, we must avoid closing ourselves off and limiting our possibilities and potentials. Sullivan discusses the denial of human desires with his concept of “selective inattention” (170). We want to avoid this kind of denial by using poetry as a means to honestly explore our emotions and desires.

Defense versus Coping

Many will argue that defenses are not necessarily bad things. Typically, this becomes a matter of definition. Anna Freud concludes her book on defenses by arguing that

the ego is victorious when its defensive measures effect their purpose, i.e. when they enable it to restrict the development of anxiety and ‘pain’ and so to transform the instincts that, even in difficult circumstances, some measure of gratification is secured, thereby establishing the most harmonious relations possible between the id, the super-ego and the forces of the outside world. (175-176)

Salman Akhtar, likewise, insists that some defenses can prove valuable in dealing with pain, and that poetry can sometimes aid in certain defenses such as offering a manic type of diversion (233-234). But manic defenses impede real awareness, and only offer distraction from negative emotions. Instincts must be controlled for social purposes, but must not be denied. One of our goals in studying poetry, which is also a good goal in life, is to face and learn to effectively cope with—rather than avoid—anxiety-inducing internal and external reality.

More recent theorists have explored the differences between what we might refer to as positive and negative defenses. George Vaillant follows Anna Freud in praising the ego for its adaptability to the external world through defenses. He relates the mind’s defenses to the body’s immune system as it protects us “by providing a variety of illusions to filter pain and to allow self-soothing.” Rather than disavowing the “emotional and intellectual dishonesty” of the mind’s defenses, Vaillant sees them as often “mature and creative” (1). He differentiates between four levels of defense mechanisms: “psychotic defenses” that can “profoundly alter perception of external reality” (40); “immature defenses” that, according to Vaillant, “represent the building blocks of personality disorder” (45); “neurotic defenses,” which are “more private” and

“less intrusive to others” (59), and where self-deception is less overt and “the user feels responsible for his or her conflicts” (60); and, finally, the mature defenses, which tend to face, rather than avoid, both internal and external reality in some productive way. Mature defenses are adaptive, while the lower level defenses are maladaptive in various degrees and cause suffering both to the subjects enacting them and to others. The mature defenses (altruism, sublimation, suppression, anticipation, and humor) alter reality in their own way, but not in a way that we would describe as pathological. While an individual’s perception of reality, obviously, remains subjective to an extent, we should seek an honest and realistic assessment of our conflicts with ourselves (id and superego), with our objects or others, and with reality. Vaillant’s mature defenses may, to use his terminology, “minimize” reality, but they do not “ignore,” “exaggerate,” or otherwise “distort” it (36-7). In this sense, we may question whether mature defenses should be referred to as defense mechanisms at all.

Cramer has set out to provide a useful differentiation between “coping” and “defense” to be “understood as two different types of mechanisms that may serve as means for adaptation” (“Coping” 920). While both serve the same purpose—to deal with anxiety—they follow different psychological processes. Essentially, Cramer explains, coping mechanisms are conscious and intentional processes, while defenses are not:

coping mechanisms involve a conscious, purposeful effort, while defense mechanisms are processes that occur without conscious effort and without conscious awareness (i.e., they are unconscious). Also, coping strategies are carried out with the intent of managing or solving a problem situation, while

defense mechanisms occur without conscious intentionality; the latter function to change an internal psychological state but may have no effect on external reality, and so may result in nonveridical perception, that is, in reality distortion. (921)

Cramer discounts other criteria that attempt to differentiate between these two processes, including coping as normal and defense as pathological, based on a lack of empirical evidence.

While not everyone agrees with Cramer's distinction (see Newman; Erdelyi), it provides a useful terminology through which we may distinguish these two different processes. Maria Miceli and Cristiano Castelfranchi agree with Cramer's two criteria for distinguishing coping from defenses, but add a significant third one. "In the case of the defense mechanisms," they write, "we suggest that their intervention involves a manipulation of mental representations, whereas coping involves only a revision" (288-289). While coping, like defense, has the goal of reducing stress, it also comes with the goal of "epistemic accuracy"—that is, believing what is true (290). Coping strategies adhere to what one at least believes to be reality, but defense mechanisms do not. "Acceptance," Miceli and Castelfranchi write, "is strictly linked to adherence to reality in that one realizes the problem and the distress it involves Recognition of the problem makes it possible to tackle and, potentially, to solve or at least to limit its negative consequences" (293-294). Uwe Hentschel et al. also use the term coping as an alternative to defense. They write that the concept of coping should be "understood as a process of adaptation that permits the person to work toward the attainment of his or her goals." They continue, "coping involves the organization and integration of the person's

accumulated experience and available resources; it is attuned to the characteristics and requirements of the outside world” (15). Ideally, we seek to use poetry for positive coping, which does not distort reality. Defense mechanisms can thwart our goal of achieving complete honesty and deep awareness. This awareness is important in achieving positive strategies for coping with negative emotions and representations. One of the most noted positive mechanisms of defense—or, let us say, strategies for coping—that is particularly relevant to artists is sublimation. Anna Freud defines sublimation as conforming your identity with social values through creative activities such as writing or reading poetry (52). But sublimation only maintains its value when it avoids manic denial or escape into fantasy; it may serve as a valuable tool in gaining awareness only if the sublimation is analyzed in order to unveil deeper truths about its creator or its appreciator. We want to engage our students in poetry in ways that specifically require the exploration of self and other.

A strong sense of self is important, but a sense of self as fluid offers a more realistic and valuable conception, since we must continue to grow and change throughout life. As teachers, we want to use poetry as confrontation and challenge to self, not as diversion and not as a substitute ego. We want students to relinquish rigid control of their emotions, fantasies, and other repressed elements of self. We want them to explore and experience their inner selves—not to deny their genuine selves in order to avoid anxiety, but to confront the reality of anxiety.

Poetry the Anti-Defense

While dealing with defenses in a large class remains important, it often proves difficult because of their uniqueness to each individual. We could take a somewhat aggressive approach by refusing to recognize immature defensive behavior or even to call students out on it, but we must also take care not to further damage fragile egos and bring about a deeper retreat. What we can reasonably do is try to offer a supportive environment that allows and encourages students to deal with strong reactions in a productive way. A therapeutic approach to poetry offers this type of atmosphere by putting less stress on the text's or the instructor's authority.

Fortunately, by its very nature, poetry is an effective means of overcoming many defenses. One major cause of anxiety that may arise in readers occurs when a text evokes shameful or painful emotions or memories. Poetry's ability to remove shame and guilt through recognition and validation of emotional states proves valuable in breaking down defenses that are mainly manifested in the classroom and in general readers by a rejection of the text. Sharon Hymer points out that repression of certain negative thoughts and emotions comes from shame associated with superego resistance; works of art can break down this resistance, allowing for honest personal realizations and the ability to express them (62-5). Stephen Levine describes the role of the artist in these terms. Artists, he says,

are sensitive to the pain of the world and of the soul and use their work as an attempt to heal this pain. The conflicts of everyday life and the demons of the psyche are transformed by works of art into beautiful appearance, the shining

truth. This transformative vision then can have the power to touch the soul of spectators and audiences. The latter find their own deepest needs reflected in the work. (3)

The aesthetic beauty of poetic language is a powerful factor in breaking down ego defenses and raising awareness of feelings, images, and ideas. Poetry and other modes of art put form to repressed and/or fragmented emotions. Norman Holland discusses how form itself can act as a positive defense. If the defense itself, the form in this case, gives pleasure as a sublimation, the overall potential for pleasure in a text increases. Holland writes that “a little pleasure in form releases a far greater pleasure in content” (132). This applies to both the reader and the writer of a work.

Levine discusses the value of the presentation of art works, by which he means not only form but the way that art makes things present. He writes,

the arts ‘make present’; they re-create in the living moment a suffering that has been. If the presenter ‘talks about’ his or her suffering instead of putting it into artistic form, it remains distant from us; it is not actualized in the here and now.

On the other hand, when the moment of pain is re-created in an artistic form, then it becomes real; we feel as if it were occurring for the first time. We cannot help but be affected or moved by it. (45)

George Bell focuses on this aspect of capturing moments in his approach to poetry therapy. Bell writes, “Because poets focus on moments, they have had, and perhaps always will have, unique access to reality in human experience” (178). He continues:

by including all which is experienced in a particular moment, it becomes possible for a person to observe not only *what* is being dealt with, but *how* the interactions of thoughts are taking place. . . . The goal is to include everything just as it is experienced so that one can say, in reflection, this was what it was like for me to be alive at that moment. With the recording of many moments, self understanding is gained. (179)

This understanding includes all of our contradictions and internal conflicts. Poetry links us back to our primal desires and emotions by employing primary processes of formal expression like image and rhythm within secondary forms of language and structure which offer control and mastery. Sigmund Freud discusses the value of literary works in these terms when he explains, “all aesthetic pleasure which a creative writer affords us . . . [,] our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work[,] proceeds from the liberation of tensions in our mind. It may even be that not a little of this effect is due to the writer’s enabling us thenceforward to enjoy our own day-dreams without self-reproach or shame” (IX 153). In this way, the authority of a published text can actually work as a positive for conquering defenses. Holland explains, “The thought of others reading or seeing [a text] as we do licenses our response. They take over some of the functions of a superego, and, because they constitute so relaxed a superego, my own ego need not be so self-conscious, so oriented to action as if they were not there” (98). Poetry allows us to face our fantasies, our desires, our pain—all very human—without self-reproach or social stigmatism. Once we become aware of and honest about our inner beings, then positive change may begin.

Paradoxically, however, along with putting us in the moment of a feeling, poetry also offers an assuring separation from our pain. Akhtar points out (233-234), as does Mazza (25), that a poem offers a safe distance from painful emotions and helps to reduce resistance. This distance offered by an imaginative work reduces the need for initial defenses. While this distance may at first serve as an externalization and avoidance of one's own interior state, it may provide a stepping-stone in acknowledging something that the reader can integrate and accept when ready. "The poem is able to produce liberating and creative psychologic action without necessitating movement in the real world," writes Edward Stainbrook (8). Likewise, Holland explains, "our model tells us that the introjection necessary for full experience of a work depends on two conscious expectations: first, that the work will please us; second, that we will not have to act on it" (98). Reading poetry liberates one from repression and other defenses, and allows one to explore and discover unconscious thoughts, emotions, and processes.

Freud sees creative writing as an avoidance of reality while implying that it might also allow us to confront reality through fantasy. While artistic form may have a unity that does not exist in real life, it does evoke and confront real emotions and realistic circumstances, and it allows for a connection to the internal world of fantasy and imagination that we tend to lose touch with in adulthood. Poetry and other creative works can link us back to our inner fantasy world and our primal desires. We must give up fantasy for reality in adult life, but creative writing operates through fantasy in a way deemed socially acceptable. As adults, we become ashamed of our fantasy life, but the realm of creative writing still allows an important connection with fantasy (*IX* 145). This

is not to imply a loss of reality, but a capacity for one to experience the inner self through the separation offered by a work of art. Freud explains that “many things which, if they were real, could give no enjoyment, can do so in the play of phantasy, and excitements which, in themselves, are actually distressing, can become a source of pleasure for the hearers and spectators at the performance of a writer’s work” (144). While this separation may appear to be manic and a defense mechanism in itself, it may offer an important opening into the inner realms of both emotion and imagination that readers can then integrate into consciousness.

Poetry can also aid in enlarging reality orientation, which defense mechanisms inhibit. Developmentally, one must establish a realistic relationship with one’s self and one’s environment. This process begins in early infancy, but, because of various defenses, adults often lose touch with the reality of their true self and their relationship to the external world. Indeed, as Hynes and Hynes-Berry point out, “it is not always easy to keep the different facets of one’s world in perspective” (36). Poetry can assist in establishing a more accurate assessment of reality as it encourages one to relate coherently to various images and concepts. Readers are encouraged to “examine the more complex—and potentially more troubling—realities of their emotional, social, and psychological lives” (37). Examination of a text may reveal that one has unrealistic expectations for the future, for example, or that one has rewritten the past to make it less troubling (37). Poetry gives us universal truths about the world. Drawing on the work of existential therapist Irvin Yalom, Hynes and Hynes-Berry show how poetry and other forms of literature force us to recognize certain essentials of reality such as the unfairness

of life, the inevitability of suffering and death, and our ultimate aloneness; but they also show us our responsibility for our own actions, and the importance of leading an honest and noble life in relation to others (38).

In order to gain deeper self awareness, one must overcome debilitating or maladaptive personal defenses. By delving deeply into the unconscious, poetry offers a challenge to the existing ego, but it can also offer one new possibilities for a more genuine self to emerge. As Susan Vaughan puts it, “After learning the rules your [neurological] networks contain in psychotherapy, the next step is to begin to challenge your character’s closely held values, question their operation modes” (74). This challenge to the existing ego does not come without a destructive element. “Clearly, getting in touch with the inner self will not always be a pleasant experience. Sadness and pain are frequently part of the growth process,” write Hynes and Hynes-Berry (30). New revelations and realizations can lead to an experience of fragmentation, but this fragmentation is a necessary step for ultimate renewal. Levine writes,

a major theme of my thinking is the necessity of fragmentation, the refusal to find premature solutions that would only cover over differences in a façade of unity.

At the same time, I find myself striving always towards integration, motivated by a hope for wholeness and reconciliation. It is this activity of working through disintegration that I consider to be at the core of the creative and therapeutic processes. (xvi)

The relativism that comes with the destruction of the rigid ego may initially lead to a sense of despair. Stainbrook explains, “a most fundamental and growing threat to many

persons is a sense of the loss of control of the purpose of life.” However, he continues, “only by losing these absolutes of traditional meaning can one be free and hopeful in the creation of new relative alternatives. Sustaining relative truths cannot be created confidently until the ‘Absolute Truth’ is relinquished” (4). This initial despair or anxiety that comes with the challenge to the ego will prove only temporary, provided that the reader continues along the path toward renewal, achievable through the creative potential of the poetic function. The engaged reader and expressive responder will, ideally, come to discover a new and ever renewing outlook on life. Finding the self means realizing that you have virtually endless possibilities. Finding the self essentially means losing the self, or losing the rigid image of self that limits experience. Defenses protect this rigid self, but they cannot free one from anxiety. Only an honest appraisal of self can allow for such freedom, and in poetry we have a great tool for achieving this honesty.

One way to make the most of poetry is to take a different approach to poetic texts by putting more emphasis on the experience of the poem rather than the meaning. The difficulty and frequent ambiguity of poetry often becomes a major source of frustration, particularly when students have been taught to focus on—even obsess over—the goal of locating a specific meaning for a poem or a line of poetry. A focus on meaning often leads to frustration and anxiety, followed by implementation of defense mechanisms that attack or dismiss the text. I propose an approach that treats the poem as an object, by which I mean something that we may integrate into the self rather than stand in material opposition to. Following the Kleinian school’s approach to therapy, we must learn to put meaning aside as secondary, and focus on the immediate experience of a poem. This,

after all, is where we can locate the unique power of a poetic text. This does not give one a license to find absolutely any meaning whatsoever in any given text. Our experience of a poem must always remain grounded in its language, but the psychological states this language gives rise to in us should be our focus, rather than some presumed valid interpretation based on a presumed intrinsic meaning of this language. Our experience of a poem can even develop or alter as we gain deeper symbolic understanding, or as we continue to have new experiences. What keeps a poem alive, so that we return to it again and again, is our ability to experience it differently, perhaps more deeply, at different moments. As fluid subjects, our experience of everything continually changes. Because of its relative ambiguity, poetic language can change with us, show us how we change, and, most importantly, help to bring about change. We are not rigid subjects and poems are not rigid texts. We should not treat ourselves or our texts as such.

CHAPTER II

Projective Identification in the Classroom I: Teacher/Student Dynamics

The Three Objects of the Classroom

Understanding the dynamics of projective identification among the three objects of the classroom—teacher, student, text—can help us to become better teachers who enable our students to get the most out of studying poetry, literature, or any other subject. I will focus on the relationships between student and teacher, and between student and text. I elide treatment of the relationship between teacher and text because I want to downplay the authority that a teacher has over a text that often influences students' responses. This triangular structure of object relations in the classroom is not an Oedipal structure. Although the teacher cannot altogether avoid the role of paternal authority, this approach seeks to downplay that role as much as possible. Also, as the work of Kristeva shows, the poem is both a maternal and paternal object that both enacts and subverts symbolic law.

Students will often use projective identification with their teachers in order to avoid or short-circuit the frustrating process of learning, but they may also use projective identification to communicate with or experience gratitude with their teachers. Projective identification can be a defense that disrupts education, or a tool that potentially enhances

it. We can also use the projective identifications that occur between students and texts in ways that lead students toward both greater awareness and renewal, and greater empathy and reparation, by examining the way readers put themselves into texts and experience others through texts.

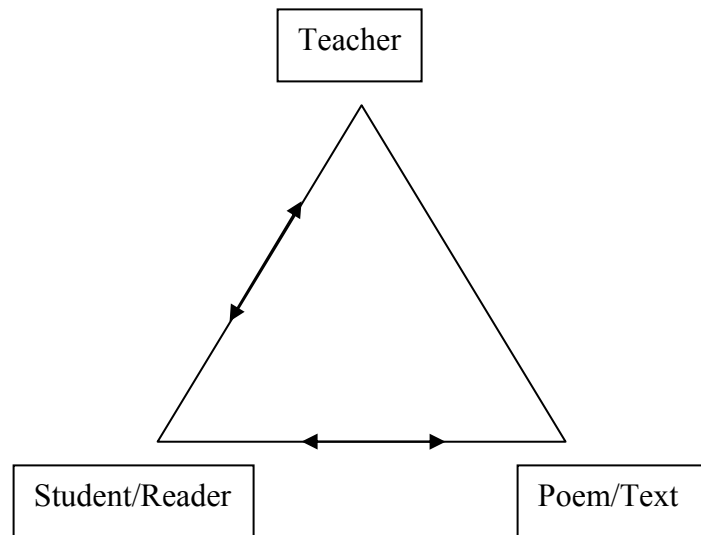


Fig. 1: Projective Identification and the Three Classroom Objects: I focus on the student/teacher and reader/poem dynamics.

The Student/Teacher Relationship

Melanie Klein's concept of projective identification provides an important theoretical basis through which we may consider the dynamics of the poetry classroom. Students will often use projective identification as a defense to avoid anxiety and, concurrently, create a poor environment for education. However, projective identification also provides a useful means of communication between teacher and

student that can help us as teachers empathize better with our students so that we can respond better to their educational needs.

Projective identification refers to a process of projection, that is, a putting of parts of one's self into another, in such a way that seeks or creates a response. In the classroom, students will expel and project anxiety causing parts of themselves into teachers who will then experience their own anxiety; or students may project their interest and genuine excitement about a class into a teacher causing the teacher to feel excited and encouraged. Projective identification can have positive or negative consequences in the classroom depending on the nature of the projections and the way they are responded to. The concept of projective identification first occurs in Klein's late essay "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms." Klein discusses how, in the infant, "split-off parts of the ego are . . . projected . . . into the mother. These . . . bad parts of self are meant not only to injure but also to control and take possession of the object. In so far as the mother comes to contain the bad parts of self, she is felt to be not a separate individual but rather *the* bad self." Klein explains that this "leads to the prototype of an aggressive object relation" (*Selected* 183). This negative aspect of projective identification forms "the basis of many anxiety situations"—paranoia in particular (186). When students project bad parts of themselves into their teacher, it will increase anxiety and prove severely detrimental to education. However, Klein writes, it is "not only the bad parts of the self which are expelled and projected, but also good parts of the self." These parts of the ego which "are expelled and projected into the other person represent the good, i.e. the loving parts of self" (183). This represents the positive aspect of

projective identification where the prototype of a loving object is formed—so long as this projection is not so excessive as to give one the sense of losing the good parts of self to an idealized other. A teacher experienced as a good object can provide education that students experience with gratitude, but a teacher who is overly idealized may prevent students from taking the necessary responsibility for their own education. Projective identification thus consists of both potentially positive and potentially negative elements. “The processes of splitting off parts of the self and projecting them into objects,” Klein writes, “are thus of vital importance for normal development as well as for abnormal object relations” (184). Irving Solomon writes, “The therapist has to distinguish between projective identification as a form of communication and projective identification as a means of expulsion of unwanted parts of the self into the external object” (26). Projective identification may enable deeper understanding for the mother with her infant, for the analyst with the patient, or, I propose, for teachers with their students and for a reader with a text insofar as a poetic text communicates and becomes introjected by the reader.

Projective identification impedes education when students use it as a defense. It is the key primal defense mechanism of what Klein calls the paranoid/schizoid position where objects are not experienced as whole, but divided into strict categories of good and bad. Bad objects then become threatening and must be attacked in return. The prototype of the infant’s early object experience is the breast, but in the paranoid/schizoid position, the breast is not a whole object but is split between the good breast, which provides nourishment and life, and the bad breast, which, in its absence, withholds these things and

threatens survival. The paranoid aspect of the position refers to the fear of the bad object and the phantasy attacks on the object that arise from these fears. In the classroom, students will often split their teachers in ways that turn them into representations of students' own authoritative superegos through both overly positive and negative projective identification. Teachers then come to represent either the ideal ego or the harsh superego—both of which impede education.

As a defense, like any other defense, projective identification seeks to decrease anxiety. Students will often project positive, good elements of themselves—in particular, the parts of themselves that could master classroom material through the frustrating process of learning—into an ideal object/teacher who has already mastered the material and can simply pass it on to them in a stress-free environment. When the teacher is coaxed, through projective identification, into taking this role, it may make for a comfortable classroom, but it will not provide the optimal environment for learning and student development. However, students may experience not just the normal anxiety involved with learning in the classroom; they may also experience anxiety due to their envy of the teacher on whom they feel dependent in order to achieve their educational goals. In these cases, students project negative elements of self, in particular their harsh superegos that make them feel inadequate, into teachers whom they experience as inadequate. Such teachers have nothing to offer, and therefore will not bring about envy and the anxiety that goes with it. But such teachers also cannot provide education. Students expel their own fears of inadequacy into the teacher in order to make the teacher feel inadequate. Vulnerable teachers will feel attacked not only by students, but by their

internal superegos that make them feel “not good enough.” Teachers may make the situation worse by reacting to students’ attacks with counter attacks where they experience students as uncaring, lazy, stupid, or otherwise unworthy of their effort as teachers, and, in some cases, where they will verbally reprimand students in the classroom. In such cases, an educational environment will quickly decline in a way that is difficult to recover from.

One major problem with projective identification in the classroom is that by expelling parts of self, positive or negative, students lose self awareness. We want our students to move beyond unrealistic paranoid/schizoid defenses into what Klein calls the depressive position where realistic awareness can occur. Developmentally, one achieves the depressive position in late infancy when the infant moves “from a partial object relation to the relation to a complete object” (*Selected* 118). This drive to repair the split and attacked object, Klein writes, “paves the way for more satisfactory object relations and sublimations” (189). In the depressive position, objects are not strictly split between good and bad, but are experienced as whole. A teacher thus will not be overly idealized or harshly attacked through projective identification. In the depressive position, students are able to take back the elements of self that they have expelled so that they can take responsibility for them. Not only is the teacher then experienced as a whole object, but the student becomes whole as well. When defensive projective identification is relinquished, the student’s ego grows stronger and more integrated. The student can then take on the role of one who can achieve mastery instead of projecting that role into an idealized teacher. Betty Joseph explains that real understanding occurs in the depressive

position, where one is able to “use” understanding “in the sense of discussing, standing aside from a problem, seeking, but even more, considering explanations.” This level of understanding involves “the capacity to take responsibility for one’s impulses” (140). Only in the depressive position does one have the capacity for self-reflection and the mature object relations necessary to gain deeper awareness and to achieve reparation. Students will feel capable and will no longer need to attack the teacher by projecting their fear of inadequacy. What the teacher can offer then will be experienced with gratitude and not with envy that stifles education.

As teachers, we must learn to understand and use projective identification, even when it comes in the form of an attack, because of what it communicates to us. Projections tend to exist in subsymbolic forms of communication such as body language or tone of voice, which can make them difficult to consciously process. But we can pick up on them by being receptive to the way they make us feel. When students project into teachers, teachers will experience a form of countertransference. We can use this countertransference to better understand the needs and anxieties of students. We should not allow ourselves to be negatively affected by projective identifications from our students, even when they come in the form of attacks, and we certainly should not respond back with attacks—either active or passive. Rather, we should take students’ projections as forms of communication where students tell us that the class is either too stressful or too boring for optimal learning to take place.

Daniel Goleman discusses an optimal level of stress that is most conducive to education. If students have too much stress, their anxiety will inhibit their brain’s

cognitive and creative ability. Likewise, students with too little stress will become bored and apathetic (270-272). Our task as teachers, which Goleman describes as an “emotional task,” is to achieve and maintain this optimal level of stress in the classroom (274). We can use projective identification to know when students are becoming too bored or too anxious in a classroom because they will make us feel bored or anxious. Students will often project their lack of interest into teachers who will then begin to lose interest themselves. Or students may project their frustrations into teachers who will then become frustrated with students. The key is not to act out on our countertransferences through attacks, rejections, or apathy, but to receive projections, and adjust our teaching accordingly. This may mean pushing a class that is bored, or making them more active participants in the material through class activities. Or it may mean easing off a bit or providing more support to a class that is experiencing overwhelming frustrations.

The Teacher as Good Object

We may ask here exactly what kind of object the teacher should be in a classroom to achieve an optimal level of stress and to encourage students to function from the depressive position. The teacher should not, for one, take on the role of the superego in either its idealized or its harsh, overly critical form. An ideal object makes students who need to take responsibility for their own education and development too dependent on the teacher. They will not be sufficiently engaged in material even though the class may appear to be running smoothly. A harsh superego is destructive to students’ egos. It will overwhelm them with anxiety and a sense of inadequacy, and will only evoke envy and

hostility toward the teacher. Students must be challenged, but must be able to cope with these challenges if growth and learning are to occur. We want our students to have strong identities so that they are able to tolerate the frustration involved in the educational process. At the same time, we do not want these strong identities to become overly rigid because education and development require a degree of openness. As teachers, we must take on a similar role. We must remain strong enough in our identities to tolerate the frustrations that students will project into us, but open enough to adjust to students' needs when necessary.

A major part of attaining strong but fluid identities as teachers involves gaining deeper self awareness by constantly analyzing our teaching methods and constantly interrogating our motives. If we, as teachers, achieve an understanding of our own egos—our own needs, desires, phantasies, etc.—we can avoid teaching practices designed to support our narcissism, and enact those that are most useful or helpful to our students. Of course, we must maintain some self-interest in order to function as teachers, but our gratification comes when we see the resultant development in our students. When we become better able to respond to student needs, we develop a new identity for ourselves as teachers that gratifies the ego, one of helping others to achieve. Mark Bracher explains, “The fullest enactment of our (teachers’) identities occurs to the extent that we enable our students to develop their identities in ways that enable their greatest possible personal fulfillment, which is itself found . . . in prosocial activities that benefit others” (*Radical* 77). A teacher’s identity can be both strong and flexible if we maintain it as an identity bound in the other—our students and our field. We may change our

teaching style and methods, but must remain committed to what we teach, and, above all, the people we teach. Bracher writes, “Truly ethical teaching is teaching that helps our students learn, grow, and develop their identity to its optimal extent” (*Radical* 156). Teachers with rigid egos will not be able to support student identities because they are too concerned with protecting their own identities. However, teachers who lack confidence and commitment, who have weak identities as teachers, will prove too vulnerable to the attacks and manipulations that frustrated or anxious students will project into them.

Student frustration is inevitable and necessary in any class that provides students with anything of educational value. Deborah Britzman writes, “Education is often the stage for painful fights, . . . for the urgency of wanting to learn and the defense of needing to already know” (*Novel* 148). Not knowing can be difficult for the ego. It gives rise to anxiety based on the fear of inadequacy and envy toward the one who, one imagines, does know—the teacher. Because attacks and manipulations through projective identification are inevitable in the classroom, the teacher—like the mother with her infant or the analyst with the analysand—must be capable of surviving them. We must experience and survive the frustrations of our students and use these frustrations to support our students’ development.

D. W. Winnicott discusses the difference between relating to an object and the more mature ability to “use” an object. As teachers, we must become useable objects to students. We do this by showing that we can survive their omnipotent projections, through which they imagine they can control us, with our identities intact and without

retaliating or moralizing. When teachers show they can experience students' projections and keep their identities as teachers intact without counterattacking by either becoming aggressive toward students or apathetic toward teaching, they show they are not simply objects to be related to or controlled through projective mechanisms, but that they are separate objects, beyond students' omnipotent control, who have something of value to offer. We show our survival, or our object permanence, not by reacting to or acting out on students' projections, but by patiently coming to understand what these projections are communicating to us. To be of use to students requires us to maintain confidence in ourselves and in the abilities of our students—to believe in the educational process and to empathize.

Britzman points out that object permanence also applies to students (*Novel* 119-121). They must be able to survive our attempts to make them develop and learn with their egos intact. As teachers we must not only educate but also help students survive their education. Eric Brenman writes of this phenomenon in terms of the psychoanalytic encounter, "the pursuit of truth goes hand in glove with the ego strength to bear it. This strength is derived from supporting relationships" (3). Surviving students' projections with our identities as teachers intact, while remaining open to what these projections communicate to us, will help students survive our demands and remain open to what we can offer them. In this way, the educational process becomes one of mutual support and development between teachers and students.

One model that will help us to consider the way we can experience students' projective identifications and use them to offer support is Wilfred Bion's concept of a

container. We may act as a container through empathy, just as we encourage empathy in our students. The mother/infant relationship provides the prototype of the container/contained relationship. This primal object relationship enables the subject to tolerate and regulate affects. When an infant experiences intense emotions, the attuned parent reflects the experience back and then stabilizes it, soothing the child. This enables the child's capacity for diverse and intense emotional experience. Ruth Riesenberg-Malcolm defines the theory of containment

as the capacity of one individual (or object) to receive in himself projections from another individual, which he then can sense and use as communications (from him), transform them, and finally give them back (or convey back) to the subject in a modified form. Eventually, this can enable the person (an infant at first) to sense and tolerate his own feelings and develop a capacity to think. (166)

Projected experiences, she continues, “go into the mother who modifies them through an emotional function that transforms the baby's raw sensations into something that—if all goes well—the baby takes back into herself and becomes the basis for the baby's awareness of her feelings and, eventually, thoughts” (168). In the prototypical relationship, the mother acts as the container (♀) for the contained (♂) projective identifications of the infant.

As teachers, we must allow for some frustration, but must keep it at an optimal level. When students do experience frustration and project it into us, we must be able to contain it and help students to cope with it. Students will eventually learn to cope with the frustrations of the classroom on their own and delay evacuating their anxiety through

projection. Bion writes, “The choice that matters to the psycho-analyst is one that lies between *procedures designed to evade frustration and those designed to modify it. That is the critical decision*” (29). In order to avoid immediate evacuation, the frustrating experience must be tolerated. Projected frustrations are contained and then returned by the attuned teacher so as to become more tolerable, so that students will not need to evacuate them in the future. Teachers can contain students’ frustrations and respond to them in a number of ways that may include simply offering words of encouragement such as, “I know this is a tough assignment, but it’s nothing you can’t handle.” Or we may have to respond to frustrations by making ourselves available outside of the classroom where we can offer more direct support, or by taking a different approach to material inside the classroom. The important aspect of the container, as it relates to teaching, is to remain patient and try to understand what students’ projections communicate to us—to use them to empathize better with students.

To be a good, useful, whole object, the teacher must put the needs of students first, but this is not the same as putting their desires first. What students may desire is a lack of anxiety, which is not conducive to learning and development. We should not try to protect our students from stress, but should keep it contained, in part, through empathy and understanding. Goleman explains that “whenever teachers create an empathetic and responsive environment, students not only improve in their grades and test scores—they become eager learners” (284). The good teacher, like a good boss in the workplace, must provide students a “secure base” (277). Goleman lists the characteristics of a good boss: great listener, encourager, communicator, courageous, sense of humor, empathetic,

decisive, takes responsibility, humble, shares authority (277); and the good teacher: responsive to needs, lets student guide interactions, pleasant and upbeat, warm and caring, clear but flexible classroom manager (283). By taking on these characteristics, we provide a secure base to our students. We contain their frustrations, provide support, make them active and responsible participants in their education, and encourage creativity and independence.

Rejection, Placation, and Manipulation

What we seek in the classroom is for our students to learn in a way that encourages them to grow and develop. In a poetry classroom, we want students to attain a deeper understanding of the effects of poetry and its relevance for the reader so that it can lead to increased awareness of both self and other. Pursuit of this goal can be aided by the clinical writings of the Kleinian theorist Betty Joseph, which deal with the issue of patients attaining the kind of understanding that leads to psychic change. Much of Joseph's clinical work may be applied to the classroom setting. Michael Feldman and Elizabeth Bott Spillius describe one of the major themes in Joseph's work as an "avoidance of what one might call 'knowledge about' in favor of 'experience in'" (3). We want to enable students to experience a poem by having them invest in it emotionally and imaginatively; we do not simply want them to acquire empty knowledge of a subject that will get them through an exam. Students will not always prove receptive to this deeper understanding, and the awareness and development that it brings. Students bring with them to our classes an entire history of relating to poetry and education in a certain

way, and participating in English classes that have taken a very different approach. We may refer to this renewing and reparative approach to teaching as what Britzman, using Freud's term, calls "after-education": a psychoanalytic education that seeks to move beyond the authority, indoctrination, inhibition, and anxiety involved in traditional education (*After-Education* 4-5). While some students will find this approach to poetry new and exciting, others will avoid any real understanding or insight that it might offer them. Joseph, in her essay "The Patient who is Difficult to Reach," discusses three ways in which patients avoid gaining real understanding, each of which applies to students and their use of projective identification in the classroom. I use the terms "rejection" and "placation" for the first two, and use Joseph's term "manipulation" for the last.

Rejection represents the total breakdown of education that occurs when students completely discard a teacher, text, or subject. This can occur in a passive form where students simply refuse to read, work, or engage in the class, or in a more active form where students openly attack a teacher's methods or capabilities, or the authors or texts chosen for the class. Attacks that come with rejection may involve open defiance, or may come in more subtle forms such as a roll of the eyes or a private conversation held between students during a lecture. Rejection tends to be contagious and difficult to recover from once it occurs with a large number of students, so it is important to notice students' negative projections early and to deal with them effectively.

Some students will reject understanding, or the text, class, or teacher, due to envy of the good that these things possess, or because of immature paranoid/schizoid defenses. Students will use projective identification in its negative role to split and expel their

frustration, self-doubt, social fear, fear of dependence (envy), or genuine lack of interest into the teacher. Teachers receiving these projections may in turn tend to feel frustrated with students, begin to doubt their teaching abilities or the value of the subject, fear reprimands from students that may disrupt class or lead to negative end-of-semester reviews, begin to feel envy toward students for their power, or begin to lose interest in the class or subject. Teachers who are easily frustrated or, like many inexperienced teachers, prone to self-doubt are especially vulnerable to the destructive capabilities of these negative projections.

As teachers, we must use these projections for what they communicate to us, rather than retaliating against them. When students expel unwanted elements into us, they are also communicating their educational or sometimes emotional needs. When students begin rejecting a class, its teacher, or its material, they communicate their anxiety or boredom to the teacher. It is essential that a teacher survive, contain, and use students' negative projections to better respond to their needs and create an optimal stress level for education to take place. Surviving students' projections means not crumbling under self-doubt when things begin going badly in the classroom. Instead of showing self-doubt or doubting oneself into incapacity, teachers must show students that they are strong, permanent objects. A strong object, however, is not a stubborn one. Teachers must be prepared to interpret students' projective identifications and adjust to their needs. Teachers must stay committed to the students and the class, but not to their ineffective teaching methods.

