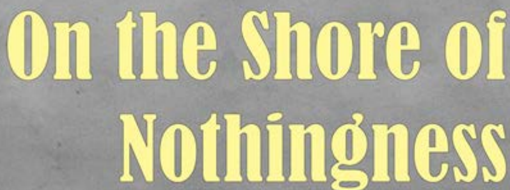

# On the Shore of Nothingness

## A study in cognitive poetics

Reuven Tsur

# *Table of Contents*


Preface. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 7
Synopsis. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 11
1. Introduction: Means, Effects, and Assumptions. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 19
2. Poem, Prayer and Meditation . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 39
3. The Ultimate Limit—Appresentation and Transcendence . . . . . . . . . . . 55
4. "Composition of Place", Experiential Set, and the Meditative Poem. . . . 87
5. Mystic Poetry—Metaphysical, Baroque and Romantic. . . . . . . . . . . . . 119
6. The Sublime and the Absolute Limit. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 141
7. Rhythmic Structure and Religious Poetry—
The Numinous, the Infernal, and *Agnus Dei*. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 167
8. Visual and Auditory Ingenuities in Mystic Poetry. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 199
9. Oceanic Dedifferentiation, "Thing Destruction" and Mystic Poetry. . . . . 231
10. The Infernal and the Hybrid—Bosch and Dante. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 263
11. Let There be Light and the Emanation of Light—
The Act of Creation in Ibn Gabirol and Milton. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 287
12. Light, Fire, Prison: A Cognitive Analysis of
Religious Imagery in Poetry. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 317
13. The Asymmetry of Sacred, Sexual, and Filial Love
in Figurative Language. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 349
References. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 359
Index. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 369

# On the Shore of Nothingness

Space, rhythm, and semantic structure in religious poetry and its mystic-secular counterpart

A Study in Cognitive Poetics

Reuven Tsur

with contributions by Motti Benari

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Ce n’est point avec les idées, mon cher Dégas,
que l’on fait les vers, c’est avec des mots

(Stéphan Mallarmé)

# *Preface*

When I was a young high-school teacher in a youth-village near Jerusalem, I said during a discussion of Tchernichovsky's poem "Nocturno" that the poet expressed in it his wish to integrate with nature. One of the students asked "What does he mean by 'integrating with nature'? Does he want to sleep among the rocks?". It may have been intended as a mischievous, teasing question. But I decided not to handle it as such. I suddenly realised that I had been making unquestioning use of a Romantic cliché acquired at the university. It took me decades to come up with what I could accept as a fairly satisfactory answer. Years later I met that student at a students' reunion, and told him that now I had an answer to his question. But he did not remember that he had ever asked it. This book is for people who want to know what we mean when, by way of reading poems, we use such clichés as "The poet wants to integrate with nature", or "dissolve in eternity, or in nothingness"; or "this poem displays an ecstatic quality", "this poem conveys the union of a human ego with a non-ego", "the 'I' in this poem is deeply drown'd in self-oblivion" or "the poet has got a glimpse of an inaccessible reality", or "of the beyond", or "this poem conveys a mystic insight".

This is a book by a practicing nonbeliever who feels that he has had significant intuitions concerning religious and mystic poems, and who believes that it is worthwhile to try to account for them in a principled manner. It is not a monograph on the varieties of religious or mystic poetry. It has no claims for comprehensiveness of any sort. Rather, it explores selected strategies of coping with certain kinds of religious and mystic experiences in a limited area of religious and mystic poetry. Rather than offering a wide scope and a wide variety of texts, I shall go into minute details of a small number of poems. The choice of such a strategy may be justified by the purpose of my inquiry.

As the motto of this book suggests, it is not at all with ideas that one writes poetry; it is with words. This study does not try to explore religious ideas for their own sake, but rather how religious ideas are turned into verbal imitations of religious experience by poetic structure. We face a domain replete with paradoxes. It is not only the great paradoxes of religion and mysticism, but also those involved in the literary endeavour. We explore how poets attempt to express the ineffable by using words; and some of them are quite successful in doing this. Meditation aims at the voluntary surrender of voluntary control. Some meditative poems attempt to convey the resulting nonconceptual state of mind by using conceptual language.

The issue at stake here is how does the poet induce his readers to perceive a nonconceptual state of mind emerging from a stretch of conceptual language. In other words, we are dealing with the translation of perceived qualities from reality to some semiotic system, or from one semiotic system to another. Such semiotic systems not only open possibilities, but, at the same time, impose constraints. The preci-

sion of translation depends on how fine-grained the sign-units of the target system are. What we are after is the conditions which arouse an illusion that the experience suggested by the stretch of words is authentic. I have isolated four conditions the presence of which may induce a reader to perceive a group of signs (such as, e.g., a stretch of words) as displaying some nonconceptual, ineffable quality, that is, evoke a perception that the two are somehow "equivalent":

* the most salient features of the source phenomenon are represented;
* a relatively large number of distinguishing characteristics of the source phenomenon are sampled for representation;
* the target system is sufficiently fine-grained to capture the most salient features of the source phenomenon;
* the nearest options of the target system are chosen to represent features of a source phenomenon.

These conditions would apply to compact disks rendering music as well as to mystic poetry conveying mystic qualities. A meditative or mystic poem does not *arouse* a meditative or mystic state of mind; it can only convey certain theological ideas or, at best, *display* some perceptual quality that may be perceived as equivalent to a meditative or mystic experience. It is the afore-mentioned four conditions that govern the conversion of ideas of religious or mystic interest into the verbal imitation of some meditative or mystic quality and evoke a perception that the experience and its verbal imitation are somehow "equivalent". To paraphrase Gérard Genette on Rimbaud's "Voyelles", the global correspondence creates the illusion of a feature-by-feature analogy (Genette, 1966: 152; cf. Tsur, 1992b: 120): we detect, so to speak, a subjective mystic or meditative experience in the text. Moreover, the poetic codes of romantic and symbolistic poetry, for instance, are more fine-grained regarding the features required for conveying subjective experience than many other poetic codes. Consequently I found, paradoxically enough, that some of my best examples for the present conception of mystic and meditative poetry were secular poems—romantic or symbolistic.

Much discussion of mystic poetry translates the poems into their own terms, that is, using and elucidating the terms of a conceptual system developed by the mystics themselves. Yeats's poems are frequently discussed in terms of his *A Vision,* or by invoking Swedenborg. Blake's poems are frequently interpreted in terms of a conceptual system abstracted from his visionary works. The same happens to Ibn Gabirol's philosophical and devotional poetry, in which his poetic ideas are traced back to his philosophical treatise *Fons Vitae,* consisting of a series of Platonic dialogues between Master and Disciple. Such an approach frequently obscures the uniqueness of poetic expression. The present endeavour is radically different: it attempts to use a conceptual system involving cognitive, linguistic, and stylistic terms, to describe the interaction of verbal structures with their contents in a poem; and to account, systematically, for the perceived subjective quality regularly associated with such interactions between contents and verbal structures.

The present study was conducted at a relatively advanced stage of my professional career. This had both an advantage and disadvantage. On the one hand, over the years I have developed a conceptual system that may yield significant insights into the nature of religious and mystic poetry. On the other hand, I have already "used up" some of my most illuminating examples in earlier discussions. Much that I wrote on hypnotic-ecstatic poetry and the poetry of altered states of consciousness in my earlier publications, mainly in my *Toward A Theory of Cognitive Poetics* (1992 a) and *The Road to "Kubla Khan"* (1987b), should have been reproduced here. I particularly regret that I could not reproduce here my discussion of Baudelaire's "Correspondances" (Tsur, 1992a: 455–470) along with Rimbaud's "Voyelles" (Tsur, 1992b: 111–135), the ecstatic rhythms and mystic visions yielded by Colerdige's "Kubla Khan" (Tsur, 1987b), and the stylistic distinctions between Whitman's "illustrative" and "meditative" catalogues (Tsur, 1992a: 416–428). I have contributed a chapter on Cognitive Poetics to a recent book, *Cognitive Stylistics—Language and Cognition in Text Analysis;* it includes a detailed close reading of Keats's "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" as a poem whose structure suggests an altered state of consiousness. Here I have only reproduced in Chapter 1 part of my discussion of Wordsworth's "Daffodils" (from Tsur, 1992a: 447–450). At the infernal pole, I regrettably had to leave out two of my favourite passages from Milton's *Paradise Lost,* on the Hellish perspectives suggested by "At once as far as Angels' ken he views / The dismal situation waste and wild," etc. (I: 59–64), and on Satan's endless fall, headlong, "from the'etherial sky [...] to bottomless perdition" (I: 44–49). Elsewhere I have offered a close reading of the former passage (Tsur 1977: 180–185; 1992: 85–91), and discussed at considerable length the "perceptual forces" generated by gestalt and prosodic resources in the latter (Tsur 1977: 207–212; 1992: 148–153; 1998: 256-264). The last-mentioned reference also includes an empirical study of the rhythmical performance of that "endless" run-on sentence. I have published during the years three Hebrew books and a number of articles on mediaeval Hebrew poetry, a vast section of which is devotional. I could include only a very small part of this in the present book.

