

## CHAPTER 6

### IMAGERY

Imagery or word-picture is the representation of sense experience through language. It is used to move emotion. To do this, it employs two different methods: description and symbolizing. The term imagery has two meanings: in its literal sense it means the collection of images, which directly describe the subject within a poem. In a broader and different sense it is synonymous with figures of speech or figurative language which indirectly describes the subject by comparing it to something else with which it has something in common to make the description more vivid to the reader such as similes and metaphors. (Holman, 1986, p.249)

Images are words that create pictures of the thing they describe in the mind of the reader so that ideas, feelings, description, atmosphere and mood and so on in a poem are conveyed more clearly or vividly. Images help to bring a poem to life and create a sense impression. Images help understand what a poet means by the images he is using. A poet, trying to make the sound of a poem suit the sense of its own, searches for a way of expressing himself that will cause others to imagine as nearly as possible exactly what he himself saw and felt. That is, the poet's purpose is to enable the reader to share his own experience.

As there are five senses, so there are five major types of imagery; plus the 6<sup>th</sup> sense of the mind as well. (Dickinson, 1959, p.50)

**Sense imagery appeals to the 5 senses:** are as follows:

sight

taste

smell

sound

touch

In poetics, we call images of

Sight - Visual images

Taste - Gustatory images

Smell - Olfactory images

Sound - Auditory images

Touch - Thermal and tactile images

Motion - Kinesthetic images

Since image is any word or group of words that renders sensory experience. Imagery consists of all the images in a poem or in a section of a poem. Because images can be grouped, we speak of the pattern of images or of imagery and since no poem can include every sensory detail available, the poet must select imagery consistent with the mood he wishes to create in the reader. Thus two poems dealing with the same experience, for example, a spring day, may make use of different imagery to create a different mood.

The opening lines of this Wordsworth sonnet show both kinds of images, literal and figurative:

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free;  
The holy time is quiet as a Nun  
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun  
Is sinking down in its tranquillity.

The two middle lines are highly figurative, whereas the first and fourth lines are broadly literal.

Also in **Wordsworth's 'Daffodils'** the lines consist of highly effective visual images, with motion and color animating the scene: 'I saw a crowd / A host of golden daffodils, / Beside the lake, beneath the trees, / Fluttering and dancing in the breeze' create a literal image in our minds of the scene that Wordsworth wishes to describe-the daffodils as 'dancing'

Because images and imagery are important to poetry, numerous classifications and approaches have been devised. Let us here classify images rather simply by their relationship to the familiar senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. Illustrations of thermal and kinesthetic images are also included. (Davis, et.al., 1977, pp.493-494)

In the following stanza from **The Rime of the Ancient Mariner**, **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** gives us an excellent example of how poetry can effectively present **images of hearing**.

The ice was here, the ice was there,  
The ice was all around:  
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,  
Like noises in a swound!

**Robert Frost** appeals to our **sense of touch** in four lines from his "**Birches**":

And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.

**John Keats** offers us a fine illustration of images that appeal to our **senses of smell and taste** in these lines from "**The Eve of St. Agnes**":

Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;  
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,  
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;  
Manna and dates, in argosy transferred  
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,  
From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon.

The opening stanza of the same poem provides us with an example of **images of biting cold (thermal images)**;

St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was!  
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;  
The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,  
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:  
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told  
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,  
Like pious incense from a censer old,  
Seemed taking flight for heaven, without a death,  
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

In "After Apple-Picking," **Robert Frost** employs the **sense of muscular tension (kinesthetic images)** to convey the weariness of the speaker:

My instep arch not only keeps the ache,  
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.  
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.

**Robert Brook's** famous poem, **"The Old Vicarage, Grantchester"**, provides examples of each of these senses (Burton, 1970, p.99)

**"The Old Vicarage, Grantchester" by Rupert Brooke (1887-1915)**

Ah God! To see the branches stir } kinaesthetic  
Across the moon at Grantchester!  
To smell the thrilling----sweet and rotten, } smell  
Unforgettable, unforgotten  
River-smell, and hear the breeze } sound  
Sobbing in the little trees.  
Say, do the elm-clump greatly stand, } shape----suggested  
Still guardians of that holy land?  
The chestnuts shade, in reverend dream,  
The yet unacademic stream?  
Is dawn a secret shy and cold } colour and thermal  
Anadyomene, silver-gold?  
And sunset still a golden sea  
From Haslingfield to Madingley?  
And after, ere the night is born,  
Do hares come out about the corn?