It is also extremely important that teachers contain students' frustration and not respond by acting out their own. Nothing will perpetuate or broaden rejection like a counterattack. Frustration in the classroom is inevitable, but we must not act out on the frustration that students will project into us. We must understand that students may envy our authority, but it will do little good to point out this envy or insist on our authority. We cannot force gratitude. It is much more productive to relinquish some authority by doing class activities that make students active participants and that put learning into their hands.

Rejection stems mainly from students' inability to tolerate frustration in one form or another. Poetry can be frustrating in its inexact, playful, at times even evasive, use of language. The teacher must act as a container for the students by allowing for some frustration but also setting up a nurturing environment where it may be tolerated. Joseph stresses the gaining of understanding as well as "tolerating not understanding" as major goals (139). If we deemphasize meaning, the typical focus of studying poetry in an English course, in favor of experiencing, then poetry becomes less of a source of frustration. Students can then focus on learning how poetry functions and involving themselves in the experience of poetic language without becoming frustrated when they cannot reduce a poem, a line, or an image to an equivalent meaning in conventional language.

Rejection is probably the easiest to recognize of the strategies students enact to avoid the frustrating process of learning. Other methods are less overt and easier not to notice because often there is no obvious problem in the classroom. Placation is perhaps

the easiest for the teacher to fall prey to. When students placate the teacher, they simply go along with whatever ideas the teacher presents in order to pass a test, write a paper, or, generally, to get a good grade, without really considering the information presented and its applications or relevance. With placation, students fear the anxiety that learning presents to their egos, and teachers are vulnerable when they fear this anxiety as well.

Bracher explains that

Often . . . the main impediment to education is not the opposition but rather the collusion between the two sets of identity needs, resulting in teachers and students engaging in activities that both parties find supportive of their identities but that do not contribute significantly to realizing the aims of education: learning and identity development. (*Radical* 79)

Students and teachers have the same goal in the case of placation, but it is not to create an optimal educational environment, but simply a low-stress one. Placation often gives the appearance of active learning, but it represents the extreme in passivity. Students seem engaged when they appear to agree with and support the teacher's opinions and interpretations of texts, and when they are able to repeat these opinions and interpretations on tests and in class discussions. But it becomes an instance where no real learning, understanding, or insight occurs in students.

Placation puts the teacher in the role of the ideal object or the one who knows, but it is really an empty idealization because, though the teacher appears to have knowledge, it is empty knowledge that does not challenge students and does not lead them to attain real understanding of material or to see how the material is relevant to them. Placation

typically arises as a defense against the anxiety and frustration that come with learning. When students placate, they are communicating their own self doubt, social fear (the fear of looking bad or stupid to others), and envy or fear of dependence (since attaining only empty knowledge would not make them feel dependent on the teacher). In this case, they are expelling through projective identification the split-off part of themselves that could engage in the material and could achieve meaningful understanding, but is afraid of the frustrating process of learning, into the teacher who already knows the material and can simply pass on necessary information. Potentially anxious students then become bored students. They see the class material as irrelevant to them and placate the teacher who presents the material as irrelevant. The teacher whose goals are simply for students to answer objective questions and attain empty knowledge of materials will work very well with students who are bored, but who still want good grades. The students continue to desire a lack of conflict or stress in the classroom and are happy if their teachers provide it.

Placation is an easy trap for teachers to fall prey to since its major characteristic involves a lack of conflict in the classroom. Typically, we think of conflict as a negative in the classroom, and certainly a lack of conflict makes our jobs easier. But a complete lack of conflict in the classroom may also be an indication that students are not experiencing the texts in the ways we want them to, and are not using the texts to explore and challenge themselves. Teachers who are afraid of conflict themselves or who have fragile egos are especially vulnerable to placation because, just as it involves no real challenge to the identity of students, it involves no challenge to the identity of the

teacher. There may be a degree of laziness or even narcissism in the teacher who allows placation, but essentially the teacher experiences the same fear of frustration and anxiety that students do. Projective identifications between students and teachers who fear the frustration and anxiety that go with learning will continue to reinforce placation and inhibit education.

Teachers must remember never to become too pleased with themselves or complacent with their teaching. Only teachers who constantly analyze themselves and the dynamics taking place in their classes will recognize when placation is taking the place of real education. Not only must we constantly question ourselves as teachers, but we must constantly question our students and make them responsible for their own education. The easiest way to avoid having students placate you as a teacher is to avoid telling them exactly what they should get out of a text. We must relinquish our total authority over the texts we teach and refuse to play the role of the ideal object or the one who knows. When students do offer interpretations or responses to texts, we should always play devil's advocate and keep them open to alternatives so that a student's response does not become the ultimate authority for the class either. We want to look at texts for their possibilities rather than their objective, closed meanings. At the same time, however, it remains important to establish clear goals and guidelines for the approach the class will take with poetic texts.

When we do recognize that placation is taking place in the classroom it is important not to change from the teacher who fears conflict to the teacher who attacks students for not engaging or for being brain dead. These kinds of direct attacks on

students who placate will only increase their anxiety and resistance to learning. We should, instead, engage students in activities that require them to actively assess the materials themselves, rather than passively take in our thoughts or opinions. This could include focused writing activities or small group discussions with specific goals. We should make students do much of the work themselves when looking at a text. Our role should be to give them the tools to do this and to moderate open discussions.

Occasionally, we may need to pull in the reins if students get too far off track, but we should encourage open exploration of all of the things (images, emotions, thoughts) that a poem might give rise to. This approach may cause some frustration initially, because many students desire an idealized object to expel their conflicts into without having to attain meaningful knowledge. But most students will come to accept and even appreciate it when they discover the rewards.

Manipulation is similar to placation but tends to play more on a teacher's narcissism or image of a teacher's role as master than on fear of conflict. Manipulation often takes place with teachers whose intentions are to relinquish authority, but whose students are not comfortable with them in that role. With placation, students who desire a lack of conflict fit well with teachers who desire a lack of conflict and together they create a classroom with a lack of conflict and, with it, a lack of learning. With manipulation, students force reluctantly authoritative teachers into the role of authority by stroking their egos, playing on an ideal image they may have of the role of the engaged teacher, or by making the classroom uncomfortable by regressing to something resembling rejection when teachers refuse the role of authority. When teachers take an

approach that downplays their authority over texts, students who find this frustrating will try to manipulate them into giving interpretations and acting as the authority. Where placating makes things easier on the teacher and the students, manipulation makes things easier on the students. Teachers may easily fall back into this authoritative role themselves because, after all, they do, in most cases, have more knowledge about the text and the subject than the students do. Such a response also gives the teacher a sense of mastery, and with it a sense of respect or even awe from students.

But the teacher must, at times, refuse this role because it encourages passivity. Students' motivation for manipulation is essentially the same as that for placation—fear of frustration in learning—and involves a similar splitting off. Joseph explains that some of her patients are beyond understanding “because the part that could aim at understanding and making progress is split off and projected into the analyst” (146)—or teacher in our case. In other words, students split off the part of themselves that should take this role of interpreter or explorer of a text and project it into the teacher. The teacher experiences a kind of countertransference brought about by an outward demand from students, which may involve them asking the teacher a lot of questions that they should be trying to answer for themselves, or more passive demands, which often involve uncomfortable silences in the classroom when students refuse to engage, not because they are rejecting the material, but because they doubt they have anything of value to offer. Or students may play on a teacher's narcissism by making comments that clearly posit the teacher as the authority over the material. Students will sometimes try to split the teacher as ideal good object who masters the bad object of the frustrating text they are

reading. But again, this makes the teacher into a false ideal who contains only empty knowledge, rather than a teacher who allows for necessary frustration and only contains it when it becomes overwhelming to education.

These countertransferences we feel as teachers, however, can make us desperate to take the role of the one who understands the text. Joseph writes, “It is more comfortable to believe that one understands ‘material’” rather than play the role of one who does not (158), but this is what we must do at times. Part of an approach to poetry that will bring about a deeper understanding of texts and their relevance requires us as teachers to put our understanding aside so that students can experience texts for themselves. We must refuse to answer questions at times, or turn these questions back onto students. This may cause frustration, but through our encouragement and support we can contain this frustration. We must at times actively downplay our role as master of texts, because even if we feel we know a text well, we should recognize that it contains possibilities we have not considered. We must also learn to tolerate and survive long silences in the classroom rather than giving in to them because we feel uncomfortable. Silence that will lead to real engagement later is more valuable than filling silence with empty knowledge.

Chapter III

Projective Identification in the Classroom II: Student/Text Dynamics

Poetry as Transference Object

Poetry, fortunately, already provides us with a powerful ally in terms of helping students to develop and attain renewal and reparation. I propose treating a poem as an object in the classroom in order to make the study of poetry more relevant and approachable, and less frustrating and alienating to students. By object, I mean something that students relate to or have a relationship with, internalize and project into, and use for positive growth, rather than a subject that we focus on and try to learn or master, which often leads to feelings of frustration and anxiety, or, worse yet, indifference. Kleinian theorists provide an analytical model that helps us to understand the dynamics of reading poetry in terms of the projections and introjections of readers, which involves readers reflecting on feelings, associations, and phantasies evoked by poems. Through this approach, students may experience transference and countertransference through a poetic text. A poem may act as a container for the reader through a process akin to psychoanalytic transference where readers can emotionally invest themselves in, or project their internal objects into, a poem in such a way that encourages deeper awareness of affects while offering loving recognition and support. In a phenomenon similar to countertransference, readers receive projections from poems

when the poet brings them into the experience that the poem is trying to express. Through receiving these projections, readers develop greater empathy with the writer or speaker of the poem—and thus with others in general. This loving relationship with poems functioning as objects offers one a rewarding experience in the external, object world. Such rewards in the realm of language and social relationships—in the symbolic—encourage further linguistic and social development. This development leads to a better balance between the need for object relations and personal independence. The reader’s relationship to the poem serves the therapeutic purposes of increasing self awareness and providing renewal, and guiding one toward reparation of self and improved relations with objects in the external world.

Considering poetry as a transference object means specifically considering its capacity to promote personal renewal, or the opening up of self that leads to the attainment of deeper awareness. Poems reflect human experience in all of its emotional, imaginative, and cognitive complexity. In her essay on *The Orestia*, Klein writes, “The creative artist makes full use of symbols; and the more they serve to express the conflicts between love and hate, between destructiveness and reparation, between life and death instincts, the more they approach universal form” (*Envy* 299). The artist’s use of symbols finds its roots in infancy where the capacity for symbol formation first emerges. Klein explains that infantile emotions and phantasies attach to objects “real and phantasied—which become symbols and provide an outlet for the infant’s emotions. . . . The child puts his love and hate, his conflicts, his satisfactions and his longing into the creation of these symbols, internal and external, which become part of his world” (299). The

symbols found in poetry become a part of the reader's world. At times, they help us to understand our inner worlds better; at other times, they make us feel more comfortable and confident with our experiences as humans. To Klein, art reflects the complex and fluctuating nature of human experience, which makes it valuable for raising awareness and for self assessment. Klein writes, "Though the rejected aspects of the self and of internalized objects contribute to instability, they are also at the source of inspiration in artistic productions and in various intellectual activities" (245). Art offers a reflection of the inner self with all of its conflicts. It is this element of art, in part, that makes it a useful tool in attaining the depressive position and achieving renewal and reparation.

Poetry, in its exploration of various, often intense, affective states, allows one to experience and explore various emotions in a safe environment. Poetry therapist Hirsch Silverman writes that "inhibited and negative emotions can be opened up through poetry therapy and the valuable energy within us used to create *interrelationships*. Experiencing psychotherapy through poetry as an unlocking of psychic energy makes one open to more intense physical, emotional and spiritual experiences than before" (22). Again, tolerance of anxiety becomes crucial for opening the self to the experiences that poetry offers. But poetry is useful to students because a poem maintains its otherness as an external, permanent object. Students will project their experiences and emotions into poems, but poems will reflect these projections back in a modified form where students are able to process and interpret them. Poetry's ability to return these projections in aesthetic form makes it an invaluable tool for raising awareness. Students can receive the parts of self that they split off and become more integrated people.

In this sense, the poem functions like Bion's container in a far more effective way than the teacher can. By allowing a poem to act as a container, we can avoid much of the anxiety involved in self exploration. A more in-depth understanding of how a container works will help us to better understand how a poem may function as a transference object for the reader. As the prototypical container, the mother must take in the infant's unsymbolized, frustrating emotional experience—what Bion refers to as beta (β) elements—passed into her through projection. The mother then interprets these elements, transforms them into a more elaborated, symbolized form (a form such as what dreams might be made of)—what Bion refers to as alpha (α) elements—where the potential for attaining consciousness arises. Beta-elements refer to obscure but strong emotions that infants cannot tolerate and therefore immediately evacuate and project into the mother. As Bion writes, “beta-elements are suitable for evacuation only—perhaps through the agency of projective identification” (13). When beta-elements predominate, one experiences “an incapacity for symbolization and abstraction” (Grinberg 50). There comes no potential for understanding or awareness with beta-elements; they must be transformed into alpha-elements for the attainment of mental health. Bion explains that “alpha-elements comprise visual images, auditory patterns, olfactory patterns, and are suitable for dreams, contact-barrier, [and] memory” (26). Alpha-elements do not equal consciousness, but produce a “contact-barrier” between consciousness and unconsciousness that creates the potential for realistic conscious awareness. Poetry also takes these raw, unsymbolized elements of self and puts them into a form where they may be interpreted. With the mother's help, infants will eventually develop their own alpha-

functions. Likewise, through reading poetry and exploring the self through poetry, students can develop their own creativity and their own symbolizing functions.

In the mother, the projected bad object of the infant's internal world gets "modified in such a way that the object that is re-introduced has become tolerable to the infant's psyche" (90). Bion refers to the mother's capacity to act as a container—"to be open to the baby's projected need" (Grinberg 56)—as "reverie." "Reverie," Bion writes, "is a factor of the mother's alpha-function" (36). "By receiving the projections of beta-elements, and working them by her own alpha-function," Riesenber-Malcolm explains, "the mother/analyst is 'a container' for these projections, which then can be called 'the contained'" (171). The capacity of the mother, or the analyst in therapy, to act as a container enables one to make use of emotional experience rather than simply evacuate it. Tolerance of emotion is necessary for the conversion of beta- into alpha-elements that create the potential for consciousness, thinking (α) (as opposed to simply having thoughts (β)), knowledge (K), and symbol formation. Real knowledge, or knowing, for Bion "is the activity through which the subject becomes aware of the emotional experience and can abstract from it a formulation which adequately represents this experience" (Grinberg 102). Attaining knowledge is often a frustrating process to the adult as well as the infant. An inability to tolerate frustration disables (-K) one's ability to attain real knowledge of both self and other. Acting as a container, a poem can reflect the reader's emotional state back in a form that offers distance and greater tolerance and thus enables the reader to gain awareness of and make use of emotions for positive personal

development. Poems can act as objects of transference by both reflecting one's inner world and making it more tolerable.

In the transference that takes place between reader and text, readers' projections are as complex as experience itself. Klein and her followers take a broader view of transference than Freud. Klein views the transference relationship as dynamic like all object relations. To Klein, transference involves not just previous relationships but all of the phantasies, emotions, defenses, love and hate, etc., that go with them. Klein writes, "in unraveling the details of the transference it is essential to think in terms of *total situations* transferred from the past into the present, as well as of emotions, defenses and object relations" (*Selected* 209). Beyond referring only to direct references to the analyst, Klein's "conception of transference as rooted in the earliest stages of development and in deep layers of the unconscious is much wider and entails a technique by which from the whole material presented the *unconscious elements* of the transference are deduced" (209). One's earliest object relations provide a foundation for everything that comes out in relationships and transference, and, to Klein, "object relations are at the *centre* of emotional life" (206). As Joseph explains, Klein shows "that what is being transferred is not primarily the external object of the child's past, but the internal objects" (156). As a transference object a poem reflects "total situations" that we may relate to and, sometimes, find comfort in. As a container, it reflects our projected feelings back to us, offering awareness, tolerance, and recognition of emotion. Poetry puts emotions into symbolic forms (alpha elements) of metaphor and image and gives them back to the reader so that they may become conscious, modifiable, and useful.

Poems can function as loving objects, or objects of transference, for the reader, offering recognition and validation for emotional states, while also offering support to help one cope with negative emotions. Like the analyst, a poem translates our inner world back to us, ideally, in such a way that offers deeper awareness. Poetry therapists often treat, or use, poems as potential loving objects for their patients, since poetry offers recognition of personal feelings that are conscious but discomforting. Reading an author's poetic expression of familiar emotions that one experiences as shameful or illegitimate offers a sense of normalcy. Morris Morrison explains, "The reader . . . quickly finds that he is no outsider. Though the poet speaks for himself, the reader discovers his own psyche, his own thoughts and feelings, being expressed. He is not so alone as he had imagined himself" (88-9). Feelings that were once shameful are now "legitimate rather than a sign of weakness or frivolity" (Hynes 28). One finds in poetry a common emotional unity in human kind; "Poetry releases one from the world of the particular into the healing ambience of the universal" (Morrison 89). The recognition the reader finds in a text offers real human understanding, which strengthens self-confidence. Anxiety related to negative emotions becomes tolerable, and one can now probe more deeply into one's psyche. Gilbert Shloss explains that in poetry therapy "powerfully rendered poetic expression often stimulates in the client a sense of permissiveness to explore his own fantasies or emotions" (7). Recognition of what is already conscious leads into a recognition of formerly unacknowledged thoughts and feelings as well, moving one toward enhanced self awareness and the kind of development that we strive for in education.

Poetry, because of its regressive, primal nature, is specifically adept at helping people to cope with negative emotions such as anxiety or depression, which find their roots in infantile frustration and object loss from birth, weaning, and an increased sense of reality. Pain is ubiquitous, since we all sense a primal loss of our experienced omnipotence in the womb and of the nurturing maternal object that we must renounce. Akhtar defines “mental pain as a sharp, throbbing, somewhat unknowable feeling of despair, longing and psychic helplessness” (231). Since most humans repress this primary loss, we often experience the mental anguish that arises from it as objectless and without a definable cause. James Hamilton points out, in his response to Akhtar, that the difficulty in defining such pain may be because it finds its roots in pre-symbolic loss (1221). Akhtar, and other therapists who use poetry, see the value in finding language and images described in poetry to capture the inner turmoil of the reader. Akhtar describes using Tennyson’s elegy “Break, break, break” with a patient having difficulty dealing with the death of a loved one. The patient found that the poem “provided a psychic space for necessary mourning. . . . In giving voice to [the patient’s] hitherto mute agony and in witnessing her pain, the poem functioned as good mother and a good analyst!” (237). Poems can function this way for students in the classroom as well, if we allow them to.

Readers tend to invest their own identities in works of art that appeal to them because they offer personal recognition or aesthetic beauty. Stainbrook explains,

The desire and the readiness to surrender some control of [one’s] thinking to the structured and organized information of the poem is enhanced by the cultural

authority attributed to the poem as a work of art. Moreover, the esthetic structuring of the poem invites the social role enactment of an empathetic identification with the imagery and thought of the poem. In his characteristic way the participant must identify with the poem and allow himself to behave as if the poem is his own thinking. (7)

Here, we see poetry as offering the potential for change through a reader's identification with a text. A poem's ability to offer recognition by representing the reader's own mental or emotional state brings the reader to this identification. This can even occur with pre-symbolic experience. Barbara Pizer writes, "A poem allows the possibility of recognition without pinning it down" (68). In Bion's terms, as a container the poem creates alpha-elements out of beta-elements so that they may rise to the level of contact barrier where they are available for interpretation without the reader necessarily attaining full realization in consciousness. In this way, poetry can begin to express and recognize what is presently beyond expression.

As objects, poems renew us when we project ourselves into them and receive these projections back in a form that we can interpret and integrate into ourselves. A poem can act as what Christopher Bollas calls a "transformational object"—an object that enables the subject to alter and renew itself (*Shadow* 115). Bollas writes, "Persons rich in self experiencing, who take pleasure in the dialectics of the human paradox, seek objects with evocative integrity that challenge and stretch the self" (*Being* 31). As we seek these objects out in poetry or in the object world in general, we open ourselves up to new experiences and renew ourselves through object relations. Again, the primary

relationship with the mother provides the prototype. We first experience the maternal object that integrates our experience as relational, rather than as a completely separate object. We experience poems the same way. The search for such a transformational object, Bollas tells us, continues into adult life. “The memory of this early object relation,” he writes, “manifests itself in the person’s search for an object . . . that promises to transform the self” (*Shadow* 14). Poems can function as these objects as they integrate our experiences in specific ways that bring about a new self. This occurs through a process of projective identification where we subjectify our object world—putting personal meaning into objects to find ourselves reflected back in sometimes surprising ways. Bollas writes, “This type of projective identification is ultimately self enhancing, transforming material things into psychic objects, and thus furnishing an unconscious matrix for dreams, fantasies, and deeper reflective knowings” (*Being* 23). Bollas refers to this process where objects give rise to greater creativity and awareness as “lifting.” He writes, “Some objects . . . release us into intense inner experiencings which somehow emphasize us. I think of this as a form of *lifting*, as encounters with objects lift us into some utterance of self available for deep knowing” (*Being* 29). Poems can lift us in this way, enhancing our inner experience and making us more attuned to ourselves.

Poetry as Countertransference Object

Along with acting as an object of transference, a poem can also act as an object of countertransference: as we analyze a poem, it evokes emotions, images, and thoughts in us through something similar to projective identification. This phenomenon can enhance

our capacity to empathize with others, an essential element in positive object relations and in social justice on a broader scale, giving us a deeper awareness of our objects.

Along with the important realization of self comes the realization of the other. Poetry can increase object awareness, leading one to realize one's dependence on others and the importance of interpersonal relations. Poetry therapy works by "allowing the patient to identify with other human beings, who have experienced similar conflicts, anxieties, and feelings, and who have been able to state, for all humanity, a universal theme or dilemma" (Berger 75). The reader comes to have a relationship with the text that begins with recognition of the self but leads to recognition and empathy for the other, similar to what occurs during countertransference. Hynes and Hynes-Berry explain: "The recognition that one can be *heard* is the most elementary stage in developing awareness of others. The awareness increases significantly at the point where the participant sees that *listening* is also possible" (34). The relationship that arises between reader and text can encourage one to relinquish narcissistic structures, explore the social world, and seek real object relations.

Empathy provides the foundation for all meaningful object relations. And along with the personal benefits of strengthening interpersonal relationships, the development of empathy is imperative for the functioning of a just society. "To be fully human we cannot just be aware *of* others. We must also feel *for* them. . . . The way we feel about interdependence and sharing clearly has an effect on how we live and respond" (Hynes 35). Since we cannot function outside of the external world, we must learn to develop mutually nourishing relationships. Some poems deal specifically with the power of the

interpersonal. Other poems give recognition of a common humanity and offer the reader a kind of prototypical relationship, which can foster recognition of the need for and the value of real human relationships.

A poem can help us connect with the external world and reject narcissism by acting as what Winnicott calls a “transitional object.” A transitional object, prototypically, refers to the first object belonging to a child (a blanket or a toy perhaps) that the child forms a strong bond with. This object serves the child, on one level, as “a symbol of the union of the baby and the mother” (96)—the primary bond—though it is clearly not the actual mother; it belongs to the child as well as to the external world. We could not describe such an object as primary because the relationship the child has with it moves away from the mother and the narcissistic view of self, but, at the same time, the relationship with the inanimate object does not constitute a real secondary object relation. “The transitional object,” Winnicott explains, “is *not an internal object* (which is a mental concept)—it is not a possession. Yet it is not (for the infant) an external object either” (9). Thus, Winnicott describes the object as transitional, providing a space—what he calls a “potential space”—existing paradoxically between self and other, between separation and dependence, that moves one gradually toward reality and real object relations.

We can see children at play making use of objects that are under their control, reflecting their inner fantasies, but that also clearly have external existence. Winnicott writes, “The transitional object is never under magical control like the internal object, nor is it outside control as the real mother is” (10). Play occurs in this transitional boundary

between fantasy and reality. Thus, like Freud, Winnicott sees the child's imagination as the root of artistic creativity and enjoyment in adults. Winnicott locates art, or cultural experience, "in the *potential space* between the individual and the environment" (100). As Peter Rudnytsky explains, "Art provides a lifelong refuge to which we can turn as we negotiate our precarious oscillations between illusion and reality" (xiii). Art and other transitional phenomenon (play, religion) may function in this capacity because they are accepted forms of illusion. Winnicott explains that "the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged" (13). We can think of poems as offering a potential space for the reader, which could aid in the transition into greater and more realistic awareness of self and objects needed to attain real reparative object relations. In order to separate from the primary object and to form symbols, Winnicott explains, the child must have a strong foundation in the primary relationship. The attuned or "good-enough" mother must give the child a sense of love, continuity, and object permanence. This foundation gives the child the ability to make the transition into the external world. Poems may also offer a sense of love through recognition, continuity through the creation of form, and permanence as they survive as objects or even celebrate survival as a theme. As objects, poems can lead one in the transition toward a renewed and repaired self by giving both support and deeper awareness of objects. This renewed and repaired self will have a strong sense of reality, and a capacity for object love.

In the classroom, the poem provides a “third object” that allows for a transition into remunerative object relations. Virginia Goldner writes, “Poetic action is a densely layered one- and two-person process that achieves its psychological effects by potentiating the mental space that is *thirdness*” (110). Goldner describes thirdness as “that quality of mental space that allows us to connect to another’s mind and negotiate meaning” (115). This space between self and other creates a genuine sense of human empathy, and poetry opens up this space. Goldner explains that reading a poem creates a third that is not the poet or the reader but rather a kind of meeting place where the relationship exists between the two (115). The words we read belong to another whom we relate to, yet at the same time they become our own.

Poems may act as supportive objects through their regressive qualities that return us to the loving mother, the good object or the container, of infancy. Goldner refers to this aspect of poetic thirdness as the “transcendental third”: “the music of universal laws and meaning.” She writes, “A poem’s rhymes and meter, the elemental pleasure of sounds making music, must call up the infant’s coos and babbles, the mother’s harmonic responsiveness” (110). Poems not only evoke our earliest experiences and communications, transcending norms of experiencing and communicating, but, like the good mother, reflect our experience back to us in aesthetic form that we can make use of.

Of course, any effort to strictly categorize the experience of poetry in terms of what we project into poems and what poems project into us will not prove altogether successful. Transference and countertransference, renewal and reparation, increased self awareness and increased empathy, are all constantly occurring at the same time and

building upon each other because of the profound effect objects have on our subjectivity and because when we learn about our objects, we are also learning about ourselves. Bollas writes, “Each entry into an experience of an object is rather like being born again, as subjectivity is newly informed by the encounter, its history altered by a radically effective present that will change its structure” (*Being* 59). Poems as objects can transform us in a number of positive ways that affect our image of self and our relations to others. As loving objects they offer support and recognition by reflecting or containing our intense experiences. They also project into us, giving us new experiences and deeper empathy with the experiences of others.

Poems can both perform reparation and encourage exploration of the external world where reparation may occur. They encourage creativity in the symbolic by integrating our experience, and offering a rewarding relationship with language. As a “third” object they bring about heightened object awareness, and a heightened sense of reality in general. They transcend norms of experience to offer new self awareness and insights. They offer us a space between subject and object, and between fantasy and reality, that opens up the potential for transformation, change, and renewal. When we treat poems as objects rather than subjects, in the classroom or in general, we allow and encourage them to have these profound effects on us.

Poetry and Reparation

As students find valuable and supportive objects in poetry because of the awareness and recognition poems provide, they establish a relationship with an external

object that we may describe as reparative. As a separate object, a poem connects one not only with the self, but with an other, an external object, that one may empathize with. The ability to empathize with others is key to attaining the depressive position and the capacity for reparation. Klein's concept of reparation essentially refers to the process through which one replaces negative, aggressive feelings toward one's significant others with more loving feelings. Poetry can assist the reader in making reparation in a number of ways. For one, a poem can stand in as a loving, supportive object for the reader by providing images of strong loving objects, and by offering recognition to various emotional states—providing a sense of normalcy and wellness needed for the capacity to perform reparation. Poetry can also raise awareness on a number of levels. Awareness is essential because reparation requires a realistic view of the self and the object world. Through its use of metaphor, poetry has a unique capacity for expanding awareness by pushing up against the limits of meaning and language in order to uncover deeply rooted sensations and mental processes. Poetry also posits subjects in relation to the object world, linking us to others by evoking empathy, and showing us our dependence on others for love and growth. As supportive loving objects, poems encourage exploration of and interaction with the object world. Poetry also stimulates individual creativity—the foundation for reparative acts. Creative works, Hymer explains, allow “individuals to make reparation not only to the object but also to the self” (57). Poetry assists in the achievement of—and can even bring about—reparation for the reader.

Klein specifically considers the importance of balancing negative emotions and impulses with the reparative capacity of love. She writes, “This making reparation is, in

my view, a fundamental element in love and in all human relationships” (*Love* 68). For positive, sustaining relationships to exist, a good loving object must be maintained internally through the process of reparation. This loving object provides one a sense of security and a sense that one is loveable, allowing for the comfortable entrance into the social world where other object relations become possible. This capacity for love and the sense of being lovable proves essential for the preservation of life itself, just as the original love of the mother proved essential for survival during infancy. The dominance of love over the self-destructive elements of hatred involves a feeling of guilt associated with destructive instincts that leads one to constantly repair one’s loving objects through acts of creativity. As one makes reparation, empathy, “a most important element in human relationships,” becomes possible and with it arises a sense of responsibility for one’s objects (66). Only the self capable of love and reparation may engage in positive relationships with others and maintain a healthy interest in the external world. Feelings of hatred become linked from early experience with the fear of annihilation. Feelings of guilt give rise to the fear of losing love—of abandonment. The security one experiences with a strong, loving object allows one to accept gratification from relationships—and this, in turn, increases one’s capacity to experience gratification in general. These feelings of gratitude and security, according to Klein, “are apt to increase [one’s] creative powers . . . and to influence [one’s] capacity for work and for other activities” as well (73). But if one feels incapable of love and reparation, one will never master the life-threatening destructive impulses.

The pleasure found in reading brings about positive feelings in the reader that give rise to a sense of security and joy in the external world. Klein considers reparation in terms of the reader by looking at Keats's poem "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." In the poem, Klein explains, "Keats is speaking from the point of view of one who enjoys a work of art" (*Love* 106). Keats the reader experiences the poetic work—Chapman's translation of Homer—as a good object as he becomes a kind of explorer of the self and the outside world through it. From the poem's support and stimulation, Keats the reader grows elated with positive feelings toward the outside world that will lead to further explorations and their promise of reward. The reader as explorer also becomes an explorer of the internal world. As inhibitions break down, one becomes better able to gain awareness of objects and of reality in the social world, as well as of the self.

When reading, the reader experiences both the anxiety and the desire to repair that motivates the creation of a work of poetry. Poetry can counteract fears of annihilation and abandonment, and help one to maintain the depressive position. Reparation found through poetry offers feelings of love and stimulation of creativity. Constructive means of coping with negative emotions lead to positive object relations, as well as a positive relationship with the self. Object reparation, Klein points out, is also self reparation since our relationships with others are always linked to our internal experience. Klein explains, "all that we have received from the external world and all that we have felt in our inner world . . . makes part of our selves and goes to build up our personalities" (111). We experience the hatred within ourselves with revulsion, but we also project our love onto

the external world. If we have good, loving internal images, we experience the world as more loving. But our own hatred creates the experience of a more hateful world.

We perform reparation through symbolic acts that offer awareness, support, and ultimately self control in relation to our objects. This capacity to maintain a loving image of our objects proves crucial for the attainment of mental health and a rewarding relationship with the world. The act of reading and experiencing poetry offers awareness of complex emotional states, while also putting emotions at a manageable distance. Poetry provides us with recognition of familiar emotions—evoking a sense of calm and arousing pleasure. Poems themselves can take on the role of loving objects, stimulating our interest and providing us with loving support. The mental and emotional stimulation we gain from poetry can lead us to our own creative capacity where we may recreate and constantly renew ourselves by performing reparation. A consideration of poetry for its reparative capacity gives us a unique appreciation of the genre, which also has practical value for teachers of literature who seek to stimulate development in their students, or for therapists who use poetry in their practice.

CHAPTER IV

Poetic Regression and Awareness

Freud's Primary Processes

Poetry has a unique value among literary forms. Perhaps the most unique function of poetry is its ability to affect us, through language, at an uncanny, primal level. Both Michael Maltby (49) and Paul Christensen (88) acknowledge this “magical” quality of poetry. According to Maltby, we experience this quality “as much sensually as verbally and that moves us through the realm of words to somewhere beyond them” (49). Robert Rogers writes, “The minute a thought or feeling becomes verbalized it has acquired a secondary process dimension.” Rogers sees poetry as emerging from the tension between the more primal elements of the self and the secondary processes of reason and language (63). Poetic language brings us back to a pre-symbolic state of nearly endless possibility, paradoxically, through the symbolic mode of language. Rafael Campo explains that “in poetry, the instinctual and the emotional coexist on par with the intellectual and the rational” (19). In poetry, we witness our core being exposed but also put into a formal, coherent structure conducive to assessment and revision. Akhtar concurs that poetry seems to have “uncanny access” to the unconscious. “Reading poetry informs one about the inner state of affairs, [and] enhances empathy with the self” (236). This uncanny ability of poetry comes from its use of what Freud calls the primary

processes, which offer a regression to the core of one's being, giving rise to pleasure and ecstasy even when dealing with negative emotions. As Francis Henry and Phyllis Luckenbach-Sawyers explain, "Ecstasy, which often accompanies visualization and meditative states, is a time-honored method of transcending our ordinary consciousness and a way of helping us arrive at insights we could not attain otherwise" (28). Poetry transcends ordinary experience and operates at a heightened level of consciousness. Charles Ansell states more generally, "Creative art is an experience of transcendence. Psychologically, art which transcends the experience witnessed by the mind presses deeper into states of feeling not immediately accessible to consciousness" (20). Poetry provides an invaluable tool for pressing into unconscious states specifically because of its minute attention to internal and external details, and its condensed mode of expression. Leedy writes, "Poetry encourages patients to explore their feelings, to feel more deeply, to extend their emotional range yet to discover patterns, also, of control and fulfillment" (70). By tapping into our unconscious, poetry helps lead us toward a deeper and more honest understanding of our selves.

On one level, poetry operates through Freud's primary processes. These include the capacities for metaphoric and metonymic association, the primitive energies and emotions of the body, and visual orientation (*V* 601-606). In *Interpretation of Dreams* Freud describes dreams as regressive to the pre-linguistic, unconscious primary processes. Much of Freud's concept of the dream work also applies to poetic expression. Lacan relates Freud's dream work concepts of condensation and displacement to the literary devices of metaphor and metonymy (*Écrits* 152). Freud argues that dreams

function primarily through imagistic representations (*V* 339-340), much in the same way that poets seek symbolic or metaphoric images to reflect their inner states. As in the final stage of Freud's dream work, poets must translate their inner experience into an intelligible linguistic form. A recent statistical analysis by Sophie Schwartz revealed that the language patterns of dream reports resemble those of literary works (28). If we consider Freud's concepts of the primary and secondary processes, we see that the primary processes involving elements such as emotion, image, metaphor, and rhythm contain many of the same elements found in poetry, but like the final re-creation of the dream work, poetry must ultimately operate at the level of secondary processes of language and thought since it is a conscious craft. In poetry, we find, perhaps, the closest manifestation of primary processes in the secondary process of language. Through poetic language, we can begin to make the unconscious primal self manifest in conscious thought. This is the major goal of Freudian psychotherapy, and a crucial step in attaining a renewed self.

