

## Imagery for meaning

To convince the reader that the 'wilderness' should remain untouched, Hopkins paints a beautiful picture of a mountain stream in his poem 'Inversnaid'. In the first stanza he uses the animal imagery 'horseback-brown' to convey both colour and strength, and follows this with the alliterative 'His rollrock highroad roaring down.' Together, these two lines give an image of a fast-moving stream, tumbling noisily over rocks with the power of a galloping stallion. The word 'his' gives the impression of majesty, as though the stream is lord and master of the countryside, which adds to the idea that humans have no right to invade.

He moves on to describe the stream cascading over a waterfall into a 'pitchblack' pool. The foam created is described softly, the roaring horse now becoming a 'fawn', which again combines colour with movement – lighter and more delicate as it 'turns and twindles'. Here the alliteration and made-up word creates a lightness which contrasts with darkness of the pool.

The stream now continues at a more leisurely pace which Hopkins captures with the rhythmical line, 'Are the groins of the braes that the brook treads through'. The word 'treads' suggests slow, careful plodding as the stream moves through flatter ground. His delight in the scene is shown when he describes the 'beadbonny ash' alongside. This implies the tree looks as though it is glistening with jewels and the verb 'sits' makes us think the tree belongs there – and humans don't.

Having created his picture, Hopkins goes on to make a plea in the last stanza that the beauty of nature should remain untouched. The alliteration in this stanza of 'wet', 'wildness', 'weeds' and 'wilderness' adds to the natural rhythm, which suggests nature is far more magnificent than anything created by man.

Whitman, too, in 'Patrolling Barnegat' uses natural imagery to paint a picture, but this time to create a sinister and mysterious scene of a beach during a storm. The most startling thing is the use of the present participle at the end of every line. This gives me the impression that the storm is never-ending and makes me feel as though I am there patrolling with the poet. He describes the gale as having an 'incessant undertone muttering', making it sound sullen and menacing and follows this with 'demoniac laughter' which creates an air of evil devilishness.

The waves crashing onto the shore are described twice as 'careering' which implies they are out of control and alliteration is used to give the idea that the storm is unending. The idea that the storm is somehow evil is created by words such as 'death-wind' and 'savage' and mystery is created by his questioning whether or not he is seeing a ship in distress and 'a group of dim weird forms'.

This poem is all one stanza which again helps to intensify the storm, making it appear ceaseless and violent. If the meaning of the poem is not very clear – is the poet on duty as the title suggests? – the unpleasantness of his situation certainly is as the 'savagest trinity' of waves, air and midnight appear to be watching him as much as he is watching them.

Armitage's poem 'November' contains much unpleasant imagery as well, this time to show the horror of ageing. The narrator is accompanying his friend who is taking his grandma to hospital, probably to die. 'She sinks down into her own incontinence', presents a revolting picture of a woman unable to control her own body, but 'sinks' also suggests death and a gradual fading away. Many others in the hospital are described with similar repulsive imagery. They have 'pasty bloodless smiles' and 'slack breasts'. The vigour and firmness of youth has gone completely. They are 'monsters', frightening to look at, somehow evil. Yet the narrator is aware that this comes to us all in the end. 'We are almost these monsters', he tells his friend.

Armitage uses these grotesque images to provoke horror and then to remind us, via his friend, that we must enjoy life while 'the sun spangles' before we too end up with 'stunned brains', unable to think or enjoy.

Duffy, in her poem 'Havisham' uses imagery to suggest the violence felt by a woman who has been jilted. Like Hopkins, she uses colour. Her eyes are 'dark green pebbles', suggesting envy and hardness. The curses she utters are 'puce', dark yet vivid.

The veins on the backs of her hands are 'ropes', standing out with anger, ready to 'strangle with.'

From this, it can be seen that powerful imagery can be used for many different purposes.

## Bitterness

Robin is bitter towards his one-time protector and friend, the more famous Batman, who he feels has abandoned him. This is shown in the comment 'big shot', which shows jealousy as well as bitterness. He feels he has been 'ditched' and left 'in the gutter.' It is as if he feels Batman turfed him out too soon, having no more use for him and as if he resents being merely the ball-boy, regarded as only a son or younger brother to the real hero.