The paper that constitutes Chapter 11 was written back in 1972–1973, and has not been previously published in English. In time, I took from it the comparison of Milton's "Nativity Ode" to corresponding passages in *Paradise Lost,* and included it in another book (Tsur, 1992a: 97–100); I thought, however, that that would not be sufficient reason to omit it from here. The paper that constitutes Chapter 13 was Chapter 3 in an earlier book of mine (Tsur, 1987a); I felt however, that the present book would be incomplete without it. Much of the theoretical machinery of this book has been developed earlier, and is reproduced here from earlier publications. Some chapters of this book have already been published in learned journals separately. The Chapter "Poem, Prayer and Meditation" was published in *Style* 1974. Chapter 12 has been published in *PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts,* http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/journal/articles/tsur02.htm (1998). A drastically abbreviated version of Chapter 4 has been published in *Pragmatics and Cognition* (2002). The Hieronymus Bosch part of Chapter 10 is

going to be published in a special volume on the grotesque of the *Psychotherapy Patient* series; an abbreviated version of Chapter 8 will be published in a special issue on literature and consciousness in *Journal of Consciousness Studies.*

Motti Benari co-operated with me during part of the project and made valuable contributions throughout the study; in Chapters 1 and 4 he is outright co-author.

Jerusalem, January, 2003.

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# *Synopsis*

Chapter 1
"Introduction: Means, Effects, and Assumptions". The first section of this introductory chapter offers an overview of attempts to define varieties of religious, mystic and meditative experiences. The second section points out that there is a religious and a secular variety of mystic poetry. A close reading of Wordsworth's "Daffodils" is proposed as an instance of a romantic ecstatic poem. The third section raises the problem of adequacy in the conversion of perceived qualities from reality to some semiotic system, or from one semiotic system to another. The issue is introduced via an excursus on onomatopoeia. A sound imitation is *perceived as* equivalent to the imitated reality if the target semiotic system is sufficiently fine-grained in the relevant respects, if as many salient features of the source phenomenon are represented as possible, and if the most relevant options of the target system are chosen. Different semiotic systems may represent different salient features of the source phenomenon. The same applies, with the necessary changes, to representing the salient features of mystic experiences in the verbal medium. This may explain why some of the best examples for my conception of mystic poetry are secular, romantic or symbolistic, poems. Poetic codes developed by romantic and symbolistic poetry are more fine-grained than some other poetic codes precisely in those respects that can best convey the salient features of a mystic experience, or display a mystic quality. Finally the problem of ineffability is addressed.

Chapter 2
"Poem, Prayer and Meditation". Is the devotional poem a poem, a prayer, or a meditation? This chapter offers a distinction between these three notions in terms of Roman Jakobson's model of language functions (Jakobson, 1960). In *poem* the poetic function is dominant, in *prayer* it is the "conative" function, whereas in *meditation* the "emotive" function. It is argued that these differences in the dominant function entail further logical, semantic, and structural differences. It also demonstrates that one and the same Holy Sonnet by Donne can be read as a poem, a prayer or a meditation at different times, following up the changing implications of the changing dominant functions. This chapter quotes the article "Aesthetic Ambiguity" by the psychoanalyst Ernst Kris and the logician Abraham Kaplan, who argue that ambiguity is beneficial for an aesthetic object, but detrimental to a liturgical one.

Chapter 3
"The Ultimate Limit—Transcendence and Appresentation". This chapter adopts from Gordon D. Kaufman an archetypal situation in which, he says, people use "God-talk", that is, language in which such terms as *God,* or *the gods, angels, demons, the other world,* and so on, occur. "In this respect the idea of God functions as a *lim-*

*iting concept,* that is, a concept that does not primarily have content in its own right drawn directly out of a specific experience, but refers to that which we do *not* know but which is the ultimate limit of all our experiences. What literary movements as different as Metaphysical poetry, Romantic poetry and Absurd drama or literature of extreme situations (e.g., Kafka) have in common is a feeling of human limitedness, being confined to the "here and now"; but against this common background of shared feeling illuminating distinctions can be made. Metaphysical and Romantic poetry strive, with different emphases, to transcend the absolute limit, whereas the Absurd assumes that "God is dead", and that any attempt at transcendence is doomed to failure. Kaufman also puts forward two models of transcendence (and of God): the *interpersonal* and the *teleological.* These two models of transcendence lead to quite diverse theological conceptions, and different kinds of poetry.

Chapter 4.
"'Composition of Place', Experiential Set, and the Meditative Poem". This chapter discusses two crucial aspects of Jesuit meditation and what Louis Martz calls "Poetry of Meditation". Martz and some seventeenth century Jesuits claim that on the "well-making" of "seeing the place" or "the composition of place" depends all the success of meditation. We raise the question of what is the relationship between "seeing the place" and the success of meditation. Meditation involves an essential paradox: it requires that one abandon voluntary control voluntarily. This is the problem solved by "composition of place". Ornstein (1975) argued that both meditation and orientation are typically right-hemisphere activities of the brain. "Seeing the place" activates the orientation mechanism and puts the brain into an operative mode which conforms with meditation. This hypothesis was supported by a recent SPECT-imaging study of the brain during meditation (Newberg et al., 2001). This issue is crucial for an understanding of a paradox in poetic communication, too: How does conceptual and sequential language communicate nonconceptual experiences? It will thus loom large in most chapters of this book. We also have to face the apparently unexplained fact that the "Composition of Place" is more meticulously observed in romantic nature poetry than in the "meditative poem" proper (Martz suggests that some of the best romantic nature poems belong to the meditative genre). It is in this context that we analyse Donne's Holy Sonnet 7 ("At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow"). The other aspect discussed is that of mental set. Tellegen devised a test to assess the personality variable "absorption". This is the personality variable that predicts hypnotisability. He distinguishes between "instrumental set" and "experiential set". Absorption is defined as a propensity to adopt the experiential set. Again, for most people it is not easy to relinquish the instrumental in favour of the experiential set. Both hypnosis and meditation presuppose an experiential set. In the anonymous Spanish sonnet "To Christ Crucified" we follow the process by which it switches from an instrumental to an experiential set. We do not attempt to encompass meditation as a whole, only to point out certain cognitive links between structure and perceived effects.

Chapter 5.
"Mystic Poetry—Metaphysical, Baroque and Romantic". An important assumption of the present study is that devotional, meditative, or mystic poetry is first of all poetry, shaped and constrained by the possibilities and constraints inherent in the various poetic styles. This chapter adopts from John Crowe Ransom (1951) a distinction between three "ontological" models: Physical, Platonic and Metaphysical poetry, of which I shall be using the last two only. In Platonic poetry, a variety of images illustrate one idea; in metaphysical poetry, the various aspects of one image may each suggest a different idea. Both neoclassical and romantic poetry are "Platonic"; but the former focuses on the ideas as represented by highly general images, whereas the latter typically subsumes the concrete images in a particular, coherent landscape. The orientation mechanism evoked by the landscape renders the compact abstractions diffuse, which may be perceived as an intense, supersensuous presence. This chapter discusses the handling of a metaphysical image in a very minor seventeenth century poem by Quarles (Metaphysical poetry at its height is discussed in chapters 2, 4, 6 and 8) and two exquisite pieces of "Platonic" poetry by the German baroque poet Andreas Gryphius, and the English romantic William Wordsworth. In both sonnets, the octet offers a landscape description in which the abstractions are perceived as some supersensuous presence; the sestet offers a "colloquy" that leads to an insight into the human significance of the preceding landscape description.

Chapter 6.
"The Sublime and the Absolute Limit". This chapter takes up the issue of the ultimate limit and its transcendence from chapter 3, and the issue of orientation from chapter 4. The notion of the "sublime" is introduced as a means for rendering the ultimate limit apprehensible: that which is sublime exceeds the observer's ability to perceive it in one intuition. In this chapter I first explore the sublime in biblical poetry. Then I examine how romantic and metaphysical poetry handle these problems. I discuss a quatrain from Keats's sonnet "When I have fears", and Donne's Holy Sonnet 5 ("I am a little world"). In the former I examine how "Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance" and "to trace / their shadow with the magic hand of chance" arouse a vivid intuition of having had a glimpse of the world beyond the ultimate limit. In Donne's sonnet, the apostrophe "You which beyond that heaven which was most high / found new worlds" reflects the crisis and disorientation when the ultimate limit turns out not to be the ultimate limit; when beyond the "ultimate" limit new worlds are discovered (we are in the seventeenth century). In another poem, Donne writes: "The New Philosophy calls all in doubt"—the same crisis is presented in the abstract. In Holy Sonnet 5, the self-specifying information of the orientation space is destroyed. Nonetheless, the numinous is revealed *within* the ultimate limits: the poem ends with a verbal allusion to a verse from *Psalms* which Rudolf Otto quotes as an instance of the numinous. This point is reached not through transcendence, but a painful psychological process: the fire of "envie and lust" is turned into a fire purifying the heart.

Chapter 7.
"Rhythmic Structure and Religious Poetry—The Numinous, the Infernal, and *Agnus Dei"*. This chapter attempts to establish reasoned, systematic relationships between poetic structures on the one hand, and, on the other, poetic qualities of religious interest, regularly attributed to them by generations of poets, readers and critics. It offers a theoretical framework which may account for perceived qualities of poems by relying on an interaction between the rhythm, stanza structure, and semantic, syntactic and thematic elements. It draws upon two notions: "convergent and divergent poetry", and "double-edgedness". Two poetic strategies are considered: that which evokes a stable world, and that which indicates a vague, unstable world; and both are "double edged". By achieving cognitive stability, you irrecoverably lose evasive, undifferentiated precategorial information, which is crucial for adequate adjustment to a world-in-flux. And conversely, by abandoning cognitive stability, evasive precategorial information essential for adequate adaptation becomes accessible; but the sense of control and security is weakened or lost. The same holds true, mutatis mutandis, of prosodic structures. A fairly predictable meter may be perceived as rational, "trance-inductive", or imposing a simplifying structure on reality. When meter is less predictable, and the clear-cut contrasts between prominent and non-prominent events become blurred, it may arouse awe, apprehension, and anxiety, owing to the undermining of security; or the sequence of blurred shapes and contrasts may be perceived as isomorphic with emotional processes and mystic experiences. According to Tennyson, it is the vagueness of Milton's hell that renders it awful; it is vague on all levels: thematic, semantic, syntactic, and prosodic. In a nightmare passage from Tennyson's *In Memoriam,* by contrast, the symmetrical stanza and the all-too-regular rhythm appear to undermine the infernal atmosphere. The numinous, "spell-weaving", potential of regular rhythms—as opposed to their simplifying, naive potential—is explored in Blake's "The Tyger" and "The Lamb".