Like Freud's dream work, poetic language contains regressive elements that return us to our primal inner selves. Freud describes three types of regression occurring in dreams that we may also apply to poetry: topical, temporal, and formal. These concepts offer theoretical insights into how poetic expression functions and how we experience it. Topical regression explains how we build from our experiences and use our imaginative capability to create new experiences in the dream world. In our real world experience during waking life, we experience the world through sensory perceptions that are stored as memories. These memories become the foundation of our

character with its conscious and unconscious elements. In dream life, these elements of our character—thoughts, motivations, actions, opinions, desires, etc.—build from stored memories that become fragmented or otherwise altered by the dream work to create a new sensory experience in dreams. In the same way, a poet regresses into a more sensory oriented state when creating poetry by paying careful attention to internal personal images and emotions. This regressive looking inward through which poetry functions also stimulates the reader's own personal images and evokes emotional reactions.

Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull explain, through neuroscience, the nature of the visual aspects of the dreaming mind, which relate to Freud's concept of topical regression. If we accept the strong correlation between dreaming and the imagination—which neuroscientific evidence would appear to support—this research can only teach us more about the imaginative mind and the poetic function. "The visual regions of the brain," they explain, "can be regarded as involving three hierarchically organized zones" (209). The primary visual area simply takes in visual input. Damage to this zone causes blindness, but has no effect on dreaming. The second zone is dedicated to specialized tasks such as recognition of color, motion, and objects. Damage to this zone gives rise to complex visual disorders in both dreams and waking life. The third, and highest, zone deals with abstract aspects of visualization involved in arithmetic, writing, construction, and other higher spatial oriented functions. Damage to this zone effects visual cognition, but has no effect on basic perception. However, damage to this zone produces a total cessation of dreaming (210). This implies that our visual input systems are reversed in dreaming. Just as in Freud's topical regression, our perception input focuses internally in

dreams, rather than externally as in waking life. This may offer us some insight into the biological functioning of the imaginative mind which involves a similar type of regressive looking inward.

Temporal regression deals with issues of desire, motivation, and development. In earliest pre-infancy, the child developing in the womb lives in a state of pure pleasure and security where the maternal body satisfies all needs. As Sandor Ferenczi explains, “there is a stage in human development that realizes this ideal of a being subservient only to pleasure. . . . I mean the period of human life passed in the womb. In this state the human being lives as a parasite of the mother’s body” (218). The infant has the omnipotent feeling “that one has all that one wants, and that one has nothing left to wish for” (219). The infant in the womb lives free of anxiety. Upon birth, “The first wish-impulse of the child, therefore, cannot be any other than to regain this situation” (221). After birth, infantile sexuality develops as motivated primarily by seeking a return to this state of pleasure. As one matures, the primary pleasure principle must reconcile itself to external reality. In this important step, one must realize the need for inhibition and control of infantile desires in order to function socially and to attain a realistic optimal amount of pleasure. In regression, we lose this inhibition and control and return to a state of pure pleasure seeking. While neither poetry nor dreams simply represent the wish fulfillments that Freud saw dreams as, the practice of creating and reading poetry does involve a seeking of gratification on numerous levels, as well as potentially getting us in touch with our primal desires in all of their complexity.

Freud makes the connection between works of art and the two mental processes explicit in his essay “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning.” He refers to the “unconscious mental processes” as “the older, primary processes, the residues of a phase of development in which they were the only kind of mental process” (*XII* 219). Phantasying is a primary process free from the restraints of the secondary processes. This activity “begins already in children’s play, and later, [is] continued as day-dreaming” in adult life (222). In “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” Freud makes this connection between the play of early childhood and the regressive creative writing of adulthood explicit saying that “every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own” (*IX* 143). Freud also makes the link between creative writing and dreaming explicit in this essay saying that “our dreams at night are nothing else than phantasies”—the type that creative artists make use of (148). Of course, with the regression to phantasy and poetic form comes conflict and contradiction.

The primary and secondary processes conflict on multiple levels: emotion versus thought, poetic versus more straightforward modes of expression, and motivations of pleasure seeking versus the reality principle. Freud sees art, in all of its forms, as the place where these conflicting mental processes can find some common ground. In terms of the pleasure/reality conflict, Freud says that “art brings about a reconciliation between the two principles in a peculiar way. An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction” (*IX* 224). Artists express the dissatisfaction with the external world of the reality

principle—a dissatisfaction with the renunciation of primal urges. Art reaches people, according to Freud, because this dissatisfaction is universal to all humans. In this sense, art offers recognition and potentially greater awareness of the human condition, but also allows for a gratification of primal instincts that we typically repress.

Formal Regression: Rhythm and Metaphor

Formal regression, which takes place in dreams as well as in poetry, deals specifically with primary and secondary processes of expression. Like dreams, poetry contains images, but poetry also has a musical quality that separates it further from ordinary language. Alice Jones writes, “Music summons feeling, and in a poem, so much more can be said, especially in the white spaces around the lines” (693). We may relate the musical, extra-verbal aspects of poetry to what Daniel Stern calls vitality affects, which make up the earliest pre-linguistic modes of communication between parent and child, in order to better comprehend poetry’s ability to express primal emotions. Vitality affects are communicated through physical gestures which infants take in visually, as well as musical qualities of expression like tone and rhythm, which can express visceral states without a formal signifying system. Like visceral experience, however, vitality affects do not necessarily fall into specific categories of emotion. Stern describes them through examples such as “a ‘rush’ of anger or of joy, a perceived flooding of light, an accelerating sequence of thoughts, an unmeasurable wave of feeling evoked by music” (55). We witness vitality affects in the nonsensical sounds infants make that imitate the rhythms and tones of adult language. Sounds of this type, along with other common

infantile modes of verbal expression such as crying or laughter, provide the foundation of the earliest social interactions. What is important for development is that adults respond to the sounds or expressions of infants with exaggerated vocal and physical responses that reflect the infant's own vitality affects. These provide a foundational prototype for social interactions. The rewards of these earliest, primal interactions are essential for providing children the motivation to develop language, with its promises of greater and deeper social interactions. The promised rewards of greater and more meaningful social interactions, along with the frustrations that come with inadequate social functioning, drive one to develop formal language. The achievement of language enables one to function socially and offers one the sense of both a social and cultural identity.

Poetry combines the characteristics of both formal language and the more tonal and rhythmic elements of primal expression. Stern relates vitality affects to artistic expression, or what he calls "artistic style" (159). When experiencing art, Stern says, "you can experience the level of intensity and quality of feeling that is occurring in the other and that may be elicited in yourself" (160). We find the expression of vitality affects in poetic language rewarding beyond what we find in ordinary prose. Vaughan finds vitality affects invaluable in her therapeutic practice for communicating with her patients. Tonal elements of communication that hearken back to infantile expression modes provide the therapist with important personal connections with her adult patients (94). Jones writes, "Those earliest forms of language, the infant's coos and babbles, are not very far in the background of every poem" (690). This regressive, tonal quality of poetry makes it better able to capture emotions and convey them to the reader. "What

poetry can do,” writes Jones, “that nothing else can is this: swallow the reader, enter us, take us backstage of everyday reality into the realm of what we feel and experience and can never say” (696-697).

Rhythm is perhaps the regressive element most unique to poetry over other literary forms. Joost Meerloo writes that “the rhyme and rhythm of poetry often have a much more compelling force than the actual meaning of the words” (59). In the rhythm of poetic language, we find the necessary road to regression. Meerloo explains:

It is sometimes a great struggle in psychotherapy to liberate a patient from such compulsive self-imitations and repetitions; and without a therapeutic regression to the origin of this ancient language of rhythms, the patient will fail in his attempt at self-recollection. For this reason poetry, as a well-chosen form of communication, is a welcome adjunct to psychotherapy. (65)

Regression allows us to break with our habitual self. The vehicle of rhythm brings us back to the primal self, the original source of life, from which a new self may emerge. Christensen describes how rhythm reflects the movement of our own bodies, as well as the interior of the maternal body from which we came (90; 97). Poetry also lends itself to oration; it gives us the sounds of our own voices and the emotional tones they carry (92-93). Meerloo expands on the primal and ubiquitous characteristics of rhythm even further. In relation to the body, Meerloo explains, “Breathing, of course, has its distinct rhythms, as do the intestines, the heart and the muscles, the molecules and even the intratomic particles” (55). He also attempts to explain the infant’s receptiveness within the uterus to the sounds of the maternal body: “the knowledge that amniotic fluid is a better

sound conductor than air, makes the existence of a prenatal syncopated rhythmic sound world more than likely” (55).

The ability of poetry, through rhythm, to return us to this joyous state of omnipotence in the womb gives it a soothing aspect, which makes it particularly adept at helping one to cope with negative emotions. Meerloo explains, “rhythm means recognition and responding to something familiar. Such preoccupation with familiar messages can be used as a defense against feelings of pain” (63). Rhythm reflects the familiar in the body and the voice, but poetic rhythm also reflects our external experience of time, seasons, and various functions of the natural world like winds and tides (54). The rhythms and tones of poetic language draw us into a comfortable, pleasurable realm of primary processes, while offering intellectual and rational reflection on human experience. Poetry can deal with painful, or otherwise emotionally charged, subjects through musical language experienced as beautiful by the reader. This quality of poetry allows one to recognize, accept, and ultimately transcend various negative thought processes and emotional states. Poetic rhythm connects us more deeply with ourselves and with our environment.

Metaphor, as a formally regressive primary process and as the central literary device in poetry, provides another significant therapeutic tool for readers. Lacan relates metaphor to Freud’s concept of condensation, which, Lacan says, “envelopes poetry’s own properly traditional function” (*Écrits* 152). To Freud, a dream as a whole is a condensing of thoughts and feelings into an imaginary scenario. Likewise, a poem attempts to capture human emotions and images in order to express them in a more or

less cohesive and coherent whole. Metaphor is particularly adept at dealing with the pre-symbolic, primal elements of self because it functions mainly through the image in order to make meaning inexact. Metaphors open themselves up to multiple meanings when read, just as condensations in dreams branch out when interpreted. For example, a metaphor such as “my heart is a ball of fire” is open to various interpretations. It could mean that the speaker is a passionate being, in love, angry, in pain, or perhaps experiencing acid reflux. Following such a branch of associations opens up a text and allows for more personal interpretations that in turn give insights into the reader as much as they do the poem.

In order to show that meaning, or a signifier, is always inexact, Lacan describes metaphor as a substitution of one signifier for another (*Écrits* 155-156). To Lacan, every signifier is a metaphor in a sense because meaning operates through a system of symbols that cannot accurately capture human experience such as the feelings of the body or the images of the mind. Metaphors used in poetry embrace the inadequacy of language. Lacan says that “a definition of poetic style could be to say that it begins with metaphor, and that where metaphor ceases poetry ceases also” (*Seminar III* 218). Lacan uses metaphor to discuss the disconnect between human experience and expression due to the limits in the symbolic. Metaphor, he says, rips “the signifier from its lexical connections” (218). In Lacan, however, this acceptance of inner conflict that comes from an acknowledgement of the nature of the symbolic is the very thing that opens up the subject and allows for renewal. Poetry gives us the best linguistic form through which to

explore our inner selves because it opens the self up to new and multiple possibilities of meaning.

Lacan uses metaphor in part to discuss the fragmentation of experience, but others have found the concept useful for its potential to find wholeness and cohesion. Akhtar refers to the primary processes of poetry as “libidinally gratifying.” “Common to all these literary devices,” he writes, “is the aim at fusion, linkage and bringing things together” (235). Metaphor defragments by condensing the multiplicities of the self. As in Freud’s conceptualization of condensation in the dream work, poetry uses metaphor to bring together various disjointed thoughts, emotions, images, words, and experiences into a single image or episode (*V* 279-284). Ansell explains, “The poem and the unconscious share a major feature: both are represented in compressed form” (13). Metaphor works to integrate the various registers, and offers a pathway to the unconscious. Metaphor, Gorelick writes, “enlarges, it connects, it shatters old frameworks” (123). Locating a meaningful metaphor in poetry gives a reader a means to express emotional states. The unspeakable, pre-symbolic finds its symbolic expression in poetry through metaphor, and this achievement brings with it the possibility of renewal. Jones writes, “what is most important about poetry is how it approaches the unsayable” (684). Mazza discusses metaphor within the symbolic/ceremonial component of his theoretical framework for poetry therapy. When subjects attempt to deal with difficult emotions, such as depression suffered from a loss, metaphor can help them to connect their inexplicable, interior reality with a symbolic exterior reality (40-41). Thus, the reading of an elegiac poem may offer a subject dealing with loss a variety of benefits by providing recognition or newfound

awareness to difficult emotional states through a condensed image or narrative.

Metaphor in poetry gives the reader a concrete means of expression for what had hitherto remained unexpressed. While the regression to metaphoric expression in poetry draws attention to the limitations of language, it also offers the best mode within the symbolic to express and understand human experience.

Thomas Ogden recognizes the centrality of metaphor for attaining self awareness in the analytic process. Ogden says that the distance between the inexpressible and the expressible is “mediated by metaphor, by the sounds and cadences of words and sentences, and by images and gestures” (1). He ties metaphor specifically to emotional experience and its communication. “Metaphor is an integral part of the attempt of two people to convey to one another a sense of what each is feeling (like) in the present moment and what one’s past experience felt like in the past (as viewed from the vantage point of the present)” (26). Ogden sees metaphor, along with the state of reverie that brings it about, as essential to the analytic process. “As analysts,” he writes, “we are also involved in learning and teaching the limits of metaphor” (26). Poetic language, along with being the primary vehicle of metaphor, pushes these limits to the extreme. To Ogden, metaphor and its importance for attaining self awareness are essential in finding and creating personal identity. “Without metaphor, we are stuck in a world of surfaces that cannot be reflected upon. . . . Metaphor is a form of language in which I describe ‘me’ so that ‘I’ might see myself” (36). Metaphor creates the self-aware, renewed, creative subject through poetic language based on image and analogy. This language allows for access to the primal self, while maintaining control and mastery of it. Ogden

says, “In a very significant way, analytic work with patients who operate in a world of concrete (nonmetaphorical) experience involves an effort to help the patient come to life in a new experiential form—a form characterized by a self awareness mediated in language” (37). One of our goals as teachers of poetry should be to use the potential of poetic language in such a way that we lead our students to greater awareness and deeper experience.

Freud points out that the “three forms of regression [topical, temporal, and formal] are, however, basically one, and in the majority of cases they coincide, for what is older in point of time is at the same time formally primitive and, in the psychic topography, nearer to the perception end” (*V* 548). In each of these models, the regression through which poetry operates gets us in touch with our more primal selves, and enhances self awareness. Stainbrook is critical of this approach to poetry as regressive because it can limit the achievement of growth. We want not only to bring back the repressed or forgotten, we also want to bring in new things. “The learning of consciousness is achieved both retrospectively and prospectively,” he writes (10). We must keep in mind that regression provides an opportunity for the opening up of the self, not a reversion to a prior state that has its own limitations. Regression only serves a meaningful purpose when it leads one toward awareness and renewal.

Chapter V

Regression, Renewal, and Reparation in Lacan and Kristeva

Lacan and the Poem as Analyst

“In poetry, as in psychoanalysis,” Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy explain in their book on Lacan, “language is pushed to its limits, and becomes a struggle with the inexpressible” (199). Poetry functions much like the speech of the analytic process, in which speech is loosened so that desire may make itself manifest. Desire subverts the rigid, imaginary ego that limits truth and subjectivity. Through poetry, we escape the code of normal speech and discover a new definition of being for ourselves. “There is poetry,” according to Lacan, “whenever writing introduces us to a world other than our own and also makes it become our own” (*Seminar III* 78). In essence, poetry imposes upon us the Otherness of language—what Lacan calls the symbolic order—but also allows us to find our unique place within that Otherness. Lacan places poetry in the dual roles of both the analyst—introducing the true nature of our subjectivity by effecting desire—and the fully realized analysand—realizing our own capacity for creative subjectivity—though, for our purposes, these roles are essentially the same. Ideally, analysis prepares the analysand to accept the role of interpreter. Bruce Fink explains, “Once patients begin to wonder about the why and wherefore of their words, thoughts, and fantasies, begin to formulate questions about them, their desire is engaged in the analysis” (25). Lacan refers to the “true termination of an analysis” as “the kind that

prepares you to become an analyst.” The goal for both the analyst and analysand is to confront “the reality of the human condition” (*Seminar VII* 303). Poetry forces such a confrontation—a confrontation with human lack and desire through language.

Lacan calls poetry “the creation of a subject adopting a new order of symbolic relations to the world” (*Seminar III* 78). Poetry moves us away from the complaisant, imaginary *moi* concept of ourselves—the ego, where our desire is bounded in the other—toward the “creative subjectivity” of *je*, where the subject, freed from the desire of the other, may locate his own desire through the loosening of speech. “[C]reative subjectivity,” Lacan insists, “has not ceased in its struggle to renew the never-exhausted power of symbols in the human exchange that brings them to the light of day” (*Écrits* 71). Language defines us, and imposes its own limitations, but only through language can we be freed from a false, imaginary concept of ourselves. In the symbolic, we escape the oppressive identity, rooted in the other, established during the mirror stage. But the symbolic establishes its own law, and brings its own limitations. In poetry, we subvert the law that imprisons our experience in cliché, where we fall victim to the master signifiers imposed on us through social and parental expectations. Literature is both the law and its transgression. For Lacan, the existence of the former and the potential of the latter are both essential.

Lacan believes in the power of poetry, which in large part explains his appeal to those of us in literary studies. We find value in Lacan’s work for the same reason we find value in other critics or literary theorists: because he helps us to become better readers. But what exactly is a Lacanian reading of a poetic text? Lacan states:

Commenting on a text is like doing an analysis, . . . One of the things we must guard most against is to understand too much, to understand more than what is in the discourse of the subject, . . . I would go as far as to say that it is on the basis of a kind of refusal of understanding that we push open the door to analytic understanding. (*Seminar I* 73)

How can one achieve this analytic understanding, which is also “a kind of refusal of understanding,” when dealing with a text? To decipher the above quotation, as it relates to commenting on a text, we must first understand the goal (and limits) of Lacanian analysis, and, second, we must consider the role of the analyst in attaining these goals, since Lacan clearly positions the reader—here—in the role of the analyst.

However, the inadequacy of Lacan’s analogy should be fairly obvious. The reader/author, or even the reader/text, relationship is not the same as the interchange that occurs between the analyst and the analysand. Still, a significant relationship does exist in both cases, and an exploration of the parallels will help us better understand the value of reading and interpreting poetry for psychoanalytic benefits. The goal of Lacanian analysis is, essentially, to recognize the truth about desire through speech, though one can never articulate the whole truth of desire. The ultimate truth for Lacan is the lack of truth. The ultimate object of desire—what Lacan calls the phallus—does not exist. Lacan calls desire “the metonymy of the lack of being” (*Écrits* 259). “Desire,” he says elsewhere, “a function central to all human experience, is the desire for nothing nameable” (*Seminar II* 223). Fink explains the metonymic nature of desire: “desire moves from one object to the next[;] . . . desire involves a constant slippage or

movement. Desire is an end in itself: it seeks only more desire, not fixation on a specific object” (26). The realization of these truths about desire comes about through the loosening of speech, and through poetic language. Of course, the carefully crafted language of the poet has little in common in its approach to the free-association that takes place in the analytic situation; however, I maintain that one can read both poetry and analytic discourse the same way. Consider Lacan’s comments on James Joyce’s writing:

It is because the signifiers fit together, combine, and concertina . . . that something is produced by way of meaning that may seem enigmatic, but is clearly what is closest to what we analysts, thanks to analytic discourse, have to read—slips of the tongue. It is as slips that they signify something, in other words, that they can be read in an infinite number of ways. But it is precisely for that reason that they are difficult to read, are read awry, or not read at all. But doesn’t this dimension of ‘being read’ suffice to show that we are in the register of analytic discourse?

What is at stake in analytic discourse is always the following—you give a different reading to the signifiers that are enunciated than what they signify.

(Seminar XX 37)

It is in poetic language that this slippage most blatantly occurs. But, of even greater significance in the above quotation: poetic language serves as an initiation into analytic discourse. Lacan implies, accurately, that the text itself can take on the role of the analyst—that poetry can function to bring about the kind of recognition and renewal that takes place in the analytic process.

Here, we must pose the Oscar Wildean question: are we interpreting the text, or is the text interpreting us? As Robert Penn Warren states, “in one sense . . . the reader does not interpret the poem but the poem interprets the reader” (212). Certainly, Lacan would not want the kind of transference—which is more like introjection—that takes place within ego psychology to take place with a literary text. When Lacan speaks of “understanding too much,” he is warning about this kind of ego transference where “the subject reconcentrates his own imaginary ego essentially in the form of the analyst’s ego” (*Seminar II* 245). “Any conception of analysis,” Lacan explains, “that is articulated . . . to defining the end of the analysis as identification with the analyst, by that very fact makes an admission of its limits” (*Seminar XI* 271). Likewise, we do not want students to simply become the poem, but to find themselves and an empathetic other through the poem. Lacanian analysis seeks to defy limitations and open up possibilities for the subject. The analyst does not want to become the other of the mirror stage for the analysand. The analyst, instead, should be positioned as the “cause” while the analysand moves along in analysis. Fink explains, “When the analyst is viewed as the cause of the analysand’s unconscious formations, the analyst can be considered a ‘real’ object for the analysand (which is denoted by the expression ‘object *a*’)” (38-39). As object *a*, the analyst can be located within the analysand while maintaining otherness. The analyst does not want to stand as an ideal ego; the analyst, instead, seeks to bring about (cause) a new psychoanalytical perspective that is attuned to the unconscious and to desire.

Likewise with a text—we do not want the text to validate us (though it can provide valuable recognition), nor is it our job to validate it, but to use it to open doors.

Like Lacan's object *a*, the text should set desire in motion. After all, what use is a new code if it simply substitutes one authority for another? True poetry should draw attention to its own lack. It should be a failure of sorts, because, as poets and other creative writers often point out, language ultimately proves inadequate to capturing meaning. Warren explains that "the poet fails, as fail he must in some degree, in the exercise of his creative control and second, in so far as each reader must, as a result of his own history and nature, bring to the poem a different mass of experience, strength of intellect, and intensity of feeling" (212). Poetry should serve as a cause of desire that the reader uses to open up possibilities within the symbolic code. The reader should use poetry not to define the self, but to recognize the artifice of a certain type of clichéd definition of self. Poetry destroys this clichéd self without creating a new self in its own image; instead it allows for the possibility of renewal. This renewed self will be one with the capacity to recognize the truth of desire. As we locate desire in a text, we move closer to our own desire. Lacan explains,

Psychoanalytic experience . . . exploits the poetic function of language to give [one's] desire its symbolic mediation. May this experience finally enable you to understand that the whole reality of its effects lies in the gift of speech; for it is through this gift that all reality has come to man and through its ongoing action that he sustains reality. (*Écrits* 103)

We are of the symbolic, but we can operate creatively in the symbolic; this is the poetic function. If speech, the act of language, is a gift, as Lacan insists, then poetry makes the

most of this gift. We receive this gift in its fullest sense every time we read and interpret poetry—every time we engage in poetic language.

The relationship between the text and the reader provides our real concern; as literary teachers and critics, we draw attention to the dynamics of this relationship and help to guide it along. Lacan's own readings of literary works—including "The Purloined Letter," *Hamlet*, and *Antigone*—serve as models of how to comment on a text constructively for the purposes of psychoanalysis. Jonathan Scott Lee explains, "Lacan explicitly attacks the kind of psychoanalytic criticism that reduces works of literature to symptoms of their authors' neuroses" (108-109). We cannot legitimately play analyst based on how a text relates to an author's biography; we can only analyze the text and its effects, not the person who composed it. "Rather," Lee continues, "it is essential that the analyst come to understand the special character of the relation between the work and its audience" (109). This is consistent with Lacan's view of the analyst as a kind of empty mirror, a blank slate for the analysand. We must be careful here not to confuse this with the *méconnaissance* or misunderstanding of the self that takes place in the mirror during the mirror stage. Lacan uses literary texts mainly in order to illustrate and illuminate his notion of the truth. He favors texts that, if read correctly—if read through the lens of Lacanian analysis—could effect the kind of psychoanalytic renewal in the reader that analysis strives for. "It is thus indisputable," he says, "that the analyst can play on the power of symbols by evoking them in a calculated fashion in the semantic resonances of his remarks" (*Écrits* 80). Poetry, in the role of analyst, can do just this. Lacan continues by emphasizing, "This is surely the path by which a return to the use of symbolic effects

can proceed in a renewed technique of interpretation” (81). Lacan encourages the use and study of poetic texts for the analyst. “To be taught and to be learned,” he says, “this technique would require a profound assimilation of the resources of a language, especially those that are concretely realized in poetic texts” (81). Poetry, as analyst, moves the analysand toward the position of the interpreter—the analyst of poetic language who can realize desire in the text and in the self. Just as the analyst molds the analysand into an analyst, poetry can operate to create poets—people who recognize the clichéd language of the master signifiers that seek to define and confine them; the poet seeks to transcend the confinement of language through creativity. The poet, in this sense, refers not strictly to one who writes poetry, but to a renewed, and ever renewing, approach to life.

The first step toward this ultimate goal of becoming the interpreter and creator is to abandon the imaginary ego created during the mirror stage, and to recognize one’s position as subject in the symbolic order. Lacan explains the imaginary nature of the ego: “There’s no doubt that the real I is not the ego . . . the ego isn’t the I, isn’t a mistake, in the sense in which classical doctrine makes of it a partial truth. It is something else—a particular object within the experience of the subject. Literally, the ego is an object—an object which fills a certain function which we here call the imaginary function” (*Seminar II* 44). The ego provides us with a false notion of ourselves, rooted in the image of the other, as a whole being. This ego forms during the mirror stage where a *méconnaissance*, or misrecognition, of the self takes place in order to maintain an imaginary notion of wholeness and control. The awkward child associates himself with the image of

wholeness in the mirror and the image of the parent; these become the foundation for the imaginary ego, which gains support in the symbolic through certain master signifiers. Lacan differentiates between *moi* (the imaginary ego) and *je* (the subject in the symbolic order). The ego is a rigid, false self; the subject is a more genuine realization of self, though determined by the Otherness of the symbolic. But the subject is not rigid; the symbolic allows for play within its confines. Lacan explains,

All I need do is think about myself [moi]—I am eternal. From the moment I think about myself [moi], no destruction of me is possible. But when I say *I*, [*je*] not only is destruction possible, but at every instant there is creation. Naturally, it isn't absolute, but for us, if a future is possible, it is because there is this possibility of creation. And if this future isn't, likewise, purely imaginary, it is because our *I* is carried forward by the entire discourse which came before.

(Seminar II 292)

We can only locate our true selves—selves essentially without truth—within this symbolic realm—the realm of the poetic function.

One might correctly say—to play on Lacan's phrasing—that reading a poetic text is like being analyzed insofar as it can put desire in play and lead one to discover one's own desire. I am not proposing that browsing works of poetry over a period of time in any way might serve as a substitute for the analytic process. But we can see the parallels when we examine how poetry illustrates a struggle with desire through language and, in doing so, operates on the reader to encourage a genuine recognition of the subject in relation to the world. With its element of surprise, poetry escapes the clichéd master

signifiers that determine one as a generic being. Poetry helps destroy this false or illusory self through creativity. For creative destruction to come about, we must look for alternatives to the master discourse that stifles creativity and encourages complacency. Since language, to a large degree, determines our subjectivity, this reconstitution of our identity can only come about through a creative and poetic use of language. First, we must recognize that we are determined by the Other—language, parents, authority—in order to recognize how our identity is falsely created. Poets, according to Lacan, already recognize how the language through which we define ourselves does not belong to us (*Seminar II* 7). Poets recognize the inadequacy of language—the lack in the Other. But poets also recognize the need for creativity and the need for language to create subjectivity. As Bracher explains, poetic language moves us toward possession of the phallus (that is, closer to filling the innate lack of being that we sense in the other and in ourselves). This will ultimately lead to a symbolic castration—or fragmentation of the self—because there is no absolute signifier. “We approach the recognition that the absolute truth about being is that there is no absolute truth, and that the absolute signifier of being is that which signifies the lack of such a signifier” (“Rouzing” 195). This recognition is part of the goal of Lacanian analysis, and an important first step in discovering the nature of reality and our real identity—in as much as such a thing is possible.

Kristeva's Semiotic Renewal

Kristeva helps us to understand both the drive toward linguistic expression and poetry's subversion of language. She adopts Freud's concepts of primary and secondary processes specifically for the purpose of discussing poetic language as a means of regressing to the core self. To Kristeva, this regression becomes revolutionary, challenging the self and the culture in order to bring about change. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva introduces the concepts of the semiotic and the symbolic—the two modalities of language. Kristeva's symbolic is similar to that of Lacan—a paternal realm of structured language. She explains elsewhere, “The symbolic (*le symbolique*), as opposed to the semiotic, is this inevitable attribute of meaning, sign, and the signified object” (*Desire* 134). The semiotic is the visceral motivation behind language—a linguistic drive discharge. Kristeva associates the semiotic with the chora, which is the realm of the subject's inter-connectedness with the maternal body; this includes the womb as well as stages of infancy before separation is established. Kristeva explains:

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body—always already involved in a semiotic process—by family and social structures. In this way drives, which are ‘energy’ charges as well as ‘psychical’ marks, articulate what we call a chora: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. (*Revolution* 25)

The poet seeks to attain a link with the instinctual body through language and form. Instinctual drives provide the motivation for poetic expression, while poetic expression makes these drives manifest in the symbolic. Thus, poetry brings us back to the long forgotten core of our inner being, getting us in touch with the unconscious and with our primary interdependence.

The semiotic chora manifests itself most prominently in poetic language, which Kristeva calls “a resumption of the functioning characteristic of the semiotic chora within the signifying device of language” (50). Poetic language offers a challenge to formal symbolic structures—to meaning in general—and offers a regressive return to the chora, and to the maternal. Kristeva stresses the destructive, violent nature of this semiotic return. “In ‘artistic’ practices,” she writes, “the semiotic . . . is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic” (50). As the bodily drives invade language, the system of language and meaning begins to break down. In this sense, destructive impulses are manifest in the semiotic’s invasion of the symbolic. However, the symbolic is also destructive toward the semiotic for Kristeva in the way Lacan posited: the move into the symbolic comes with the separation from the maternal, and imposes the primal lack in the subject. Kristeva explains, however, that these “two heterogeneous operations . . . are, reciprocally and inseparably, preconditions for each other” (66). The semiotic gives rise to the symbolic, and the symbolic gives the semiotic its necessary vehicle in language. Kristeva insists that the mutual exclusivity of the two is relative. “Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic,” she explains, “no signifying system he produces can be either ‘exclusively’ semiotic or ‘exclusively’ symbolic, and is instead necessarily

marked by an indebtedness to both” (24). For Kristeva, as for Lacan, any discussion of the subject must involve a discussion of the linguistic function. The semiotic and symbolic are interdependent as well as antagonistic to each other—a representation of the human subject in conflict.

Kristeva’s “thetic” refers to the differentiation that allows for one to move from the semiotic to the symbolic in order to posit a separate identity. The thetic phase sets up difference or opposition of self to other, and allows for the entrance into the symbolic at the expense of the safety of the chora. This is the move from narcissism to the social world of love objects. It begins with Lacan’s mirror stage where the subject recognizes the other, and reaches completion with the resolution of the Oedipus complex where the subject must separate from the other and enter the social realm. The mirror stage first posits the subject as outside of the other—the mother, in particular—setting up the notion of difference essential to the structure of language. This notion of difference also becomes a necessary first step in the separation from the mother via the threat of castration during the Oedipus complex (though Kristeva would later abandon the castration complex as a motivational force for language and replace it with the imaginary father who offers a rewarding symbolic). This concludes the thetic phase and the entrance into the symbolic through a violent process of separation from the maternal chora brought about by the threat of castration from the paternal figure. The breach of the thetic occurs in the semiotic return to the maternal chora through poetic language. Kristeva explains, “the signifying economy of poetic language is specific in that the semiotic is not only a constraint as is the symbolic, but it tends to gain the upper hand at

the expense of the thetic and predicative constraints of the ego's judging consciousness" (*Desire* 134). Poetic language operates across this thetic boundary as it returns to the maternal semiotic through the symbolic, getting one in touch with the instinctual body that society forces one to repress.

Kristeva deals with the maternal throughout her work. Regression seeks a return to the maternal realm where a primal unity could take place. The semiotic in poetic language reveals the subject's "oceanic longing" as it pushes toward an annihilation of being by challenging symbolic and social structures. But the maternal also serves as the source of language—the very precondition of the symbolic. Kristeva, following Lacan, points to Freud's *fort-da* game as an instance of the symbolic moving away from the maternal where the child seeks to master separation from the mother by replacing her image with words (42). Here, as Lacan has pointed out, the child finds refuge in the symbolic from the overwhelming dependence on the mother. "Rejection, or expenditure," writes Kristeva, "constitutes the key moment shattering unity, yet it is unthinkable outside unity, for rejection presupposes thetic unity" (147). Only through the thetic phase can the subject locate itself as independent of the maternal. With the entrance into the symbolic comes a *jouissance* of separation. This thetic separation from the maternal, introducing the concepts of presence and absence, as well as subject and object, provides the structure for language. In her essay "Stabat Mater" Kristeva makes the connection more explicit: "A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language—and it has always been so" (*Tales* 254). The entrance into the symbolic creates the division between the symbolic and the prior,

maternal semiotic that brings the subject back to “‘instinctual drive’ activity relative to the first structurations (constitution of the body as self) and identifications (with the mother)” (*Desire* 137). The subject in the symbolic cannot simply abandon the maternal. The separation from the chora remains incomplete; the maternal constantly returns, especially in poetic language, but this return offers us a deeper awareness of the inner self and of desire.

“Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother,” Kristeva explains. “On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language . . . maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element . . . poetic language would be for its questionable subject-in-process the equivalent of incest” (136). Poetic language, in this sense, transgresses the ultimate taboo of the paternal social structure. Kristeva says, “The very practice of art necessitates reinvesting the maternal chora so that it transgresses the symbolic order” (*Revolution* 65). “The artist introduces into the symbolic order an asocial drive, one not yet harnessed by the thetic” (70-71). Through art and literature, the social code is destroyed—but this comes about as a creative destruction. Where the social code begins to crumble, the primal psychic space of the subject reemerges. Literature, in particular, to Kristeva represents “the very place where social code is destroyed and renewed” (*Desire* 132). Literature challenges the symbolic in order to put something more essential to the subject in its place. “The artist sketches out a kind of second birth. Subject to death but also to rebirth,” Kristeva explains (*Revolution* 70). As the subject returns to the maternal chora, the rhythmic nature of the

semiotic in poetry parallels the maternal interior. It contains “‘musical’ but also nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations, but, in radical experiment, syntax itself, that guarantee of thetic consciousness” (*Desire* 133). The confining structures of language crumble in poetry; this, to Kristeva, gives it its revolutionary power.