Oh, is the water sweet and cool,  
 Gentle and brown, above the pool?  
 And laughs the immortal river still  
 Under the mill, under the mill?  
 Say, is there Beauty yet to find?  
 And Certainty? and Quiet kind?  
 Deep meadows yet, for to forget  
 The lies, and truths, and pain? . . . oh! yet }  
 Stands the Church clock at ten to three? } taste----suggested  
 And is there honey still for tea?

### Examples of analyzed poetry:

#### Meeting At Night

The gray sea and the long black land;  
 And the yellow half-moon large and low;  
 And the startled little waves that leap  
 In fiery ringlets from their sleep,  
 As I gain the cove with pushing prow,  
 And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.  
  
 Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;  
 Three fields to cross till a farm appears;  
 A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch  
 And blue spurt of a lighted match,  
 And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,  
 Than the two hearts beating each to each!

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

Source : (Perrine, 1963, pp.46-47)

“Meeting at Night” is a poem about love. It suggests certain things about love: being in love is a sweet and exciting experience; that when one is in love everything seems beautiful to him, even small objects seem. The poem does not state any of these things the poet uses imagery to

communicate these statement indirectly. He does not even use the word love in his poem. His business is to communicate experience, not information. He does this largely in two ways. First, he presents us with a specific situation, in which a lover goes to meet his sweetheart. Second, he describes the lover's journey so vividly in terms of sense impressions that the reader not only sees and hears what the lover saw and heard but also shares his anticipation and excitement.

Each line contains some images; some appeal to the senses : visual imagery is used in lines 1,2,3,4,8,10; that is, the gray sea, the long black land the yellow half-moon, the startled little waves with their fiery ringlets, the blue spurt of the lighted match-all appeal to our sense of sight and convey not only shape, but also color and motion; auditory imagery in lines 6,9,10,11,12, i.e. at the pane, the quick sharp scratch of the match, the low speech of the lovers, and the sound of their two hearts beating-all appeal to the sense of hearing; olfactory imagery in line 7, the warm sea-scented beach appeals to the senses of both smell and touch.

### **Is My Team Ploughing**

“Is my team ploughing,  
That I was used to drive  
And hear the harness jingle  
When I was man alive?”

Aye, the horses trample,  
The harness jingles now;  
No change though you lie under  
The land you used to plough.

“Is football playing  
Along the river shore,

With lads to chase the leather,  
Now I stand up no more?"

Aye, the ball is flying,  
The lads play heart and soul;  
The goal stands up, the keeper  
Stands up to keep the goal.

"Is my girl happy,  
That I thought hard to leave,  
And has she tired of weeping  
As she lies down at eve?"

Aye, she lies down lightly,  
She lies not down to weep:  
Your girl is well contented.  
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

"Is my friend hearty,  
Now I am thin and pine,  
And has he found to sleep in  
A better bed than mine?"

Yes, lad, I lie easy,  
I lie as lads would choose;  
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,  
Never ask me whose.

A.E.Housman (1859-1936)

Source : ( Monfries, 1980, pp.69-72)

The purpose of this poem is to communicate poignantly a certain truth about human life : that life goes on after our deaths pretty much as it did before-our dying does not disturb the universe. We can learn only how the poet felt a man's death affected the life he left behind. This poem does not allow any comforting thoughts on the subject of death. A country boy who has died asks his still-living friend about the life he used to know, and he hears that everything is going on as it did when he was alive. It seems that no one mourns or even remembers him : his team of horses is still ploughing; boys are still playing football, and--the final blow, delayed until the last verse--his former sweetheart no longer weeps for him but has gone off with the friend he is addressing. There is no suggestion that the dead might live on in the memory of the living. There is no idea of any after-life; it is baldly stated that the boy now simply lies in a hard bed under the ground he 'used to plough'.