Chapter 8.
"Visual and Auditory Ingenuities in Mystic Poetry". One of the central assumptions of the present study is that mystic or religious poetry reaches the less rational layers of the mind by interfering with the smooth functioning of the cognitive system. In this way, the experience is affected not only by its contents, but also by the perceived quality of the structure of the underlying mental process. Mystic or religious poetry occurs in vastly different styles. The present study distinguishes between two prototypes of such styles, based on drastic and on smooth interference, respectively. The present chapter examines poems based on a very special kind of drastic disruption, of which George Herbert was the grand master. It considers the relationship between mystic poetry and "typographic foregrounding". In this relationship both mystic and aesthetic principles are involved. At the same time I also explore certain psychoanalytic and cognitive mechanisms underlying the mystic and aesthetic effects. Two opposite tendencies are pointed out. On the one hand, the letters of the alphabet may induce magic and mystic processes of enormous force. On the other

hand, human society may apply defense mechanisms against such processes, fossilising them into stylistic mannerisms and ingenuities. A wide range of ingenuities are discussed in George Herbert's poetry: visual, as in the following less well-known poem,

*Ana-* { MARY / ARMY } *gram*

How well her name and *Army* doth present,
In whom the *Lord of Hosts* did pitch his tent!

and auditory ingenuities, as, e.g., echo plays, or his "pruned rhymes", in which it is uncertain whether the mannerism is visual or auditory; and, eventually, such notoriously ingenious devices as

For who can look for lesse, that loveth { Life? / Strife?

or Herbert's famous "Easter Wings".

Chapter 9.
"Oceanic Dedifferentiation, 'Thing Destruction' and Mystic Poetry". This chapter takes its point of departure from Anton Ehrenzweig (1970: 135), who speaks of "a creative ego rhythm that swings between focussed gestalt and an oceanic undifferentiation. [...] The London psychoanalysts D.W. Winnicott and Marion Milner, have stressed the importance for a creative ego to be able to suspend the boundaries between self and not-self in order to become more at home in the world of reality where the objects and self are clearly held apart. [...] Seen in this way, the oceanic experience of fusion, of a "return to the womb", represents the minimum content of all art; Freud saw in it only the basic religious experience. But it seems now that it belongs to all creativity". To illustrate what I *don't* mean by oceanic dedifferentiation, I quote Ehrenzweig on the Homunkulus episode in *Faust.* He claims that Homunkulus encased in a glass womb is a perfect image of oceanic dedifferentiation. I claim that, on the contrary, the focused gestalt of this image may be, at best, an allegory of this state. By contrast, Faust's "immersion in an abstraction" image, "Disciple, up! untiring, hasten! / to bathe thy breast in morning-red!", does evoke the detection of such an experience. Indeed, traditional *Faust* criticism claimed that these lines indicated that Faust had had a momentary mystic experience. The main bulk of the chapter is a close reading of three poems from three different cultural periods in three languages: a Hebrew text from the early Middle Ages, from the so-called Mercabah mysticism; a poem by the seventeenth century English poet Richard Crashaw; and a love poem by Baudelaire ("Hymne"). The chapter demonstrates that all three texts are based on strategies of dissolving focussed gestalts into thing-free and gestalt-free qualities and suspending the boundaries between self and not-self or, at least, between the objects. Most astonishing is the finding that the three texts tend to have recourse to similar grammatical manipulations for achieving these perceptual qualities.

Chapter 10

"The Infernal and the Hybrid—Bosch and Dante". I assume that not only numinous, mystic, and meditative qualities can be conveyed in poetry by interference with the smooth functioning of cognitive and psychodynamic processes, but demonic and infernal qualities as well. These principles are applied here, in the visual medium, to traditional representations of the devil and Hieronymus Bosch's infernal creatures; and, in poetry, to Dante's Inferno. Hell can be rendered awful not only through threat of some painful punishment, but also by suspending the sense of intelligibility, control, comfort and security afforded by ordinary consciousness, that is, by suspending the clear-cut boundaries of objects, thought categories, and blurring the divisions into which the world is marked off. This, in the final resort, may evoke a response of "exasperated helplessness", and "emotional disorientation". The key term is the "grotesque". In the devil's image, the boundaries between man and goat are suspended; in Bosch's tree-man between human, plant, eggshell, etc. In Bosch taboos related to excretions are flouted, too. In Dante we encounter plants or flames that reveal "the anguished workings of a human mind and heart". In relation to both Bosch and Dante the weaknesses of source-hunting scholarship are pointed out, as compared to cognitive and stylistic studies.

Chapter 11.

"Let There be Light and the Emanation of Light—The Act of Creation in lbn Gabirol and Milton". This chapter has a thematic and a stylistic focus. From the thematic point of view I am taking up a problem of great theological interest: the fusion of the personal and the Neo-Platonic conception of the Creator. However, it is not the theological issue which I address here, but the stylistic problem of fusion. I make use of two dichotomies: "split and integrated focus" and "convergent and divergent style". The terms "focus" and "convergent and divergent" have been imported into literary criticism from optics, suggesting that they refer to perceptual qualities. The two central texts in this chapter are one section from Ibn Gabirol's "Kingly Crown" and the creation in Milton by the Son=Word. To use Dr. Johnson's words, in both works "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked together with violence"; but whereas in the former attention is focussed on their incompatibility, in the latter the transition is made, by linguistic manipulations, as smooth as possible. Finally, I present Milton versus Milton. *Paradise Lost* is usually categorised by traditional scholars as a baroque poem; Herbert Grierson included "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" in his anthology of Metaphysical poets. In this last section of the chapter I compare strikingly similar passages from the two poems, pointing out the elusive cues the cumulative effect of which is to integrate focus in the former poem, and split it in the latter.

Chapter 12.

"Light, Fire, Prison: A Cognitive Analysis of Religious Imagery in Poetry". This chapter explores the cognitive foundations and the literary applications of spatial im-

agery. There seem to be several good reasons to have recourse to spatial imagery; this chapter explores two of them. On the one hand, concrete visual images constitute a bundle of features and, as such, allow for the efficient coding of information. This, in turn, grants the cognitive system great flexibility and efficiency both in creative thinking and in poetry. A single image encoding a variety of meaning units can be regarded as an instance of the aesthetic principle "unity-in-variety". This also can be said to save considerable mental energy and, according to a Freudian conception, one possible source of pleasure is the saving of mental energy. On the other hand, the recoding of information into spatial imagery may help the cognitive system to overcome some of its inherent limitations. Thus, fast-changing or lowly-differentiated information may be recoded into a more stable and differentiated spatial template, as in the case of sound pitch recoded into musical scales; or conceptually presented information may become less differentiated in perception, owing to recoding into Gestalt-free and thing-free imagery. Such lowly-differentiated qualities may be reinforced by the mechanisms of spatial orientation, or the mechanisms for alleviating cognitive overload. From such a perspective, the Lakoffean conception of conceptual metaphor based on spatial imagery appears to be congenial to human cognition, but only a small part of a complex situation. This chapter recapitulates two stylistic modes, "Metaphysical" and "Mystic-Romantic". Surprisingly, the techniques by which these opposite effects are achieved are quite similar. The Metaphysical mode seeks to yield an insight into matters of religious significance in a flash, through a sudden transition from complexity to unity. The phenomenological quality of this kind of insight is typically witty. The "Romantic" or "Mystic" mode seeks to achieve the verbal imitation of some experiential contact, of an intuitive rather than conceptual nature, with some reality that lies beyond the *absolute limit* of our experience. Some poems, at least, are remarkably successful in translating those mystic ideas into verbal imitations of mystic experiences. We shall discuss at great length the handling of the images of light, fire and prison in Akhnaton's old Egyptian inscription, in the works of four English poets, Sir Philip Sidney, John Donne, William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot, and of two Mediaeval poets, Hebrew and Armenian, Shlomo Ibn Gabirol and Kostandin of Erznka. Ibn Gabirol's and Kostandin's texts also touch upon the problem of fusing the personalistic and Light-emanation conceptions of creation.

Chapter 13.
"The Asymmetry of Sacred, Sexual, and Filial Love in Figurative Language". Speaking of sacred love in terms of sexual and filial love is more natural than the other way around; they give rise, therefore, to opposite stylistic effects, emotional and witty respectively. Some sixteenth and seventeenth century poets, such as Michael Drayton and John Donne, do indeed achieve a witty effect by speaking of sexual love in terms of sacred love. After many small-scale examples from English and Hebrew poetry, a whole sonnet is discussed, Spenser's "Most glorious Lord of Life". The first twelve lines elaborate on the love of Christ who sacrificed himself for humanity. In the final couplet there is a surprise: "So, let us love, dear love, like

as we ought / Love is the lesson which our Lord us taught". Such a punch line would be more appropriate in one of Donne's libertine poems than in Spenser's love poem. Two literary traditions are relevant to this sonnet. Viewed in these different traditions, two opposite effects arise in the poem. According to the Platonic conception, love between the sexes is the first step toward the higher harmonies that govern the world (this Platonic principle is reflected in Ibn Gabirol's verses as well, quoted above, in chapter 3). In such a reading wit is rather moderate. By contrast, according to the conventions of the English sonnet, the final couplet should effect a surprise ending, even a reversal of all that's said in the preceding lines. In such a reading the poem offers some extreme metaphysical wit.

