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ruskin watts  
**REPLY / REPLICA**

how i can read and you may write a poem

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how i can read and you may write a poem

**drone fascicle two  
a poetry & poetics  
periodical  
2002**

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periodical  
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drone fascicle two  
(revised w/ pts 3 & 4  
completed, 02/04)

© 2004 Ruskin Watts  
drone codices, dartington

contact: ruskinwatts@web.de  
in der au 6 / D – 51570 windeck  
ISBN: 0-9541407-3-7

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the series so far (2001 – 2004)

drone fascicle one  
*senses/love: an imaginary symposium*  
(featuring theo reiz de man, axel s. parrot,  
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drone fascicle two  
*reply/replica: how i can read & you may write a poem*  
(featuring dan tallis, cecil voss and n.guy ban)

drone fascicle three  
*venus cuniculous: excerpt of analogue*  
(featuring alexis troy)

drone fascicle four  
*document of hearsay: poem, letter, facsimile & edition*  
(featuring bart bach)

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a word on the > drone codices< logo:  
as a pair of gates, pi and phi are shown, signs for a voiceless stop  
opening to an aspirant, the sounds of P! to Ff; like a pair of wells,  
of memory, say, and amnesty, books as springs of mneme & lethe;  
the codex a telling tail, a semely spoor, god bromios a damp squib;  
like two open passages of numbers, pi & phi, inexactly notated and  
tending to nothing, irrational, a ratio, a form of infinitesimal thea(t)ry,  
a more secular alpha & omega, no voice yet – a vibrancy.

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or where the beetle winds  
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gray & collins

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just like leaves in the wood, so too generation of humans:  
some to the ground through wind fly scattered while others on living  
wood bud new in the spring's return. humanity too grows  
one generation, another decays. yet should you desire  
genealogical certainty here, there's plenty who'll tell you.

*The Iliad VI, 146*

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## SUGGESTIVE SIGESTICS

*the more the utterance, the more the silence is  
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Hölderlin fragment

## SYNOPSIS

(1 = chapters; 1.2 = paragraphs; ii = sub-paragraphs)

- 1 Approach, structure then story
  
- 2.1 End-rhyme types in the first half
  - ii) Penultimate consonants
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- 2.2 Masculine & feminine cadences and 'annominatio'
- 2.3 Rhyme in the central quatrain
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- 3.6 Harmony over-looked or over-emphasized
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- 3.8 Unsaid words speak out-side
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- 3.10 Metre and assymetry
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- 4.2 Parsing
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- 4.3 Parenthesis, participle, conditional
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**1.**

I have your advent poem in front of me, dear Dan, and am wondering about the best and clearest way for me to approach it. You are asking how its shape and workings can be most simply displayed to the increasingly perplexed and diverted, overfed reader. It seems to me there are two separate ways of investigating a piece of language: first what it is talking about and the story it is plainly telling, and then what it is structurally built out of and what its form does and says without paying attention to the story telling. Of course both of these need to be taken care of eventually. (Maybe they even mouth nicely together into a sea of understanding, both historical and contemporary: a conclusive continuum!) I will start with the second way, the question of form and its own messages, before turning to the narrative level of these lines on 'nature' – "*at war ...to nativity*".

**2.1**

The first thing that springs to my mind are the rhymes. The poem appears as a series of six rhyming couplets. In addition, there appears to be a progress of end-rhymes which links or interlaces each couplet's rhyme with the one coming next and with the others as a whole. The result is a processive and fitful mono-rhyme. Maybe I should say, instead of each couplet's 'rhyme', that rhyme sound which the ends of the pairs of lines have in common. I mean the 'tertium comparationis' that binds them and identifies them as one, one rhyming pair. The rhymes are never pure in terms of vowel sound. The final consonant sound, as well as related length or weight or tone of the vowel, is what the two occurring rhyming sounds have in common. This nature of the consonant ending in the 'rhyming couplet' is also the feature which develops and shifts from one couplet to the next. If it is only or mainly the TH ending which lets the syllable *faith* 'rhyme' with *worth*, then the ending LTH has modified and intensified this rhyme in the next couplet, with its rhyming syllables *wealth* and *filth*. It is now that a further feature of the rhymes comes to mind. This is the alliterative pattern of these ultimate syllables, an aspect which lends