The poem is couched in the form of a dialog : a quatrain of plaintive questions by the dead man is followed with implacable regularity by a quatrain of the friend's jaunty, cheerful answers, all beginning affirmatively with 'Ay' or 'Yes'. The simple stanzas are like a ballad, the lack of ornament and the simple elemental life is suggested by the bare imagery of country life and the implied story of two country boys and a girl. We can imagine the poem, set to a simple tune, being sung by two voices. A plaintive note is sounded by the feminine endings to the first and third lines of each stanza, and we hear sadness in the long vowels, with which the second and fourth lines rhyme. The form is strictly regular; only the lastline of all - **Never ask me whose.** - alters the monotony of the whole by



beginning with a strongly stressed syllable. This produces the desired effect of **shock and cynicism**. The vocabulary is simple, as befits the rustic subject; the boys talk as country boys would talk, in few words, most of them monosyllables.

From the whole poem we derive an impression of bleakness. Life is enjoyable and is looked back upon nostalgically by the dead; the dead lie cold in the earth and are forgotten.

### Winter

When icicles hang by the wall,  
    And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,  
And Tom bears logs into the hall,  
    And milk comes frozen home in pail,  
When blood is nipp'd, and ways be foul,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
    'Tu-whit, Tu-who!'  
A merry note,  
    While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

When all aloud the wind doth blow,  
    And coughing drowns the parson's saw,  
And birds sit brooding in the snow,  
    And Marian's nose looks red and raw,  
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
    'Tu-whit, Tu-who!'  
A merry note,  
    While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Source : (Perrine, 1963, pp.6-8)

The poem “Winter” creates a convincing picture of an Elizabethan country winter by its selection of images that suggest the qualities of winter life around a sixteenth—century, English country house. But instead of telling us directly that winter in such surroundings is cold and, in many respects, unpleasant, though with some pleasant features, he gives us a series of concrete homely images which suggest these qualities and enable us, imaginatively, to experience this winter life ourselves.

In the first stanza, the images in lines 1, 2, 4, 5 are unpleasant, because winter is a generally unpleasant season.—the shepherd lad blows on his fingernails to warm his hands; the milk freezes in the pail between the cowshed and the kitchen; the roads are muddy—because winter is a generally unpleasant season. These are balanced by pleasant images of warmth inside the house in lines 3 and 9. In the second stanza, the unpleasant images are in lines 10, 11, 12, 13—the folk listening to the parson have colds; the birds “sit brooding” in the snow; and the servant girl’s nose is raw from cold. These are balanced by pleasant imagery of food and heat in line 14 and 18 : logs are being brought in for a fire in the main hall, hot cider or ale is being prepared, and the kitchen maid is making hot soup or stew. The owl’s call is **not** merry : the poet is being sarcastic. The owl’s call is melancholy and cold, and with its long vowels emphasizes the coldness outside and the contrasting warmth inside.

### **The Daffodils**

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 but be 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 flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

**William Wordsworth (1770-1850)**

Source : (Alexander, 1967, pp.46-47)

This poem is simply the description of a beautiful natural scene. The poet is out walking by the shores of a lake when suddenly he comes upon a large number of daffodils which, moving in the breeze, look as if they are dancing. The poet's impression was one of joy and gladness. The flowers appeared to be enjoying life so much that they filled his heart with

happiness. In their company he felt carefree and gay—life seemed wonderful. Even after he left the scene while resting he still remembered the golden flowers dancing beside the lake, and sometimes when he is sad, thoughtful or depressed the more thought of that beautiful scene makes him happy.

“The Daffodils” is a wonderful lyrical and descriptive poem, full of beautiful soft imagery---dancing flowers, blue sky, sparkling waves, twinkling stars---all give a picture of happiness, peace and loveliness. The scene he depicts in colorful image of gold, the magnificence of the panorama makes one feel one is actually there---one can visualize the scene with its green hills, blue water and sky and vast numbers of golden fluttering flowers. Here life is fresh and sweet, and when we are alone, sad and lonely, we just have to think on such a scene to make us happy and cheerful.