*Chapter 1*

# Introduction: Means, Effects, and Assumptions

## *Means, Effects and Themes*

Religious poetry is often analysed via its sources and generic influences, through its historical and social implications, or by its symbolism and religious attitudes.[1] The present study explores how stylistic resources are exploited for turning theological ideas and religious attitudes into poetry, into the verbal imitation of some religious experience. By the same token, it explores how the effects of certain well-known poetic devices are qualified when they enter into a religious context. Our concern is mainly with the effects and qualities perceived in the text, when stylistic and poetic means combine with a religious context.

In this paragraph we will try to present some of our assumptions, without any claim for innovation. We assume, for example, that one of the purposes of religious poetry is, typically, to reproduce effects characteristic of religious experience, or at least to display them. We also assume that religious poetry is sometimes quite successful in doing so.[2] Our main innovation in this respect is that we take this assumption more seriously than usual. We will try to identify some of the poetic means employed for that end. We do not presume to cover all the possibilities, merely to focus on some important techniques, to pinpoint some principles, wherever it is called for, and to exemplify these techniques and principles by pieces of religious poetry. We certainly will not try to avoid thematic discussions, since our concern is with the effects arising from an interaction between cognitive processes, varieties of stylistic devices and typologies, and the religious context—themes, practices, and ideas. We will not elaborate upon the meanings, ideas and symbols for their own sake, beyond the needs of the religious poetic discourse; though we will illustrate in what ways the cognitive argument can help us handle some problems of philosophical or religious interest (such as reconciling the biblical and Neoplatonic views of Creation in chapter 11).

## *The Religious Experience*

As mentioned above, one of the main goals of the present study is to explore the techniques by which religious poetry may become a verbal imitation of religious

1 This chapter was written in collaboration with Motti Benari.

2 This last assumption is not so obvious as it might seem, and we will discuss it briefly later in this chapter.

experience. This will require at least a minimal clarification of the nature of the religious experience. For this purpose we will have to rely on some observations made by students of religion, concerning the essence of such experience.

First of all a distinction seems to be needed between a religious experience and a mystic one. Not every religious experience is mystic by nature. Beit-Hallahmi & Arggle (1997) made a thorough investigation, trying to reveal what they thought would be the core of religious experience, but were unbale to reach a definite straightforward conclusion. To any rule they found exceptions and every definition had its own problems. Ignoring a wide range of philosophical and theological issues, we might do with a very general definition like: A religious experience is an experience involving the apperception, recollection or reassurance that beyond the entire universe predominates a higher order, a pattern of some sort. Our concern is with the feelings and perceptions that accompany the contemplation of these issues, and therefore we might try to understand in what way certain feelings reported as typical to religious experience can be detected in a text. Greeley's experimental findings (1975) with US subjects may serve as a convenient illustration. He sampled 1,467 people reporting one or more religious experiences. Reports on the ingredients of religious experience included "an experience of great emotional intensity" (38%); "a sense of the unity of everything" (29%); "a sense of the ineffable nature of the experience" (26%); "a loss of concern about worldly problems" (19%) or even a sense of "being bathed in light" (14%), etc. We certainly do not claim that whenever a text displays one or more of these perceived effects we are confronted with religious poetry. Such effects are by no means necessary or sufficient conditions for "religious poetry"; however, we may expect much religious poetry to display some subset of these and similar qualities. The present study explores the stylistic conditions, the specific combinations of stylistic devices, that typically generate such qualities.

Mysticism is a religion in which God "ceases to be an object and becomes an experience", or in which "man lives in the presence of divinity", an existence in which the abyss between this world and the transcendental world is somehow bridged, overcome, blurred. Some of the features listed in the preceding paragraph apply in mysticism at a greater intensity than in "mere" religion. Such a definition of "mysticism" is very elusive and it seems that there is no one kind of mystic experience. As Horne (1978) has neatly shown, there are hardly any necessary or sufficient conditions for an experience to be demarcated as mystic. Rather, there are many different experiences assembled from a common "pool" of characteristics having a family resemblance. "Family resemblance" refers to relations among members of categories where two members might not resemble each other, while both resemble a third member, like a child who resembles both his parents whereas they don't necessarily resemble each other (Rosch & Mervis, 1975). Some features may occur in several mystic experiences, and not in others. There is no one feature that is obligatory to all of them. The categories "religious" and "mystic" are, then, what Wittgenstein called "open concepts"; that is, their members need not have any shared properties, merely a "family resemblance"; and there is no natural cut-off point between neighbouring concepts, as between "hills" and "mountains". For different purposes we may draw

the boundary between them at different points. Thus, the boundary between mystic and nonmystic (even some kinds of secular) poetry becomes arbitrary.

Stace (1961: 131–132) distinguished two major categories among mystic experiences: introvertive and extrovertive. In this Jungian distinction the difference is, for present purposes, mainly in the sense of unity. In the extrovertive experience the subject experiences the multiplicity of the world as a unity: "the Unifying Vision—all things are one", while in introvertive experiences the Self is the essential object of the experience yielded: "the Unitary Consciousness; the One, the Void; pure consciousness". In the introvertive experience, everything (including time and space) fades or dissolves into a mystic oneness. In the extrovertive "all the things that are 'One' nevertheless retain their identity, while at the same time belonging to that one" (Horne, 1978: 15). "Oneness and separateness are maintained" (ibid.). Horne makes another important distinction concerning the two kinds of experience. The extrovertive experience according to Horne is always spontaneous, sensed as forced upon the mystics without any preliminary preparation. The introvertive is induced and is the result of a quest involving contemplation, concentration or other methods aimed at purifying the mind from distracting objects (usually known as meditative techniques). These distinctions are remarkably similar to certain aesthetic definitions. The romantics speak of poetry and imagination as "unity in variety"; James Smith says of the metaphysical conceit that its elements must be such that they may enter into a solid unity while preserving their warring identities. A central assumption in the ensuing study will be that there is some fundamental kinship between certain religious or mystic contents and the choice of certain style types.

The distinction between spontaneous and induced experiences is essential, and seems to be beyond dispute among scholars. The use of terms is still diversified. Huxley (1972) calls it simply "spontaneous" and "induced" experiences, while Horne (1978) integrates it with Stace's distinction between the introvertive and the extrovertive. Gimello (1978) quotes Smart (1958) on that issue, and they both follow Otto (1917 [1959]) in identifying all experiences that involve the immanent unity of all things as mystic and induced experiences. The spontaneous experiences are "numinous experiences" that involve a variety of contacts with a transcendent being.

> [The numinous experience] is one of an encounter with a being wholly other than oneself and altogether different from anything else. Such an encounter is usually said to be gratuitous, in the sense that those subject to it are not themselves responsible for its occurrence, and it is typically described as both overwhelming and self-authenticating.
>
> The mystical experience, by contrast, is not so much an encounter with a 'sacred other' as it is the interior attainment of a certain supernal state of mind. Such an attainment is usually held, except by mystics in traditions strongly committed to the numinous, to be the result of the subject's own efforts in following a certain contemplative discipline or method (Gimello, 1978: 172).

The method through which one might bring oneself to experience mysticism might be meditation. Thus, some of the effects in spontaneous and induced experiences might be similar, but some might diverge as a consequence of different ways and degrees of self-involvement. Notwithstanding this conception, we tend to adopt Louis Martz's position, who distinguishes between meditation and mystical activity in terms of "the lower levels of the spiritual life" and "the operation of special grace" (see below).

It would appear that Otto (1917 [1959]), Smart (1958), Gimello (1978), Beit-Hallahmi & Arggle (1997) and some others regard all mystic experiences as basically introvertive, whereas extrovertive experiences are either considered numinous or not considered at all. The key to this jumble of terminology seems to be, again, "open concepts". The question of the "right" terminology is less significant for our needs. The distinction, however, might be very helpful for first approximations, and we will return to it time and again, in explaining the presence and importance of certain devices in a religious poetic text.

It may be worth noting that not every mystic experience is automatically considered religious. Beit-Hallahmi & Arggle (1997: 79) quote a table from Hay & Heald[3] based on a survey in Britain. This table indicates, for example, that only 55% of those who reported having experienced that all things are one, regarded this as religious, the rest did not interpret it religiously. Horne says that it is a mood-dependent distinction. Mystic experiences that are treated with seriousness get a religious nature and have long-term effects. Otherwise they become casual anecdotes (Horne, 1978: 21-23). This observation might become useful also for readers of religious poetry, since a degree of seriousness in the text (as perceived through emotional load, for instance) might affect the overall impression of certain devices. This will be discussed in later chapters at length.