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the final words a stronger characteristic of 'rhyme'. The alliterative consonance, coming in a chiasmic ABBA pattern in the series *faith-worth-wealth-filth* is continued with the introduction, or rather mutation, of the letter sound P which alliterates in the third couplet. A little journey of lips, teeth and voice has led the enunciation from F and W and back, and then on to P. In the third couplet, the final sound of the lines has also altered: from TH to T. The main distinction between the syllables *filth* and *plete*, is a reduction of the continuing 'fricative' sounds F and TH to their related short-sounding 'stops' P and T. In this way, the transition from a soft final consonant to a hard one, TH to T, is matched by the transition of soft consonants (F through W) to the hard initial-letter sound P. *Filth* to *plete*.

ii.

The L in this case has remained the same. But if I listen to the last syllable of each line throughout the poem, the possibility appears that the penultimate consonant is also involved in these transformations. Like this: the faint Y/U sound of the little i in *faith* transmutes through the R in *worth* into the L sound of the next four lines, which wanders forward in the syllables *plete* and *plet*, only then to recur in later couplets as the respective U and R sounds again in the syllable pairs *d-yoowett/doowit* and *hart/hert*. (The sequence of penultimate consonants in the first ten line endings is thus: Y, R, L, L, L, L, / U, UU, R, R ...) Looking at this pattern, I recklessly suggest that one could make a good forensic case, using the argument of a chiasmic arc intimated among these penultimate internal consonants –

U to R to L to R to U

– and allege that an earlier draft of the poem had the fourth and fifth couplets in the reverse order. (Giving the sequence: U, R, LLLL, RR, UU ... fading out into the following double U and Y sounds in the endings of the last short lines.) I do not doubt, at any rate, that such care ought to be taken in matters of rhyme! One might allege, that is, that the *made/mirrored* couplet originally followed after the *admirers/beauty* couplet; and that the sequence was altered later, possibly for the sake of plot and comprehension, if not for competitive musical reasons.

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## iii.

But back in the first half of the poem, I find on completing the third couplet, that it ends with the word *couplet*. The interpretation faces a choice here. It can choose, half way through the lines, to turn toward the relationship this rhyming pattern might have with the 'narrative' material of the poem: the interpreter impulsively responding to the word *couplet* blatantly appearing in a position which is both at the end of a couplet itself, and at the close of the first 'half' of the poem as it is arranged on the page in twelve lines. That the word marks the close of a sort of larger semi-strophe, is thus a possibility. Making a major caesura and marking an opening in the poem. This would be a good place to pause and survey the connections between the words *faith* & *worth* etc, which extend beyond their phonetic values. A first reflection would be in order. The question of a redundancy, the match of word with occasion, could bring this consideration of 'meaning' into the consciousness. However, the investigation can also decide to continue concentrating on the rhyming strategy, responding to a new development.

## 2.2

The third couplet has introduced for the first time polysyllabic words at the end of the line. In addition, advantage seems to have been taken of the opportunity of having a final syllable which is unstressed ending the line. This is of course not so easy with a monosyllabic word ending a line; although the reading eye and voice might choose to understress a word for reasons of rhetorical flow, of natural language stress, or regularity of metre. With a polysyllabic word ending in an unstressed syllable, like the word *couplet*, there can be no doubt of the accent. With the rhyming of the words *incomplete* and *couplet*, a new kind of half-rhyme is introduced: the uneven pairing of a so-called masculine with a feminine verse ending. In this case it is a long-syllable ending which precedes a short one. Otherwise, far from being a half or 'slant rhyme', this is almost a *rime riche* of identical consonants: and for the first time in this poem. (Taking the whole word into account, it is a minor larynx vibration which voices the prepared P and turns the centre of coUplet into cuMplet.) Such 'rich' juxtaposition

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and heaping (ex-aggeration of relationships), usually of different inflections of the one word, or otherwise homonyms of similar sound, was called by theorists of rhetoric *annominatio*, and its use is implied a lot in these lines, even if not thoroughly applied in the pure form of 'fill/fully' and 'worth/worthy' etc.