In her early essays on motherhood, “Motherhood According to Bellini” and “Stabat Mater,” Kristeva draws specific parallels to the physical act of birth, as a return to the mother, and artistic creation. Kristeva describes birth as “the reunion of a woman-mother with the body of her mother.” She continues, “The body of her mother is always the same Master-Mother of instinctual drive. . . . By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother” (239). This return to the instinctual body also means a loss of symbolic identity, but this loss, paradoxically, becomes a source of creation. What the artist attains in the creative act, “a woman also attains it (and in our society, especially) through the strange form of split symbolization (threshold of language and instinctual drive, of the ‘symbolic’ and the ‘semiotic’) of which the act of giving birth consists” (240). Kristeva insists that “craftsmen of Western art reveal better than anyone else the artist’s debt to the maternal body and/or motherhood’s entry into symbolic existence—that is, translibidinal *jouissance*, eroticism taken over by the language of art” (243). Art, to Kristeva, occurs when the maternal body invades the symbolic and the subject returns to that unattainable maternal origin that brings about *jouissance* through its very paradox of life and death, pleasure and pain. Though women can attain this *jouissance* in the act of giving birth, men and women alike are driven to create art by this desire. Kristeva

writes, “Motherhood is the fantasy that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory” (*Tales* 234). The recovery of this lost territory, previous to symbolic being, serves as a goal of artistic creation. We revisit this lost territory and potentially experience a kind of rebirth whenever we read poetry

Kristeva’s Symbolic Reparation

Klein describes how the initial move into the world of object love, away from primary narcissism, is toward the father who helps the subject to repair the damaged primary relationship to the mother. Fears of annihilation in the primary relationship lead to a debilitating sense of dependence on the mother and a greedy desire to possess the maternal body for one’s own gratification. Overwhelming feelings of guilt over the maternal relationship may prove equally debilitating. The child must detach from this foundational relationship for fear of over-dependence, though this separation will prove painful. “These conflicting feelings [of the need for love and the need for separation],” Klein explains, “together with the emotional and intellectual growth of the child which enable him to find other objects of interest and pleasure, result in the capacity to transfer love, replacing the first loved person by other people and things” (*Selected* 91). Love, to Klein, is a displacement of the relationship with the primary good object onto people, things, and interests in the social world. As one displaces this primary love onto objects, the emotional intensity of the primary relationship, with its destructive and threatening elements, decreases. Klein writes of the subject, “because his feelings towards these new people are less intense, his drive to make reparation, which may be hampered if the

feelings of guilt are over-strong, can now come more fully into play” (93). This increased capacity for reparation allows object relations to flourish so as to continue increasing a sense of love and goodness in the self.

Kristeva’s conceptual system of poetic language derives a great deal from Klein’s model of creativity as reparation. We might refer to what takes place in Kristeva’s realm of the poetic as “symbolic reparation.” In Kristeva’s work beginning in the early 1980s, we begin to see a stress on the dangerous anxieties of the maternal realm and the reparative capacities of the symbolic. In 1982’s *Tales of Love*, Kristeva turns toward the positive psychic benefits of love and the symbolic order. We see a shift in her concept of the poetic as a realm of semiotic renewal to a more blatantly Kleinian view of love and reparation achieved in the symbolic. In *Tales of Love*, with its emphasis on the depressive position, Kristeva discusses the separation from the mother that comes with the entrance into the symbolic in terms of pleasure, as well as pain. The love that must be established in the symbolic realm offers a cure for this pain—symbolic reparation. Real, loving object relations must take place based on the primary narcissistic structure where the subject experiences autonomy within the maternal, good object. Separation from this object leads to emptiness, but love leads to a reparation of objects and self. The image of the loving parent, what Kristeva comes to call the imaginary father, helps us survive the separation that leads to the symbolic. We move away from the state of pure being toward an ever renewing, ever repairing, state of poetic fluidity.

In our narcissistic primal relationship with the mother, we have a pre-disposition for the symbolic that Kristeva calls the imaginary father (22)—a loving parental figure

that serves as a positive object who will guide the subject into the symbolic realm. This concept is essentially that of the good primary object in Klein that provides a foundation for loving relationships throughout life. Kristeva writes, “The subject exists only inasmuch as it identifies with an ideal other who is the speaking other, the other insofar as he speaks” (35). The love of the imaginary father is necessary for the violent evolution toward the symbolic. Kristeva calls love “a death sentence that causes me to be” (36). Though love assists in the murder of the ego and the end of narcissism, Kristeva insists that “one is ill when not loved” (37). One cannot remain in the pre-symbolic where the inability to fulfill the mother’s overwhelming desire would cause the subject to lose itself. Separation from the maternal brings about a feeling of emptiness that reveals itself in the symbolic, but the imaginary father allows us to cope through the reward of love in the world of language and external objects.

Kristeva describes a triangular structure of primary narcissism, which leads to the symbolic, around the basis of three terms in operation prior to the Oedipus complex. The unstable “narcissistic subject” finds himself attracted to his “*primary identification*, which is a father imagined to be loving” (374). This is the imaginary father—the “father of individual prehistory,” the image of the good mother/parent. But the subject is also drawn to the “abject mother”—the bad mother—“a magnet of desire and hatred, fascination and disgust, constituted by the archaic mother who has ceased to be a container of needs but not yet made up into a taboo object of desire” (374). The real father of the symbolic becomes the third party of the Oedipal triangle, but to Kristeva, as opposed to Lacan and Freud, he is not a threatening or castrating figure; as in Klein, he is

a real secondary loving object. Kristeva explains how the father as a third object “allows me to block up that emptiness, to calm it and turn it into a producer of signs, representations, and meanings” (42). Love and language become the reaction and the antidote to the aggression and debilitating paranoid fear of the primal relationship. The symbolic keeps us moving forward—avoids the negative total regression to the mother and to primary narcissism, which could only mean the absolute annihilation of self. Our positive object relations guide us to and maintain us within the symbolic. In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva envisions a talking cure for destructive behavior that must involve loving object relations. Kristeva places love firmly in the symbolic, seeing it as a speech act. “*Love is something spoken,*” she says, “*and it is only that*” (277). In the analytic situation, this comes into play through positive transference. “I speak in favor of imagination as antidote for the crisis,” Kristeva writes, calling imagination “a discourse of transference—of love.” Freud turned love into a cure, she tells us, “not to allow one to grasp a truth, but to provoke a rebirth” (381). The analyst, like the imaginary father, guides individuals through the symbolic so that they may build “their own proper space” and learn “to speak and write themselves” (380). Loving reparation conquers stifling hate and allows the self to be.

Kristeva’s *Black Sun* deals with the dependence on the mother and the pain of separation that leads to depression. Kristeva associates depression not only with the loss of the life instinct but also with a loss of words. The black sun of depression compels one “to silence, to renunciation” (*Black Sun* 3)—the opposite of poetic expression. Kristeva traces the root of depression to the primary lost object. “I can thus discover

antecedents to my current breakdown in a loss,” Kristeva explains in the first person, “death, or grief over someone or something that I once loved. The disappearance of that essential being continues to deprive me of what is most worthwhile in me” (5). The depressed person experiences this loss of the love object as a loss of self and seeks to return to the lost mother “along with other objects of love, first in the imagination, then in words” (6). Kristeva draws attention to the link between the mourning of the good object and creative reparation through art and, ultimately, language.

Kristeva refers to these sometimes obscure lost objects as the “Thing”: “Ever since that archaic attachment the depressed person has the impression of having been deprived of an unnameable, supreme good, of something unrepresentable, that perhaps only devouring might represent, or an invocation might point out, but no word could signify” (13). Here, we see the lost good breast of oral satisfaction along with the bad, devouring breast. The loss of the Thing not only represents the loss of the maternal, but the loss of one’s essence in the real. Kristeva argues that “the ‘primary identification’ with the ‘father in individual prehistory’ would be the means, the link that might enable one to become reconciled with the loss of the Thing” (13). Only the love of the imaginary father, and subjection to the symbolic can help to fill this loss. But the symbolic must ultimately fail in this quest; it can only displace the primary loss endlessly—reparation is not finite and must constantly be enacted.

Separation from the maternal allows the subject to escape maternal desire that would prove overwhelming. Kristeva writes, “For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming

autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity” (27). But, following Klein, Kristeva explains that the maternal object is introjected and the subject feels an internal threat due to matricidal aggression. The mother then becomes the “death-bearer” as the child feels the threat of retaliation. Kristeva takes up the issue of aggression and its link to depressive states, arguing that depression “conceals an aggressiveness towards the lost object” (11). This aggression is experienced as anxiety that one must enter the symbolic to cope with by performing reparation. For the subject to emerge, the mother must be cast aside. Kristeva explains, “Such a mother, who is imagined as indispensable, fulfilling, intrusive, is for that very reason death-bearing” (78). The subject must separate to become an individual being. The fear of the death bearing mother is the fear of one’s own death drive, or one’s internal aggression, that would lead one to non-being. Kristeva follows Klein in seeing this fear as giving rise to life and to language—to the entrance into the symbolic where reparation takes place.

One might argue that Kristeva shifts from a focus on the importance of the maternal realm in the 1970s to the necessity of the symbolic in the 1980s. However, her real focus remains, as it began, on the interaction and conflict between the two. A focus on poetic regression and symbolic reparation in her work reveals the constant ebb and flow, death and rebirth, hate and love, fear and panic, that occurs within the subject operating in and between these realms. A return to the semiotic chora offers a return of repressed desires and phantasies that can guide one toward the self realization that analysis strives for. However, one cannot remain in the maternal realm—that can only lead to depression, silence, and death. The symbolic contains destructive elements itself.

One cannot leave the maternal without experiencing a deep sense of loss. Kristeva eventually incorporates Kleinian theory to envision a loving symbolic realm that serves to compensate for that loss.

Chapter VI

Poetic Integration

Integration and the Three Registers

For Kristeva, Lacan, and others, the realm of the poetic initially destroys and fragments the self. The attainment of deeper awareness brings a traumatic challenge to long held images of self and modes of thinking. If the process of attaining greater awareness fragments the ego, integration is the defragmentation of self. All paradigms of integration involve bringing the unconscious into consciousness, and bringing subsymbolic modes of experience, processing, and expression into verbalization. In the poetic we find the interaction of Freud's primary and secondary processes, Lacan's three registers, and Kristeva's semiotic and symbolic. A poem brings a kind of wholeness to all of our diverse and conflicting experiences as humans. Beyond attaining greater awareness of self and environment, one must integrate this awareness through reflection and expression. Poetry does this. One must also accept new insights, learn to own them, and then apply them to routine life. Poetry, Crootof explains, "helps to lift the cover to a deep well of feelings, which can then be discussed, dealt with, and integrated" (50-51). A new self now begins to emerge, one that attains a sense of unity by integrating the three registers of experience: emotional, imaginary, and symbolic. Stainbrook considers also the relationship of cognition with the three registers: "For evolved and symbolizing man,

cognition as image together with language and logic are inextricably interrelated with feeling” (1-2). One’s thought processes must attain consistency with one’s total experience of the world.

Poetry provides tools for defragmentation by “providing a wholeness of consciousness—an integration of emotion, cognition, and imagery—with which to create and maintain personal meaning” (Stainbrook 11). One of the major benefits of poetry therapy, Stephen Rojcewicz points out, is its promotion of “an integration of basic raw emotions, freedom of expression, and a highly organized poetic structure, allowing primitive feelings and impulses to be placed in perspective, mastered, and expressed in a more constructive manner” (7). The power of poetry lies in the power of symbolic expression itself. When one finds language for thoughts, emotions, and images, one becomes integrated and comes to own them—to own previously unpossessed elements of the self. Poetry offers one the language to match experience. The beauty of poetic language affects one more deeply than conventional language. Levine writes that language “used in a creative way, can regain the symbolic potency that it has lost in everyday conversation” (4). Hynes and Hynes-Berry point out the liberating quality of poetic beauty: “Where beauty is perceived, an integration of self takes place. The integrated personality, by definition, has achieved an ability to *be*—free from the need to possess, to want, to demand for self alone . . . the individual is freed at least momentarily from bondage to the self” (27). The integrated subject has liberated the self from narcissistic structures and from repressive defenses. A self emerges that realizes the potential to recreate, renew, and make positive life-altering changes.

When teaching poetic texts, teachers often find themselves confronted with an insistence on interpretation. Students tend to approach poems by asking, “What does this poem mean?” An alternative approach might ask questions more along the lines of Shoshana Felman’s “how” does the poem mean (119) or, I propose, more specifically, “What does this poem evoke in the reader?” and “How does the poem function to achieve this reaction?” Poetic texts, more than other literary forms, operate across the three registers of mental experience. Poems function through *language* in order to capture and evoke sensory *images* in the mind which capture or evoke *emotional* states. An approach to teaching poetry through the three registers would avoid simply interpreting a poem at the linguistic level of meaning and would instead focus on the poem’s effect on imagination and emotions. The key to this methodology is essentially to approach poetic texts with a consideration of each register. The goal is to come to understand poetic texts in terms of how they use the three registers, and how we experience poetry through the three registers. This approach is not only beneficial for understanding poetry, but also leads students toward deeper mental integration.

Engagement with poetry can aid in integrating one’s self and one’s experiences within emotional, imaginary, and symbolic registers. Academics often write about and teach poetry strictly on a symbolic/cognitive level, but poetry does not operate solely on this level. Teaching students about the three registers provides a beneficial conceptual framework for discussing poetry and how it is both created and experienced. Poetry ultimately functions on the level of the symbolic—on the level of language. But poetry attempts the task of bringing the subsymbolic registers into the symbolic as it avoids

normal or clichéd language and operates through metaphor and other primary processes. The symbolic world, as Ferdinand de Saussure teaches us in his first principle of the linguistic sign, involves language that is arbitrary and does not belong to us (67). The symbolic being functions in the social world by taking part in the culture, but often experiences a disconnection from the sub-symbolic inner world that is more personal and unique. Psychoanalytic therapy seeks the emergence of this more genuine self. Poetry provides an important tool for bringing about this emergence via its challenge to the symbolic.

Providing our students with an explanation of the three registers is important in order for them to better comprehend their own experience of the world, as well as to better understand the poetic function. We can explain the symbolic fairly simply as language and shared culture. The subsymbolic registers are less easily explained. With the imaginary I recall Andrew's explanation of his father's work to Lily in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*: "'think of a table then,' he told her, 'when you're not there'" (23). I tell my students to imagine a table. Then I ask if everyone is picturing a table. Yes, of course. Then I ask them if they are all picturing the same thing. No. Why? Because one's images are personal and never adequately captured in the symbolic. One may also apply this concept to poetry. A poet attempts to convey his or her personal images to a reader, but in doing so evokes images in the reader's mind that will be similar to but also different from those in the poet's mind, or in the minds of other readers. This explains in part why we each experience a particular poem differently. When a poet describes a "many towered Camelot," for example, nearly all readers will picture a place

with many towers, but the exact images evoked in their minds will each have unique characteristics.

The emotional or visceral level of experience is also unique to each individual and beyond adequate expression in the symbolic. We can explain emotions with words like “happy” or “sad” and, because we all have some universal experience of such emotions, we can communicate what we feel to a certain extent. However, one can never fully convey one’s inner emotional state to another. Poetry, through its use of metaphor and images, attempts to get at emotions in a much deeper way than conventional language. When Tennyson writes “my light is low,” for example, we get a deeper, though perhaps also more ambiguous, sense of his depression or his thoughts of mortality than we would through simple expressions like “I am sad” or “death troubles me.” Poetic metaphors express emotions by evoking correlate images in the minds of readers. Readers will tend to respond with emotions similar to what the poet is trying to express; however, a reader’s emotional reaction to a certain image can never be wholly predictable since we will all have different mental associations with specific images.

In the classroom, we can do exercises with poetry that engage students in the imaginary realm. We must begin by pointing out how poetry often functions through analogy and descriptions of images. When examining poems we should focus, at least in part, on what images the poet uses to create the poem. Then we can draw our students’ attention more to their own personal images. One basic exercise, for example, involves students creating their own artistic visualization of a poem on storyboards, and then creating a linguistic description of their visualization. This exercise takes a linguistic

text, translates it into a personal image or a series of them, and then translates the image into a new linguistic text. This engagement with the imaginary serves the function of getting students in touch with their capacity to create images and thus their capacity for creativity. The creative self begins to emerge with its potential for renewal and reparation. In some ways, this simple exercise parallels Freud's concept of dreams, which also gives us a useful sequential model for approaching poetry in terms of the three registers. In Freud's model of dreams, our desires or wishes—the latent content—are disguised by the dream work, which turns them into sensory images in dreams—the manifest content—that we must then turn into language in order not only to communicate the dream to others but also to understand it ourselves. Poetry functions in a similar way: poets find an image or analogy that expresses their inner selves and then translate this image or analogy into language.

Wilma Bucci makes a useful revision of Freud's model of dreams through her multiple code theory. Bucci takes issue with Freud in two important ways. First, she sees dreams' latent contents, their activation, as emotion schemas rather than limiting them to wish fulfillments. Bucci writes, "The activated emotion schemas may include an unconscious wish seeking fulfillment, but may equally well be some other emotion structure—such as fear, worry, or conflict, or a problem the individual is trying to solve" (249). Thus Bucci, like many other contemporary analysts who examine dreams, opens up the possibilities of what dreams may express. Second, Bucci sees the manifest content of sensory dream images as a direct, rather than censored, expression of the latent contents. "The images," she explains, "serve as objective correlatives of the feeling

states, precisely as images do in creative art forms” (249). Bucci explains dreams as following a progression through the three registers from emotion to image to a final re-creation in language.

Dreams, like poetry, follow the progression that Bucci calls referential activity. To Bucci, who brings a perspective of cognitive science, humans process information simultaneously in multiple cognitive systems (a process known as parallel distributed processing) (88-90). Poetic texts are both created by writers and processed by readers in these multiple systems, some of which are symbolic and others of which are subsymbolic. The referential process connects nonverbal systems to each other and ultimately to words. “Images,” Bucci explains, “may be characterized as transitional in format, combining some features of both subsymbolic representations and verbal symbols” (175). They provide a transition from emotions and other implicit, purely subsymbolic registers to their expression in language. Bucci explains the importance of the referential process for the integration of self:

To account for the overall organization of the human information-processing system, connections among all representational systems are required. Nonverbal representations, including subsymbolic components that are processed continuously, synchronously, and in parallel, must be connected to one another and to the discrete symbols of language processed in single-channel, sequential format. (178)

In psychoanalysis and poetry, the inner self and the emotions must be brought into the symbolic through the imaginary. This referential process permits the “activation of

dissociated emotion structures in a context where they can be tolerated, examined, and reconstructed” (13).

Bucci points out that the referential process that links emotional experience to verbal expression is the domain of poets. The poet contrives “the construction of a symbolic context into which emotional experience may be embedded. . . . In the expression of emotion . . . metaphors may be understood precisely as concrete and discrete symbols for unnamed, subsymbolic feeling states” (216). Teaching Freud’s dream theories and important contemporary revisions of them, like Bucci’s, can help students understand how poetry, like dreams, functions through the three registers. We can approach poems by asking what the underlying desires or emotions are that seem to have activated their creation. What images do they use to express these subsymbolic activating elements? We can do this along with examining meaning on a purely symbolic level. Then we can move our focus from writer and text to reader by asking students to describe the images a poem evokes for them, and to focus on and express their own emotional or visceral experience of the poem.

Neuropsychanalytic Integration

The brain is not static; all emotional, as well as cognitive, systems are adaptive. Humans can learn and relearn behaviors through experience and practice. When we refer to the process of personal renewal in therapy, we do not mean it metaphorically. Biology teaches us that the brain has the capacity, literally, to renew and restructure itself. The human brain is constructed of a complex web of billions of interconnected neurons (brain

cells) that communicate with each other primarily through transmission of chemicals called neurotransmitters, though some communicate electrically. The interconnections among neurons govern all mental processes and allow different parts of the brain, serving different functions, to communicate with each other. Eric Kandel explains, “Each perception and thought we have, each movement we make, is the outcome of a vast multitude of basically similar neural calculations” (*In Search* 72). Connections among neurons, called synapses, either inhibit or stimulate mental responses. But, as Kandel tells us, “synaptic strength is not fixed—it can be altered in different ways by different patterns of activity” (171). Furthermore, “the number of synapses in the brain is not fixed—it changes with learning!” (214-215). The functions and alterations in synaptic connections provide the foundation for both our short- and long-term memories. Kandel writes, “Short-term memory produces a change in the function of the synapse, strengthening or weakening preexisting connections; long-term memory requires anatomical changes” (215)—new synapses. Neurotransmitters fire across a string of neural connections for each mental process that takes place. These connections, or patterns of connections, become encoded in our brains based on our learning from experience. With learning and memory, synapses between specific neurons either strengthen or weaken their connections, or form new connections. Long term changes in the brain require repetition of certain behaviors and responses. Kandel writes, “practice makes perfect, repetition is necessary for long-term memory” (264). Poetry offers us a way to experience emotions or thoughts in new ways that, when repeated, can lead to lasting alterations. Poetry also acts on our personal associations, allowing us to revisit

certain images or relive certain emotional experiences so that we can master or alter them.

Neuropsychologists now believe that when therapy brings about change—renewal and reparation—the connections between neurons, the structure of the brain, also change. Vaughan explains that “psychotherapy works because it produces long-lasting changes in neurons that make up your mind” (xiv). She continues, “We now have solid scientific evidence to suggest that the so-called ‘talking cure,’ originally devised by Freud, literally alters the way in which the neurons in the brain are connected to one another. This rewiring leads to changes in how you process, integrate, experience, and understand information and emotion” (4). Kandel sees a major principle of the mind/brain connection as follows: “Insofar as psychotherapy or counseling is effective and produces long-term changes in behavior, it presumably does so through learning, by producing changes in gene expression that alter the strength of synaptic connections and structural changes that alter the anatomical pattern of interconnections between nerve cells of the brain” (*Psychiatry* 39). When we teach poetry in such a way as to increase awareness and integration, and to alter relationship prototypes, we use poetic texts to achieve nothing less than a neural restructuring of the brain.

When we talk about the concept of integration in neuroscientific terms, we literally mean the strengthening of inner connections among neurons in the brain. The achievement of neuroscientific integration, however, involves basically the same process as the psychoanalytic—using language to bring the contents of the inner brain into consciousness where they can be dealt with. Louis Cozolino explains that

“psychopathology doesn’t exist in a specific brain area, but rather is the result of unhealthy mutual interactions among participating systems” (28). He sees two general types of integration that take place within the brain, while remaining cautious about oversimplifying the intricate and complex inner connections among neurons and specific parts of the brain. First, he describes what he calls top-down integration, which “includes the ability of the cortex to process, inhibit, and organize the reflexes, impulses, and emotions generated by the brain stem and limbic system” (29). Basically this means getting in touch with the contents of the inner brain and our more primal elements, including emotions and unconscious memories, so that we may apply our higher, outer brain capacities for thought, reflection, and control to them. Second, Cozolino stresses the importance of left-right integration. He explains the differences between the two hemispheres of the brain: “The right hemisphere is more highly connected with the body and the more primitive and emotional aspects of functioning. The left hemisphere is more closely identified with cortical functioning, whereas the right is more densely connected with limbic and brain stem functions” (30). In Cozolino’s view, the right brain is the more primitive brain that we must connect with the higher functions of the left brain—including, most importantly, language. He writes, “adequate language production requires an integration of the grammatical functions of the left and the emotional functions of the right. Left-right integration allows us to put feelings into words, consider feelings in conscious awareness, and balance the positive and negative affective biases of the left and right hemispheres” (29). Both types of neural integration are important for Cozolino and both essentially deal with making the unconscious conscious through

language. “Integration,” he writes, “is accomplished through the simultaneous or alternating activation of conscious language production (top and left) with more primitive, emotional, and unconscious processes (down and right) that have been dissociated due to undue stress during childhood or trauma later in life” (31). The language of self-reflection, key to therapy, potentially allows for personal change.

Solms and Turnbull remain wary of strict divisions in terms of left and right brain. While they acknowledge some functional dichotomies—the left brain being related to the verbal, logical, and analytic aspects of mental functioning, and the right being related to visuospatial, imagistic, and holistic processing—they maintain that “all of the attempts to dichotomize the basic mental functions of the left and right hemispheres have proved futile, and it is likely that there is no single fundamental factor that distinguishes the functions of the two hemispheres” (244-245).

Solms and Turnbull focus, rather, on a more strictly top/down model, looking at the neurological separation of the brain into inner, primal functions and executive, prefrontal lobe functions. They see the language and thought that occur in the executive brain as regulating the primal urges. Instincts and emotions are largely unconscious and located in the internal brain. The external, executive brain, particularly the prefrontal lobes, acts as judge and inhibitor and gives us control over emotion and consciousness. The prefrontal lobes form a superstructure over the rest of the brain that “gives them the capacity to integrate all the information streaming into the brain (from its current visceral and environmental situation) with all the information derived from previous experience stored elsewhere in the brain—and then to calculate the best course of action before

executing a motor response” (287). As Freud theorized, consciousness enables one to regulate primitive drives. The pre-frontal lobes are unique to human beings. Solms and Turnbull relate their executive function to Freud’s concept of the ego, and favor a strengthening of the ego as it extends its influence over the id (the primal brain). “The aim of the talking cure, then, from the neurobiological point of view” they argue, “must be to extend the functional sphere of influence of the prefrontal lobes” (287-288). We might also relate the inhibitory capacity of the executive brain to the secondary processes, and the unconstrained mental activity of the primal brain to the primary processes. A strong ego reverses the effects of repression, bringing inhibitory restraints on unconscious urges by making them conscious.

Therapy, Solms and Turnbull argue, restructures neurological functions. The talking cure accomplishes this through language that makes connections in the brain and affects behavior. Solms and Turnbull call language “an extremely powerful tool for establishing supraordinate, reflexive, and abstract connections between the concrete elements of perception and memory, and for thereby subordinating behavior to selective programs of activity” (288). Poetic language may serve as a tool for attaining greater awareness that will help us to regulate behavior in a positive and productive way.

The Poetic Self

This approach to poetry involves embracing fragmentation while actively seeking integration. Through these processes the renewed, renewing, creative, poetic self will emerge. Levine explains, “It is essential to human beings to fall apart, to fragment,

disintegrate, and to experience despair that comes with lack of wholeness. . . . I believe that it is at this critical moment that the possibility of creative living arises . . . the creative act occurs as the death and rebirth of the soul” (xvi). This approach to poetry as renewal involves a regression in order to get us in touch with our deeper or more primal selves so that we may challenge ourselves and our culture so as to progress and continue to progress as individuals. Poetry promotes the kind of regression that can both raise awareness and challenge the self by engaging the imagination, and we should approach poetry by optimizing its potential for this engagement. Levine writes, “a major part of psychotherapy is the healing of the imagination by the imagination. . . . The therapeutic ideal would then be a freeing of the imagination, the possibility of a more creative life for the person and for the social world in which he or she lives” (2). Elsewhere he says, “healing has to be understood as the restoration of a person’s imaginative capacity” (41). However, “it is essential to realize that the restored self is different from the initial identity.” This restoration involves “an integration of the personality on a deeper foundation. It is a movement towards wholeness and unity” (23). The poetic self can never completely attain this sense of wholeness and unity, since it would involve a dishonest, unrealistic assessment of self. Rather, it can move toward it; the poetic self recognizes its endless fluidity, potential, and creative capacity.

Our ultimate goal for a renewed self with repaired object relations must be achieved through a creative engagement with the symbolic. Poetry serves as a powerful tool by operating in highly condensed forms of linguistic expression, pushing up against the limitations of language in order to form new meaning. Shloss cites a major goal of

poetry therapy as “to use poetry as a means of encouraging the development of the client’s self-actualized creativeness” (6). Silverman explains, “The purpose of poetry therapy is to help a maladjusted person to learn, by various ways and in time, new ways of dealing with and thinking about himself and other people, and new responses to his life situations” (25). In poetry therapy, this renewal often comes by getting clients to express themselves through poetry, but Hynes and Hynes-Berry explain that the relationship to the work of art itself has an element of creativity for the reader. The poem stands as a work of art by itself, but the reader’s interpretation of and relationship to the poem make the reader into an artist, “making an original relationship between two elements, neither of which is necessarily original in itself” (55). Where the poem goes, so goes the reader—toward renewal of the self. Stainbrook explains that poetry brings with it the “potential for formulating statements of existence and for structuring experiences out of which a revitalized and remoralized self may emerge” (5). Through active analysis and response to a text, Gorelick tells us, “All persons are potentially capable of responding to the creativity of others with their own creativity” (126). These insights from poetry therapists give us some guidance as to how we can approach literary texts in the classroom to encourage integration in order to encourage the emergence of a renewed self.

As we learn to integrate a more genuine self, we also find new possibilities and form new perceptions. Gorelick calls poetry “a mirror, a disguise, a bridge. Poetry is continuity, it is change” (137). Poetry leads us toward a renewal of self by presenting us with options—with various new schemas for living and coping. By offering more viable

schemas, “*Literature corrects discrepancies*. A work may contain an element that reveals that a strongly held opinion is based on an incorrect understanding” (Hynes 51). The raising of general awareness of self and environment can lead to revelations that encourage reassessment of self. Pizer writes, “A poem, in its reading and writing, trains the mind to be in the present, to drop or question familiar patterns of assumption” (66). The way we make meaning of our experiences in the symbolic, cognitive register ties in with imagistic perceptions as well as our emotional reactions. Betty Sue Flowers explores the rigid nature of images and the emotions they give rise to. Because of their unique ability to create images through language, and allow for various responses to these images, poems teach readers to explore their own images (59). But poems also offer readers alternative images in association with thoughts and emotions, as well as alternative responses to certain images. This can help one to replace negative images with positive ones and replace negative emotions with hope.

The increased reality orientation that poetry offers teaches readers that many things are beyond their control, but poetry also teaches that one does have the ability to alter processes, perceptions, and even emotional reactions. By offering a variety of words and images, poetry shows the many possibilities of life. As it encourages readers to evaluate new modes of thought and new images, some schemas will arise as preferable—as more positive or pragmatic. Rich Furman writes, “Poetry, if nothing else, is a tool for helping individuals explore their lives and create meaning from their experiences” (197). Ansell explores how poetry can assist us in expanding and improving our processes of perceiving and making meaning. Poets themselves are

essentially meaning makers. “With perception [the poet] can shape and reshape all manner of experience” (14). As poets create meaning for themselves, they offer various perspectives to readers who may apply these new modes of meaning making to their own lives. Ansell explains, “The unconscious does not seek knowledge; it seeks meanings. Its expressions have become our art forms” (19). As readers begin to reassess, revise, and renew their own perceptions and cognitive processes, they will become artists themselves. Poetry has the ability to stimulate the reader’s own creative potential. Active reading itself functions as a kind of personal creative process. Crootof explains, “The poem may touch off a series of psychic events that contribute to the patient’s feeling of well-being in a way similar to what is experienced after having been involved in a creative act” (47). This experience of the creative act, even if achieved vicariously, gives the reader a sense of mastery over emotions and personal thought processes. Irving Leon explains, “The structure of the creative product promotes a sense of unity, thereby maintaining cohesion, against centrifugal fragmentation” (389). The subject becomes able to integrate various components of self so that renewal and reparation may take place. Ideally a new self will emerge—one that is more aware, relativistic, hopeful, confident, and one with more positive and mutually beneficial relations with others.

Part II

Applications to Literature, the Reader, and the Classroom

Chapter VII

Three Therapeutic Approaches to Poetry in the Classroom

Brief Poetry Therapy Model

Many of the approaches typically taken in literature classes are of value to a renewing and reparative approach to poetry, though teachers can do more to build on the rewards that literature offers students. The conventional practice of identifying and discussing themes or predominant moods of poems, for example, is useful because it allows students to objectively consider elements of human nature that are being reflected by a poem. One of the first steps in increasing students' awareness of themselves and their relationships is to identify psychological phenomena or truths, which students can later consider in more personal ways. Most literature teachers already engage students in issues of poetry's thematic and tonal elements. In a literary theory class, we may even use poems to exemplify or clarify psychological or social concepts of various schools of theory. These approaches already get students thinking in different ways and considering their worlds and their selves more perceptively and comprehensively.

Another way we can get students to think more adequately about emotional and psychological issues is by encouraging them to think about poetry in terms of its potential therapeutic value. Mazza suggests a number of questions that apply specifically to the therapeutic value of poems in his “poetry therapy training exercises for practitioners” (149). First, we can ask students what type of person may find a particular poem helpful. Some poems may speak more specifically to or may have more relevance for a certain gender, ethnicity, or age group. We can also ask if there are particular issues or problems that a specific poem could help someone address. Poems can often help one cope with depression or anxiety by offering recognition or by increasing awareness. We can ask if a poem offers hope to readers that would enable coping. On the other side, we can ask if a poem could have harmful effects on a certain reader’s identity. Some poems express despair but offer little hope to a suffering reader; some offer false hope that a reader may reject; others may express racist or misogynistic views that will insult and alienate certain readers. Thinking about poems in these ways increases empathy in students by helping them to imagine how others might read from their unique points of view, while also having them consider poetry for its therapeutic value.

Mazza illustrates a brief poetry therapy with the goals of providing ego support, helping one to form relationships, and helping one to deal with specific problems (26). Mazza’s model is useful for considering how we might structure a class using a therapeutic approach to poetry. In the first phase of his model, Mazza uses poetry in a supportive role. He chooses poems that offer support and instill hope, without yet delving into personal issues that arise in deep self exploration. Likewise, we may want to

start students out with hopeful poems, or poems that offer recognition. We can also begin with a more objective approach to poetry and its therapeutic value early in the semester. Students will begin to emotionally connect with poems initially, without having to explore or reveal their personal thoughts, feelings, phantasies, or associations in detail. They will begin to find recognition in poems and develop “empathic understanding” (28-29). They will begin to see themselves and others, and themselves through others, in a relatively safe environment, which will get them more comfortable with thinking of poetry in this way early in the semester.

Once support is established, Mazza moves to the “apperceptive phase,” which involves the “development of insight regarding specific problems” (29). Students will begin using poetry for self exploration in order to gain deeper awareness. As teachers, we will encourage students to explore and examine their personal responses to poems through the three registers of emotion, imagination, and cognition. Poems will often validate student responses, but our role as teachers is mainly to not *invalidate* them. We should encourage personal judgments based on taste, values, or relevance, because these judgments can teach students about themselves and can be used to teach students about the how poetry works on the reader. It is essential, however, to always go beyond simply having students react to texts. We always want them to analyze their reactions based on their experiences or personality traits, to consider what their reactions are in all three registers of experience, and to consider what characteristics of a text brought about these reactions. It often proves productive to have students focus on a specific line or a specific image in a poem that has special significance to them (19). This can help

students to focus and clarify their emotional or imaginary responses, while also helping them to better understand and appreciate the power of poetic language. We can build on this exercise by asking students to change one word in the line or one detail in the image they have focused on and then analyze their response to the alteration. This will not only offer students a slightly new experience with language to consider their responses to, but the responses they will have to these alterations will draw attention to the precision of poetic language.

As students gain increased awareness of their emotional and imaginary responses to poems, we can also help them explore personal associations through poetry. They examine not only emotions and images, but also the personal experiences and memories associated with them. This step gets into even more personal explorations and self analysis that will help students to raise their self awareness. Here words, images, and emotions are linked to events, people, places, and objects. Making these links between poems and the self can be quite a leap for many students. One way to start out slowly and get students to use association without necessarily getting too personal is to use intertextual associations instead of personal ones. We can ask students if the poem reminds them of a song, a movie, another literary work, or another piece of art. This offers students some distance as they begin to follow their associations. Instead of linking directly to personal experience, which might make them uncomfortable, they link the poem to a third object that is linked to the self as a work of art that has meaning to them, but that clearly has its own existence as a separate object. Following these types of

associations can provide a foundation from which students can learn to relate poems specifically to past memories or to their current life situations.

Since allowing for personal meaning is so important, teachers should consider using poems that are more open-ended. We want to examine all potential meanings of a text, without settling in on one specific master reading. Some poems are more prescriptive or closed-off than others, and students are more likely to be put off by these poems. But when we introduce open-ended poems, students are able to project their own personal meaning into them. They can fill in narrative gaps and ambiguities with their imaginations or emotional reactions that reflect their inner world. Then they can analyze their creative readings to come to a better understanding of their phantasies, desires, and emotions.

Creative reading allows students to take action, and this is empowering. Mazza, in his third phase, sees the choosing of one's own text as one valuable way of taking action. Choosing a poem or song for your self is a form of self expression (29). This form of expression is open to students who are not artistically inclined as well as those who are. Once students have become comfortable with responding to poems on a personal level and examining their responses, we can then ask them to select their own poem or song lyrics that carry meaning for them. This process of selection is something nearly everyone can relate to since nearly everyone has had some kind of profound experience with a poem or song at some point in their lives. By choosing their own texts, and then writing about their unique experience of them, students enact a kind of creative agency that moves them closer to becoming creators themselves.