### *Religious and Secular Mystic Poetry*

It has been observed by several researchers of widely different persuasions that certain major characteristics of mystic-religious poetry and of the meditative poetry stemming from Jesuit meditation loom large in certain kinds of secular poetry. Let us mention only a few of those authors, who had the greatest influence on our work. Louis Martz, for instance, observed in the "Conclusion" to the revised edition of his book that some of the best romantic poems are secular versions of the meditative poem. "The genre of meditative poetry should be broad enough to include some of the Odes of Keats or the later poetry of Wallace Stevens, as well as the unorthodox, though still religious, poetry of a Yeats or a Wordsworth or an Emily Dickinson" (Martz, 1962: 324). Walt Whitman's poetry contains lengthy catalogues that have very little to do with God, or other notions of established religion. William James,

3 The exact reference according to Beit-Hallahmi & Arggle (ibid.) is: Hay D. & Heald G. (1987) Religion is Good for You, *New Society,* 17 April.

whose book *The Varieties Of Religious Experience* (1902) is subtitled "A Study in Human Nature", refers to Whitman's poetry several times in it, including in the chapter on "Mysticism" where, among other things, he begins a long footnote with the comment "Whitman in another place expresses in a quieter way what was probably with him a chronic mystical perception" (396).[4]

In a paper (which appears to have influenced the conception in this study more than any other work) called "Three Poems on Ecstasy", Leo Spitzer (1962) states its aim as follows: "I shall take up three poems dealing with approximately the same subject matter (the ecstatic union of a human ego with a non-ego), in order to study the magic transformation which actual words of the particular language have undergone at the hands of the poets who have succeeded in making their inner experience a poetic reality for the reader" (142). Only one of the three ecstatic poems refers to a religious experience proper, "En una noche oscura" by the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross. "This poem, written about 1577 by the Carmelite monk San Juan de la Cruz, is a perfect example of the manner in which the body can be made artistically tributary to the mystic experience. The Catholic saint treats no lesser a subject than the ecstatic union, not with a human being, but with the divine, in terms that constantly fuse soul and body" (153).[5] The other two texts are conspicuously secular. Their subject is the ecstatic union of human lovers: John Donne's "The Ecstasie", in which the lovers experience "mystic union of a Neo-Platonic order" (142); and the scene of Isolde's *Liebestod,* at the end of Richard Wagner's music-drama, *Tristan und Isolde.*

Spitzer's analysis of Isolde's *Liebestod* most powerfully anticipates our conception of oceanic dedifferentiation in poetry (see Chapter 9). In Isolde's words "we have the pantheistic idea of the melting into the universe of two souls who have consumed themselves in longing for each other [...] sinking, ever deeper, into the sea of nothingness" (Spitzer, 1962: 175). This sea of nothingness, however, "is not that void described by Jacopone and other mystics (including Juan de la Cruz): an emptiness created by the soul in order that it may be filled by God; it appears as a turbulent mass of waves, perfumes, breaths [...] ruled over not by a personal God, but by the violent forces of Nature" (ibid., 176).

The following excerpt from Spitzer raises two points of utmost interest, which we propose to pursue here at some length.

> We are reminded of the progress in time of the mystic experience. Juan de la Cruz has been able to transcribe the unbroken line, the parabola of that ex-

4 Hanita Goodblatt (1990) has distinguished between illustrative and meditative catalogues in Whitman's poetry. Tsur has discussed in great detail the semantic differences between the two types of catalogue, in an attempt to account for the quality of "altered state of consciousness" in the latter type (Tsur, 1992a: 416–428).

5 Having recently re-read Spitzer's paper, we were surprised to discover that he had pointed out in San Juan's poem grammatical forms very similar to those we pointed out in chapter 4 in an anonymous Spanish sonnet, deployed for very similar effects.

> perience in its evolution from energetic pursuit to self-annihilation, from human to divine action—and this is a short poem of eight stanzas (as though the poet would suggest that what happened with such intensity cannot be measured by man-devised clock-time) (Spitzer, 1962: 169).

Our first point concerns Spitzer's phrase "the progress in time of the mystic experience [...] from energetic pursuit to self-annihilation". Alternatively, the phrase "self-annihilation" may be replaced by "an emptiness created by the soul in order that it may be filled by God". This process is crucial. Tsur has elsewhere elaborated at great length on the "Obtrusive Rhythms & Emotive Crescendo", which sometimes yield what he has called "poetry of altered states of consciousness" (Tsur, 1992a: 431–454); he has also explored the emotive crescendo in a context of divergent rhythms (ibid., 455–470). Using Spitzer's terms, the emotive crescendo can be characterised as a verbal pattern that indicates an emotional progression from energetic pursuit to self-annihilation, culminating sometimes in an emptiness created by the soul in order that it may be filled by God, or some peak experience. Chapter 2 below will consider at great length the emotive crescendo in a sonnet by Donne. In chapter 3, excerpts 8–10 contain the closing couplets of three of Keats's most intense sonnets, in which the energetic pursuit leads to states denoted by such phrases as "in nothingness do sink", "swoon to death", and "Death is Life's high meed". These excerpts exemplify the points of climax of the same phenomenon. In chapter 7 the obtrusive rhythms in Blake's "The Tyger" will be considered at great length. To provide a comprehensive picture of the issue, it would be necessary to quote here entire chapters from Tsur's 1992 book, and also from some other books. Here we will confine ourselves to the reproduction of part of a brief discussion of Wordsworth's "Daffodils" (in which both the obtrusive rhythms and the emotive crescendo are conspicuous):

(1) I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:

A poet could not be but gay
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flesh upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

Many readers have detected an ecstatic quality in this poem. A few psychological distinctions concerning the nature of ecstasy will readily suggest why. On the one hand, according to some psychologists, emotional qualities involve a sudden deviation from normal energy level, and emotions related to joy and ecstasy involve an *increase* of energy to varying degrees (cf. Tsur, 1978; 1992: 56–61). On the other hand, Plutchik, in his work on emotion rooted in instinct, associates calmness, serenity, happiness, joy, and ecstasy (in this ascending order of judged intensity) on all levels of evolution with pulsatile or orgastic behaviour associated with the reproduction instinct. The term "reproduction"

> is used to represent the prototypic response associated with sexual behavior. Apparently at almost all animal levels, sexual behavior is associated with some form of pulsatile or orgastic behavior. Even the asexual reproduction of one-celled organisms has an intense pulsating quality as recorded by high speed photography. Pleasure is presumably associated with all forms of sexual behavior, and may be defined in terms of approach and maintenance-of-contact tendencies (Plutchik, 1968 [1962[1]]: 73–74).

In the dancing of the daffodils (reinforced by the exceptionally regular rhythms of the poem) readers may detect "some form of pulsatile or orgastic behaviour" characteristic of ecstasy too.[6]

This poem begins with a notion of "loneliness", and ends on a note of "solitude", developing as it were from "floating on high" to some "vacant or pensive mood", through a constant process of **intensification.** Consider the group of synonyms and otherwise closely related words

sprightly→ glee→ gay→ jocund→ bliss.

6 As will be argued in Chapter 9, Newberg et al. relate mystic experiences, from the evolutional point of view, to neural circuitry initially evolved for reproduction.

First of all, these words have a cumulative impact, as far as the impression created by the poem goes. Secondly, when comparing the first and the last members of the group, there appears to be a considerable difference in intensity between them. The intervening members occur in a random order; they conform with the crescendo pattern only in a certain mental performance: when the pattern is "retro-related"[7] from the last member. Thus, for instance, the word *pleasure* may indicate a lower degree of pleasure than *bliss;* but it would still indicate the peak of the experience, by virtue of its place in the pattern. Harold Bloom has pointed out that there are here pairs of successive words in which the second member tends to be more "ample" (perhaps only by virtue of the crescendo pattern): *crowd*→ *host; fluttering*→ *dancing; shine*→ *twinkle* (add to this *sparkling).* Now, consider the contribution of the following two lines to this pattern: "The waves beside them danced; but they / Outdid the sparkling waves in glee". Here, *danced, sparkling* and *glee* are made *somehow* to participate in the same scale, suggesting degrees of emotional energy. The verb *outdid* acquires a crucial function in suggesting or generating the crescendo pattern. The expressions of movement and joy (reinforced by the expressions of shining) are drawn together in the metaphor of the last two lines:

(2) And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

Paradoxically enough, the height of intense movement occurs in a relaxed, "pensive mood", when the speaker is lying on his couch. "I gazed—and gazed—but little thought" connotes a kind of self-oblivion, while denoting 'I had no idea' (the speaker could not, at the moment of gazing, estimate how significant the 'show' was). Although there is here a break in the continuity of the experience, indicating, as it were, "emotions *recollected* in tranquillity", the last stanza takes up this connotation, and heightens it to "vacant" (denoting 'empty' or 'unoccupied with thought or reflection') and "pensive" (which suggests 'dreaminess or wistfulness', and may involve 'little or no thought to any purpose').

Maud Bodkin's comments on certain passages in Dante's "Paradiso" may throw some light on the issue. Our foregoing discussion implies that we need not be surprised that some elements in Wordsworth's presentation of bliss is more aptly characterised by some of Maud Bodkin's comments than the elements originally commented upon in Dante, as, for instance, it "can also be realized with imaginative sympathy, as constituting a cosmic dance in which the spirit of man may participate" (Bodkin, 1963: 145).[8]

7 That is, when a pattern is elaborated from its end point backward. Tsur has discussed in detail the cognitive mechanisms involved (Tsur, 1992a: 466–470).

8 We are certainly not suggesting that Dante's image is less apt than Wordsworth's, only that the applicability of Bodkin's comment is more conspicuous with reference to Wordsworth's image than to Dante's.

This poem can be taken, then, as a prototype of poems that progress from energetic movement to self-oblivion, "an emptiness created by the soul in order that it may be filled by God"—except that the vacant soul is filled here not by God, but by some intense, blissful experience. At this point one should become aware of a most disconcerting problem that haunted us throughout the present research. Some of the best examples for our conception of mystic or ecstatic poetry are secular, romantic or symbolistic, poems. It was not before writing the present introductory chapter (which happened to be the last one to be written) that we suddenly realised that the explanation was built into the theoretical system underlying our whole argument. This explanation will be suggested at the end of the next section of this chapter.

Recent advances in brain science and the biology of belief may reinforce our conception of the structure of this poem and the altered state of consciousness it suggests. Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili and Vince Rause (2001), in discussing the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems as our arousal and quiescent systems, observe:

> There is evidence, however, of cases in which both systems function at the same time when pushed to maximal levels of activity and this has been associated with extraordinary alternative states of consciousness. The unusual, altered states can be triggered by various kinds of intense physical or mental activity, including dancing, running, or prolonged concentration (39).

Obviously, in this poem both systems are highly activated.