### 2.3

If I continue surveying the final rhymes in the second half of the poem, I find that *duet* and *do it* repeat to some extent the slanted masculine/feminine *rime riche* of *incomplete* with *couplet*. This rhyme also forms a closer association of the four current lines, 5-8, by again ending in a T sound. In the analysis of rhymes, it would now be possible to identify a pattern of two quatrains: one ending in TH, one ending in T; one ending with monosyllables, one with alternating masculine and feminine endings. In addition, each with an alternating vowel pattern in the line's final syllables: a wide vowel (A) alternating with a more closed mouth (B) throughout.

#### ii.

So, starting at the top, in addition to the consonant endings analyzed above, the alternating lines feature an arrangement of vowel sounds as well: the wide (more smiling-mouthed) and the narrow (more pouting-mouthed) respectively, in the

'A' pairs *faith / wealth, complete / duet*, and the

'B' pairs *worth / filth, couplet / it*,

which continue through in the series ABABABAB, including the next couplet *heart/dart-hurt*. This last mentioned pair, the penultimate in the poem, also introduces an additional method for slanting the rhyme: the suggestion that a monosyllabic word with a stress is to be rhymed with a compound word whose final component carries somewhat less of a stress. Otherwise, the pair *heart/ hurt* has the by now familiar (since line five) 'rich' half-rhyme structure of similar consonants in both syllable endings of the couplet, but with in each case vowels of a declining width.

### 2.4

The strategies of half-rhyme so far tried out can be summarised as follows:

and heaping (ex-aggeration of relationships), usually of different inflections of the one word, or otherwise homonyms of similar sound, was called by theorists of rhetoric *annominatio*, and its use is implied a lot in these lines, even if not thoroughly applied in the pure form of 'fill/fully' and 'worth/worthy' etc.

### 2.3

If I continue surveying the final rhymes in the second half of the poem, I find that *duet* and *do it* repeat to some extent the slanted masculine/feminine *rime riche* of *incomplete* with *couplet*. This rhyme also forms a closer association of the four current lines, 5-8, by again ending in a T sound. In the analysis of rhymes, it would now be possible to identify a pattern of two quatrains: one ending in TH, one ending in T; one ending with monosyllables, one with alternating masculine and feminine endings. In addition, each with an alternating vowel pattern in the line's final syllables: a wide vowel (A) alternating with a more closed mouth (B) throughout.

#### ii.

So, starting at the top, in addition to the consonant endings analyzed above, the alternating lines feature an arrangement of vowel sounds as well: the wide (more smiling-mouthed) and the narrow (more pouting-mouthed) respectively, in the

'A' pairs *faith / wealth, complete / duet*, and the

'B' pairs *worth / filth, couplet / it*,

which continue through in the series ABABABAB, including the next couplet *heart/dart-hurt*. This last mentioned pair, the penultimate in the poem, also introduces an additional method for slanting the rhyme: the suggestion that a monosyllabic word with a stress is to be rhymed with a compound word whose final component carries somewhat less of a stress. Otherwise, the pair *heart/ hurt* has the by now familiar (since line five) 'rich' half-rhyme structure of similar consonants in both syllable endings of the couplet, but with in each case vowels of a declining width.

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The strategies of half-rhyme so far tried out can be summarised as follows:



- a) similarity only of the final phoneme sound, TH to RTH;
- b) similarity of final phoneme complex, LTH to LTH;
- c) liquid transitions, RTH to LTH;
- d) transition from voiced or fricative consonants to short-stopped unvoiced ones, WLTH or FLTH to PLT;
- e) the coupling of stressed and unstressed syllables in a rhyming pair (plete/plet);
- f) coupling of wide and narrow vowels (fAYth/ wORth);
- g) contrast of monosyllables with polysyllabic or compound rhyme-words.