In Mazza's final phase, he takes creative agency further by encouraging readers to respond to poems with their own creativity. Students can experience independence and personal renewal as they become the agents of creation. One way to begin is to ask students to change any part of a particular poem in order to make it more fulfilling or desirable to them. This may include a narrative change, an altered metaphorical image, or a change in wording. This enables students to consider their ideals, or how they may alter things in their lives or in the world in general to make them more positive, while also engaging their creativity. Other ways we can get students creatively engaged in texts involve having them respond to poetry through a different medium. The most common method is to have them draw a picture in response to a poem, integrating the imaginary register with the linguistic. Another possibility, if students are comfortable with it, is to have students, in groups or alone, physically act out a poem. This brings in imaginary as well as physical interpretation—engaging the imagination and the body.

We can use these kinds of creative response activities not only to further engage imagination, but to develop empathy and improve object relations. Of course, imagination proves essential for empathy; one must have imagination to put oneself in the position of the other. One writing exercise that works well is to have students write their own poems or narratives from the perspective of either a speaker of or a character in a poem. This exercise often works better when it involves filling in gaps in a text. One literary example of this is Tennyson's Mariana poems, where he writes from the perspective of a Shakespearian character, and we could certainly list others. Another exercise to get students to relate to an other through poetry is to have students write a

letter to the speaker of or a character in a poem. This exercise can encourage empathy, though some students may offer judgments or chastisement. We can try to avoid negative letters, and encourage more empathy, by having students write to the speaker or character as if they were a good friend or a close family member.

Another good exercise that encourages students to relate to and empathize with an other through poetry involves role playing. We can have one student play the role of a speaker or character from, or an author of, a poem and have another student interview them. If a student were playing an author, for example, another students could ask them what was happening in their lives when they wrote the poem, how they felt when writing the poem, how they felt after the poem was written, where they came up with a certain image or metaphor, or what they meant by a certain ambiguous phrase. For a character in a narrative poem, they may question why certain actions were taken, or they may ask how the character felt during a certain scene. Whatever the scenario, the student being interviewed must try to answer the questions by empathizing with an other through imagination. With all of these exercises that encourage creative responses from students, we foster the emergence of a self who is open and full of creative possibilities that they may use to alter themselves or their worlds in positive ways. Students will hopefully take these newly discovered elements of self with them beyond the literature course.

In this therapeutic approach to poetry, however, teachers must always proceed with caution. Mazza warns of several issues that occur in poetry therapy that can lead to negative outcomes (27). One potential problem with poetry, and other works of art, is that it may be used as an intellectualization of a real personal issue. This

intellectualization can prevent students from attaining real awareness or it can prevent them from experiencing real recognition, though we can try to engage them in poetry in more emotional and imaginative ways that make poetry more vital and less purely intellectual. In fact, this approach to poetry is far less guilty of intellectualization than traditional approaches. We must also be careful not to put our agenda as teachers above students' needs. We cannot force students to experience personal revelations or to appreciate us for offering them the opportunity for such experiences. Our role in this approach is to provide students with opportunity and support. The major concern with a therapeutic approach to poetry, which is an ethical concern in the classroom, is of evoking feelings in students that they cannot cope with. Of course, traditional, non-therapeutic pedagogies can also evoke such feelings, especially when dealing with emotionally intense texts. We must always be careful to let students progress at their own pace. Teachers cannot analyze students in the way that therapists do; it is unpractical in a classroom setting as well as unethical. What we are offering students is an opportunity to learn more about themselves and their relationships. The degree to which they do this must be left largely up to them.

Table 1: Brief Poetry Therapy Model

Supportive Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read poems that offer hope and recognition • Objectively consider poems for their therapeutic value
Apperceptive Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subjectively respond to poems through the three registers of experience • Focus on specific lines, words, and images • Change parts of texts and respond to changes • Explore intertextual and personal associations • Explore all potential readings of texts • Analyze personal responses
Action Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select text of one's choice • Examine personal relationship with chosen text
Creative Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make desirable changes to texts • Respond to poetry through other artistic media • Imaginatively fill in gaps in texts • Write from perspectives of speakers, characters, or authors • Write letters to speakers, characters, or authors • Conduct interviews with classmates acting as speakers, characters, or authors

Experiential Therapy Exercise

Alvin Mahrer's experiential therapy provides a useful model for using poetry as a vehicle through which to explore personal emotional experience in the context of a poetry class. Mahrer's four part model of an experiential therapy session, however, goes beyond emotional experience to include memory and associations, as well as creative expression, serving the goal of bringing about personal renewal. Mahrer's sessions have several attributes that make them applicable to the classroom and ideal for our goals in the teaching of poetry. Mahrer believes in the personal construction of the external world—that the way we, as humans, experience the world largely depends on our imagination or our fantasies. Experiential sessions involve creative activity so that a renewed self

emerges with a more positive and profound image of self and of external reality. This creative activity translates easily to English classes. Mahrer's sessions are not grounded in any particular theoretical framework, though they are consistent with psychoanalytic goals. Mahrer's sessions are each independent and, ideally, each lead to a gained sense of renewal. This makes them useful in achieving therapeutic benefits with students during the relatively short time-span of a semester. Mahrer's sessions can be done in any setting or context. He even suggests that these sessions may be done independently without the therapist (or teacher), which is helpful because teachers rarely have the capacity to give students the kind of in-depth personal attention that most forms of therapy require. The following exercise, heavily based on Mahrer's four part experiential sessions (which he outlines most recently in his book *Becoming the Person You Can Become*), tends to work best, in my experience, as a homework assignment, though the instructor may want to give some guidance beforehand. The teacher may want to go through and explain each step before assigning it: however, sometimes less explanation, though it will frustrate some students, leads to surprising, positive results.

Mahrer's premise is that people generally function in their lives with "operating potentials for experiencing," but rarely seek their "deeper potentials for experiencing." Experiential therapy seeks to discover one's deeper potential so that a renewed self will emerge. Mahrer's first step involves "discovering deeper potential for experiencing." First, the subject should locate a scene of intense emotion. Mahrer makes this scene the focus of the session rather than the therapist or patient. Mahrer suggests using either a scene from real life or an intense dream, but because the session can start from or jump

off from any scene of intense emotion, I have found that a poem that one experiences intensely can serve in this capacity.

To begin, each student chooses a poem that serves as the focal point throughout the entire exercise. Once the poem has been chosen, students try to isolate the exact moment of intense emotion—the exact stanza or couplet within the poem where they experience the most intense feelings. Students, as they focus in, should try to get outside of themselves in order to discover something deeper, beyond their operating potentials of experiencing. They should imagine themselves within the scene of the poem as if they were the central character in the poem or an actor in a performance of it. As they continue to penetrate the exact moment of peak feeling in the poem they should narrow the moment down even further to a specific word or phrase where the visceral experience of the poem grows most intense. It does not matter at this point what the quality of the feeling is, only where the reader quantitatively feels most intensely. This first step in itself proves useful for increasing awareness and integration of emotions, and works well when done independently in a classroom setting. After performing this first step, a good way to continue is to compare students' responses as to where their experience of a particular poem peaked. Often, especially in emotionally intense poems, a class can locate a near consensus as to where the poem becomes most intense down to a few lines or so simply by comparing the words or phrases selected by each student. A broader study of this sort could reveal some useful generalizations about a generic reader's experience of a particular poem. This could help us choose specific poems that have therapeutic value or that may help with specific personal issues.

If, however, one chooses to continue on to step two, it is important to remain with the experience uninterrupted. Students should continue to penetrate and intensify the deeper experience of the poem and to become another person or thing in this experience (like an actor portraying the experience). In their minds, they should begin to fill in details associated with the experience like images and memories. Students should keep in mind that this should be an enjoyable exercise. Locating this deep, rarely sought after potential for experience should be both positive and exhilarating even if the focal experience is painful or negative.

Step two of Mahrer's process involves "welcoming and accepting the deeper potential for experience" located, but not defined, in step one. In Mahrer's therapy sessions, participants act out and talk through the activities in this and the following two steps, but for my purposes, I have transformed this model into a writing exercise. In step two, I ask students to write for approximately five to ten minutes. They begin by naming and describing the deeper experience of step one—whatever they feel, think, envision, or experience through the most intense moment of the poem. The goal here is to integrate the experience by bringing it into language. As they write, students should admit both their positive and their negative reactions to the experience, so that they may come to recognize the complexity of their emotions and reactions. Often, for example, a strong sense of fear and panic linked with a negative experience can also give rise to a feeling of courage or inner strength—a deeper potential—that comes from facing the experience unflinchingly. Here may be another potential place to stop the exercise, depending on what the teacher or students are comfortable with. From here, students begin to explore

personal memories and relationships that can bring up potentially painful feelings.

Students continue by describing or discussing people they know who might exemplify, or whom they associate with, this experience. They recall times in their lives when they felt this experience or something close. Finally, they consider this as a deeper, new potential in themselves by asking how this quality of experience is not them or does not match how they see themselves or how others see them.

The final two steps deal in imagination and fantasy but remain deeply rooted in personal experience. The prompts in these steps are similar to those in creative writing exercises. Students learn through these prompts to locate and be their creative, renewed selves open to broader possibilities and deeper potentials that they can realistically apply to their lives. In step three, students will now “be the deeper potential for experiencing in a past scene.” Students should find a specific real-life scene from their past where they either came close to this experience evoked by the poem, or where this experience was strikingly absent—appropriate or even preferable, but not present. This step often evokes painful memories and may not be appropriate for all classroom settings. However, even though these past scenes often prove painful, students are given the opportunity to act in them playfully in such a way that aims to repair negative feelings. Students will be in their past scene, but not as themselves. They should be in their scene as if replaced by a character or actor who exemplifies the deeper potential for experiencing discovered through the poem—a character both me and not me. This writing exercise should be fun and should have a playful tone. Students should write, again probably five to ten minutes, creating their own fantasy where they play out this real-life past scene with the

me/not me character in their place. Students may try to make this a corrective fantasy or just an absurd and funny one that greatly exaggerates the deeper potential experienced in the past scene. This and the fantasy scenes in part four may be done from any grammatical person (first, second, third) or in any format (prose fiction, dramatic scene, expressive poem).

Step four asks the student to practice “being the qualitatively new person in the new world.” Staying in the character that is both “me” (the student or subject) and “not me” (like an actor playing the subject with the deeper potential for experience), students are asked to do two more fantasy writing exercises. First, students should go back to the original poem that gave rise to the experience and write a story or scene where they are in the actual poem being this character experienced through the poem in the situation portrayed in the poem. They may write themselves as the speaker of the poem or a character in the poem, but their focus should remain on their deep experience as they recreate the scene of the poem through this new perspective. Again, this should be a fun and free exercise.

Lastly, students create another fantasy scene where they play this character in a likely future scene—something that they anticipate taking place in real life. This might be something they are looking forward to or something they are anxious about. Though this scene is realistic and likely to occur in some form in the future, this exercise is a complete fantasy; anything can happen. Ideally, the discovery of a deeper potential will allow one in the future scene to face down his or her fears or repair an important relationship, or it may simply provide a more intense experience of the scene, broadening

and deepening the potential for experience. At the end of the exercise, now that students have enacted this new potential in fantasy, they will hopefully consider how they might carry, use, or be this new person of deeper potential experiencing in real life.

After students complete the exercise, I follow up by once again engaging their imagination and their connection to this deeper experience by having them create a character sketch of their me/not me fantasy characters from the exercise. I ask them to describe, in writing, how their characters walk or talk, what they look like, how they carry themselves, how they interact with others, their general attitude or demeanor, what quirks they might have, where and in what situations they feel most comfortable, where and how they are most likely to excel. This follow up helps to give students a clearer image of this new potential and what they can achieve with it. It also continues to strengthen their connection with their deeper potential. As they accomplish these things, they will likely gain a clearer picture of how to apply this deeper potential within them to their lives in a positive and constructive way.

Mahrer has two main goals for the subjects of his experiential sessions: integration and actualization. This means that people will come to cherish their deeper potentials “and their deeper potentials become integral parts of the new people they have become” (*Becoming* 423). Mahrer’s concept of integration involves self discovery and a kind of self reparation where we learn to accept rather than reject the potentials within ourselves. While this version of the concept differs in key ways from the other concepts of integration described above, it still essentially involves bringing the inner self to the surface. To Mahrer, “The normal, ordinary, adjusted state is one of non-integration”

(*Experiencing* 471). We tend to function day-to-day through operating potentials, but Mahrer wants to help people to locate and apply deeper potentials so that they may become their optimal selves. As people come to recognize these deeper potentials for experience, they come into “continuous touch with the full range of internal, bodily felt feelings” (478). This integration increases one’s range of emotions, and helps one to achieve mastery over them so that they become free of painful feelings and able to optimize positive potentials. This integrated self is a renewed and continuously renewing self. Mahrer, like Kristeva, uses the metaphor of a death/rebirth in order to describe this renewal. “The domain of operating potentials, roughly analogous to the ego,” he explains “is extinguished. . . . [I]t undergoes its own death” (481). The integrating person has the “freedom to leave the domain of operating potentials, with all its problems. The feeling is one of freedom, liberation, and the utter hilarious nonsense of their former problem-filled life” (484). Once the individual has located and integrated the deeper experience, “what had existed as the bad form of the deeper potential is magically gone, and in its place is the integrated, good form” (489). Subjects learn to live more positive lives and experience themselves as more complex and relative. Mahrer writes, “integrating persons have risen to a plateau on which they are friends, even with potentials which seem opposite, polar, logically inconsistent with what they are being now” (505). Positive integration creates a person who “(a) is whole, one, unified, (b) is peaceful, tranquil, harmonious, and (c) is welcoming, expanding, becoming” (512). This means that one is integrated in the traditional sense of bringing the inner self into consciousness; one has a repaired relationship to the self which translates into more positive

interpersonal relations in the external world; and one now has the capacity for continued renewal and reparation.

Actualization, Mahrer's other goal, essentially means applying this newfound integration to one's life. Mahrer explains, "Perhaps the paramount characteristic of actualization is the sheer increase in the depth and breadth of experiencing. . . . [A]ctualization involves bringing deeper potentials into the realm of operating potentials" (564). This has positive implications for object relations. "Having taken back into one's self the externalized deeper potential," writes Mahrer, "the person now is free to relate more intimately and integratively with the external world" (499). "The world in which the person now exists has reduced relationships of disintegrative fear and hate" (532). A new sense of a loving self and a loving world leads to improved interpersonal relations, but Mahrer's optimal self also possesses a sense of separation and independence. "The integrating person already has the sense of oneness and love and belongingness," writes Mahrer (533). "The integrating person no longer lives in a world in which others take over his personhood" (538). This new, integrated, and actualized self can function in positive ways with others without total dependence on them for support and recognition. Again we seek a strong but flexible self. Using poetry in the classroom as a scene of strong feeling through which to engage in my version of Mahrer's experiential therapy sessions can help us to lead our students toward their own deeper potentials and renewed selves.

After having completed this exercise, the vast majority of my students have acknowledged it as a positive experience. Through engagement in a poetic text, this

exercise leads some to gain awareness on various levels. Some students discover, through poetry, newfound inner strength or a new level of self confidence that they can apply to relationships and other interactions in the social world. Some discover a deeper sense of compassion or empathy. From these newfound discoveries of their emotions or desires, some students realize new goals for themselves or envision new destinies. This exercise allows some to reevaluate where they are in their lives in comparison to where they want to be. For some this exercise provides a helpful means through which to cope with negative experiences, especially death and other personal losses. It allows students to reevaluate relationships. It allows for a cathartic release of negative emotions or stress-inducing concerns. It also allows students to have fun and live out whatever wild fantasies they can come up with, while giving them insights into their own imaginations. Finally, not least of all, it enables them to relate to a poem on a deeper level and to see how poetry is relevant to their lives.

Table 2: Experiential Exercise

Step One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a poem that you like or have a strong experience with • Find the scene of most intense feeling in the poem (a stanza or a couple of lines) • Try to imagine yourself within the scene of the poem as if you were a character in the poem or an actor in a performance of it • Focus in more precisely to find the exact moment of peak feeling—the word or phrase in the poem that you experience with the most emotional intensity • Fill in details in your mind such as images and associations • Try to enjoy the moment of experience—even if it is negative
Step Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write for 5-10 minutes (about a page) doing the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Name and describe the deeper experience—what you are feeling, thinking, envisioning, experiencing ○ Admit your positive and negative reactions to the experience ○ Are there people you know who might exemplify this experience, or whom you associate with this experience? ○ Are there times when you felt this experience or something close? ○ Finally, consider how this quality of experience is not you, or does not match how you see yourself or how others see you
Step Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a specific scene from your past where you came close to this experience, or where this experience was strikingly absent (maybe preferable but not present) • Be in this past scene, not as yourself, but as if replaced by a character or actor with this deeper quality of experience • Write for 5-10 minutes creating a fantasy where you play out this past scene with the you/not-you character in your place
Step Four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay in character • For 5-10 minutes, rewrite the story or scene happening in the original poem from Step One with your character (that is both you and not you; like an actor playing you with this deeper experience) as the speaker or protagonist • Write for 5-10 minutes where you play this character in a likely future scene—something you anticipate taking place in real life
Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write for 5-10 minutes, creating a sketch of the character you created in your experiential exercise • Consider how they walk, talk, look, carry themselves; where they excel or come up short, how they relate to others, how others see them, etc.

Metaphor Therapy Exercise

Another useful exercise for understanding the nature of poetry and its unique relevance to the individual reader derives from Richard Kopp's step-by-step model of metaphor therapy. This model of therapy focuses mainly on personal images, but involves the integration of all three registers. The basic premise of metaphor therapy is that human beings structure their reality metaphorically. Kopp writes, "Metaphors are mirrors reflecting our inner images of self, life, and others" (xiii). Kopp uses the term "metaphorms" to refer to "cognitive-metaphoric structures that comprise an individual's personality structure, i.e., the metaphoric structure of individual reality" (103). There are three types of elemental metaphorms: metaphors of self, life, and others; and three types of relational metaphorms: metaphors for how we relate to self, life, and others. These metaphors or metaphorms, according to Kopp, are key to awareness and change. "Exploring metaphoric images," Kopp writes, "can move the client to deeper levels of experiencing" (9). In order to achieve renewal of self, he explains, one must restructure one's mental imagery—one's metaphors. Metaphor therapy seeks to bring about change by raising awareness of both internal and external reality, and by integrating the registers of experience through metaphoric language and imagery.

Metaphor therapy, like a number of other therapeutic approaches, stresses individual creativity. Kopp sees metaphor as "the root of creativity and openness of language, and . . . an essential aspect of cognition" (93). Metaphors, he explains, "combine two modes of cognition—logical and imaginal—into a distinct third form: metaphoric cognition" (94). He relates this to Freud's ideas about poetic language as

well. “Metaphor,” he says, “may be seen as lying at the interface between primary and secondary process thinking” (113). Metaphors, as the primary vehicle of poetic language, bridge the gap between visual imagination and verbal expression. They help individuals express things beyond normal language through the creation of verbal images. Kopp explains that “the metaphor-maker [or, we might say, the poet] draws out of his or her creative imagination an image that resembles a pattern of meaning present in a specific situation to which the metaphoric image refers” (96). Through exploring metaphor in poetry, not only do readers gain deeper awareness, but they can achieve renewal by escaping the normal confines of traditional linguistic expression. Kopp writes, “Imaginal cognition is essential to the creation of new ways of looking at things” (96). When bringing the image into the verbal, people can express something new and renewing through metaphor.

Kopp divides the process of metaphor therapy into four phases with seven steps that he says should be followed loosely in therapy. Again, I am transforming a therapeutic approach that engages in poetic language into a writing exercise. One major difference between my approach as a teacher and Kopp’s approach as a therapist is that while he stresses using client-generated metaphors as a focus, I ask students to locate a metaphor in a poem that they relate to in terms of their view of or relation to self, life, or other. While this may not serve quite the same therapeutic purpose, using a poet’s metaphor as opposed to deriving a personal one offers a degree of separation that may be more appropriate or comfortable in an academic setting.

The first step of phase one involves the location of the metaphor. As we know, a poetic metaphor may be a few words or an extended conceit that lasts the length of a poem; either could potentially work, though a smaller focus may be preferable since students will expand the metaphor themselves during phase two. It also may be more useful, though not necessarily, for students to choose a metaphor that they relate to negatively, or that they associate with negative emotions, as they will transform or re-imagine it during phase three.

Once the metaphor is located and copied down on paper, students will describe in writing their own mental image of the metaphor in their own words. They will transform the poet's verbal metaphor into their own unique and personal mental image; then they will describe not the metaphor in their own words, but their mental image of it in their own words. At this stage, students should just focus on describing the image itself without making a relation to their lives or any real situations. I recommend having students do these first two steps independently several times in classes leading up to the metaphor therapy exercise. It will prove helpful to first get them familiar with how verbal metaphors bring up images in the mind, and get them accustomed to noticing and working with metaphors before going through all four phases of the exercise.

In phase two, "the client moves beyond the original metaphor . . . and enters the domain of his creative metaphoric imagination" (7). In step three, students expand on the surrounding scenery of the mental image described in phase one. Kopp suggests a number of ways that one may do this. One can expand on the action of the image by describing what else is happening in the mental scene. One can bring in other imaginary

sense impressions beyond the visual—hearing, smell, touch, taste. Lastly, one can expand on the time frame of the image by exploring what happened before and what happens after the mental scene (7-8). This step engages the imagination more deeply while also giving students good practice in descriptive writing. In the next step of phase two, students shift from the imaginative to the emotional, affective register by describing “feelings and experience associated with the metaphoric image” (8). By the end of phase two, we have engaged all three registers around a poetic metaphor.

Phase three contains only one step but is key in terms of transforming the image in order to achieve renewal. Now, students go beyond simply recording their images and affects to taking control of them. Working with the expanded image created in step three, students consider how they would alter this image or narrative to make it more favorable to them. For example, if their mental image was of someone drowning, they might alter the image to that of someone being rescued or swimming to safety. Students are encouraged to produce a corrective fantasy, taking potentially negative images and putting them in an idealized form. Kopp explains, “Transforming the metaphoric image changes the metaphoric meaning of the situation” (9). This phase allows students to create something new and better out of their images, and gets them to break away from their set ways of imagining.

In the fourth and final phase, students come “out of the domain of metaphoric imagination, back across the ‘metaphoric bridge,’ returning to the domain of logical discourse and the external world of everyday life and literal meanings” (11). The two steps of this final phase get more specifically personal by asking students to examine

what their chosen metaphor represents to them in their lives, and how they might apply their alteration/idealization of the metaphor to their lives. In step six, students make explicit this connection between the metaphor they explored in the first two phases and their real life. Here, they write about why they relate to their chosen metaphor and what the metaphor represents to them in terms of self, life, or personal relationships. In the final step of the exercise, they relate the changed image or narrative they imagined in step five to the real life situation described in step six. They apply their altered image to how they might alter something in their lives, and, thus, potentially bring about a sense of renewal.

This exercise intends to help students appreciate the centrality of metaphor in poetic language, while encouraging them to relate poetic metaphors to themselves, their lives, or their relationships. This exercise can also help in raising awareness on various levels (self, other, reality), particularly in terms of examining images. Lastly, this exercise should bring about renewal through the alteration or expansion of mental images. Kopp explains, “Instead of being imprisoned in the current metaphoric reality reflected in a particular metaphor or early memory metaphor, the client is freed by changing the metaphor, which can result in a change in the client’s perception of reality” (107). Like the experiential exercise, students generally find this to be a positive experience. By engaging the poetic imagination, students create a more ideal image of self, life, or other and then relate it to their own lives.

Table 3: Metaphor Exercise

Phase One	Step One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a metaphor that you relate to from a poetic text • Write it down
	Step Two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a few sentences, describe your own mental image of the metaphor (the picture you get in your mind) in your own words
Phase Two	Step Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand on the surrounding scenery of the mental imagery described in Step One • Bring in other imaginary sense impressions beyond the visual—hearing, touch, taste, smell • Expand on the time frame of the image by exploring what happened before and what happens after the scene
	Step Four	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe emotions and other visceral experiences associated with the metaphoric image
Phase Three	Step Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the expanded image created in Step Three, consider how you would alter the image or narrative to make it more favorable to you
Phase Four	Step Six	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make explicit the connection between the metaphor explored in the first two steps and your real life by writing about why you relate to the chosen metaphor and what the metaphor represents to you in terms of your self, your life, or your relationships
	Step Seven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relate the changed image imagined in Step Five to the real life situation described in Step Six—here, you are applying your altered image of the metaphor to something you might alter in your real life

Mazza's brief poetry therapy, Mahrer's experiential therapy, and Kopp's metaphor therapy all allow for and encourage the imagination of a new self. Making poetry the focus, or third object, in these approaches gives us a vehicle through which to delve into emotional experience in order to enrich our lives. Like paradigms for poetic renewal in Lacan and Kristeva, these therapeutic approaches involve both a regressive fragmentation of self and a progressive integration where deeper self awareness is gained.

Chapter VIII

Why Pre-Raphaelite Poetry?

While any poetic texts could potentially work with this approach to poetry, I have found Pre-Raphaelite poetry along with its Victorian and Romantic predecessors particularly useful for a number of reasons. While there exists no specific definition of Victorian or Pre-Raphaelite poetry, there are several general characteristics that we may point to that make the work of these poets ideal for our purposes of allowing for self exploration and engaging the imagination in the reading process. We cannot discuss these characteristics as entirely separate from one another, but we may attempt to categorize them: 1) evocative expression of sensation and emotion, 2) rich, evocative visual description, 3) imaginative freedom, 4) frequent ambiguity of meaning or morality, and 5) emphasis on psychological exploration, often through dramatic distance. These characteristics are significant in that they involve keeping desire in play, engaging the reader creatively, integrating the three registers, and offering recognition and self awareness.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti puts forth his Pre-Raphaelite manifesto of art in his short story "Hand and Soul." In this 1849 story, originally published in the short-lived Pre-Raphaelite journal *The Germ*, Rossetti presents a self portrait through his fictional young Italian artist, Chiaro dell' Erma. Early in the story, Chiaro seeks out an admired famous artist with hopes of serving as his pupil, but when he meets the artist and looks at his

work he finds it “lifeless and incomplete” leading him to declare, “I am the master of this man” (48). Chiaro sets to work and, after several years, achieves fame as an artist. However, he still does not feel fulfilled. “In taking his breath, he found that the weight was still at his heart. The years of his labour had fallen from him, and his life was still in its first painful desire” (50). Realizing that he has “misinterpreted the craving of his own spirit,” he decides to “set a watch on his soul and put his hand to no other works but only to such as had for their end the presentment of some moral greatness” (50). This new purpose soon disappoints him as well, when violence breaks out in the church where Chiaro has painted “a moral allegory of Peace” (52). As he watches the blood run off of his paintings, he once again feels a sense of failure. Later, in a state of despair, Chiaro is visited by a woman, a vision, who represents an image of his own soul within him (53). She advises him to seek not fame, but to “seek thine own conscience (not thy mind’s conscience, but thine heart’s), and all shall approve and suffice” (54). She also advises him not to worry about serving God through his art, because he already serves God by expressing himself honestly. She says, “In all that thou doest, work from thine own heart, simply; for his heart is as thine, when thine is wise and humble; and he shall have understanding of thee” (55). In the story’s conclusion, Chiaro paints the woman and, thus, represents his own soul through his art. William Michael Rossetti comments on the story, “Though the form of this tale is that of romantic metaphor, its substance is a very serious manifesto of art-dogma. It amounts to saying, The only satisfactory works of art are those which exhibit the very soul of the artist. . . . [B]ut to paint that which your own perceptions and emotions urge you to paint promises to be a success for yourself, and

hence a benefit to the mass of beholders” (250). Applied to poetry, this story shows the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of honestly expressing desire, emotions, and their appropriate visual images that act as symbols, in poetic texts, through language.

Pre-Raphaelite poetry is generally considered a late phase of English Romanticism, finding its influences particularly in Coleridge, Keats, and the two major Victorian poets, Tennyson and Browning. In his 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth famously describes good poetry as “the overflow of powerful feelings,” which “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (85). John Stuart Mill makes a similar judgment in 1833, “if the human emotion be not painted with the most scrupulous truth, the poetry is bad poetry, i.e., is not poetry at all, but a failure” (10). Arthur Hallam, in his 1831 review of his friend Tennyson’s first volume of poetry, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, maintains this valuing of emotion, but sees the reflective aspects of Wordsworth’s poetry as overly intellectual. Hallam puts forth, through Tennyson, the concept of a poetry of sensation—as opposed to one of reflection. He admires Wordsworth for “awakening the minds of men, and giving a fresh impulse to art,” but argues that “it is not true . . . that the highest species of poetry is the reflective” (184). Wordsworth’s profound expressions of his inner self, according to Hallam, do not necessarily achieve artistic beauty, which Hallam, like the Pre-Raphaelites later, values above all. Hallam calls any mode of artistic creation a false art that is created “by any other predominant motive than the desire of beauty” (184). This poetry of sensation demands more of readers because of its ambiguity of morality and meaning.

Hallam values the more primary aspects of poetry, sound and image in particular, as they evoke sensations in the reader. He makes the weighty claim for great poets: “they speak to the hearts of all, and by the magnetic force of their conceptions, elevate inferior intellects into a higher and purer atmosphere” (189). He sees poetry as potentially transcendent: “the strong musical delight prevails over every painful feeling and mingles them all in its deep swell until they attain a composure of exalted sorrow, a mood in which the latest repose of agitation becomes visible, and the influence of beauty spreads like light over the surface of the mind” (195). This early Tennysonian poetry of sensation, with its use of primary processes, would prove hugely influential to Victorian poetry, especially to the Pre-Raphaelites. With its focus on sensation, it is useful in the classroom for helping students to gain self awareness by focusing on their visceral experiences of texts.

Pre-Raphaelite poets place greater emphasis on the visual aspects of poetry than their precursors. The Pre-Raphaelite movement has its foundations in the visual rather than language arts, so the integration of the visual into language that we frequently see in Pre-Raphaelite poetry remains consistent with many of the original aspects of the movement. Isobel Armstrong describes the new principle of poetry put forth by the Pre-Raphaelites as being “to move away from expressive theory by attempting to extend a *visual* theory to language and poetry in general” (234). She continues, “The idea of representation through the visual and, by extension, the verbal sign, is the strength of Pre-Raphaelite thoughts” (235). As a poetry of sensation, the Pre-Raphaelite poets’ extensive use of visual images, or objects, engages readers in their own unique imaginative

activities by encouraging them to bring up images in the mind and experience them both visually and emotionally on their own, not through the subjectivity of the poet. This quality makes it useful in the classroom for getting students to explore and respond to their unique mental images. Carol Christ discusses the tendency in both Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites to attempt to show objects in themselves, or, “to anchor feeling in the qualities of objects rather than in the imagination of subjects” (*Victorian* 7). She writes of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, for example, “Rossetti is against interpretation of natural objects. . . . He does not attempt to convert them into emblems of general truths. Rather, he tries to portray the sensuous immediacy of a particular moment of perception” (*Finer* 47). Because these poets do not interpret their objects, readers are left to do so, and, in doing so, will also come to explore their own relationships with various images and objects.

As a visual poetry, this poetry reflects the imaginative freedom of the artist, while also encouraging imaginative engagement in readers. One particular element of Romanticism involves a rejection of the Neo-Classical ideal of objectively capturing reality in set poetic forms, and a movement toward freedom of form and a turning inward toward one’s own creative imagination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge specifically stresses the imaginative elements of Romanticism. Describing what he calls the poet’s esemplastic power—the power “to shape into one” (91)—he defines the poet as one who “diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination” (174). John Ruskin, the most influential Victorian art critic, who was also a

supporter, major influence, and, for a time, friend of the Pre-Raphaelites, takes a view similar to that of Coleridge on the imagination. Referring to it as “the source of all that is great in the poetic arts,” (3) Ruskin discusses three functions of the Imaginative faculty: 1) Penetrative, where the artist captures the internal essence of the object, 2) Associative, where parts come to form a seemingly natural whole, and 3) Contemplative, where the artist regards the object. Ruskin writes that “in all cases the Imagination is based upon, and appeals to, a deep heart feeling; and how faithful and earnest it is in contemplation of the subject-matter, never losing sight of it, nor disguising it, but depriving it of extraneous and material accidents, and regarding it in its disembodied essence” (35). Both of these theories of imagination involve the creation of a unified object of art via the creativity of the artist. The nature of creativity remains difficult to define, but its power and value to humans cannot be denied. As poets exercise their imaginative faculty, readers are stimulated to create their own mental images, to make meaning where meaning is vague, and to impose their own sense of unity—or lack thereof—on the work of art. Ideally, readers of poetry will go beyond creative reading and find in the creativity of another their own creative capacity that will stimulate them to create—to become poets themselves.

These aspects of Pre-Raphaelite poetry that focus on the emotional, visual, and imaginative all lead to a poetry that contains a great deal of linguistic ambiguity. Pre-Raphaelite poetry, and Victorian poetry in general, remains ever aware of the limits of linguistic expression. Pre-Raphaelite poetry often draws attention to these limits, and in doing so enables readers to more easily read themselves into poems. With its focus on

primary processes, Carole Silver has argued that Pre-Raphaelite poetry is essentially dream poetry. She defines literary Pre-Raphaelitism as “a movement to which dream is central, a movement which utilizes accounts of actual dream, dream language, dream symbol, and, most significantly, a movement with the characteristics of dream itself” (“Dreamer” 5). She discusses this poetry in terms of the Victorian philosophical, medical, religious, popular, and literary writing about dreams, which pre-date Freud, but include many of the same elements he would later discuss in *Interpretation of Dreams*. Dreams, in the mid-nineteenth century, were seen as containing truths about the inner self and as using associative logic (Silver, “Dreamer” 6-9). The Pre-Raphaelite use of dream distinguishes itself “by a special concern with accurate accounts of ‘real’ dream experiences and by increased emphasis on capturing dream logic and structure. Their belief in the principles of truth to nature and fidelity to experience made them demand fidelity to inner experience, as to external nature” (12). From their beginnings with *The Germ*, Pre-Raphaelite writers “reiterated the sentiment that sleep and reverie are the true sources of creative energy and psychological truth” (13). Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s poetry, for example, contains associative logic, rapid shifts in scene and image, composite figures (condensations), displacements of self, private symbols, lack of temporal and spatial consistency, gaps, and lack of cause-and-effect (23). The same can be said for much of the poetry of William Morris, Christina Rossetti, Charles Algernon Swinburne, and their precursors such as John Keats and the early Tennyson. This poetry, like dreams, involves images and scenarios that evoke intense feelings without offering any obvious meaning. Along with linguistic ambiguity, this poetry also resists making

moral judgments that many readers find off-putting. This poetry is not didactic, allowing us instead to make our own explorations. Essentially, we want readers to have the characteristics that Walter Pater gives to the “aesthetic critic.” Reacting to Matthew Arnold’s view of a moral aesthetic, where art becomes a moral guide, a kind of religion, Pater explains that what is important to the aesthetic critic is “the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects” (72). We cannot offer poetry as a moral guideline to readers and students, but we can engage them in poetry in such a way that leads to deeper self awareness, offers identity support, and encourages empathy and creativity—all essential to a capacity for ethics.

Finally, Victorian poetry, like Romanticism, involves a focus on the human mind, and offers readers insights into mental phenomena. The major development in Victorian poetry comes in the dramatic monologue form pioneered by Tennyson and Robert Browning, and widely used by other Victorian poets including Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Morris. William Johnson Fox wrote of Tennyson’s 1830 volume of poems, “Mr. Tennyson . . . seems to obtain entrance into a mind as he would make his way into a landscape” (76). Dramatic monologues differ from Romantic lyrics by offering distance to their subjects. Instead of getting the subjective voice and thought processes of the poet, the reader is presented with the voice of a character presented objectively. Ekbert Faas describes how this new poetic form developed around the same time as mental science, describing it as a “poetry of psychology” (12). As these poets show us characters as psychological studies, we are invited to experience and even interpret their mental processes, and, in the process, find recognition and awareness of our own. Dante

Gabriel Rossetti describes his own process of entering a character through dramatic monologue as finding an “inner standing-point” (332)—that is, putting himself wholly in the perspective of his character. Readers of these poems—whether Romantic lyrics or dramatic monologues—also find themselves in the inner standing-point of the speaker, which enables them to empathize as well as analyze.