> The maximal stimulation of the arousal system can also cause a spillover effect, which causes quiescent responses to surge. The resulting trancelike state is experienced as an ecstatic rush of orgasmiclike energy. This state can be induced by intense and prolonged contemplation, during rapid ritualistic dancing, and sometimes, briefly, during sexual climax (42).

Further, in a footnote they comment: "Essentially any repetitive stimulation, whether it be physical, emotional, sensory, or cognitive, can potentially generate such states" (184). Tsur has repeatedly pointed out that in such poems as this one or "Kubla Khan" (Tsur, 1987b; 1992a: 445–452) the hypnotic-ecstatic effect is intimately associated with the more than usually regular rhythm on the prosodic level, and the dancing (daffodils or rocks) on the thematic level.

The contribution of the phrase "floats on high" to this effect will be illuminated by a comment by Maud Bodkin, speaking of "flight as it is known in dreams", with reference to a very different image in Dante's "Paradiso", characterising its effect as "the absence of any sensation of effort, the wonder at effortless attainment of a new sphere". To this we may add Michael A. Persinger's comment in his neuro-psychological study (1987), speaking of "God Experience involving temporal lobe instability" (26). "Few people appear to acknowledge the role of vestibular sensations in the God Experience. However, in light of the temporal lobe's role in the sensation of

balance and movement, these experiences are expected. [...] Literature concerned with the God Experiences are full of metaphors describing essential vestibular inputs. Sensations of 'being lifted', 'feeling light', or even 'spinning, like being intoxicated', are common" (Persinger, 1987: 26). After quoting an account of such an experience, he observes: "Note the repeated references to vestibular sensations: 'floating,' 'lifted,' 'moving,' 'spinning'" (27). The phrase "as a cloud floating high" is introduced, as it were, merely as a simile for loneliness; by the same token, it suggests effortlessness as well as elements of the spiritual experience toward which it leads.

Our second point elaborating the above quote from Spitzer concerns the suggestion that "this is a short poem of eight stanzas (as though the poet would suggest that what happened with such intensity cannot be measured by man-devised clock-time)". This is the only point on which we tend to disagree with Spitzer's admirable paper. This kind of self-reference appears to me far-fetched in a mystic poem. Besides, the same problem arises in the secular version of mystic and meditative poetry ("Daffodils", for instance). Both Martz and we have independently noticed that most of the poems under discussion are all too short for an experiencer to build up the enormous psychological intensity suggested by them. Martz conjectures in the introduction to his anthology that these poems do not embody the meditative process itself, but may be merely a by-product of it.

> But what one should expect to find, more often, is some part of the whole meditative action, set down as particularly memorable, perhaps in accordance with the kind of self-examination advised by Dawson under the heading: "What is to be done after Meditation." One is urged here to scrutinize carefully the manner in which one has performed every part of the meditative process, from preparation through colloquy; to examine closely the distractions, consolations, or desolations that one may have experienced; and finally, to "note in some little booke those thinges which have passed in our Meditation, or some part of them, if we think them worth the paynes." Most of the poems in this volume, I believe, are the result of such retrospective examination of the practice of meditation: memorable moments of self-knowledge (Martz, 1963: xxii).

Even if we accept such an account of the poems' genesis (and we are not sure we should), we must approach this problem, I believe, from an aesthetic vantage point. Neither of the foregoing explanations can account for the brevity of "Daffodils", or Keats's and Wordsworth's sonnets. As I will argue in the next chapter, a poem, *as an aesthetic object,* is not meant *to arouse* a mystic or meditative (or any other emotional) experience in the reader. Rather, it should allow the reader *to perceive* a mystic or meditative (or some other emotional) quality in it, (just as in music one is capable of perceiving, say, some sad quality, without becoming sad). Such a perception may take place even in the absence of the duration so essential for entering into a mystic or meditative state. On the contrary, sometimes brevity may be even an advantage. Aristotle had some illuminating comments, *mutatis mutandis,*

on this issue: "As [...] in the case of animate bodies and organisms a certain magnitude is necessary, and a magnitude which may be easily embraced in one view; so in the plot, a certain length is necessary, and a length which can be easily embraced by the memory" (Aristotle, 1951: 36). In other words, a mystic or meditative poem need not be long enough for undergoing the mystic or meditative experience, only for discerning the parts required for the perception of a mystic or meditative quality in it; at the same time, it must be short enough to be perceived as an integrated whole. Donne's Anniversaries or even "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward" cannot be experienced with the same intensity as some of his Holy Sonnets.

*Semiotic Systems—Conversion and Adequacy*

The issue at stake is the translation of perceived qualities from reality to some semiotic system, or from one semiotic system to another. In our case, this involves the representation of some of the salient features of religious experience in the verbal medium. The precision of translation depends on how fine-grained the sign-units of the system are. If the target system is sufficiently fine-grained and the nearest options of this target system are chosen to represent a source phenomenon, it may evoke a perception that the two are "equivalent". We will briefly illustrate the problem through a well-known linguistic-literary phenomenon: onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia is the imitation of natural sounds by speech sounds. There is an open set of infinite noises in the world; any language contains a closed system of between twenty and one-hundred speech sounds. Nevertheless, we tend to accept many instances of onomatopoeia as quite adequate phonetic equivalents of the natural noises. How can language imitate, with such a limited number of speech sounds, an infinite number of natural noises? Take the bird called "cuckoo". Its name is said to have an onomatopoeic origin: it is said to imitate the sound the bird makes, and the bird is said to emit the sound [kukuk]. Now the bird emits neither the speech sound [k] nor [u]; it uses no speech sounds at all. It emits two continuous sounds with abrupt onsets, and a characteristic pitch interval between them, roughly a minor third. Each vowel has its characteristic "formant structure" (i.e., energy concentrations, at specified pitch ranges); as Tsur (2001) has shown, the formant structure of the cuckoo's continuous sound is nearest to that of the [u] in human speech. The [k] has no acoustic trace in the cuckoo's call. But stop consonants are phonetically abrupt, and being a voiceless stop, it is used to indicate its abrupt beginning; and being a back sound, it is co-articulated with [u], and thus preferred to, e.g., [p] or [t] in this sound imitation. Significantly enough, in a wide range of Chinese dialects too the same bird says "pu-ku" (with a falling-rising tone on the second syllable); that is, it contains two syllables consisting of an [u] sound each, preceded by a voiceless stop. In human language, European languages at least, pitch intervals are part of the intonation system, not of the lexicon. Consequently, the pitch interval characteristic of the cuckoo's call is not lexicalised in the bird's name. In this respect, the human phonological system is not sufficiently "fine-grained".

Now the cuckoo's call is sometimes translated to another semiotic system as well: the sound of a recorder, or some other wind instrument with a whistle mouthpiece—in Haydn's (or Leopold Mozart's?) "Toy Symphony", for instance. The overtone structure of the sound of these instruments is similar to the cuckoo's call (in Mahler's first symphony, where it is played by the traverse flute, the overtone structure sounds less similar). The onset of the sound played on these instruments can be abrupt too. The player may articulate it with the tip of the tongue touching the teethridge, producing "tu-tu" as it were. Unlike the lexicon of human language, this semiotic system does provide the option to produce the pitch interval of a minor third; but, on the other hand, it need not co-articulate the steady pitch sound with a velar consonant; so the player resorts to "tu" rather than "ku". Thus, the two semiotic systems are quite limited as to their means for reproducing the cuckoo's natural call; and they offer different sign vehicles for it. Neither of these systems offers the exact sounds for reproducing the cuckoo's call; in each one must choose the options that are nearest to the target sound. That is the best that semiotic systems can offer for the representation of qualities perceived in reality or in another semiotic system. A sound imitation is *perceived as* an equivalent of the imitated reality if the target semiotic system is sufficiently fine-grained in the relevant respects; as many salient features of the source phenomenon are represented as possible, and the most relevant options of the target semiotic system are chosen.

Sometimes it is the meaning that determines to which features of repeated units we attend. In Hebrew, *mətaktek* means "ticktocking"; we attend to the repeated voiceless plosives and perceive the word as onomatopoeic. *Mətaktak,* by contrast, means "sweetish". In Hebrew, the repetition of the last syllable is lexicalised, suggesting "somewhat (sweet)". The meaning directs our attention to this redoubling of the syllable, and we attend away from the phonetic features of the plosives.[9]

This excursus on semiotic systems may illuminate our handling of a central problem of the present book. Poetry is a complex of semiotic systems; it offers an indefinite (but by no means infinite) number of verbal strategies for capturing the felt qualities of such religious experiences as ecstasy, meditation or mystic experience. There is no one-to-one relationship between the various verbal strategies and the felt qualities suggested by them (in speech research, Al Liberman would call such a phenomenon "complex coding"). A divergent verbal structure may be "isomorphic" with mystic experiences, by virtue of the blurring of visual images and metric shapes; alternatively, it may undermine the psychological atmosphere of security and cognitive control, inspiring awe and anxiety, thus enhancing the felt qualities of an infernal landscape, for instance. Likewise, a convergent structure may generate such widely different felt qualities as simplified mastery of reality, rational predictability, or a hypnotic / ecstatic quality—by virtue of its various potentials which may be foregrounded at different times.[10] We accept a translation from one

9 This is what Wittgenstein would call "aspect-switching".
10 In chapter 7 we will discuss divergent and convergent styles at length.

semiotic system to another as adequate (e.g., the representation of the felt quality of a mystic experience in the verbal medium), if the target system is sufficiently fine-grained; and if the options most similar to the source experience are chosen. When we print a picture, the higher the resolution (that is, the more fine-grained the system), the better is its resemblance to the original. And when we record music, the finer the metallic grains on the tape, the higher the fidelity of music achieved. We will expect the best quality afforded by our system, even if we are able to adapt ourselves to lower resolution pictures, or lower fidelity music. We may imagine hearing the bass sounds of a symphony on the speaker of a small portable radio; but the same sound quality would be unacceptable to us on a high quality stereo system. Some languages may be more fine-grained than others in some respects, and less fine-grained in other respects.