### **Silver**

Slowly, silently, now the moon  
Walks the night in her silver shoon;  
This way, and that, she peers, and sees  
Silver fruit upon silver trees;  
One by one the casements catch  
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;  
Couched in his kennel, like a log,  
With paws of silver sleeps the dog;  
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep  
Of doves in a silver-feathered sleep;  
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,  
With silver claws, and silver eye;  
And moveless fish in the water gleam,  
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

**Mr. Walter de la Mare (1873-1956)**

Source : ( Palgrave, 1956, p.569)

This poem is a good example of how sound devices help create the mood evoked in the poem by the scene described. It is an impressionistic poem filled with the hush of the moonlit night that it describes. Each image is clear, and each is silvered, yet monotony is avoided partly by the frequent variation of rhyme, partly by the wonderful variety of image shapes which underlies the consonant color imagery. And the quiet coming from the high proportion of long vowels slow down the rhythm of the lines. The use of 's', 'l' and 'm', which are euphonious sounds, make the verse very melodious and flowing. The repetition of the word 'silver' adds emphasis in both content (it makes the reader see the world as all silvered) and in sound the 's', 'l', 'v' sounds are flowing and echo the silence of the night. The avoidance of any harsh vowel and consonant combination; the slow, falling rhythm in duple time with occasional counterpointing to give the ear delight without disturbing the quiet of basic rhythm. What movement there is belongs to the moon's stately wheeling through the still night, and the harvest mouse whose scampering contrasts with an emphasized stillness of all life else, and yet for all its emotion, is caught by the moon that lays her charm on claws and eye.

The meter is basically iambic tetrameter with lines 9, 10, 13, 14 being varied by the substitution of an anapestic foot, and line 1 is a dactylic foot.

## **Conclusion**

Imagery is the combination or collection of images in a work of literature. It is language that appeals to the sensory experiences and produces mental pictures or ideas in the readers. This usually involves

imaginative and figurative language. Imagery is an effective way of producing a vivid experience.

### Poems for Practice:

Find the imagery used in the following poems and describe the impressions they evoke and the ideas they convey.

#### a The Destruction of Sennacherib

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,  
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:  
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,  
That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown.

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824)

#### b Prelude I

The winter evening settles down  
With smell of steaks in passageways.  
Six o'clock.  
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.  
And now a gusty shower wraps  
The grimy scraps  
Of withered leaves about your feet  
And newspapers from vacant lots;  
The showers beat  
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,  
And at the corner of the street  
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.  
And then the lighting of the lamps.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Source : (Clayes, & Gerrites, 1975, p.149)

**c Loveliest of Trees**

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now  
Is hung with bloom along the bough,  
And stands about the woodland ride  
Wearing white for Eastertide.

**A.E. Housman (1859-1936)**

Source : (Palgrave, 1956, p.539)

**d Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

**Robert Frost (1875-1963)**

Source : (Clayes, & Gerrietts, 1975, p.227)

**e The Eagle**

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

**Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)**

Source : (Clayes, & Gerrietts, 1975, p.38)

Identify the items below with one of the following labels:

- a) visual image;
- b) hearing image;
- c) touch image
- d) taste image;
- e) smell image.

1. small rain
2. azure-lidded sleep
3. a damp cave
4. purple petals
5. noiseless spider
6. the hapless soldier's sigh
7. woman wailing for her lover
8. the earth in thick fast pants was breathing
9. on honey-dew was fed
10. bitter chill it was
11. silent was the flock in woolly field
12. let no buzzed whisper tell my secret
13. to feel for ever its soft fall and swell
14. announced by all the trumpets of the sky
15. the gray sea and the long black land
16. a mile of warm sea-scented beach
17. the calves sang to my horn, the foxes on the hill barked clear and cold
18. dazzling whiteness
19. the busy morning cries came thin and spare
20. I listened to the rain falling and the wind blow cold