In the following chapters, I examine three Pre-Raphaelite poets for their therapeutic value or their capacity for encouraging renewal and reparation, while considering classroom activities that will maximize their value for students in these respects. All of these poets are rich in each of the characteristics described above and are thus particularly useful for this approach to poetry. My treatment of these poets loosely follows Mazza’s model for a brief poetry therapy. Although each of these three poets are useful for each of Mazza’s phases, Christina Rossetti is a poet who offers supportive recognition and hope, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, with his honest treatments of human desire, deepens our awareness of our inner selves and our relationships, and William Morris is the most purely imaginative poet of the three and demands imaginative response from his readers.

CHAPTER IX

Christina Rossetti: Language of Contemplation and Hope

Contemplation

As a devotional poet whose works sometimes offer moral instruction or encourage renunciation of all worldly things, Christina Rossetti may seem an odd choice for an approach to poetry that seeks to open up meaning for the reader. Her intense Christianity, central to all of her work, may alienate some. Woolf writes that Rossetti “saw the world from the same angle always” (“I Am” 242). The emphasis on a Christian belief system tends to close off meaning and desire as it envisions a concrete object in Christ who would provide ultimate fulfillment through spiritual union after death. With this union as the goal of life, Rossetti appears at times to value a renunciation of the world and imply a death-wish since only death can provide salvation. This goal stands in direct opposition to an approach to poetry that stresses an acceptance of the world as good, and encourages active participation in the object world. Yet, when we read Rossetti’s poetry, we find an underlying complexity that leads Woolf to address Rossetti, in the same paragraph, “When you struck your harp many strings sounded together” (243). Because Rossetti’s poetry frequently operates through open-ended allegory and vague symbolism, the object and the nature of desire are not always so clear, and thus many readers can relate to her portrayal of profound yearning and her transcendence of it that is at least as much a poetic transcendence as a theological one.

Feminist criticism has provided a major resurgence of Rossetti's status as a poet since the 1970s, focusing particularly on Rossetti's female desire in relation to her faith. Feminist critics, like Germaine Greer and Dolores Rosenblum, or more recently Lynda Palazzo (*Christina*) and Mariaconcetta Constantini, have tended to either downplay or deconstruct Rossetti's Christian spiritual yearning in order to locate elements in her work that subvert patriarchy and patriarchal Christianity. Feminist critics have also tended to see the influence of Christianity as an impediment to both Rossetti's life and her poetry, especially in her later work where religion becomes more prominent and overt. In recent full-length treatments of Rossetti, Diane D'Amico, Mary Arseneau, and Dinah Roe avoid subverting or ignoring Rossetti's faith and ground her desire more firmly in the spiritual, while also reconciling Rossetti's spiritual self with her poetic self rather than seeing the two in conflict. Though her religion grounds all of her work, Roe writes that Rossetti's "true instinct [was for] unfettered self-expression" (5). Feminists tend to see her as conflicted and oppressed by the relationship of her art to her faith, but more recent assessments show that the two are inextricably linked. The hopeful elements of her poetry arise from the hope that religion provided her, though they are often presented through symbolism rather than being overtly dogmatic. Rossetti's poetry is primarily contemplative, emotionally expressive, and symbolically reparative, with her religion providing a vehicle and a foundation of hope.

Rossetti does not reject the world, but seeks a balance between renunciation of worldly things that lead to vanity, and active contemplation and enjoyment of the world. I teach Rossetti's poems "An Apple Gathering" and "Another Spring," both from her

Goblin Market volume, together in order to illustrate this conflict in Rossetti. I also use these poems to encourage students to contemplate the value of both renunciation and action in their own lives, and get them to think about finding their own balance. This is an especially appropriate issue for traditional college aged students who often seek new and exciting experiences but tend to be prone to excess.

“An Apple Gathering” portrays a speaker who explains that she “plucked pink blossoms from mine apple tree / And wore them all that evening in my hair” (1-2). But upon returning “in due season” (3) the speaker finds “no apples there” (4). Her neighbors who all have full baskets of apples see her empty handed and mock her as they pass. She becomes filled with regret when she sees their joy in the harvest. Her thoughts of regret then turn to Willie, a former love. She asks, “Ah Willie, Willie, was my love less worth / Than apples with their green leaves piled above?” (17-18). Apparently, Willie does value the apples that are now in season over the love that they once had. The speaker, however, had put more value on their relationship. She says, “I counted rosiest apples on the earth / Of far less worth than love” (19-20). But what they had shared is now gone:

So once it was with me you stooped to talk
 Laughing and listening in this very lane:
 To think that by this way we used to walk
 We shall not walk again! (21-24)

In the end she is left to sit alone in the cold night.

The implication here is that the speaker chose the immediate gratification of the pretty blossoms so that when the time came to harvest the apples she had none. Her

neighbors, who showed greater restraint, were rewarded in the end and able to enjoy the fruits of the harvest. In the classroom, I begin by establishing the allegorical reading of the poem with my class and briefly discussing the value of patience and reserve. Then, I have them write about what the poem specifically means to them. They may relate themselves to the speaker, or they may write about others they have known who resemble the speaker. Either way, I ask students to specifically assign meaning to the blossoms and to the apples. One may read the poem through Christianity where renouncing the gratifications that the world offers, with the blossoms being gratifications that are seen as sinful, will allow one to attain greater rewards later on in Heaven (apples). But Rossetti also brings up the human relationship with the speaker and Willie, and readers may focus more on this. Nearly everyone has had the experience of rushing into a relationship and regretting it later for any number of reasons. Relationships may bring joys or even physical pleasures, but with a lack of restraint one often becomes hurt or humiliated like the speaker of the poem. Or readers may use the poem to consider a number of other forms of regret, for example, not studying enough in high school because of a too active social life. The allegory remains open for students to read themselves or others into it.

Rossetti's poem "Another Spring," however, offers a very different perspective. While many of Rossetti's poems appear to favor restraint in life or even the renunciation of the material world for the greater rewards of the spiritual, "Another Spring" stands out as an anti-renunciation poem with its *carpe diem* theme:

If I might see another Spring

I'd not plant summer flowers and wait:

I'd have my crocuses at once,
 My leafless pink mezecons,
 My chill-veined snowdrops, choicer yet
 My white or azure violet,
 Leaf-nested primrose; anything
 To blow at once not late. (1-8)

Using floral imagery, similar to the blossoms in “An Apple Gathering,” Rossetti now values the immediate gratification that these flowers would offer. Rossetti’s speaker clings to life and all of the potential joy of the material world:

If I might see another Spring
 I'd listen to the daylight birds
 That build their nests and pair and sing,
 Nor wait for mateless nightingale;
 I'd listen to the lusty herds,
 The ewes with lambs as white as snow,
 I'd find out music in the hail
 And all the winds that blow. (9-16)

In this verse, Rossetti specifically values, through animal images, the world of relationships—the object world and the world of object love:

If I might see another Spring—
 O stinging comment on my past
 That all my past results in “if” —

If I might see another Spring
 I'd laugh to-day, to-day is brief;
 I would not wait for anything:
 I'd use to-day that cannot last,
 Be glad to-day and sing. (17-24)

The speaker in this poem wants to live without the regrets that one who renounces life would have. She will seek joy in life; her desire is firmly and lovingly connected with the object world. She does not split the evil world from a loving Heaven, but finds positive images in worldly things. In “Another Spring,” we may say that life itself is, broadly, the object of desire. Rossetti recognizes the nature of desire, however, as always fleeting, hence the underlying tone of desperate yearning throughout even a poem that looks favorably on life. As a contrast to “An Apple Gathering,” we can use “Another Spring” to encourage fortitude in students and encourage them to think about the need to embrace life and to live without regrets that come with inaction—a different form of regret than we see in “An Apple Gathering.” In the classroom, we can ask students to write about what they would like to do in life given the opportunity—such contemplations could even lead students to take positive actions. Taken together, these poems offer two perspectives, both of which have value and both of which have flaws, that lead readers to consider the need to balance reserve with action.

Both of the above poems deal with the issue of desire in complex ways, as do many of the poems by Christina Rossetti and her brother Dante Gabriel. Many of Christina Rossetti's poems treat the object of desire as obscure—not simply a desire to

merge with Christ—and show the awareness that, while moments of joy are always possible, desire is always potentially a source of deep suffering. My purpose is not to locate the source or object, repressed or conscious, of Rossetti's desire—since all desire is ultimately obscure and objectless—but to explore how she uses poetic language to both examine and repair the lack that she portrays as spiritual longing. Constance Hassett writes, “Desire in its many varieties and gradations was regarded by Rossetti as absolutely central to poetry. It is more than a theme, however; the finest Rossettian poem itself stirs desire” (*Christina* 11). “A Pause of Thought” provides one of the clearest examples of the complexity of desire in Rossetti:

I looked for that which is not, nor can be,
 And hope deferred made my heart sick in truth
 But years must pass before a hope of youth
 Is resigned utterly. (1-4)

In the opening verse, she recognizes that her desire is objectless and unappeasable, but imagines that eventually she will give up its pursuit:

I watched and waited with a steadfast will:
 And though the object seemed to flee away
 That I so longed for, ever day by day
 I watched and waited still.

Sometimes I said: This thing shall be no more;
 My expectation wearies and shall cease;

I will resign it now and be at peace:

Yet never gave it o'er. (5-12)

She has, at times, considered giving up pursuit of the object, but never can:

Sometimes I said: It is an empty name

I long for; to a name why should I give

The peace of all the days I have to live?—

Yet gave it all the same.

Alas, thou foolish one! alike unfit

For healthy joy and salutary pain:

Thou knowest the chase useless, and again

Turnest to follow it. (13-20)

Rossetti shows an awareness that desire never ends. The speaker cannot, even with age, escape the drive to pursue the elusive object of desire, as she predicts in the opening stanza; nor can she will herself to give it up, as she proposes in the following stanzas.

She recognizes that the lack she experiences is a source of pain, but she cannot avoid it as long as she lives. This poem of depression and lack, however, also has an affirmative quality. The final lines imply that she will continue in her pursuit. The way Rossetti continues, at least in part, is through producing poetry that seeks reparation in the symbolic. This poem is reparative to readers because it offers realistic recognition of the nature of desire and the human drive to struggle with it.

In my classes, I focus on the aspects of Rossetti's poetry that lend it to deconstruction. I consider how her poems open themselves to readers' interpretations and contemplations, how they keep desire in play, and, how, through the reparative structure that Rossetti often employs, they offer redemption. Roe, in her book on Rossetti's "devotional imagination," allows that "Rossetti's own insistence, stylistically and theologically, on the slipperiness of meaning, the pitfalls of translation and interpretation, and the shortcomings of human understanding, encourages her readers to think and feel for themselves" (7). In Rossetti, we find a poet of constant self contradiction and great emotional and imaginative complexity. Rossetti is a devout Christian moralist who, in many instances, writes open-ended poems that actually encourage more relativistic thinking and a more personal approach to reading poetry. She is a poet of deep despair and worldly renunciation who often writes life affirming poetry expressing images of profound joy. Rossetti achieves these reparative moments through her poetry, just as she expresses moments of pain and longing. Desire comes through in her language, often accompanied by anger, debilitating fear, or overwhelming depression. But as a poet Rossetti finds reparation to both internal and external worlds through phantasy, image, and language. Because Rossetti's poems often follow a reparative structure that offers emotional support, and because they use vital but ultimately ambiguous images and symbols, much of her poetry carries potential for encouraging personal exploration, making it a valuable tool both within and outside of the classroom.

Rossetti's poem "My Dream" presents itself as an ambiguous retelling of a confounding dream. Yet, through its ambiguity it both seduces the reader by evoking curiosity and invites the reader's own interpretation. By framing the dream content of the poem with the opening lines, "Hear now a curious dream I dreamed last night / Each word whereof is weighed and sifted truth" (1-2), interest is evoked in the poem as object—the reader's desire is brought into play. This interest grows stronger when the speaker interrupts the actual dream early on to say,

The rest if I should tell, I fear my friend
 My closest friend would deem the facts untrue;
 And therefore it were wisely left untold;
 Yet if you will, why, hear it to the end. (9-12)

Both Sharon Smulders and Kathryn Burlinson have pointed to the unique relationship the poem establishes to its reader. Smulders explains, "First, [Rossetti] imperiously enjoins the reader's close attention in the poem's opening lines . . . then opens to the reader the option of continuing" (53-54). The poem, through its frame, invites the kind of exploration and creativity that proves key to the reparative process. Burlinson emphasizes the playful position of the text to the reader. She writes that Rossetti's speaker indulges "in flirtatious play with readers, provoking and teasing us into efforts of understanding" (9). Poetic language is most effective in its ability to avoid strict meaning through figurative language, and, as we see in "My Dream," to keep desire in play. Constantini sees "My Dream," in this regard, as a highly subversive text. She writes, "Behind [Rossetti's] playfulness and relish for odd fantasies, we can trace a deliberate

attempt to unveil the dangers of dominant ideologies, and declare the relativity and inscrutability of the world” (165). Rossetti returns to the frame at the end of the poem by saying, “What can it mean? you ask. I answer not / For meaning, but myself must echo, What?” (49-50). By denying meaning as the speaker, Rossetti’s poem encourages and empowers the reader to explore and find personal meaning.

Critics have tended to focus on the frame of “My Dream,” but if we focus on the actual dream, while acknowledging its open-endedness, we recognize in it a reparative structure consistent with many of Rossetti’s other poems. One may read it, due to much of its specific imagery, as a psychoanalytic allegory for the separation from overwhelming, destructive desire, and the attainment of the depressive position achieved through and allowing for symbolic reparation. In such a reading, the dream represents an essential step in development that must be achieved by the subject then maintained through reparation. This maintenance is a major feature of Rossetti’s poetic project.

The dream portrayed in the poem begins with the speaker imagining herself standing by the Euphrates river. She writes, “Till out of myriad pregnant waves there welled / Young crocodiles, a gaunt blunt-featured crew, / Fresh-hatched perhaps and daubed with birthday dew” (6-8). The river becomes an image of a fecund maternal womb, as if the waves themselves give birth to the crocodiles. One of the crocodiles soon emerges as clearly the most dominant. The poem states, “And special terror weighed upon his frown; / His punier brethren quaked before his tail, / Broad as a rafter, potent as a flail” (20-22). The phallic imagery here is difficult to ignore, but as the poem develops the king crocodile comes more to resemble, in Kleinian terms, the phantasy

attacks by the subject on the bad maternal object that withholds oral gratification, or the bad maternal object retaliating from phantasy attacks of oral sadism by devouring:

An execrable appetite arose,
 He batted on them, crunched, and sucked them in.
 He knew no law, he feared no binding law,
 But ground them with inexorable jaw:
 The luscious fat distilled upon his chin,
 Exuded from his nostrils and his eyes,
 While still like hungry death he fed his maw;
 Till every minor crocodile being dead
 And buried too, himself gorged to the full, (25-33)

The king crocodile knows no restraint for his aggressive impulses; he acts on primal urges without regard to realistic consequences.

In Klein's 1931 essay "A Contribution to the Theory of Intellectual Inhibition," we find a clinical analysis of a dream that provides a near analytic parallel to Rossetti's poem. In Klein's essay, a troubled boy dreams of standing on a shore where crabs keep emerging from the sea. He must kill each crab as it emerges. "As soon as he killed the crab, he had to kill more of them which kept on coming out of the water." If he does not kill them all, he fears, they will "kill the whole world" (*Contributions* 255). Klein interprets the crabs as internal persecutors—in both the boy and his mother—that threaten the good object. The boy reacts to these threatening bad objects, the crabs, with fear, and retaliates with an aggressive phantasy (256-257). He reacts to the maternal body from

the paranoid/schizoid position, seeing it as a place of conflict between good breast/bad breast.

In light of Klein's essay, we may read Rossetti's poem in two ways here: either the crocodiles springing from the Euphrates are sibling rivals within the womb of the maternal body that the king crocodile violently attacks in phantasy in an effort to consume and control the nourishment of the mother, or, if we take a step back, the crocodiles are introjected good objects springing from a loving mother (the Euphrates) that are threatened and destroyed by the introjected bad object (the king crocodile). In either of these readings, we see a representation of the primary paranoid/schizoid position where aggression threatens both the maternal good object and the self. We can have our students relate to the image of the king crocodile by finding their own parallels. It may come to represent an external aggressive force for them such as a terrorist or a corrupt politician, or students may relate it to their own internal aggressions and phantasies.

As Rossetti's dream continues, the king crocodile falls to sleep. "In sleep," the speaker explains, "he dwindled to the common size" (36). The sense of destructive omnipotence in phantasy is lost, and the image of the threatening object becomes more manageable. "Then from far off," the speaker continues, "a wingèd vessel came" (38). This vessel, in a psychoanalytic reading, comes to represent the movement toward the father and the world of both law and the potential for loving object relations that will tame the primary relationship to the maternal with its threatening elements. Rossetti continues,

It levelled strong Euphrates in its course;

Supreme yet weightless as an idle mote

It seemed to tame the waters without force

Till not a murmur swelled or billow beat: (42-45)

This secondary object balances the relationship to the maternal—represented by the Euphrates—and calms the anxiety of that relationship. Kristeva’s model of devouring mother/imaginary father, which she derived from Klein, is particularly appropriate to the poem. In this model, the image of the wingèd vessel represents the imaginary father that, through language, culture, and civilization, provides the antidote to the destructive primary relationship with the devouring mother. In Kleinian terms, the wingèd vessel comes in to begin the process of reparation. Now the king crocodile, once overwhelmed with aggression, enters what we recognize as the depressive position. The dream ends, “The prudent crocodile rose on his feet / And shed appropriate tears and wrung his hands” (47-48). Of course, we cannot altogether ignore the potential irony of “prudent” and the implication of crocodile tears. If, however, we read these lines straight, as the text appears to suggest we should, and assume that the crocodile has become prudent and that his tears are appropriate, we see that the crocodile now feels the appropriate guilt for former acts of aggression, just as the subject must come to feel guilt for phantasy attacks on the mother once she is recognized as whole in order to perform the necessary acts of reparation. And if the king crocodile’s tears are not genuine, we must see this as a flaw in his character.

We need not teach our students Kleinian theory, however, for them to find personal meaning in the poem. “My Dream,” though ambiguous in its specific imagery,

offers recognition of primal aggressive instincts, but also shows the necessary reaction of guilt and remorse that allows for positive relations to one's objects. Basically, it describes the conflict between negative, hateful emotions and positive, loving ones. This conflict, again, may be internal or external. Once we get students to find a personal parallel to the aggressive king crocodile, we can then ask them to find its counter in the wingèd vessel, which should represent love in some form. This counter image may be a loving other to counter a destructive other, or it may be a cultural object that brings calm, or perhaps something else. Through her use of ambiguity combined with reparative structures, Rossetti invites students to contemplate their own internal and external destructive as well as loving objects, which can help them to master negative emotions and achieve reparation.

Hope

Many of Christina Rossetti's poems have a reparative structure where they move from paranoid/schizoid thinking or overwhelming depression to the managed depressive position, which makes them useful for offering recognition to negative emotions as well as support that can help us cope with them. Reparation and meaningful hope can only occur if pain and suffering are realistically acknowledged. Attainment and maintenance of the depressive position depends on this realism. Rossetti's poetry deals with depression and despair in a way that offers recognition of intense negative emotional states to readers, but she emerges from this despair by finding hope in language and in symbolism. Poems that offer hope are especially useful early in a semester when trying to establish poetry as a good, supportive object with students. These poems offer

recognition for pain, but ultimately give rise to positive emotions that students will feel comfortable exploring early on. Rossetti's reparative poems can help students alter negative schemas, and can also provide a basis for later personal explorations through poetry that may be more emotionally difficult.

Among Rossetti's most purely positive poems is "A Birthday," which is a kind of poetic celebration of the pure good object. The establishment of a pure good object, though part of a paranoid/schizoid split, is essential as an early relationship prototype provided that one later comes to a more realistic assessment of it. "A Birthday" is a good poem to begin with early in a semester in order to establish poetry as a good object and to get students comfortable with exploring emotions—in this case, positive ones. The poem essentially provides a poetic monument to love. It attempts to capture the pure essences of love and joy through creativity. The speaker creates numerous images to reflect an inner state of exultation based on strong feelings of love toward an object. The poem begins,

My heart is like a singing bird

Whose nest is in a water'd shoot;

My heart is like an apple-tree

Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit; (1-4)

The speaker begins by seeking images in the natural world to capture feelings of love. In these two opening similes, we recognize fertility in both the "shoot," which is well nourished and provides a happy home for the bird, and in the fruitful tree; both images provide positive links to the maternal object. The speaker continues, "My heart is like a

rainbow shell / That paddles in a halcyon sea” (5-6). We begin to move away from the strictly natural world toward a more imaginative one as the shell becomes personified by paddling in the sea. A shell, like the earlier nest, provides a home for living organisms. It becomes a safe womb image able to, and enabling one to, explore the calm, comfortable seas of the external object world. But even these images, the speaker feels, fall short of her inner state. She says, “My heart is gladder than all these / Because my love is come to me” (7-8). We discover the root of all of her happiness as object love. The poem begins by offering loving, joyful images that one may associate with the nourishing maternal body—the essential, primary good object—but the speaker ultimately finds greater happiness in the external world of object love. Still, the maintenance of this primary loving image proves essential; the image of the loving object must be repaired and preserved for the possibility of object love. The first stanza of “A Birthday” offers the reader an array of such strong, loving images.

The second, and final, stanza of the poem moves away from the natural world toward the world of artistic creation:

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
 Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
 Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
 And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
 Work it in gold and silver grapes,
 In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;
 Because the birthday of my life

Is come, my love is come to me. (9-16)

The speaker commands that a dais be erected as a man-made monument to her love—what Palazzo describes as “a temple . . . to the beauty of a human emotion” (“Christina” 95). While nature supplies certain images of joy, safety, and love that may prove reparative, the speaker recognizes that capturing the image of love must be a creative act. Like the subject performing reparation, one must actively create the adequate image of the pure, loving object. Rossetti engages in this creative act through the poem, as the speaker of the poem engages in it during the second stanza by ordering her monument. Both succeed in creating such an object for the reader to enjoy, adapt, and find comfort in. The poem ends, as James Doubleday points out, with the discovery of the “birthday” as the final adequate image emerging where all others fall short (30). As the love object in the poem brings about “the birthday,” or the feeling of rebirth, the reader experiences the same feeling of renewal that comes with reparation and with object love.

With “A Birthday,” we can have students reflect on the (most likely positive) emotions that the poem evokes. Along with evoking positive feelings, the poem also shows how love can provide inspiration. We can follow up on the poem by having students create their own monument to love or to their love object(s)—whether lovers, friends, or family members—through poetry or another artistic medium. Nearly everyone will have some experience of love that the poem brings up, although students who are suffering from a want of love or lost love may find the poem too hopeful. Because the portrayal of good in the poem is so pure, it lacks realistic recognition of negative emotions and may alienate some students, bringing about a negative response.

Most of Rossetti's poetry, however, does offer recognition to negative emotions that she must find symbols and language to counter. She often finds comfort and meaning in the world through the cycles of nature that to her offer symbolic evidences of God's plan. If "A Birthday" offers an important image of the good object, most of her poems envision more whole objects as they achieve reparation, seeing the world as complex, often painful, but ultimately loving. In "A Summer Wish," we witness the poet realizing joy through natural imagery and through poetry:

Live all thy sweet life through

Sweet Rose, dew-sprent,

Drop down thine evening dew

To gather it anew

When day is bright:

I fancy thou wast meant

Chiefly to give delight.

Sing in the silent sky,

Glad soaring bird;

Sing out thy notes on high

To sunbeam straying by

Or passing cloud;

Heedless if thou art heard

Sing thy full song aloud. (1-14)

In these opening verses, Rossetti discovers images from the external world that evoke joy. At this point, Antony Harrison's assessment of the poem proves accurate. He writes, "The symbols in this poem are open ended, of course, but the work might easily be seen to advocate the value of beauty created 'chiefly to give delight,' and its language insists on the exuberance, the 'rejoicing,' that accompanies the act of (poetic) creation" (20).

As Rossetti continues, however, the wish/desire part of "A Summer Wish" emerges. She turns from the natural objects to the self and finds, through the objects, a sense a yearning:

O that it were with me
 As with the flower;
 Blooming on its own tree
 For butterfly and bee
 Its summer morns:
 That I might bloom mine hour
 A rose in spite of thorns. (15-21)

She envisions herself emerging as a good object, but also as a whole object with imperfections—a rose with thorns.

O that my work were done
 As birds' that soar
 Rejoicing in the sun:
 That when my time is run

And daylight too,
 I so might rest once more
 Cool with refreshing dew. (22-28)

We could read a death-wish into these final lines, but her imagery remains grounded in the natural world. The speaker finds joy, and yearning emerges with the joy, but she does not react to this yearning with depression. The poem engages in the real world, and looks forward to more of the worldly joy that she locates in the opening stanzas. The moment of exuberance she finds in nature offers a loving image of the world that will lead the speaker to seek more of such moments. The joy apparent in her language creates a poem—a loving, reparative object—that encourages, and positively affirms life.

“Winter Rain” also finds pleasure and meaning in the cyclical wholeness of nature. Rossetti reacts to the dreary winter rain by imagining the springtime life that it will give rise to. The poem is not an escapist fantasy so much as a recognition and celebration of the poet’s sense of wholeness and meaning in the natural world:

Every valley drinks,
 Every dell and hollow;
 Where the kind rain sinks and sinks,
 Green of Spring will follow. (1-4)

The rain will feed the land and the winter provides a necessary precursor for the joyous spring. Rossetti turns also to the animal world with images of love, procreation, and maternal nourishment:

Weave a bower of love

For birds to meet each other,
 Weave a canopy above
 Nest and egg and mother. (9-12)

She sees the fecundity in all of nature, and, poetically, transforms the rainy winter day:

But for fattening rain
 We should have no flowers,
 Never a bud or leaf again
 But for soaking showers; (13-16)

Without rain there would be no flora or fauna—or even human life—

But miles of barren sand,
 With never a son or daughter,
 Not a lily on the land,
 Or lily on the water. (29-32)

Seeing nature as whole object, Rossetti does not react against the winter rain as bad object, but repairs the whole object through her poetic imagination, imagining the good that will arise.

We can use “A Summer Wish” and “Winter Rain” to get students writing about the reparative value that they find in natural world objects. Many people have positive memories of communing with a place in nature where they experienced a sense of mental clarity or came to sense a profound order in the world. Of course, nature also has its brutal side, and we can have students consider this as well, so that nature will be seen as a whole object and not just an idealized one.

If “Winter Rain” provides an example of the natural word as a whole, meaningful, and ultimately good object, “Up-Hill” does the same with life. Mazza actually recommends this poem for examining belief and understanding in poetry therapy (154-155). The poem’s dialogic structure provides realistic but hopeful answers to common concerns about life:

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day?

From morn to night, my friend. (1-4)

The voice that answers recognizes, honestly, that life is a difficult struggle.

But is there for the night a resting-place?

A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.

May not the darkness hide it from my face?

You cannot miss that inn. (5-8)

In spite of life’s difficulties, the voice assures us that we will be provided for.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?

Those who have gone before.

Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?

They will not keep you standing at that door. (9-12)

The third verse links the questioner, and the reader, to the object world. We are not alone; loving others will help us on our journey.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?

Of labor you shall find the sum.

Will there be beds for me and all who seek?

Yea, beds for all who come. (13-16)

“Up-Hill” assesses life from the depressive position by acknowledging both the good and bad—the joy and sorrow—that will inevitably come with life. It reacts to the bad in life by providing hope, and showing that the world and life are ultimately good objects. In the classroom, we can use this poem to get students to consider where they find support in life during troubled times. Essentially, we can ask them to write about who or what are their loving objects. This can help to raise awareness of the importance of object relations in the difficult struggle of life.

In taking this reparative approach to Rossetti’s poetry, where students consider what her poetry can offer them personally, I have also discovered that some of her poetry is particularly empowering to female readers. Rossetti has always had a somewhat rocky relationship with feminism, mainly because of her failure to join the likes of Augusta Webster and support female suffrage in her time, but she does portray resolute female independence in many poems that contradicts stereotypes of feminine weakness. One poem that is particularly powerful in this sense is Rossetti’s early, and rarely treated, poem “Undine.” The poem’s title comes from a water nymph from German mythology named Undine who gave up her immortality for love, but later put a curse on her husband when she caught him in the arms of another woman. Because Rossetti omits any specific

references to the myth or the curse other than in the title, the poem could represent any female in the act of leaving her male lover.

The poem begins in the middle of the action. The climactic moment of the lovers' conflict has clearly passed and Rossetti's heroine is in the act of leaving:

She did not answer him again
 But walked straight to the door;
 Her hand nor trembled on the lock,
 Nor her foot on the floor,
 But as she stood up steadily
 She turned, and looked once more.

She turned, and looked on him once more:

Her face was very pale;
 And from her forehead her long hair
 Fell back like a thick veil;
 But, though her lips grew white, the fire
 Of her eyes did not fail. (1-12)

The woman portrayed in these verses offers an image of strength to readers. She is clearly experiencing intense emotions as she leaves her lover, but her body language will not betray her. In this moment, she goes on to recall all of the memories of the love she and her lover shared together until she finds herself on the verge of madness. But even as she feels herself falling apart inside, she maintains her strength and resolve.

Yet still she stood there steadily
And looked him in the face;
There was no tear upon her cheek;
Upon her brow no trace
Of the agonizing strife within,
The shame and the disgrace.

And so she stayed a little while
Until she turned once more,
Without a single sob or sigh;
But her heart felt quite sore:
The spirit had been broken, and
The hope of life was o'er. (31-42)

Even though she is clearly devastated by her loss of love, she walks away with her self intact. She offers an image of female agency and empowerment that female students, and males as well, can find their own inner strength in. The speaker's relationship with the love object is over, but she remains an image of survival. The poem reminds us that we not only find strength through good relationships, but at times we require inner strength in bad relationships. Humans are dependent on others, but we cannot let our relationships completely define us or they may also destroy us.

One activity that works well with this poem is to get students to fill in the before and after of the narrative creatively. As they consider what may have happened in the

moments leading up to the action of the poem, they will set up a specific and unique scene that will help them relate more to the poem. The scenario they imagine may even evoke memories of a similar, real life, situation that they were involved in, which will invest them even more into the poem. Students can then imagine and write about what happens to the protagonist, or perhaps her lover, after the action of the poem. Students who find admirable strength in the female protagonist may portray her carrying this strength forward and achieving success by applying it to other aspects of her life. Or perhaps things will turn out badly for her, but at least she can go forward feeling satisfied with her courage and dignity. Again, there are endless possibilities for what students may imagine, but the openness of the poem, as with much of Rossetti's poetry, is useful for getting students engaged in their emotional and creative experiences of reading poetry.

CHAPTER X

Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Desire, Mirrors, and Art

Meeting the Self

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's watercolor *How They Met Themselves* reflects both the difficulty and value in his artistic and poetic project. The watercolor portrays a young couple meeting their doubles or *doppelgangers* in a dark forest. In this moment, the man and woman are each meeting the self as an other and, at the same time, meeting themselves as a couple. The watercolor can serve as a metaphor for gaining awareness of both the internal self and the relational self. As the figures in the painting each meet their own doubles as individuals, they must see themselves as mysterious others, and as they meet their doubles as a couple, they are able to see their relationship from an outside perspective as well. The man and woman have different reactions to this confrontation with their doubles, both negative. The man, we can see, has unsheathed his sword. He is threatened by the doubles and reacts aggressively. The woman is overwhelmed by the sight of the doubles and is in the process of fainting. Aside from the gender stereotypes at work here, the watercolor shows deep fear of confrontation with the self. Students may have similar reactions to the subjects of the watercolor when we encourage self exploration in them. They may aggressively reject it like the man in the watercolor, or they may wither away at the prospect of it like the woman. Rossetti's watercolor reminds

us of what is at stake in gaining awareness of one's self and one's relationships. As a poet, Rossetti constantly draws our attention to the often frightening elements of our desire as humans and the way it plays out in our relationships. We desire to find ourselves through loving relationships with others, but we also fear losing our individuality to others. We need love and reparation, but we also need independence and separation. This is part of the paradox of human desire that Rossetti's poetry confronts in all of its contradictions and conflict. And this can be a difficult paradox to accept.

We may use this watercolor in our classes to get students thinking about the prospect of gaining self awareness. Students can imagine what it would be like to meet their double and write either a narrative or an interview transcript. This is a fairly direct way of getting them to consider themselves objectively that may bring up questions they have about themselves or issues and problems that they may want to focus on in their self explorations throughout the semester. Students can also imagine themselves and an important relational other—a friend, lover, or family member—meeting their doubles as a pair like the couple in the watercolor. In such a meeting, students can not only ask questions of the self, but ask questions of the other's double; or the other can ask their own double questions or the other can ask the student's double questions. Such an exercise may reveal things to students about their relationships. This exercise could provide a starting point for self exploration, but may be asking too much early in a semester depending on the student.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poetry also offers us a number of insights into how we might view or use works of art, including poetry, as objects, particularly in terms of how

they may help us in understanding the nature of desire in relation to the other. His poetry expresses the yearning to find, possess, and preserve the object of beauty that to him represents a lost transcendental ideal that he can never completely regain. Rossetti's poems often serve as displaced love objects—incomplete representations of the real object of desire. We might refer to them as (p)art objects that cannot fulfill desire, but only keep desire in play and draw attention to its metonymic nature. This ability to put and keep desire in play makes Rossetti's poetry useful in the classroom. Rossetti's poetry presents an artist's sense or glimpse of the obscure, elusive object of desire. Rossetti seeks to present this ideal object in order to give it permanence as art, but ultimately fails—must fail—because desire never finds fulfillment in the object in either life or art. Thus, he shows us something about the impossible nature of desire in general, while also allowing us to explore desire at a personal level. Rossetti seeks a wholeness in the other that cannot exist—a primal desire for the ultimate union of self and other that, in the psychoanalytic model, is lost during separation from the primal, maternal object. Rossetti's work to a large extent reflects the Kleinian theorist Hanna Segal's notion that all artistic creation is an act of mourning. According to Segal, "This wish to restore and re-create is the basis of later sublimation and creativity" (187). Creative activity for Segal comes from mourning and re-instating the primary good object. She writes, "all creation is really a re-creation of a once loved and once whole, but now lost and ruined object, a ruined internal world and self" (190).

"Willowwood" is one of Rossetti's most mysterious and imaginative treatments of this theme of trying to recover a lost other. The poem begins with the speaker and an

angelic figure referred to as Love leaning across a body of water. The two do not speak or even look at each other, but Love touches his lute and reveals “The certain secret thing he had to tell” (5). The speaker’s lost female love then appears to him, as if in a mirror, on the surface of the water: “Only our mirrored eyes met silently / In the low wave; and that sound came to be / The passionate voice I knew; and my tears fell” (6-8). The speaker is overwhelmed with emotions and bends down to kiss the image or ghost in the water: “And as I stooped, her own lips rising there / Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth” (13-14). In the second part of the poem, Love sings a song “meshed with half-remembrance hard to free” (2). Soon, the speaker finds himself surrounded by figures standing among the trees. He tells us that they were “All mournful forms, for each was I or she, / The shades of those our days that had no tongue” (7-8). Similar to the watercolor *How They Met Themselves*, the doubles of the couple know and are known by the speaker and his lover.