The notion "fine-grained" needs some elaboration. We have characterised poetry as "a complex of semiotic systems". From the interaction of the various semiotic systems very delicate constituent parts may come into existence. In the syllabo-tonic versification system an enormous complexity (consisting of extremely delicate units) may arise. We have, for instance, a conventional metric pattern consisting of regularly alternating weak and strong positions. We also have stress pattern, the irregularly alternating stressed and unstressed syllables; and patterns of alliteration. The prominent units of these three patterns may converge (suit each other consistently), or diverge in all sorts of odd combinations. Syntactic units (phrase, clause) may converge with prosodic units (e.g., line), or diverge from them. The presence of a rhyme pattern may enhance the verse lines as discrete perceptual units; at the same time, it may group them into a stanza. Their absence may generate an opposite effect. All this may interact in a variety of ways with clear-cut or blurred images, and with an infinite number of themes organised by linear convergent progress, or diverge into logical gaps, multiple options of understanding, figurative language, etc. Thus, for instance, the description of an infernal landscape and a heavenly choir may activate different potentials of the same stylistic configuration. The contrast here is not only between "infernal" and "heavenly", but also between "landscape" and "choir".

In syllabo-tonic verse, obtrusive rhythms may be generated by repeating highly prominent configurations four–five times in a line (strong position + stressed syllable + sound pattern) as, for instance, in $\underset{s}{\textbf{Ty}}\underset{w}{\textbf{ger}}$, $\underset{s}{\textbf{ty}}\underset{w}{\textbf{ger}}$, $\underset{s}{\textbf{búr}}\underset{w}{\text{ning}}$ $\underset{s}{\textbf{br}\text{íght}}$.[11] Such fine-grained units are unavailable in some other systems, in French syllabic verse, for instance. In chapter 9, in the first stanza of Baudelaire's "Hymne" the obtrusive rhythm is less fine-grained; it consists of the repetition of prepositional phrases introduced by the preposition *à la.* This sequence of repeated phrase structures is segmented into octosyllabic verse lines with a compulsory caesura after the fourth syllable, clearly articulated and grouped by a rhyme pattern. The repeated phrase structure reinforces the repeated hemistiches, and has an impetuous forward sweep with a

11 From Blake's "The Tyger"—this poem will be discussed in great detail in chapter 7.

convergent, incantatory effect. By the same token, a mild divergent effect is superimposed: the main clause occurs only in the fourth line; the reader's attention must be split, so as to remember that an obtrusive syntactic prediction has not yet been fulfilled. A similar but less fine-grained structure is displayed, in the same chapter, by an old Hebrew mystic text from the so-called "mercaba" hymns. Here certain abstract magic formulae are reiterated. This text begins with four parallel verses, each one containing a prepositional phrase introduced by the preposition "from", predicting a verb, which occurs only in the fifth line. But here there are no independently established verse lines of equal length as in Baudelaire, no caesura, and no rhyme pattern. There is only the incantatory repetition of a phrase structure embodied in phrases of different length, mitigated by the need for splitting attention between the propelling repeated phrase structure and remembering that a crucial syntactic prediction has not yet been fulfilled. These poems are less fine-grained than those in the syllabo-tonic system. But they are prone to evoke the desired effect, as long as those options of the respective semiotic systems are chosen that are best suited to evoke a trance-inductive effect.[12]

We have introduced the issue of "fine-grainedness" and "equivalence" to explain in what sense a verbal structure may be perceived as an adequate imitation of a mystic experience. Long after having expounded this conception, we suddenly realized that it provides the obvious explanation for the disconcerting observation we have made above: that some of our best examples for our conception of mystic and meditative poetry are secular poems. We believe that the explanation is this: the poetic codes developed by romantic and symbolistic poetry are more fine-grained than any other poetic code developed by earlier styles, precisely in those respects that are advantageous in conveying a mystic experience, or displaying some mystic quality.[13] Thus, for instance, we will see that in chapter 4, excerpts 1–4, from Donne's Holy Sonnets (quoted by Martz as typical instances of the Composition of Place), there is barely any description of the scenery. In chapter 5, by contrast, we will see that the entire octet of Wordsworth's pantheistic Calais-Beach sonnet is devoted to a meticulous description of the evening landscape, in harmony with the poetics of romantic nature poetry. Many of the romantic and symbolistic poets were of a mystic disposition, but were adherents of some kind of secular humanism.

12 There is a comparable device in "The Tyger", where there are six groups of four highly convergent lines with little or no syntactic prediction. The fifth stanza, however, begins with two parallel subordinate clauses, predicting a main clause in line 3: "When the stars threw down their spears, / And watered heaven with their tears".

13 Regarding the perceived qualities of mystic poetry, to be analysed in the present study, at least.

Most scholars emphasise the ineffable nature of some religious experiences. One way to approach the problem is this. Just as someone may tell the events of a dream but fail to convey what is really significant about it, one may report the images, episodes and ideas related to some mystic or meditative event, but fail to convey its special character, the unique conscious quality of the experience, for instance. On the other hand, some religious poems are remarkably successful in conveying this conscious quality as well. Religious systems are conceptual systems. Language too is a conceptual system. Even such words as "ecstasy" or "mysticism" are supposed to be used as clear-cut concepts, or mere tags to identify some mental process. Yet, it seems that in good religious poetry the ineffable quality is somehow sensed through the language. Our objective is to explore how such a conceptual language can convey non-conceptual experiences such as meditation, ecstasy or mystic insights. We explore how the poet, by using words, can express the "ineffable".

Horne even points out a social element in the problem of recognising and expressing private experiences as such.

> Such experiences as pains, moods and dreams are had by only one person, so that I would think, offhand, that only the one who had the experience would be able to recognize his experience and decide whether a description of it was correct.
>
> However, after long and involved discussions which go back to John Stuart Mill, many philosophers have come to talk about private experience in quite another way. They argue that the person who is in the apparently privileged position of having the pain, dream, etc., is actually in no better position to know it than anyone else. Their reason for saying so is that if I ask how anyone knows that he has dreamed, or had a pain, I realize that his ability to identify the experience verbally (not have it, of course) arises out of social context. In his upbringing, he has learned from others to recognize and report such things (Horne, 1978: 42).

In his book on mysticism and philosophy, Stace examines this issue thoroughly.

> One of the best-known facts about mystics is that they feel that language is inadequate, or even wholly useless, as a means of communicating their experiences or their insights to others. They say that what they experience is unutterable or ineffable (Stace, 1961: 277).

Stace surveys the many theories that have been proposed to explain ineffability and shows that none of them is fully satisfactory. It could have been the intensive emotional load which is ineffable: "the deeper our emotions are, the more difficult they are to express" (ibid: 281). Yet Stace argues that the perceptive part and not just the emotional load is ineffable; that there is a logical difficulty as well.

Another explanation focuses on the gap between the teller who has experienced the mystic experience and the listener who has not. "Like the impossibility of communicating the nature of colour to a man born blind" (ibid: 283). Stace shows that this notion applies equally to every kind of experience, not just to mystical ones, making it useless to explain precisely the unique ineffability of the mystical experience.

The most common theory seeks to explain ineffability "as being due to an incapacity of the understanding or intellect to deal with mystical experience. [...] It can be directly experienced, thus goes the theory, but it cannot be abstracted into concepts [...]. Therefore mystical experiences being unconceptualizable are also unverbalizable" (ibid: 285). They are unconceptualisable because at least part of the experience is the oneness.

> Concepts depend on there being a multiplicity of distinguishable items. The mind notes resemblances and differences between them and arranges those which resemble each other in certain ways into the same class. The idea of the class is the concept. Hence where there is no multiplicity there can be no concept and therefore no words (ibid: 286).

In the introvertive experience oneness is an undifferentiated unity. In the extrovertive, oneness is experienced as "shining through from beyond or behind" the multiplicity. "Oneness" is an undifferentiated part and is therefore unconceptualisable.

Stace makes a distinction between the inability to describe the undifferentiated unity during the experience and remembering it afterwards. He argues that *"theorists have supposed that the impossibility of using concepts during the experience is also characteristic of the remembered experience"* (ibid, 298, italics in the original) and this supposition is mistaken (ibid). According to Stace, in retrospective look, most of the experience is not ineffable, and can be expressed through concepts (like the concept "undifferentiated unity" for example).

Our own solution, to be propounded in chapter 4, is a special version of this last point of Stace's. Some brain scientists and cognitive psychologists speak of relatively compact and linear processes (associated with the left hemisphere of the brain), as opposed to relatively diffuse and global mental processes (associated with the right hemisphere of the brain). The former characterise typically rational, conceptual, and logical processes; the latter—typically emotional, mystic, and other kinds of nonconceptual processes, including spatial orientation. Some brain scientists (e.g., Marcel Kinsbourne) assume that both kinds of processes consist of streams of information describable in terms of semantic features. It will be suggested in chapter 4 that the semantic features that constitute, e.g., some mystic experience *can* be paraphrased in conceptual language; what *cannot* be paraphrased is its diffuse structure, and the phenomenological quality of this diffuse structure. We can tell the events of a dream, but cannot convey its diffuse character that seems to determine its unique subjective nature. The same can be said of "oneness". Some brain scientists say that the right hemisphere of the brain processes information as a patterned

whole. Words can paraphrase the information, but not the phenomenological quality of being processed as a patterned whole. The phrase "undifferentiated unity" mentioned in the preceding paragraph does not convey the experience; it merely serves as a tag for identification.

