

## CHAPTER 6

### A. The Destruction of Sennacherib – George Gordon, Lord Byron

In this excerpt, Byron contrasts two pictures of the Assyrian troops eager to attack the enemy (Judea, in the hope of taking Jerusalem) by using two similes (like) in the first and the third lines and then link the first two lines with the last two lines by contrasting to depict two pictures. In the first two lines he compares a host of Assyrian troops, eager to attack the enemy, seen at sunset, to the green leaves of the forest in summer. (Leaves of the forest when summer is green). However, the following morning all the soldiers and their horses had died like leaves of the forest in autumn (leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown) Two end rhymes are employed: green / seen and blown / strown. The rhyme scheme is aabb.

### B. Prelude I – T.S. Eliot

The images in this poem are designed to create a mood of sadness and depression in the reader. Lines 2 and 4 contain olfactory imagery; lines 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13 contain visual imagery; there is tactile imagery in lines 5 and 7; and auditory imagery in lines 9 and 12. The adjectives are chosen for their suggestions of decay: the horse is 'lonely', the blinds are 'broken', the leaves are 'withered' and 'grimy', the lots are 'vacant', The poem has vividly presented a scene and evoked an emotion through use of imagery.

### C. Loveliest of Trees – A.E. Housman

We see that the time in this poem is spring, and the persona is describing some cherry trees which are in bloom – to him the most beautiful of all trees. The first stanza suggests the comparison of the blossoming

trees with some pretty girls standing about, 'wearing' white dresses for Easter (since 'wearing' refers especially to clothes).

In the second stanza we discover that the writer speaks of himself as twenty years old. Score is an old word meaning twenty; so threescore years and ten would equal seventy, the ripe old age we may expect to reach (as said in the English Bible: "A man's years are threescore years and ten"). The persona says that twenty of his seventy years have already passed; so he hopes that he will have fifty more years to live. Since the time is spring, as we have seen, the persona uses the word "score" instead of repeating "years". – synecdoche.

The third verse gives us the thought of the poem. Here, the speaker believes that beauty is the most important thing in life. Therefore, he will spend all of his life and time in searching for beauty and enjoying it. The phrase "things in bloom" would suggest everything in nature that is beautiful, not just the cherry trees covered with snow. Therefore, even fifty more "springs" or years would not be long enough to find and appreciate them all.

#### **D. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening – Robert Frost**

To understand this poem better, and to get a more complete picture, we must look at the specific details. Thus "my little horse" "his harness bells, "and the snow tell us that the man in the poem was traveling in a kind of old-fashioned horse-drawn sled (called a sleigh). The bells would be shaken by the movement of the horse, and would make a cheerful, pleasant sound.

The time is the middle of the winter, since “the darkest evening of the year” refers to the period of the shortest day and longest night in northern latitudes, on December 21-22 when the sun is farthest south. The cold weather continues for several months after that date, however.

This poem is in iambic tetrameter with a rhyme scheme that links the different verses: aaba, bbcb, ccdc, dddd. The rhyme changes in stanza 4 to add emphasis to the final lines. There are many long vowels, slowing down the rhythm, to echo the sense of the speaker stopping to look at the snow. There is alliteration in lines 3 (see / stop / snow). 4 (watch / woods); 11 (sound / sweep); 13 (dark / deep). The recurring “s” sounds echo the whispering sound of snow falling.

The story in the poem is very simple. A man is returning to his home on a cold and snowy evening. Still several miles from his home, he sees a quiet but beautiful scene, and stops his horse and sleigh to look at it. The white flakes are quietly drifting down into the woods beside the road. The trees are probably dark – green pines, and the branches are covered with the snow that holds to them. Below him, on the other side of the road, lies a little frozen lake. The intelligent little horse can’t understand why the man wants to stop in such a lonely spot, since there are no houses nearby. So the horse impatiently shakes its harness, and wants to go on to its stable and food. The man nevertheless stops for a few minutes to look at the beautiful scene, the woods that are “lovely, dark and deep”. But soon his common sense tells him that he must go on home, for he still has work to do and miles to travel before he can go to bed.

If you stop here this poem may be just a simple nature poem, or picture poem. But Frost’s poetry often suggests a second or deeper

meaning. Looking at it in this second way, we may have here an example of what we all feel at times, the conflict or struggle between **beauty and duty**, or between **pleasure and responsibility**. Since “Sleep” is often used in poetry to suggest death, and since life is often pictured as a road, the last part of the poem seems to say that the poet still has much work to do or duties to fulfill, “promises to keep”, before he dies. Thus we all must divide our time and energies between our love of beauty and nature on one hand, and on the other our work and responsibilities in the everyday world. We must be practical, hard – working people, but we must not fail to see and to appreciate the beautiful things in life.

#### E. The Eagle – Alfred, Lord Tennyson

This brief poem is rich in figurative language. In the first line, the phrase *crooked hands* may surprise us. An eagle does not have hands, we might protest; but the objection would be a quibble, for evidently Tennyson is indicating exactly how an eagle clasps a crag, in the way that human fingers clasp a thing. By implication too the eagle is a person. *Close to the sun* if taken literally is an absurd exaggeration, the sun being a mean distance of 93,000,000 miles from the earth. For the eagle to be closer to it by the altitude of a mountain is an approach so small as to be insignificant. But figuratively, Tennyson conveys that the eagle stands above the clouds, perhaps silhouetted against the sun, and for the moment belongs to heaven rather than to the land and sea. The word “ringed” makes a circle of the whole world’s horizons and suggests that we see the world from the eagle’s height; the wrinkled sea becomes an aged, sluggish animal; mountain walls, possibly literal, also suggests a fort or castle; and finally the eagle

itself is likened to a thunderbolt in speed and in power, perhaps also in that its beak is—like our abstract conception of a lightning bolt – pointed. Only he *clasps the crag, he stands, he watches, he falls* can be taken literally in this poem. The rest is made of figures of speech. Therefore, we gain a bird's-eye view of sun, sea and land—and even of bird from reading Tennyson's poem. Like imagery, figurative language refers us to the physical world.