The third part of the poem gives us the lyrics to Love’s song, which ominously describes the mysterious place that is Willowwood:

‘O ye, all ye that walk in Willow-wood,
 That walk with hollow faces burning white;
 What fathom-depth of soul-struck widowhood,
 What long, what longer hours, one lifelong night,
 Ere ye again, who so in vain have wooed
 Your last hope lost, who so in vain invite
 Your lips to that their unforgotten food,

Ere ye, ere ye again shall see the light!

Alas! the bitter banks in Willowwood,

With tear-spurge wan, with blood-wort burning red:

Alas! if ever such a pillow could

Steep deep the soul in sleep till she were dead,—

Better all life forget her than this thing,

That Willowwood should hold her wandering!’ (1-14)

Willowwood appears to be a kind of limbo where mourned souls remain trapped, perhaps because their mourners cannot let them go. As the song ends, we find in the fourth and final part of the poem, so does the kiss the speaker shares with his love in the water. At this moment the image/figure of the female love object fades away: “And her face fell back drowned, and was as grey / As its grey eyes; and if it ever may / Meet mine again I know not if Love knows” (6-8). The speaker then leans forward and drinks of the water as if to consume his lover into his body, showing the desire to literally merge with the lost other. The poem ends,

Only I know that I leaned low and drank

A long draught from the water where she sank,

Her breath and all her tears and all her soul:

And as I leaned, I know I felt Love’s face

Pressed on my neck with moan of pity and grace,

Till both our heads were in his aureole. (9-14)

Love in the end appears to be a compassionate figure offering sympathy, and perhaps some sense of spiritual transcendence, perhaps in the form of love's survival.

“Willowwood” offers students a symbolic way of considering their ongoing relationships with lost loves, while also tapping into the primal, universal longing for a lost paradise. Since the exact significance of Willowwood is left so vague, we can ask students to imaginatively describe what their own experience of Willowwood might be like. This forces them to consider what exactly they imagine Willowwood to be, and create a narrative that requires self reflection and consideration of relationships. We can also have students, perhaps prior to writing, create their own visual image of Willowwood through drawing or another artistic medium. The strange imagery and vague symbolism of the poem lend it to imaginative interpretation. By transforming the words of the poem into their own images, students will develop a more concrete mental image of the mysterious setting of Willowwood. By having them put themselves in the setting of the poem, they must consider their own emotions and relationships in this fantasy setting.

We may add another layer to our teaching of “Willowwood” by introducing Christina Rossetti's response to the poem, “An Echo from Willowwood.” Her poem reads,

Two gazed into a pool, he gazed and she,
Not hand in hand, yet heart in heart, I think,
Pale and reluctant on the water's brink,
As on the brink of parting which must be.

Each eyed the other's aspect, she and he,
 Each felt one hungering heart leap up and sink,
 Each tasted bitterness which both must drink,
 There on the brink of life's dividing sea.
 Lilies upon the surface, deep below
 Two wistful faces craving each for each,
 Resolute and reluctant without speech:—
 A sudden ripple made the faces flow
 One moment joined, to vanish out of reach:
 So those hearts joined, and ah! were parted so. (1-14)

If we compare the poems, the most evident difference is that Christina includes the female point of view as well. This inclusion of the female perspective makes the exercise more inviting to female readers. With the inclusion of the female, the poem offers a slightly different image that students can create from. Because the female now gazes into the pool as well, we must decide where to put her exactly. Are the two lovers side by side and both looking at the images of the other in the water, or is the female in a different dimension of Willowood where she is seeing her love in a pool and kissing him from there as he kisses her from his Willowood? Here, we may have the makings of a surrealist painting.

Through his work, Rossetti attempts to capture a lost, ever-fleeting idealized object of profound love and transcendental beauty that he can only occasionally catch a glimpse of, like the speaker of "Willowood" does in the water; but the glimpses that he

portrays in his poems prove both profound and important to the poet, and to the reader, as they get him in touch with his true desire. Rossetti poetically expresses moments of intense feeling or of profound beauty with passionate linguistic intensity, allowing readers to share in his emotional experience and locate this experience in themselves. Because of this, he can be not only a linguistically difficult poet, but an emotionally difficult one as well. Rossetti does not offer any philosophy for living, but shows us both the multiplicity and the depth of our experiences. He does not cut off meaning by offering answers or prescriptions, but captures moments, feelings, and yearnings in his art that are open to interpretation and lead to introspection in readers. Paradoxically, when we read Rossetti we become aware of the power of language while also recognizing the limits of the art object. Rossetti undercuts or subverts the symbolic to a degree by always pointing to its lack, its artifice and insubstantiality. At the same time, his poetry offers readers a realistic awareness of the nature of desire, which seeks something beyond or prior to language. Rossetti puts us in touch with the intensity our experience, offering us deeper self awareness and recognition. In this, he ultimately reveals the unique capability of poetic language.

Two Views of the (P)Art Object

In Rossetti's two ekphrastic poems entitled "The Portrait"—"Sonnet X" from *The House of Life* and the dramatic monologue—we witness speakers taking two different views of a work of art as (p)art object. Because these poems deal with works of art, they offer students insights into both the appreciation and the creation of art. Both poems deal with portraits of beautiful women who represent Rossettian objects of desire, objects

through which the artist/speaker seeks fulfillment for his own identity or ego. Lawrence Starzyk accurately points out the artists' narcissism in these poems that, according to him, results from the memorializing of the female, as well as both the pleasure and terror involved in the act of memorializing. The art object that serves the ego also threatens the ego as the painter merges with the real object within the work of art. Where Starzyk sees this anxiety arising in the act of memorializing, I argue that it is not the art object, or not only the art object, but the actual female object in which the artists seek fulfillment that brings about the threat to the subject.

The two poems have a number of significant differences in terms of the speakers' relationships with their objects of desire. By teaching these poems together, we can point out and evaluate these differences, and get students thinking about artistic creation and both its positive and negative motivations. In the longer poem, which I will refer to as "The Portrait," the speaker uses the portrait of his lost love to keep desire in play. In the moment he creates the portrait, he has accepted the merging with the other and finds some fulfillment in her that he experiences with gratitude. The relationship only proves threatening to him later because of her death. When gazing at the portrait later, through the acceptance of his desire and the maintenance of his love, he finds a moment of symbolic reparation, however flawed it may be. The speaker of "Sonnet X," however, while revealing his desire for the female object and the power she has over him, reacts to the object with greed, seeking to conquer and control the real object through her image, rather than accepting her with gratitude. In the case of "Sonnet X," the threatening aspects of the artist's desire for the real object actually provide the motivation for the

memorializing. This shows that creative acts and the investment of the self in art are not always positive or altruistic.

A comparison of these two poems recalls Klein's 1929 essay "Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse," where she first introduces the concept of art as reparative. In the essay, Klein discusses an article written by Karin Michaelis entitled "The Empty Space." The article contains the real-life story of an artist named Ruth Kjär. Klein describes Kjär as "beautiful, rich and independent," though "subject at times to fits of deep depression." She had no "pronounced creative talent," but possessed "remarkable artistic feeling" which she put into collecting art and decorating her house (*Selected* 90). When a favorite painting of hers is removed, the empty space on the wall comes to symbolize the deep depressive state that she falls into. One day, she decides to take up painting and fill the space on the wall herself. Through this act, she realizes her artistic talent, and this gives her the ability to restore herself and overcome her depression. In the first painting described by Klein, Kjär portrays a sickly looking older woman. According to Klein, this reflects her natural aggressive tendencies toward the maternal object. It provides her a way of attacking and controlling the object. The second painting, however, is a portrait of the artist's mother standing up tall and strong. Through this painting, the artist has repaired the previously attacked mother by creating an image of her as a resilient, loving object. Likewise with Rossetti's portrait poems: "Sonnet X" seeks control and mastery of the object and of desire, whereas "The Portrait" seeks to repair and maintain the object while keeping desire in play.

The longer poem “The Portrait” begins in passive contemplation of the portrait of the speaker’s deceased lover that he painted years before. He has given her eternal life, so to speak, as a representation, but even as he seeks fulfillment in her image, he realizes the inadequacy of the portrait as a substitute. The passive contemplation in the poem can only lead to the speaker facing his own desperate yearning for his living lover—can only keep his desire for her in play. While he realizes that the portrait is only a part object, he also recognizes the effect it has on him. This ability of the portrait to keep his desire in play eventually allows for a restoration of the loving image of the object in his internal world. We may debate the nature of the reparative phantasy at the poem’s conclusion in terms of whether the speaker loses his identity in the object or whether he will use her loving image to make further reparation, but he is able to maintain a loving image of a real woman, whom he sees as whole and experiences with gratitude, through a work of art and through his own capacity for symbolizing. Students can use the poem both to consider the nature of their positive experiences with works of art, and their positive experiences of their own creativity, which may come in many different forms.

“The Portrait” was originally written in 1847 during Rossetti’s youth. However, he revised it heavily for his 1870 edition of *Poems*—the same edition that the shorter sonnet of the same title originally appeared in. One cannot help but consider the 1862 death of Rossetti’s wife, Elizabeth Siddal, whom he painted obsessively, as a backdrop for this poem of mourning, though the original version of the poem was written before he met her. One exercise we can do with the poem either before or after students read it is bring in some of the paintings that Rossetti did of Siddal. We can either show a

multitude of them, which may help students understand the magnitude of his attachment to her, or we can settle on one. The Rossetti painting that I find most appropriate to the poem is *Beata Beatrix*, which is a memorial he painted to Siddal in 1864, years after her death. The painting portrays a hazy image of Siddal seated with her eyes closed and her hands folded on her lap. A red bird with a flower in its beak appears to be landing on her. Behind it is a sundial, and in the far background are two hazy figures. An opening of light shines out behind the two figures and also behind Siddal's head. We can ask students, based on the painting, what they imagine the painter's relationship to the subject of his painting was like. Some may see the portrayal of Siddal as ethereal; others might see sadness in the painting. Either way, it will get students to think about the artist in relation to his subject.

The poem itself begins, "This is her picture as she was: / It seems a thing to wonder on" (1-2). This line, as has been pointed out by critics like Michael Bright (99), A. A. Markley (83), and Riede (*Revisited* 111-112), echoes Browning's "My Last Duchess" where Duke Ferrara points out the picture of the Duchess on the wall "Looking as if she were alive" and says, "I call / That piece a wonder now" (2-3). But Rossetti's speaker has little in common with Browning's murderous Duke. The opening lines of "The Portrait" also echo the end of Christina Rossetti's 1856 poem "In an Artist's Studio," which deals with an artist idealizing his love object in painting. Christina Rossetti writes that the artist paints his female subject "Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright; / Not as she is, but as she fills his dream" (13-14). Again, we may bring in a Christina Rossetti poem to give our students a different perspective on Rossetti's male

desire. However, in saying “as she was,” Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s speaker insists, correctly perhaps, that the painting in this poem does not idealize the woman through art—as the painting in “Sonnet X” clearly does. Rossetti’s sister appears to have understood, though, the powerful relationship that her brother, as an artist, had with his portraits of his love objects.

The speaker of “The Portrait” evokes the image of the mirror early on as he stares at the portrait of his lost love. Looking at her likeness he muses, “As though mine image in the glass / Should tarry when myself am gone” (3-4). Perhaps this implies a merging with her as he locates himself in her image as if it were an eternal reflection of him, but mainly the speaker here comes to reflect on his own death through the work of art, and recognizes the way in which art can transcend death—as if his mirror image would remain in a mirror when he is no longer there. His gazing at the portrait, in fact, gives her the appearance of life. He says, “I gaze until she seems to stir” (5). Ronnalie Roper Howard sees this moment in the poem as a temporary “near delusion,” (13) but it soon becomes clear that “the earth is over her” (9)—she is dead. The art object can transcend death, but only through illusion. This early imagined stirring of the lover followed by the harsh return to the reality of her death sets up a pattern for most of the rest of the poem as the speaker both repairs her image and recognizes the reality of her death.

In the second verse, the speaker presents the images of the “thin-drawn ray / That makes the prison-depth more rude (10-11), and the “drip of water night and day / Giving a tongue to solitude” (12-13). Florence Saunders Boos refers to the thin light-ray and the single water drop in the poem as “two elements reduced to their most confined

manifestations” (221). These images reflect the speaker’s solitude, and show the monotony of his life. The slight bit of light that enters the room only makes it feel more prison like; the drops of water only make time without the beloved seem more tedious as they mark its passage. For this first of many instances in the poem, Rossetti uses the physical world to reflect his speaker’s own emotional state. In his despair, he knows that this portrait is all that remains of “love’s perfect prize” (14) except for

. . . what in mournful guise
Takes counsel with my soul alone,—
Save what is secret and unknown,
Below the earth, about the skies. (15-18)

The speaker is not deluded by the portrait; he recognizes immediately “the inadequacy of art as a substitute for life” (Riede, *Revisited* 112). Only his memories survive with the portrait, and, throughout the poem, the portrait evokes those memories. The poem shows how a material object, specifically a work of art, though limited as a substitute for a human object, can keep desire in play, and how it has value in making us deal with our desire by bringing about associations and memories, and, furthermore, how it can lead to symbolic reparation of the actual object.

In lines 17 and 18, we see the first reference in the poem to the “unknown” mysteries of death. In the poem’s third stanza, the poet/painter describes the background of the portrait as a mysterious, perhaps death-like, place. He “shrined her face,” he says, in a dark forest “Mid mystic trees” where torch-bearers make “doubtful talk” among nameless shapes, where “your own footsteps” meet you and all things are “going as they

came” (19-27). After this setting is created, we find that this “deep dim wood” (28) from the painting brings up a real-life association as the speaker’s first clear living memory of his beloved emerges. He recalls her “in that wood that day” (29) as an animated figure. He remembers the “still movement of her hands” and “the pure line’s gracious flow” (30-31). But the illusion soon passes and he again must deal with the painful fact that her portrait is “Less than her shadow on the grass / Or than her image in the stream” (35-36). He gets lost in his reparative fantasy during some moments, but never manically denies the reality of his loss, nor does he ever deny the importance of his love.

Throughout most of the rest of the poem, until we reach the climactic ending of the tenth stanza, the speaker moves in and out of painful memories of his beloved. He cannot even enjoy the blissful memories he has of her: “yet memory / Saddens those hours, as when the moon / Looks upon daylight” (39-41). We see one of several nature similes that Rossetti uses to express the inner suffering of his speaker. The depth of his yearning begins to emerge through his poetic musing. The speaker cannot completely control where this musing over the portrait will take him—ultimately, to the heart of his unfulfilled desire. In recalling his memories, he describes the joyous day when he professed his love (which we must assume was reciprocated) to the woman in the portrait, and the following day when

. . . the memories of these things,
 Like leaves through which a bird has flown,
 Still vibrated with love’s warm wings;
 Till I must make them all my own

And paint a picture. (55-59)

The simile in this verse expresses a profound jubilation, a feeling of fulfillment of such degree that can only prove fleeting—like a passing bird. But while the intense emotion remains, the painter feels that he must capture this moment so that he may keep it forever. As she models for him, he maintains this level of joy. Rossetti projects his speaker's joy onto his surroundings:

And all around was fragrant air,
 In the sick burthen of my love
 It seemed each sun-thrilled blossom there
 Beat like a heart among the leaves. (65-68)

But again, the joy of the memory evoked by the portrait cannot overcome the real grief over her death. The artist here must face the limitations of art; he has failed in his quest to capture the moment and make it eternal, though as a part object it continues to prove valuable to his reparative process; it restores the loving image of his love object so that he can experience both the joy of his memories and the grief of his loss. Though the art object is only an image, his experience of it is real, whole, and complex.

Jan Marsh points out the influence of Keats on Rossetti's poem (25). As it deals with a speaker's realization that an immortal work of art also suffers from inertness, it has much in common with "Ode on a Grecian Urn." But "The Portrait" has a closer relation in "Ode to a Nightingale" where the poet may follow his fancy (whether Keats's Nightingale, or Rossetti's memory of love) only to a certain extent before reality returns. Keats writes,

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
 Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf. (71-74)

Rossetti's speaker experiences the same phenomenon. The portrait can bring his lover back temporarily through memory, but he must continuously face the fact that these moments of escape from grief only come about through a fantasy that cannot be maintained—the fantasy that his lover actually is completely “as she was.” But this realization of the limits of art does not detract from its reparative value: it is the portrait itself that motivates the symbolization in the speaker—just as art objects at times motivate Keats's poetry—that leads to reparation.

Structurally, Rossetti's poem offers, perhaps, more of a resolution than the Keats ode. In the tenth stanza of “The Portrait,” the speaker comes to a climactic moment. After nightly battles with his memory of the lover, there comes a night where the speaker

...could have slept,
 And yet delayed my sleep till dawn,
 Still wandering. Then it was I wept:
 For unawares I came upon
 Those glades where once she walked with me:
 And as I stood there suddenly,
 All wan with traversing the night,
 Upon the desolate verge of light

Yearned loud the iron-bosomed sea. (82-90)

Critics differ on whether the speaker literally wanders into the forest or simply dreams it, but it matters little to the poem. As Joan Rees asserts, “Such ambiguity is typical of the poem where planes of reality merge into each other but the metaphorical meaning seems the dominant one” (28). In his battles with sleep, the speaker has wandered into the depths of his memory of the beloved. Upon entering the woods where the two lovers shared their most precious moments, the speaker feels more alone than ever. He projects his own intense yearning, which comes across strongest at this point in the poem, onto the cold, “iron-bosomed sea.” And yet, this moment of tears does bring her soul “a little nearer” to him as it brings about the imagined spiritual reunion of the following verse—the reparative image of the poem.

How shall my soul stand rapt and awed,

When, by the new birth borne abroad

Throughout the music of the suns,

It enters in her soul at once

And knows the silence there for God! (95-99)

The speaker has found a self-sustaining phantasy in the spiritual world. He imagines that the strength of their love will transcend life and death. In “The Portrait,” the speaker/lover finds a moment of reparation by imagining a merging of souls taking place outside of the physical realm.

In the final verse of “The Portrait,” the work of art itself takes on a spiritual value for the speaker. The speaker returns to the portrait, “Here with her face doth memory sit /

Meanwhile, and wait the day's decline" (100-101). He awaits his own death in anticipation of their reunion. But he continues, "Till other eyes shall look from it / Eyes of the spirit's Palestine" (102-103). He imagines the portrait itself will take on her spirit, while also imagining the spiritual reunion; the woman, the spirit, and the work of art all merge here as the portrait becomes a kind of shrine.

While hopes and aims long lost with her
Stand round her image side by side,
Like tombs of pilgrims that have died
About the Holy Sepulchre. (105-108)

All that made the lover vital now surrounds her holy image. In anticipation of their reunion, the spirit of the lover now seems closer to her shrine and closer to the speaker. It is only when his imaginative and symbolizing capacity serves its function that he can achieve the sense of wholeness that the merging with the love object can offer. Forced to realize the impossibility of reunion on Earth, the speaker finds that he can sustain a sense of wholeness through the promise of a spiritual reunion, and he has thus, for a moment, repaired the lost love object through art and poetry. The question remaining, however, is what the speaker will do with this reparation. Will it lead to an overwhelming Freudian melancholia that could end, in the most extreme case, in suicide? Or, preferably, will the repaired loving image allow him to live actively and maintain a connection with the object world? We do get the sense that the repaired image of the love object, in the painting and in his internal world, will sustain him, but the intensity of the longing for a spiritual reunion may also imply that he will not seek new loving relationships. Still, the

poem shows the potential value of a work of art for stimulating the desire that motivates symbolic reparation. We can use this poem as a lead in to getting students to choose works of art they have had positive experiences with in terms of changing their perspectives or helping them to cope. We can also get students to consider how creating their own art, in whatever form, can have value to them.

In contrast to “The Portrait,” the speaker of “Sonnet X,” “The Portrait” from Rossetti’s *The House of Life* sonnet sequence, ostensibly loves the female object he paints, but reacts to the love object not with gratitude or joy but with greed, in the Kleinian sense, for her part objects, or, specifically for her image as part object, that he seeks to control through art. His motivation is not to capture the loving image of his object in order to maintain it, but to conquer the object through her image. The object to him, the female, is never experienced as a real object, but only as an image, a part object. Aware of the power the object has over him, he does not react to it with loving gratitude, but appears to feel threatened. His motivation behind the painting is defensive; he reacts to the fear of losing himself in the object by egotistically dominating her. If the speaker of “The Portrait” gives perhaps too much of his ego to the object, the speaker of “Sonnet X” gives too little. He cannot escape his own narcissism in order to experience the object as loving and supportive. The work of art is created not to keep desire in play but to short-circuit desire when capturing the image becomes an end in itself. He flatters, and even idealizes, the love object in the poem, but he flatters himself even more. The poem ends with the successful immortalization of the love object as a work of art, and with the artist’s ownership of her. “The Portrait” shows a speaker who must, through imagination,

repair a lack in himself due to the loss of his love object. The speaker of “Sonnet X” sees the love object as fulfilling his ego only when he can expose, improve, and control her through his own artistic prowess.

Rossetti scholars generally agree that the poet had Jane Morris, wife of William Morris and Rossetti’s mistress and model for several of his paintings during the late 1860s and beyond, in mind when composing this poem. Furthermore, two specific paintings have been cited as the direct companions to the poem: 1868’s *The Blue Silk Dress* and 1869’s *The Portrait*. As with the previous poem, we can use these paintings to get students thinking about the artist’s relationship to his subject by asking them to imagine, based on the paintings, what the relationship was like. *The Blue Silk Dress* portrays Morris seated at a table with a book and a vase of flowers on it. She wears, appropriately, a blue silk dress. Her elbows rest on the table and her hands are folded under her chin. Her face has a sad and contemplative expression as she stares off into the distance. Students may read something into this expression and base their image of the relationship on it. *The Portrait* is generally a less descript painting. It focuses almost exclusively on Morris’s face, which is nearly expressionless, but very beautiful. What background we can see is blurred. We do see that she wears a beige or white top with pearls around her neck. The intense focus on the face in the painting may make it more appropriate to the tone of the sonnet, though what students will imagine is never completely predictable.

“Sonnet X” originally appeared in 1870’s *Poems* as a part of a larger work that would grow to be published in 1881 as *The House of Life*. “Sonnet X” begins, ironically, like a prayer—but a prayer for control. The speaker pleads,

O Lord of all compassionate control,
 O Love! let this my lady’s picture glow
 Under my hand to praise her name, and show
 Even of her inner self the perfect whole. (1-4)

He wants his love object to “glow” but only under his hand, as if only he, as an artist, can capture her true beauty. He ironically wants to show her as a “perfect whole,” but this is really a displacement. As Riede points out, “the soul he paints is his own soul as well. The artist enshrines both his beloved and his inner love” (*Limits* 158). Only in making her “whole” through art, can the speaker achieve his own sense of wholeness as both an artist and a possessor of her love. In seeking to expose her inner self, her soul, the speaker approaches violation. The poem continues,

That he who seeks her beauty’s furthest goal,
 Beyond the light that the sweet glances throw
 And refluent wave of the sweet smile, may know
 The very sky and sea-line of her soul. (5-8)

Again, “her beauty’s furthest goal,” is really a displacement of the speaker’s goal. A. E. B. Coldiron writes of this poem, “The artist wanted to reveal, but ended by controlling” (83). But by revealing he already controls, since only he, in his mind, can reveal her; her beauty becomes his possession since only he can capture it.

In the sestet, the artist has completed the portrait. The sonnet ends, “Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note / That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this!) / They that would look on her must come to me” (12-14). We hear the echo of “In painting I shrined her face” (19) from the longer “Portrait.” But unlike the speaker of “The Portrait,” the speaker of “Sonnet X” does have a strong parallel to Browning’s Duke of Ferrara who must pull back the curtain to reveal the portrait of his last Duchess. “Sonnet X” both begins and ends with enshrinement, whereas the longer poem goes on to mourning and coping. Of course, the circumstances differ: the speaker of “The Portrait” reflects on the portrait and the moment of its creation from the perspective of one who has lost the love object, whereas the speaker of “Sonnet X” is in the moment of creating the portrait. If we compare the moments of enshrinement in the two poems, however, we see that the motivation behind them differs greatly. The speaker of “The Portrait” wants to preserve a moment of joy and love from his most fulfilling personal relationship, whereas the sonnet’s speaker is strictly concerned with the love object as she can serve his artistic and egotistical purposes.

One writing exercise that we can do with students that will help them to empathize more with both speakers is to have them write from the perspective of the speaker of “Sonnet X” in the circumstances of “The Portrait,” where he is looking at his painting years later after its subject has died. Perhaps he will have had a change of heart, or perhaps he will still look at the painting with self admiration.

We can also have students write from the perspective of the speaker of “The Portrait” during the moment just after finishing the painting. He describes it some in his

poem, but perhaps the years have made him unreliable. He may have been more narcissistic at the time, or his love may have been genuine. We can leave it up to the students to imagine. Some students have even argued that the speaker of the two poems is actually the same person at different stages in life.

The poems have other differences that we must consider. The speaker of “The Portrait” creates a private shrine for himself to preserve love and memory, but the shrine in the sonnet is clearly intended for public consumption that may lead to fame and money. Perhaps he will have gained this when students imagine him years later—perhaps at a cost. The sonnet’s final line shows the speaker taking a kind of pleasure in ownership; he now controls the gaze his lover will receive. To him, he has given her a great gift. Jerome McGann sees the word “this”—“O Love, thy gift is this” (15)—as ambiguous in the poem (55). It would seem, though, that this gift that the painter gives his love is immortality; but in painting her, in creating the work of art, he also assures his own immortality. In “Sonnet X,” the act of painting the image of the love object offers wholeness to the artist more so than the relationship with the living, real love object. The most significant difference in the two poems in relation to the work of art is that in “The Portrait” the work has real value for the artist by stimulating desire, whereas in “Sonnet X” the work comes to represent a false end of desire for the artist. One exercise that works well for having students compare the poems is to have them describe what they imagine the two different paintings to look like, or, students who are more artistically inclined may draw or paint the images they imagine.

Again with Rossetti, the female perspective is absent in both poems. We could have students write something from the perspective of the female models, perhaps a letter to the artists who have portrayed them. Or we can put the females in situations similar to the males in the poems, but from their perspectives of models. A female model could write an elegy for the deceased lover who painted her, or she could write narcissistically of her self as a muse. Or we may introduce a poem written by Rossetti's model and wife, Elizabeth Siddal, that is particularly appropriate to the speaker of "Sonnet X": "The Lust of the Eyes." The poem reads,

I care not for my Lady's soul
 Though I worship before her smile;
 I care not where be my Lady's goal
 When her beauty shall lose its wile.
 Low sit I down at my Lady's feet
 Gazing through her wild eyes
 Smiling to think how my love will fleet
 When their starlike beauty dies.
 I care not if my Lady pray
 To our Father which is in Heaven
 But for joy my heart's quick pulses play
 For to me her love is given.
 Then who shall close my Lady's eyes
 And who shall fold her hands?

Will any hearken if she cries

Up to the unknown lands? (1-16)

Here, a female poet writes from the perspective of a male who only values her for her beauty. Siddal's poem provides food for speculation where students can see a point of view of one of Rossetti's actual models, while keeping in mind that the poem is a creative work and not necessarily biographical.

In Kleinian terms, we may say that the speaker of Rossetti's "The Portrait" functions in the depressive position where his dominant fear is abandonment by the object, which he responds to by attempting to repair the object symbolically. The speaker of "Sonnet X," in contrast, functions in the paranoid/schizoid position where he fears annihilation at the hands of the object and reacts by aggressively conquering the object and splitting off her image as the idealized part object, while escaping the threatening real object. The female object of desire is clearly a powerful force in both poems. The works of art in both poems, and the poems themselves, function to restore or establish a sense of wholeness in the speaker, but they achieve this end through very different psychological processes. In the longer poem, the real object allows the speaker to find a sense of wholeness through an imaginative and symbolizing process where he repairs her as a loving internal object and finds a self-sustaining phantasy after using the work of art to confront his desperate yearning. "Sonnet X" centers more upon the portrait itself rather than the female object. The love object here functions only as a means for the artist to fulfill his narcissistic desire to capture her beauty in paint. The poem gives the speaker a sense of wholeness as he looks over his artistic achievement; he has created an immortal

object that will preserve his name as an artist, while also achieving mastery over the real object through a visual image in a work of art. As students read these poems, they can consider their own motivations as appreciators and creators of art, hopefully finding the sought after reparation of the longer “The Portrait” as preferable.

CHAPTER XI

William Morris: An Integrative Approach to the Early Dream Poems

Morris's Dream Poems

In my English classes, I teach students to understand poetry through the three registers of experience: linguistic, imaginary, and emotional. While poetry functions through an established system of language, it also challenges this system by operating through more primal modes of expression. Poets create images through language that operate as metaphors for what is beyond adequate expression through traditional language. Images in poetry evoke the personal images of readers. Musical and formal elements evoke emotional responses beyond what traditional language can. My students explore these levels of response to poetry including, but also going beyond, traditional linguistic meaning. This approach offers students a thorough understanding of how poetry functions through the three registers while allowing them to explore their personal responses to poetic texts. Poems become objects, in the psychoanalytic sense, meaning that they become things that students relate to, explore their relationships with, integrate into themselves, and make use of in their personal development.

In taking this approach, I use several of Morris's dream or fantasy poems from *The Defense of Guenevere and Other Poems*. Like dreams, many of these poems lack clear or specific meaning and thus force readers to focus more on visual, imaginative, and sensual experiences. Hassett explains, "*The Defense of Guenevere* works in a variety of

ways to scrutinize, qualify, or prevent settled meanings” (“Style” 107). These poems are mysterious and atmospheric, and often unrealistic. They function through primary processes of image and emotional tone. Their action often lacks clear causality. They confuse by using non-referential pronouns. They avoid clarity in key areas, while giving elaborate descriptions of minor details. They lack narrative concerns for logic and coherence. They draw attention to the ambiguities of language and the pre-symbolic functions of poetry. Readers can use these poems to explore their own images, feelings, associations, and to create their own interpretations or responses. Poems like Morris’s that confound linguistic meaning allow students a broader experience of poetic language.

Pater refers to *The Defense* as “the first typical specimen of aesthetic poetry” (521). While one might describe Morris’s poetry as aesthetic, his art is not “quite useless” in the Wildean sense. J. M. S. Tompkins writes, “Morris is interested in the psychology of his subject, rather than the ethics” (61). While Morris’s poems lack clear moral judgments, his explorations and evocations of human emotion may be used for increasing emotional awareness of both self and other, which can lead to increased empathy. Morris’s poems put us directly into the experience of his subjects without making judgments, while also making us share the experience. Often these experiences confound his characters and his readers alike. Inga Bryden writes, “the poems typically combine the tactile, vivid imagery of a ballad, or dream, logic with psychological confusion and exploration of the boundaries (or lack of) between different states of being” (104). The strange fantasy or dream elements of many of the poems are often confused, incoherent, or unrealistic, but the experiences of Morris’s subjects and his

readers are always very real. Frederick Kirchhoff writes of these poems, “their willingness to explore the raw output of the unconscious mind is simply another aspect of Morris’s psychological realism” (51). Morris’s realism might also be described as emotional realism. Charlotte Oberg writes, Morris “emphasizes the immediate feelings of his speakers and makes us share their anxieties and frustrations as we try to fathom the meaning of their experiences” (135). Typical of Pre-Raphaelite poetry, Morris’s early dream poems make us sense and feel intensely, and offer us a level of poetic experience that is beyond and more primal than what we would get from simply interpreting linguistic meaning.

I essentially have two concerns with poems in my classes: 1) what effect does the poem have on the individual reader or how does the reader experience the poem cognitively, imaginatively, and viscerally? And 2) how does the poem function to achieve this effect or experience? Margaret Lourie writes that if we can discover how Morris’s dream poems “operate, we will perhaps have learned something essential about the Pre-Raphaelite contribution to English poetry” (195). This contribution, I believe, lies in the emotional, sensual, and imaginative elements of Pre-Raphaelite poetry that create a unique and multi-layered experience for readers.

While Morris writes in the genre of fantasy and romance, his themes are often tragic and painful. Aesthetic and Pre-Raphaelite poetry often fall under the charge of escapism, but Morris’s poetry remains powerful because he does not allow his readers or his characters to escape into his world of fantasy. Realistic tragedy and its human responses constantly undercut the romantic fantasy world throughout *The Defense*. Silver

writes, “In all, the most powerful poems of the fairy tale division show the downward turn of the wheel of fortune and the tragic love and death connected with it” (*Romance* 45). Amanda Hodgson discusses Morris in terms of his use of romance and its tensions with reality. In Morris’s early romances, including *The Defense*, she writes, “there is a crucial tension between the concept of art as escapist and the belief in art as an incentive to practical commitment. It is by examining this tension that Morris’s early use of the romance form can most usefully be clarified” (13). To characterize Morris’s poems as romance proper would indicate a heroic ideal, but Morris has no interest in espousing a moral code. Hodgson writes, Morris “seems unconvinced about the usefulness of the dreams he is presenting with such vivid force. If Morris’s early work is romance, it is of an interestingly flawed and tentative nature” (18). Morris does not present the Middle-Ages of romance as a time of chivalric ideals, noble actions, and moral clarity. Just the opposite, Hodgson writes, “many of the poems are concerned with the unpleasant realities behind the romantic façade of medieval legend” (46). Morris’s early poems present characters and speakers who are not people of grand heroic actions, and whose stories do not end in romantic victory and happiness. Ralph Berry, in fact, sees the main themes in the volume as “defeat” and “sexual frustration” (277). Hodgson comes to a similar conclusion: “the image of suspended animation and sterility is strongly present in *The Defense of Guenevere*” (48). Though Morris’s characters exist in a fantasy world similar to that of romance literature, romantic ideals are constantly undercut throughout the volume.

By using fantasy or dreamlike scenarios, Morris's dream poems actually draw attention to the harshness of reality and its emotional consequences. Many of his poems contain all of the elements of romance that would lead to a happy conclusion, only to end in tragedy and psychological pain. Patrick Brantlinger emphasizes the contrast in the volume "between the real and the ideal, or between harsh fact and lovely fantasy." Not at all escapist, "Morris' poetry reflects reality precisely by refusing to reflect it" (18). Because ideal fantasies are always undercut, escapist romance is avoided. Brantlinger relates this undercutting of romance to the rise of industrial society (in which we still live) during the Victorian era. To him, Morris draws attention to "the hostility of industrial civilization to the values embodied in romance and in all forms of beauty" (23). His romance and fantasy draw attention to their impossibility, and force us to face reality. In his later, 1894, lecture "How I Became a Socialist" Morris reflects, "apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilization" (*Collected XXIII* 279). This still resonates with many readers. In an age where we constantly turn to television, computers, home videos, and various other means of escape, this failed romance, or failed escapism, of Morris draws our attention back to reality. In an age where we can very easily lose our identities to the mass media and to mass consumer culture, Morris's emotional and imaginative poetry takes us to something more real within us. Blue Calhoun writes of the poetry in *The Defense*, "Morris is interested in the individual struggle for self-definition within the larger social context that seems variously dull, uncomprehending, and destructive" (40). I seek to engage my students in Morris's poetry so as to allow them to feel intensely and to

envision imaginatively. This intense engagement in poetry is the very opposite of escapism.

Image to Word, Word to Image

One of my first goals for my classes is to encourage students to notice, explore, and describe the visual images that arise in their minds when reading poetic texts. Morris's poems "The Blue Closet" and "The Tune of Seven Towers" provide examples of poems derived from visual images, as they were both inspired by watercolors done by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti himself was impressed by Morris's poetic renditions of his visual works. In a letter to William Allingham, Rossetti writes, "To one of my water-colours called 'The Blue Closet,' [Morris] has written a stunning poem" (311). I use these two Morris poems along with their respective Rossetti paintings early in the semester in order to get students thinking about how the mind transforms images into language and language into images. This was a common practice of Rossetti who often produced double works of his artistic creations (paintings and poems). In this case, just as most of Morris's dream poems lack any clear and definite source, Rossetti's paintings result purely from his own imagination. Here, we have a unique dynamic where the works of Rossetti's imagination, manifested on canvas, are reinterpreted and reformed by Morris's imagination into poetry. This is the Pre-Raphaelite tendency that McGann discusses of creating art as a response to art. McGann writes about this specifically in terms of Rossetti: "Rossetti shows every artist's understanding, that the only adequate interpretation of a work of art is a responsive work of art" (21). He explains, "In this kind of model, images call out to images and their dialogue is the action of an artistic

process of thinking” (23). I constantly encourage this kind of response in my students. I want them to use the imaginative works of others to engage their imaginations. These Pre-Raphaelite double works of art offer a unique opportunity to take this approach in the classroom. Unlike Rossetti’s double works, where one artist manifests the same idea in two media, Morris’s two poems involve one artist responding to another creatively—which is what I encourage my students to do.