Thus, we argue that at least one other aspect of the religious experience, not mentioned by Stace, is ineffable. It is the way the meaning is organised. Again, as in a dream or in a figurative text, part of the uniqueness of the experience is the unique way in which the units of information are linked and clustered together. Such clusters are usually called "symbols". Stace mentions with approval the theory that religious experience is symbolic by nature, yet he sees no problem in conceptualizing it into literal language afterwards. To a large extent, information about mystic experiences is similar to information about figurative expressions: it cannot be paraphrased by literal language, only described to some extent, or partly imitated. Consider, for instance, our above discussion of Wordsworth's "Daffodils". The interaction between the theme of dancing daffodils and the poem's rhythmic structure may be regarded as such a partial imitation of what Newberg et al.. described as altered states of consciousness "triggered by various kinds of intense physical or mental activity, including dancing, running". Or, consider Wordsworth's "vacant or pensive mood" following the peak of the dancing movement, which may be referred to by such conceptual tags as "sweet thoughts recollected in tranquillity"; but may also be regarded as a verbal imitation of what Newberg et al. described as "the maximal stimulation of the arousal system [which] can also cause a spillover effect, which causes quiescent responses to surge".

Religious poetry uses a variety of techniques to generate its effects. Sometimes one religious element becomes a distinctive characteristic of a poem determining its genre, meditative poetry, for instance; but sometimes we ought to speak of mystic or meditative elements in a poem—even in a secular poem, where they do not necessarily determine its genre. Just as theological and philosophical elements may appear in genres other than "contemplative poetry", mystic elements may be found in other than mystic poetry as well. One of the main goals of the present study is to examine in what ways poetic devices of structure and organisation can be employed for conveying these qualities. How can stylistic features enable a reader to detect the presence of such qualities by way of "showing" rather than "telling"? This issue is discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter; in the subsequent chapters there is an attempt to unfold some of these poetic techniques, so essential for translating the religious subjective emotional experience into perceived qualities of a verbal artefact, such as a mystic quality, a sense of transcendence, the sublime, etc.

*Poetic Techniques in Religious Poetry*

Religious poetry uses many kinds of techniques to generate its effects. As mentioned above, one of the most important qualities perceived in religious poetry is a mystic quality, a sense of contact with other worlds. Such an effect is achieved by deviation

from our ordinary consciousness. Thus, much of our discussion is focused on the techniques used to indicate deviation from ordinary consciousness.

Much of our concern is focused on poetic devices that undermine ordinary consciousness, which readers may experience to some extent, but tend to displace away from themselves, to the poem. Generally speaking, these devices operate by three basic methods:

1. Rendering our clear-cut categorisation less distinct—by blurring the borders between categories, softening the limits, and establishing a new uncategorised unity in our perception. A wide range of poetic devices discussed in this book functions in such a way, reinforcing thematic indeterminacies, which explicitly challenge the boundaries of known categories.
2. Undermining aggressively our sense of order by violating the stability of our ordinary consciousness, by emphasising paradoxes, creating unsettled situations and splitting our focus of attention by force.
3. Shifting our general focus toward less rational and less ordered processes, evoking holistic cognitive processes (as opposed to analytical ones), and stimulating emotional effects.

A wide variety of poetic means are available for these purposes, and we do not presume to give a comprehensive view of them. We discuss some of the techniques, and the effects they produce, while trying to make our humble contribution to establishing a more or less systematic relationship between poetic techniques and perceived qualities.

### *"Emotional" and "Aesthetic" Qualities*

Finally, a word must be said about what we mean by such phrases as "mystic poem", or "ecstatic poem". We designate by these adjectives some aesthetic quality. Hepburn (1968) distinguished, with reference to aesthetic objects, between experiencing an emotion on the one hand, and detecting an emotion, or perceiving some emotional quality on the other. This does not mean interpreting a text as having an emotional topic; rather, certain verbal structures are recognised as similar, in some important respects, to the structure of emotional processes familiar to the readers from their own experience. In a recent paper (Tsur 2002) the point is re-stated as follows. Thought processes are relatively convergent streams of information that display specific directions, and whose elements are well-defined, compact, and tightly organised. Emotional processes are relatively divergent streams of information consisting of similar components, but more diffused in all respects, and less tightly organised. So, rather than specific directions, they display general tendencies. Ecstatic qualities, as in Wordsworth's "Daffodils", are based on regularly repeated convergent elements "heightened, to any degree heightened". Cognitive poetics assumes that poetic texts

do not only have meanings or convey thoughts, but also display emotional qualities *perceived* by the reader. When one says “My sister is sad” or “That dervish is ecstatic”, and “The music is sad” or “ecstatic”, he uses the words “sad” or “ecstatic” in two different senses. In the first two sentences he refers to some mental process of a person. In the third sentence he does not refer to a mental process of the sound sequence, nor to a mental process it arouses. One may be perfectly consistent when saying: “That sad piece of music made me happy” or “That piece of ecstatic music induced in me a deep calm”. He refers to a perceptual quality generated by the interaction of the particular melodic line, rhythm, harmony and timbre of the music. In other words, he reports that he has detected some structural resemblance between the sound patterns and emotions. When one says “This poem is sad”, one uses the adjective in the second sense. In this sense “sad” becomes the *aesthetic quality* of the music or the poem. We will refer time and again to this distinction throughout the present study. As we said above, a mystic sonnet is not long enough to induce some mystic state of mind in the reader. But it may display a “mystic” quality, that is, display some structural resemblance to certain mystic experiences which, in turn, may be detected by the reader.

# Poem, Prayer and Meditation:
## An Exercise in Literary Semantics

### *The Religious Poem—Aesthetic or Ritual Object?*

Religious poems are most frequently discussed, as a matter of course, under the general heading of Poetry. It appears, however, that this approach is by no means to be taken for granted. For a great many religious poets, the aesthetic merit of their poem was only an accident, so to speak. They cultivated poetry for the truth of it.

The relationship between aesthetic and devotional value in Divine poems becomes particularly intriguing in English poetry in the seventeenth century and Hebrew poetry in the eleventh century. In these periods both religious and secular poetry flourished, and very frequently among the greatest representatives of the one we also find the greatest representatives of the other. The religious poetry of both periods draws liberally upon the poetic conventions of secular poetry; yet, at the same time, it aspires to a fair degree of autonomy.

One perplexing thing about devotional poems is the question whether one may legitimately treat them as *poems* at all. Authors of devotional poems, both Hebrew poets of the eleventh century and English poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were inclined to make a sharp distinction between “poetry” and their devotional works.

> This division was clear in the Middle Ages. Secular poems were collected each in its author’s particular *Diwan,* but Divine poems were collected according to their liturgical function. In the margin of Prayer Books, or concentrated in practical anthologies for particular festivals, *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) by various authors of various ages were presented together. The devotional poems of one single poet were never gathered together, for they were not considered as poems for ‘poetry’s sake’. . . . It is characteristic that Moses Ibn Ezra mentions his *piyyutim* only once in his poetics, casually, precisely as something outside the sphere of his treatise, that is, a study of the rules of poetry that follows Arab poems. He does not mention his own devotional poems, not even when he describes his ‘metrical’ poems; although he wrote quite a few of his *piyyutim* in the classical metre and style, he distinguished it from mere poetry (Pagis, 1970: 23).

Robert Southwell, writing in 1595 in his prefatory epistle to *Saint Peters Complaint,* suggests that the difference between devotional and secular poetry goes

beyond the difference in topic. One of the main differences between the two kinds of poetry lies, according to him, in the truth values of the poems. Secular poetry tells lies, whereas devotional poetry should be written for truth's sake. Moses Ibn Ezra would have, presumably, agreed with this, but not with the consequences Southwell draws from this distinction. In Southwell's opinion, secular poetry is in the Devil's service, who "seeketh to have all the complements of Divine honour applyed to his service" (see Martz, 1962: 179). Ibn Ezra and his contemporaries sometimes felt the need to be apologetic about their secular poetry, but eventually they concluded that "The truest poetry is the Most Feigning" (Pagis. 1970: 46 ff.).

George Herbert thought that all one's poetic powers should be devoted to the writing of religious verse. As with everything else one does for the sake of God's name, one should try to make the most perfect verses one is able to. But the ultimate criterion for religious verse is not aesthetic. It is a matter of the devotion of the heart revealed by the words:

> Whereas if the heart is moved,
> Although the verse be somewhat scant,
> God doth supplie the want.
> ("A True Hymne")

(see also Summers' illuminating chapter: "The Proper Language" in his *George Herbert).*

The literary value of the devotional poems of Donne, Herbert and Hopkins seems to have deliberately some bearing on the heightened interest in them. They are indeed more intensively studied than other devotional poems, not because they are better prayers or meditations, but because they are better poems. These two kinds of value do not necessarily agree. What in a text typically "counts toward" a good aesthetic object, does not necessarily count toward a good ritual object. On the contrary:

> In ritual, form and content are strictly patterned, and repeated again and again with minimal deviation, on pain of losing the ritualistic efficacy. The ritualistic act is one of participation rather than creation: the response which the members of the group are required or expected to have is rigidly limited. As ritual becomes secularized, the priest gives way to the bard or poet. Conformity of reaction vanishes: interpretations are not rigidly confined to the institutional or doctrinal requirements, but proliferate in accord with the creative impulse of the individual artist. Poetry becomes ambiguous concomitantly with its emergence from ritual (Kris & Kaplan, p. 253).

A text which makes a good prayer as well as a good poem can be either at different times; their co-occurrence may be regarded as "a happy coincidence", so to speak. The ambiguities of the poem are to be suppressed in the prayer. Kris and Kaplan see, then, a major difference between poetry and ritual texts, one which