Batman was not a hero according to Robin, but a womaniser. The mocking headline, 'Holy robin-redbreast-nest-egg-shocker!' shows how he would like to expose the hero for what he really was and also shows his bitterness at being the little bird or even the 'nest-egg'. But now he describes himself as 'harder, stronger, older', wearing 'normal' clothes. His ridiculous outfit as Robin is mockingly described as a 'Sherwood-Forest-green and scarlet number', suggesting he no longer wants to play second fiddle to the Robin Hood saviour figure. Yet he can't anyway because Batman has let him loose 'to wander'. This is perhaps where his bitterness stems from.

When he says Batman is 'without a shadow,' he implies he is now nothing and his bitterness is shown further in his delight at the 'marvellous picture' of the super-hero 'stewing over chicken giblets', poor and alone. Robin's gloating is perhaps a sign that he has not yet grown up and is still the kid of the title.

The fact that the poem is all one stanza gives the impression of an outpouring of bitterness as does the 'er' sound at the end of every line which adds a harshness to the sound of the poem.

Similarly, the narrator of 'Education for Leisure' is bitter about the way life has treated him. 'I am a genius', he states bluntly twice and even phones the radio to tell the presenter 'he's talking to a superstar'. He breathes out 'talent on the glass' to write his name in the condensation but there is no real indication he really believes any of this. He is just bitter because he is 'ignored'. Is this the voice of a no-hoper, who feels he has not been appreciated for the talents he assumes he has? He sounds as though he has failed at school and is jobless, educated for a leisure he has no money to enjoy. Or perhaps he is desperate for fame and realises the only way he will achieve this is by killing something. 'Anything'.

He only has control and power over creatures. 'I squash a fly against the window with my thumb.' This appears to give him pleasure but not as much as flushing 'the goldfish down the bog.' He scares the budgie and the cat. These four small creatures are pathetic reminders that he can only control the weak and vulnerable. His route out of bitterness is to achieve fame by killing something bigger. The chilling first line is repeated even more chillingly at the end when he says, 'I get our bread-knife and go out.', followed by, 'I touch your arm.' We are left with a sense of unease at his plans but he feels the 'boredom' of the first stanza lift when he sees 'the pavements glitter'. This suggests life is suddenly sparkling but also implies his eyes are glittering at the thought of what he is about to do.

There is a harsh feeling to many of the clipped sentences which emphasises the bitterness. 'I pull the chain. I see that it is good. The budgie is panicking.' These give the impression of a young man observing cruelty with glee, emotionless. He can relieve the disappointment of his life only by playing 'God' and having power through killing.

## **Jealousy**

Browning's poem 'The Laboratory' is the monologue of a woman seeking poison to remove her rivals in love. Although the rhythm is jolly and she sounds as if she is enjoying the process of buying the poison, there is an underlying theme of jealousy. 'He is with her', suggests she is constantly thinking about her lover with another woman, imagining they are together constantly and almost torturing herself with the thought. It is also clear that she has been turned down in favour of several women, whom she names, savouring the thought of their deaths. The idea that 'Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!' and Elise 'should drop dead', delights her and such delight must indicate extreme jealousy.

This is also clear when she comments on the appearance of the latest woman who is 'not little.' A big dose of poison is needed but it seems she can not understand why she has been dumped for someone so big. It also seems she has been watching the two of them together, so consumed with jealousy she has been trying to kill the woman by looks alone. She would have liked to see her fall, 'Shrivelled.' This suggests complete destruction, withering away, perhaps a reference to her size earlier.

Despite the jolly rhyme scheme, there is no humour in her desire to make the death as painful as possible. 'Let death be felt', she orders. 'Brand, burn up, bite'. The alliteration in these words heightens the pain

she wants to inflict and she appears to almost spit them out in her hatred and envy. The word 'brand' almost suggests she views her rival as a prostitute to be branded for her crime.

In much the same way, the narrator of the monologue 'My Last Duchess' shows how jealous he was of his now dead wife, dead because he had her killed. Showing a new envoy, come to arrange another marriage, her portrait, he explains that the 'spot of joy' in the duchess's cheek was not joy at seeing him. His jealousy is further shown when he describes her as 'too soon made glad', a suggestion that she flirted but which, to the reader, seems an indication of a happy woman who 'liked whate'er she looked on.' His objection is that 'her looks went everywhere.'

Unlike 'The Laboratory' though, there is no humour or jollity in this poem as the duke comes across as sour and cruel. His late wife's joy is clear – at 'the dropping of the daylight', at 'the bough of cherries' and at 'the white mule she rode'. Here is no hint of flirtation, just smiling pleasure at everything she saw. Maybe the duke was jealous of her happy nature in comparison to his own bitter haughtiness. Yet she did bestow smiles on him 'whene'er I passed her.' His jealousy was because she smiled at others too, others who had not given her the 'gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name.'