Before having students read the poems, I begin with one class period where we focus strictly on the paintings. If a computer classroom is available, students can view copies of the paintings from the Internet. This way each student will have his or her own copy of the painting in color, without the teacher having to copy or otherwise procure multiple color prints. As an alternative, we can simply project the images on a screen. I begin with Rossetti’s *The Blue Closet* and have the students describe the contents of the image in as much detail as possible in a fairly short amount of time. Here, students learn to translate a visual image into language, while also gaining practice at concentrating on details and writing descriptively. After this initial focused free-writing, I have students engage their imaginations more deeply by asking them to create a broader scene in their minds. To do this they must begin with Rossetti’s image of four medieval women standing together around a musical keyboard, and expand the image spatially by considering what else might be happening in the frozen scene that is outside of the picture. They must use their imaginations in response to Rossetti’s artistic work of imagination. Then they must put the expanded image, mostly from their imaginations, into their own language. Many imagine that the women are giving a concert or are

performing at a festival surrounded by people; others see them alone singing praises to God in an old church. After expanding the image spatially in their minds, I ask students to expand the sensory experience from the visual to include other senses. Many will hear music; some imagine either a musty or perfumed smell in the air. These responses vary, showing students that the way they respond creatively to a work of art depends on their individuality. Next, I ask them to create a short narrative based on the scene they built from Rossetti's painting. This requires them to expand the image temporally by considering what might have come before and led up to the scene, and what might happen after the scene.

After finishing *The Blue Closet*, the class does the same writing activity with Rossetti's painting *The Tune of Seven Towers*. With this painting, students may imagine a dying queen, or a princess meeting an undesirable suitor, or a lonely woman whose beautiful music captivates those around her. By the end of this activity, students have essentially created their own imaginative works in writing from the two paintings, which is exactly what Morris did in creating his poems. Among the many benefits of this activity, students learn to relate to Morris's creative process before reading his works.

For the following class, I have students read the two poems that Morris created from Rossetti's paintings. Because these poems are both fairly short, and because I want my students' responses to them to be spontaneous, I have them read them for the first time during class rather than for homework. The first thing I have students do with these poems is basically the opposite of what I had them do with the paintings during the previous class. Beginning again with "The Blue Closet," I hand out storyboard sheets

with six frames on each side, the kind that filmmakers use. I tell each student to imagine that they had to film the poem in six scenes, then draw, to the best of their ability, each of the scenes on the story boards. Instead of transforming an image into language, they now transform language into a series of images. This activity gets students thinking about the poem visually, and also forces them to come up with an imaginative interpretation of the poem in order to transfer it into a different artistic mode. Because of the poem's ambiguity, students' visualizations of it differ greatly and offer a starting point for discussions about how we might possibly interpret it. The different interpretations that necessarily arise also help students toward a more relativistic approach to poetic interpretation.

For "The Blue Closet," as for "The Tune of Seven Towers," a number of questions and ambiguities arise. We can begin by looking at how each student has translated the poem into images to get an idea of what they envision happening. For "The Blue Closet," the setting is not completely clear, and the action is only slightly less vague. The poem presents four women, two queens and two damozels, who are trapped in some mysterious setting where they are allowed out only once a year on Christmas Eve so that they may sing in the Blue Closet. One of the queens, Lady Louise, recalls her dead love Arthur who may have been murdered. In the end Arthur returns from the dead, like a demon lover, and takes the women from their prison to the land of the dead with him.

The atmosphere or mood of the poem, difficult to capture in a summary, is perhaps more important to the poem's overall effect than the story. Throughout the poem

a bell tolls for the dead, only to fall silent near the end. The setting never becomes clear, but the women exist “between the wash of the tumbling seas” (2), and at one point water oozes up through the “tiles of the Closet Blue” (33). Perhaps they live in an underwater realm, or near water; each student will portray their surroundings somewhat differently. The poem is full of strange and often vague images that allow the imagination to roam. In one of the more interesting images in the poem Arthur says that he cannot weep for his love because his tears are “‘hidden deep under the seas; / ‘In a gold and blue casket she keeps all my tears’” (44-45). In one of Louise’s early memories of Arthur, he comes to her with snow in his hands and places it upon her head to melt. Then, one of the ladies makes the dark speculation that Arthur was strangled with the scarf that she wore. In the scene leading up to Arthur’s return, a lily rises up from the tiles of the blue closet. These strange details and images set a mood for the action, but explain very little. They invite the reader to interpret and imagine—filling in the elisions.

Critics have commented on the vagueness and ambiguity of the poem that leaves so much of it open to various interpretations and potential visual representations. Kirchhoff explains one way in which Morris achieves this vagueness: “the active agents in the poem are pronouns without antecedents” (51). Arthur’s name is not mentioned until near the poem’s ending, though we tend to assume, in retrospect, that the “he” mentioned throughout the poem is him. Also, it is not grammatically clear who the “she” is who keeps Arthur’s tears, or who is speaking about “my” scarf, though it is probably Louise. We may only speculate about the identity of the “they” who may have murdered “him.” At times, we may fill in these pronouns with logic, but we must rely on

imagination for some. Silver points to the many ambiguities in the poem: “In ‘The Blue Closet,’” she writes, “the identity of the mysterious *they* who hold the ladies prisoner, the reasons for *their* action, the captivity and reappearance of Arthur are never clarified” (“Dreamers” 34). Perhaps Arthur is a usurped king who was killed, and his queen and the other ladies were confined by his murderers. This is one among many possibilities that readers might come up with.

Lourie refers to the poem as “the quintessential example of Pre-Raphaelite dream-poetry” (202). Like a dream, not only are the contents of the poem somewhat vague, but the meaning of it is entirely confounding. The poem functions mainly through its eerie atmosphere and dark language in order to achieve its emotional and imagistic results in the mind of the reader. Lourie explains,

it is largely the refusal of this poem to mean anything or to lend itself to rational interpretation that provides its special power; for in ‘The Blue Closet’ Morris transcends the normal processes of waking thought and cuts off the usual orientation of the mind toward the phenomenal world. As a result, he can journey down into the pre-logical and primary image-making reaches of the psyche. The many critics who accuse Morris of escapism are quite right; he does wish to escape from the world of external reality. But what they too often fail to see is that he escapes *to* a more universal internal reality. (195)

She relates the modes of expression in the poem to Freud’s primary processes that operate in the dream-work, which include image and emotional tone (198, 200). Despite all of the poem’s ambiguities, students and readers can agree on its dark tone. Even

though the language of the poem causes confusion in the reader, Morris expresses a more primal level of meaning, prior to linguistic logic. The ladies in the poem appear to share in this confusion. Seemingly unaware of exactly what is happening to them, Calhoun explains, “the song [the ladies sing] . . . [is] simply a means of enduring until the exchange of one unknown state for another” (48). But the ladies clearly experience the emotional effect of their situation, as does the reader. A mysterious gloom or dread hangs over the ladies as they are confined in a state of limbo. Lourie writes that the ladies “seem from the outset to inhabit a kind of middle kingdom between life and death” (201). Arthur appears to as well. The ladies experience profound isolation and lack all hope. Most readers, in fact, view the ladies’ deaths in the end as a positive occurrence. In death, the ladies may finally find peace or at least achieve an escape from their current miserable state. Lourie puts this in terms similar to those of Freud’s death drive: “the dream state of absolute withdrawal into the self retains a profound and primitive attraction for us, since it suggests the cessation of all conflict” (201). This imagined state of profound peace in death carries an attraction for readers. Many students will portray the group crossing the bridge to death in the poem’s conclusion with smiles on their faces, or they will portray the lovers reunited in an embrace and kiss. In this interpretation, Arthur, ironically, becomes a benevolent demon lover. Oberg takes an extremely positive view of the ladies’ deaths, seeing them as rebirths—renewals of the past—appropriate to the poem’s Christmas setting (146). In this reading, Arthur becomes a Christ-figure who returns from the dead to provide salvation to those without hope.

I repeat this storyboard activity with “The Tune of Seven Towers,” but because the poem lacks much real time action, I take a slightly different approach. After reading the poem, I tell students to consider what may have led up to the scene Morris portrays, and what will happen after it. The scene of the poem presents Yoland of the flowers describing a desolate and haunted place that we may assume is the castle of Seven Towers. She then seductively urges Oliver to return there for her things—a mission that we sense will not end well for him. Again, much of the story is elided or left unclear. “The Tune of Seven Towers,” like a number of Morris’s other poems, invites the reader to create a past story, and speculate about the future. For the first two frames on their storyboards, students create images portraying what may have happened before to lead up to the scene in the poem. In the next two frames, they portray the action of the poem itself. Then, in the final two frames, they portray what they think will happen after the scene of the poem.

Most readers can agree that some major catastrophic event has occurred at the castle to leave it empty and haunted. David Latham writes that the poem is “eerily suggestive of some indefinable past disaster” (50). Morris leaves the reader to imagine what that past disaster may have been. In the before frames, many students will portray a war, probably suggested by the mention of “battlements,” in which the inhabitants of the castle were defeated and massacred. Some students will modernize the poem and portray a nuclear explosion (though the text may not support this). Others imagine that a plague has occurred, or a fire. Readers are also invited to speculate about the pasts of the poem’s two characters. Did they both live in the castle? Did one of them? Did neither

of them? Why did they survive when no one else did? Perhaps they fled before the catastrophe. Perhaps they had to flee. Perhaps Yoland was a queen having an illicit affair with the knight Oliver. Perhaps they were a king and queen who left their people to die. Perhaps Yoland is making the whole thing up, and has a very different past.

Students will imagine an assortment of past stories for the poem.

Students' representations for the frames portraying what is presented during the poem tend to vary less, though the poem does leave itself open to a variety of visual interpretations by leaving out much in the way of specific detail. In contrast to Rossetti's richly colored and minutely detailed painting, David Staines points out, "in this poem, remarkable for the comparative absence of concretely visualized details, Morris curiously refrains from borrowing any details from the painting" (460). Students will, however, often use one frame to portray a scene with Yoland speaking to Oliver, similar to the scene portrayed in Rossetti's painting. Most will also use at least one frame to portray the inhabitants of the castle described by Yoland in their ghostly forms.

In the final frames, most will follow the poem's ominous tone and portray Oliver coming to some harm in the castle. While most imagine Oliver's doom in the end, there may be some debate in the portrayal of Yoland. Some see Yoland as troubled by losing Oliver, with some portraying her in tears, or even as dying from grief. Others, however, see her as an evil *femme fatale*. Some who dislike Yoland even imagine that somehow Oliver convinces her to go to the castle herself where she is killed—poetic justice, perhaps. Critics have held a similar debate over the character of Yoland. Latham makes the argument for Yoland as *femme fatale*, seeing Oliver as only one in a long string of her

victims (51). He suggests that she was not even a castle maiden at all, but a sinister imposter in the castle (52). Oberg and Silver take more sympathetic approaches to Yoland. Oberg sees this and other poems in the volume as poems of “a malign destiny.” To her, Yoland is a victim of fate who does not desire Oliver’s death (134). Silver similarly describes her as “simply fated to be fatal, she is as much a victim as her lover” (42). “The Tune of Seven Towers,” like the other dream poems from Morris’s *The Defense*, opens up the reader to multiple possibilities for interpretation and imagination.

Emotional and Imaginative Engagement

Morris’s dream poems often leave out key details that require readers to engage their imaginations in order to fill in omitted material. These poems offer us an opportunity to have students respond to creative works creatively, while also allowing them to see the multiplicity of potential interpretations. This poetry calls for a more relativistic approach to meaning, which forces readers to abandon rigid approaches to interpretation. It calls for response through senses, emotion, and imagination rather than through strict meaning.

Peter Faulkner describes Morris’s poem “The Wind” as “a nightmare poem which we can hardly explain but which imposes its strange vision upon the reader” (22). Faas also describes the poem’s effect on the reader: “while some of Morris’s dramatic monologues follow the established patterns, others like ‘The Wind’ engage the reader in psychological processes without allowing him the analytical distance usually provided by the genre. A stream of consciousness engulfs us in its mysterious meanderings rather than being held up for critical analysis” (17). Unlike many of the other poems in *The*

Defense that contain dream logic, “The Wind” literally contains a dream. In the poem, an old Norseman appears to be haunted by some unnamed dread. He views his surroundings with delusions reflecting fear and anxiety saying, “If I move my chair it will scream, and the orange will roll out far / And the faint yellow juice ooze out like blood from a wizard’s jar” (16-17). Early in the poem he slips into a strange dream which begins with his amorous pursuit of a woman named Margaret, and ends in his later discovering her dead body. He awakes only to have a final haunting vision of “the ghosts of those that had gone to the war” (81). Silver writes of the poem,

‘The Wind’ contains Morris’s most psychologically complex explanation of a dream’s impact on its dreamer. . . . As if explaining the roots of his madness, the old Norseman drifts into a dream of his past, reliving, in sleep, a fragmented and distorted recollection of a long ago event. . . . In this account of dream, the relationship between cause and effect does not exist; time, place, and event are unrelated; the dreamer, for example, is absurdly slow in realizing that Margaret is dead. Her death is not logically explained and there is no ostensible connection between it and the events that end the poem: the narrator’s waking vision of the ghosts of Norwegian soldiers from the more recent past. (“Dreamers” 32)

Indeed, the poem is so full of ambiguities, it provides for multiple possibilities and forces us to imagine what has happened and what its contexts may be. What exactly happens in the dream? What is the relationship between the speaker and Margaret? Do they have sex? Why and how does she die? What significance is the war? What might have

motivated the dream? Along with these unanswered questions, the poem also provides a number of symbols and metaphors that call for exploration.

Many of the details in the poem are fairly obscure, but the poem's refrain contains a number of images that serve to set a clear tone. Repeated eleven times throughout the fairly short poem, it reads "*Wind, wind! thou art sad, art thou kind? / Wind, wind, unhappy! thou art blind, / Yet still thou wanderest the lily-seed to find*" (4-6). Oberg sees the wind as a metaphor for the speaker's ever-wandering memory. Like Shelley's west wind she sees it as both "preserver and destroyer," but in Morris's poem the seed is not found and the natural cycle is not completed (152). Potential remains unrealized. D. M. R. Bentley reads the wind metaphor similarly. Citing the opening lines of the poem, which read, "Ah! no, no, it is nothing, surely nothing at all, / Only the wild-going wind round by the garden-wall, / For the dawn just now is breaking, the wind beginning to fall" (1-3), Bentley sees the "dawn" in the poem as ironic since there is no cyclical, natural rebirth (33). This theme is reemphasized with the image of the wind seeking the lily-seed in the refrain, which suggests "that the wind, like the dawn, has failed to discover new life in the speaker" (33). While the wind does represent a failure in the natural order and sterility—both themes reflected in the speaker's relationship with Margaret—it also clearly reflects chaos and the potential cruelty of fate. This theme is also powerfully reflected in the speaker's dream where he feels helpless and confused by Margaret's death. Because the action of the dream is portrayed so vaguely, the reader shares in his emotional experience of helpless confusion in the face of tragedy. We feel strong emotions over Margaret's death, even though, or perhaps even more so because, we

cannot understand what exactly happened or why. The poem functions mainly through tone, and the symbol of the wind sets this tone early on.

Because the speaker leaves out so much information, the action of the dream, and the poem as a whole, opens itself up to multiple interpretations. I use this poem to engage my students' imaginations, asking them to creatively and logically try to fill the gaps in the text. One ambiguity in the poem leaves us wondering what exactly occurred between the two characters in the dream. Bentley and Oberg offer nearly opposite interpretations of this aspect of the text, which cause them to read Margaret's death and the meaning of the poem as a whole very differently. Bentley sees the central themes of the poem as "sexual denial and neurotic fixation" (32). The speaker "is a man who is obsessed by the past, fearful of the present, and, above all, petrifyingly afraid of action" (32-33). Bentley argues that Margaret and the speaker do not have sex, that the speaker appears to have a propensity for inaction, and that "Margaret's death has been caused, not by any identifiable act on the part of the speaker, of herself, or of persons unknown, but that it is to be seen as the result of the speaker's *failure to act*, his failure to confront her sexuality" (35). The speaker, in Bentley's reading, remains fixated on his sexual failure, which, Bentley argues, must have occurred in some form during a past relationship with Margaret. Bentley sees the poem as possibly commenting on Victorian denial of female sexuality (36). Unfulfilled women and inactive male characters arise throughout *The Defense*, and female sexuality occurs as a theme in Morris, particularly in the volume's title poem. Oberg, however, comes to a very different conclusion in her reading of the dream. She argues that Margaret and the speaker do have sex. Far from inactive, the

speaker ravishes Margaret, then perhaps murders her, or she commits suicide because of lost honor (150). We see this theme of lost honor and destructive sexuality elsewhere in *The Defense* in the poem “King Arthur’s Tomb,” where the openly sexual Guenevere of “The Defense of Guenevere” must atone for her past improprieties. Where Bentley argues essentially that sexual repression and the speaker’s inactivity destroy Margaret, Oberg argues that shame from sex and the speaker’s over-aggressive sexual actions destroy her. The speaker is haunted by either his inability to act, or his over-zealousness, or something else. The text invites the reader to fill in the blanks. The key line, in terms of how one reads the action of the dream, comes after the speaker has pursued Margaret amorously and she appears to have given in. These suggestive lines read, “I kiss’d her hard by the ear, and she kiss’d me on the brow, / And then lay down on the grass, where the mark on the moss is now, / And spread her arms out wide while I went down below” (49-51). These lines are immediately followed by the refrain. Then the speaker says, “And then I walk’d for a space to and fro on the side of the hill, / Till I gather’d and held in my arms great sheaves of the daffodil” (55-56). Has the sexual act simply been implied but elided, or was it interrupted by his literally going “down below” on the side of the hill to gather flowers?

We can also consider other possibilities for what exactly happens to Margaret. How we interpret the scene where “her head fell back on a tree, / And a spasm caught her mouth” (41-42), dictates our reading of the sequence that follows. When the speaker describes her at this point as “fearful for me to see” (42), he may indicate that she is afraid of him and her physical reaction is a symptom of fear. Or, he may indicate that she

is attempting to hide something from him. Perhaps she is sick, having a seizure, and attempting to hide her illness. Later this illness that he fails to notice kills her. In a more light-hearted interpretation, perhaps she has accidentally hit her head during their flirtation and is simply trying to hide it out of embarrassment. It is also possible that the injury sustained in this moment is what kills her. If we read the following lines, she remains mostly inactive other than, according to the speaker, returning a kiss. Perhaps she tries to conceal the severity of her injury, or perhaps the speaker leaves out some crucial information here that would implicate him in the injury and in her death. The aggressive descriptions of his pursuit of her may very well imply that he actually rapes her before covering her with flowers. The speaker certainly betrays some delusional perceptions at other points in the poem, so we may not want to take his version of the dream at face value.

Along with what happens in the dream, the reader is also invited to speculate about the motivation behind the dream. Bentley sees Margaret as an old love. He argues that the speaker relives a repressed scene in his dream (35). Faas also sees Margaret as a former love, but is less sure about whether the dream reflects a real occurrence. He writes, “all more specific details concerning Margaret’s violent death and the speaker’s possible role in it are lost in what reads like the direct transcript of a nightmare” (181). The speaker’s memories of Margaret “are full of rejection, violence, and rapist sexuality. . . . One wonders whether the speaker is relating actual events or merely articulating homicidal fantasies. Instead of providing us with a clear-cut delineation of either, ‘The Wind’ depicts an unconscious train of thought, which we are made to relive rather than

analyze, let alone comprehend” (182). The dream, Faas suggests, may be motivated by hurt or angry emotions toward the former love object. Morris draws us into the speaker’s emotional experience, without defining it specifically. We only sense that he appears haunted and deeply disturbed by something that becomes manifest in his delusion and in his dream. Faas writes, “In ‘The Wind,’ the speaker is engulfed in a nightmare into which we, too, are drawn” (181). He continues, “‘The Wind,’ like other of Morris’s poems, somehow embodies unconscious emotions more directly, prompting the reader to assume and reenact them in the process” (183).

Another possibility for the speaker’s powerful emotional experience reflected in the dream could be that he is living, or had lived, in a state of war, witnessing its destructiveness. Armstrong brings up this possibility. She sees the wind as an “indifferent” and “predatory force” (249). She reads Morris’s poetry as socially resistant in general and speculates that “The Wind” is Morris’s Crimean-war poem (250). The dream of Margaret’s death could reflect the general destruction and confusion of war displaced into the dream situation. Or, perhaps Margaret was a former love who was actually killed in a war. This reading would make the connection between the dream of Margaret and the ghost soldiers who march in afterwards clearer.

While details of the poem remain ambiguous and allow for imaginative reading, the emotional tone is fairly clear. We can use this intensely emotional poem to encourage students to explore their emotional experience with it, while also encouraging them to empathize with the characters and their emotional states. I have students choose which stanza they feel most intensely, without defining what they are feeling and circle it.

Surprisingly for a poem with such a clear climactic moment (when he discovers Margaret's death) responses will vary greatly. While some students will choose the climax near the poem's conclusion, others feel the speaker's loneliness at the beginning more intensely; others will choose the more erotic moments in the poem, while others will have intense reactions of fear in the moments leading up to the climax. After students have focused in on their intense moment, I then have them try to describe what they feel in that moment. Students will come to see the difficulty of transferring a feeling into language. I encourage them to use metaphors or associations that arise with the feeling. Finally, to get them even further into the experience, and to encourage empathy with the characters in the poem, I have students create a fictional first-person narrative where they imagine that they are one of the characters in the poem experiencing the intense scene first hand. This part of the activity allows students to explore the depth of an emotion, while also offering some distance.

The poem "Golden Wings" functions through a similar ambiguity in action, while establishing a clear emotional tone. Faulkner writes of the poem, "'Golden Wings,' like many other of these poems, is atmospheric and suggestive rather than very clear in the narrative, but in most cases this increases the reader's involvement" (22). The poem achieves its emotional power through its extremes. "Golden Wings" provides a good example of how Morris often reverses the reader's romantic expectations. The poem begins with a description of Ladies' Castle, a paradise where flora and fauna flourish, peace abounds, and ladies and knights live and love in happiness. W. B. Yeats describes the joy a reader experiences in these early verses. He writes, "The verses ran in my head

for years and became to me the best description of happiness in the world, and I am not certain that I know a better even now” (60). But Morris soon undercuts this Edenic vision by introducing Jehane who, like Rossetti’s “Blessed Damozel,” can feel no happiness in paradise because her love is not with her. In Jehane’s case, her love is not anyone in particular, but an ideal that she hopes will appear someday. In the end, she goes out to seek her love and is later discovered slain. After her death, the early, happy imagery of paradise is reversed and the landscape becomes a cruel, ravished wasteland. In the poem’s final lines we discover another dead body, this time of a man.

Brantlinger refers to “Golden Wings” as “The poem in *The Defense of Guenevere* where the conflict between art and reality is most fully and explicitly worked out” (22). Tompkins, similarly, sees the poem as representing the tension between youthful passion and lack of experience (69). He writes, “what is essential in it is the fatal confrontation of youth and the world” (70). The paradise described in the poem’s opening cannot hold up against harsh reality, and neither can Jehane’s youthful ideals of love and escape. Brantlinger also refers to “Golden Wings” as the most Tennysonian poem in *The Defense*, drawing comparisons to “The Palace of Art” and “The Lady of Shalott” (22). The setting at the beginning of the poem is one of artifice—an “Eden of art [that] reality does not penetrate” (22). When Jehane leaves this enclosed world, the harsh realities of violence and war ensue. Brantlinger points out that, as opposed to “The Palace of Art” where one clearly must leave the world of artifice, Morris’s moral is unclear. He “leaves unanswered the question of whether Jehane’s choice is right or wrong—of whether ‘Ladies’ Castle,’ because it represents isolated artifice, deserves to fall, or whether reality

itself represents no more than a meaningless and miserable annihilation of beauty” (22). “The Lady of Shalott” has a similar ambiguity. Tennyson’s lady sits with her art, isolated, but when she leaves her tower death results. Jehane’s situation is slightly different, however, as she does not live in isolation. The Lady of Shalott’s isolation is one of pure loneliness, but Jehane feels isolated among people she knows in a society where everything appears perfect. She is an outsider, but an outsider in a more realistic sense that readers can relate to.

The poem leaves us with one major question, which I focus on in class discussions. Did Jehane make the right decision by leaving the castle? The obvious or immediate answer may tend to be no, since it led to her death and to the destruction of her homeland paradise. Yet, we may admire Jehane for her independence or for her fearless quest for what is most important to her—love. Hodgson poses the question, “Is Jehane right to seek love at the cost of her life?” (48). Hodgson gives a very level assessment of the poem’s action. Jehane’s leaving to seek her lover “in some unspecified way, brings violence and sorrow within the castle walls” (48). It is unclear, however, how or even if she is at fault. It appears that the real world has simply caught up with the Eden of the first part of the poem. Jehane desires action in the real world, Hodgson argues, as opposed to the futility of the enclosed castle—but leaving leads to her death and the destruction of the “beautiful place.” Hodgson explains, “this extremely complex poem is concerned with the problem of a good which is incapable of development opposed to an evil which is destructive but contains elements of life-giving force” (48). Life in the castle seems like paradise initially, but perhaps it is inevitably doomed as it

does not allow for growth or development. To use a psychoanalytic analogy, it is like the experience of the infant in the womb. The complete attachment to the mother represents paradise, but as one develops one must move away from the maternal realm and move into the social world in order to establish one's individuality and to allow for real, mature object love, which is exactly what Jehane seeks. This separation does not come without a sense of loss and anxiety, represented in the poem by Jehane's death and by the destruction of paradise. Jehane's story gets at a core story of all human beings, and that is why many readers admire her for her decision, despite its fatal consequences. Oberg takes this reading of Jehane to the extreme by arguing that she commits suicide as an affirmative act rather than an act of despair (152-153). That Jehane took her own life is certainly a possibility, though we cannot know for sure as readers.

I encourage my students to engage in these issues with Jehane through an activity wherein they must respond to this creative work creatively. Jehane's story is told mostly from a third-person perspective, with the exception of the scene where she decides she must leave the castle. When Jehane does have a voice, she expresses her passionate yearning for love. She says as she decides to seek love in the outside world,

. . . if, indeed,

Meanwhile both soul and body bleed,

Yet there is end of misery,

And I have hope. . . . (192-195)

I first have my students write a monologue from Jehane's point of view while she is living in the castle. This encourages empathy with her so that students may try to

understand why she makes her fatal decision to leave. After this, I have them do a second monologue where they imagine Jehane after she has left the castle, a scene not portrayed at all in the poem. This second part of the activity puts Jehane in a position where she may reflect on the decision she made earlier. Students may also use this part of the activity to provide an explanation of what specifically causes her death.

Personalizing Metaphors

“Spell-bound” provides an example of a poem that undercuts romance and reflects feelings of frustration, loss, and failure. Because it reflects these universal emotions, “Spell-bound” offers readers an opportunity to consider their own experiences as analogous to, though distinct from, those of the poem’s speaker. The speaker is a knight trapped in a desolate landscape and separated from his love by a Wizard’s spell. Tompkins sees the poem as an example of Morris’s recurring theme of subjects whose “natural vigor is obstructed” (66). In his isolation, the knight envisions his love as she suffers for him. Silver explains that the knight’s reverie “projects the prisoner’s desires onto his lady and reveals his frustrated sexuality rather than hers” (“Dreamers” 31). As a dramatic monologue, the poem enables us to focus on the knight’s perspective, which is one of desperate yearning.

The poem’s rich metaphoric imagery adds to the tone of hopeless desperation. I use the poem to allow my students to explore the effects of metaphoric language as a particularly powerful means of emotional expression, and to apply the metaphors of the poem to their lives. The landscape in which the knight is trapped becomes one of the central metaphors in “Spell-bound.” Pater discusses how Morris often uses landscape to

reflect the emotional tone of his subjects (523). The speaker describes the unreaped corn that makes up his surroundings: “The year wears round to autumn-tide, / Yet comes no reaper to the corn” (5-6). This central metaphor reflects the theme of the poem: unfulfilled potential—specifically, in the knight’s case, the unfulfilled potential for love. First, I ask students to consider what this image or metaphor of unreaped corn means, particularly in terms of the poem. Examining a metaphor in this way, in terms of its meaning within a text, is fairly typical in an English classroom. Once the students have come to an understanding of the metaphor at this level, they may then apply it to themselves. They will free-write on what this metaphor might mean to them—what is the unreaped corn in their lives? This brings students in contact with their associations with the poetic metaphor, which allows for self-exploration and also enables them to better understand how the poem achieves its particular emotional power through use of metaphor.

The poem itself contains associative logic that we might use as an example for students of how metaphor and association work in the mind—potentially moving one from the figurative to the literal. The poem’s speaker makes a simile of the land as a bride: “The golden land is like a bride / When first she knows herself forlorn—” (7-8). But soon, by following his train of thought, the simile morphs into his image of his own, actual forlorn bride. Oberg writes, “his metaphor grows more and more particularized until we realize that he is envisaging his own deserted and despairing bride” (134). By following his train of thoughts, the speaker moves beyond the raw image of the landscape that reflects his emotions in the figurative, to exposing the real situation behind these

emotions, his estranged love. The vague emotional power at the poem's beginning soon locates its specific source. This is essentially what I ask my students to do with the metaphor. The sterile landscape in the poem acts as a metaphor that the speaker metonymically relates to his lost love. By following this short train of associations, the speaker is led from figurative language that expresses a certain vague state of mind to the roots behind this state of mind. When students personalize this metaphor of un-reaped corn in a desolate landscape, they are led to express what the metaphor means to them—their own anxieties over separation or realizing potential—and to consider the source of this personal meaning. For college students, particularly freshman, these are important issues to consider. Many come to relate this central metaphor of the poem to being away from home, often for the first time, separated from friends, family, and significant others. Others see the metaphor in terms of their unrealized potential as young college students seeking to find their place in the world.

Following up on the un-reaped corn metaphor, I then ask students to think of the wizard's spell in these terms. We may take the wizard's spell as another key metaphor in the poem, which lends the entire poem to a figurative or allegorical reading. The wizard's spell becomes the barrier to whatever the reader is trying to accomplish or realize. I ask students to consider what they wrote about the un-reaped corn metaphor, and then write about what the wizard's spell would or could be in their lives. It may be the circumstances that separate them from important relationships, or the thing that may keep them from doing their best in college, or some other kind of barrier. The wizard, as portrayed in the poem, may be an external or possibly even an internal force. Tompkins

writes, “The power that inhibits action seems intimately close, also part of [the speaker] himself”—an “uncomprehended psychological hindrance” (66-67). Oberg has also looked at the spell symbolically. As the speaker laments his past, the wizard may represent time “whose chains inevitably imprison all humanity, separating them from all that they love and from what gives them life” (134-135). Reading the wizard metaphorically as a cause of the lack of fulfillment, or an obstacle, allows readers to consider what their own barriers are that keep them from achieving their goals or realizing their desires.

Finally, I ask students to think about defeating the wizard. In the poem, the knight’s sword appears to represent to him the means through which he could do this. At the poem’s conclusion, the knight imagines his love coming to him with his sword wherein he says, “My heart upswells and I grow bold” (80). He recalls how it has served him well in the past when he first won her. “And you have brought me my good sword, / Wherewith in happy days of old / I won you well from knight and lord” (77-79). We may see the sword as a Freudian symbol of the speaker’s masculinity or virility that will help him overcome his sterility or paralysis. The sword represents safety, power, and joy, all associated with the success of winning his love initially. It is the object that could help him realize his potential. Like the spell, this object could be external or internal. It is not the sword itself that gives him feelings of power in the poem, but his bringing up the internalized image of it in his mind. In considering the sword as a metaphor and relating it to their situations, students examine what might give them confidence or what would perhaps enable them to achieve their potential—to reap their corn.

Many of Morris's poems allow us to imagine more detail, to expand on and explore various meanings, and to feel the emotions expressed by their speakers and characters. Like dreams, these poems function less through logic than through more primary processes of expression, and thus, we tend to experience them on a primal level. As we struggle to make meaning of these texts, they give rise to emotional responses, as well as mental visualizations, that we may explore. While the stories portrayed in these poems are idiosyncratic, readers relate to them emotionally because they express universal desires for love and happiness in the face of an often cruel and senseless reality. They also encourage the imaginative capacities of readers by leaving out information that would lead to easy understanding. The poems' ability to thwart understanding calls on readers to imaginatively create some kind of comprehensibility or meaning by adding missing details themselves. These characteristics of Morris's dream poems allow us to take a classroom approach that focuses less on settled meanings, and more on emotion and imagination. Through these poems, we can instill our students with a more relativistic and broader appreciation of poetic texts, while also allowing them to explore their emotional and imaginative capacities.

Coda: “If I had Words”

Christina Rossetti’s unpublished poem “If I had Words” captures the essence of poetic renewal and reparation that I stress in this project. The poem begins,

If I had words, if I had words

At least to vent my misery:—

But muter than the speechless herds

I have no voice wherewith to cry. (1-4)

Rossetti shows us the importance of language and the necessity of expression. The speaker feels an obscure sense of longing and misery, common to human experience. But without language she is unable to integrate and own her experience. It remains out of the reach of her creative, imaginative, reparative function. She links language to life itself, and its lack to hopelessness and death:

I have no strength to lift my hands,

I have no heart to lift mine eye,

My soul is bound with brazen bands,

My soul is crushed and like to die.

My thoughts that wander here and there,

That wander wander listlessly,

Bring nothing back to cheer my care,

Nothing that I may live thereby. (5-12)

Unintegrated into language and image, her feelings only cause suffering.

The second part of the poem echoes the first and structurally links “words” with “wings”:

If I had wings as hath a dove,

If I had wings that I might fly,

I yet would seek the land of love

Where fountains run which run not dry; (17-20)

Language here is linked with the transcendental image of a soaring dove, but, more significantly, it is linked to love, which one can only realize in the symbolic, object world. In the closing lines of the poem, Rossetti continues to link words, more explicitly, with reparative love:

If I had wings as hath a dove

I would not sift the what and why,

I would make haste to find out love,

If not to find at least to try.

I would make haste to love, my rest;

To love, my truth that doth not lie:

Then if I lived it might be best,

Or if I died I could but die. (25-32)

These closing lines echo those of *In Memoriam* lyric VIII, where the poet offers the “flower of poesy” in the elegy to his lost friend: “That if it can it there may bloom, / Or dying, there at least may die” (23-24). Tennyson finds comfort in the act of poetic

creation as it links him to his object of both love and despair. Rossetti treats love and language in a similar way; with words and love she could find peace one way or another. Rossetti's poem succeeds in expressing her vague longing even as it argues it cannot. It captures an emotional state in language even as it realizes language's limitations. It also argues for the value—the necessity—of language. Through poetic language, we renew ourselves by integrating our fragmented experience and gaining deeper self awareness. Language links us to others who provide loving recognition for our experiences, and to whom we may offer our own empathetic recognition. Poetic language also engages and enables our creativity through which we can constantly renew ourselves and perform reparation. As Rossetti describes, poetic language can provide the wings that revive us and reconnect us to the world. This is where the value of poetry lies, and this is what we can offer our students.

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