In 'Hitcher' the narrator is jealous of the man who 'was following the sun', a stark contrast to his own life dominated by work and an answerphone which 'kept screaming'. His jealousy results in him hitting the man and pushing him out of the car. Jealousy here is shown through his mockery of the man with the free hippy-like existence and he uses song phrases from the 'swinging sixties' to emphasise this. 'Blowing in the wind' suggests freedom from restraints and unpleasant bosses, a carefree and happy life. The hitcher liked 'the breeze to run its fingers through his hair', a similar suggestion.

Armitage creates the sense of jealousy by contrasting this with the driver's life. 'I'd been tired, under the weather.' This is a direct contrast with the hitcher's view of the weather which represents freedom, while for the driver it represents the sickness which might cost him his job.

In a slightly different vein, the narrator of 'Those bastards in their mansions' shows a jealous hatred of those who 'have', the 'lords and ladies in their palaces and castles', rather than one particular person. But as in the other three poems, his response is one of violence, which is why he uses contrast in the last line, 'Me, I stick to the shadows, carry a gun.'

All four poems are similar in that jealousy is shown as an extremely powerful emotion.

## Parent/child relationships

'Homecoming' is a strange poem that seems to move between present and past. I think, though, it is about the way a parent cares for its child and the way children can trust their parents, who from 'behind take all the weight'. This could be the weight of responsibility, taken seriously because of 'their arms spread wide', which suggests tolerance, patience and the idea of being reliable.

The second stanza, however, shows that parents do not always get it right. The 'model of a model mother' is ironic as she 'makes a proper fist of it', and shouts at her daughter for getting her jacket dirty. The short phrases at the end of the stanza are all clichés and give a sense of speed, as though the mother is not going to listen. The clichés represent typical parental phrases – 'Temper, temper' and the masking of a mountain out of a molehill. 'Questions in the house' is a political phrase used in the House of Commons, which is again ironic as a mucky coat is hardly a matter of national interest.

Yet this 'canary-yellow cotton jacket' is still a feature of your life as you grow up. There seems to be a picture of a parent helping their child into the coat many years later. The comparison of parts of the jacket to body parts suggests to me that the parent still cares. 'Step back into it' links to the child falling backwards in the first stanza, but back also suggests you should remember the care you had even when you are older, though the jacket must surely be a different one. 'Jacket' itself implies something warm and protective. Even though you are now older, 'It still fits.' I think this shows that your parents will still care for you even though you are no longer a child and that the 'blue murder' you felt as a child was a normal but short-lived reaction.

The child in 'We Remember Your Childhood Well' seems not to have a feeling of having been loved and protected. In 'Homecoming' the writer addresses the reader directly, using 'you' to put the reader in the place of the child. In this second poem the parents are the narrators, addressing their child, but their tone is unfeeling and dictatorial. It sounds as though they are answering the child's questions. 'Nobody hurt you.' 'Nobody locked the door.' Nothing softens these blunt statements.

It seems the child has now grown up and is accusing the parents of mistreatment, while the parents are dismissing any bad memories as being 'inside your head.' 'We have the facts' makes them sound like prosecutors in a trial, which increases the sense that the child is a defendant in a trial. The description of the parents as 'the secret police' adds to the idea of harsh dictatorship and their plea at the end, 'We did what was best', is defensive and unbelievable. This is a very different relationship to the one described in 'Homecoming', which seems to be based on trust, despite the occasional mistakes.

'The Song of the Old Mother' describes an almost equally unpleasant relationship, told by an exasperated mother who clearly resents her hard work while her children 'dream in their bed'. This contrasts with her day's labours which are listed. She has to light the fire then 'scrub and bake and sweep'. The effect of the list is to make her day seem long, one chore after another and these short, stark words contrast with the ideas of 'matching ribbons' and 'idleness', which she makes sound unimportant and trivial.

Her self-pity is evident when she says 'I am old' and the repetition of 'I must' makes it sound as though she has no choice. Though the poem is from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it could probably apply to any modern mother.

The only genuinely uncomplicated relationship seems to be that of Ben Jonson and his dead son, whom he describes as 'his best piece of poetrie.' This gives the impression of pride in his 'lov'd boy'.

It is perhaps ironic that the only sense of true and lasting love comes in the poem where the child is dead.