## ii.

So far, in the first ten lines, the endings have all been on a consonant: at first a TH and then a T. In the last couplet of the poem, instead of a maybe predictable (maybe even conclusive) return to the TH, a new and final strategy is employed for retaining similarity while introducing contrast of line endings. Along with certain now familiar factors being repeated (such as rhyming a monosyllable with a polysyllabic word, a stress with an unstressed accent, a wide with a narrow vowel), a couple of new twists are given to differentiate this last couplet's endings from those of the others. The final consonant T is retained, but it is now followed by the vowel opening out onto the line ending. With the vowel the line is now open to the line break – that is if we discount for now the residue of W and U consonants, faintly retained, which respectively close the syllables *to* and *-ty*. (These slight sounds are the scarcely avoidable phonetic dross of our relaxing our mouths into silence having completed the word – rather like the final thump-click of a harpsichordist's hands releasing the keys at the end of a piece or movement. Obsolete pronunciation and orthography once noted and notated this phenomenon.) In addition to this more open, unstopped ending (not closed in a consonant), the sequence of wide and narrow vowels is reversed in these short lines. (ABAB etc ends as BA.) Finally, an unstressed ending is now followed by a line ending on a considerable iambic stress, although it is the secondary stress in its particular rolling word – giving an expectant sense of finality. Actually, what I am calling wide and narrow mouthing also gives the impression of a higher and a lower tone. The more closed pronunciation is now followed by the wider, brighter sound, one which if physically accentuated demands of the reciter a gritted grimace or a smile.

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**3.1**

After this survey of the end-rhymes of your poem, it makes sense to stray deeper into the interior and listen to the alliteration (or quasi 'annominatio', if you like) clearly audible throughout, seeing if there are signs of any system or pattern to its deployment, before I address the primary questions of a more semantic interpretation.

**3.2**

Although there is a very high proportion of repeated and related particular sounds in the lines, there does not appear to be a strict pattern in the use of phonetic units, as would be the case in Old English alliterative verse, say, or Welsh *cynghanedd*. Neither the repercussion of assonant or alliterative items seem to yield any conscientious or habitual pattern that I can discover. If I start with the first four lines, however, I immediately find an accumulating suggestion of oblique rhymes as an obvious factor in the sound space. There is a hint or rhyme 'tendency' that does go right through the line, even if it should not be called a rhyme 'technique'. In the compound phrase *at war with death nature's faith*, the initial alliteration on W is followed by a repeated TH ending; then a new cadence in the second half of the line offers an assonant vowel in *nature's faith*. The two halves of the line are tenuously linked by the unvoiced TH pair (*death-faith*), the tempered similarity of voiced TH in the word *with* beforehand, and the false reminiscence of the opening word *at* in the first syllable of *nature*. All the words are thus somehow linked, but do not provide a pattern which is to be repeated as a technical aspect in the poem. At most, I think it can be said that a pair of alliteration (like *war with* & *coin / equal*) is joined in the line by either an assonant pair (like *nature's faith*) or with a slant end-consonance (like *while/full* or *art/fight*).

**ii.**

In the second line, there is a new and different sound feeling, a little harder than the first, introducing the stopped sounds P and CK, along with an alliteration at a distance, joining *new* back to *nature* across the line break. The first two lines are also connected by the W pairs *war with* and – *qual worth*. This is preceded by an internal slant-consonance

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provided by *prin & coin*. The minor V sound in *of equa-* ( the *f* sounds V, the *u* more breathing than a W), will have to wait until *love & nativity* for a rebirth. In the third line, the sole previous appearance of the L sound (in *equal*) – before its ‘near’ return – is presently taken up and stressed in *while* and *full*, which leads to *wealth*, in the middle of a piling up of syllables ending in T, a strong sound which has been in abeyance since the opening word *at*, featured in the mirroring word-pairs *art fights* and *fit its...* This accumulation culminates in what seems to me a key effect in this staggering choreography: the oblique repetition of the word *equal*, now not paired as “new” but *near*. What affects me is a slow sense of transition and shift, diffusion and weave, a push and pull or ebb and flow, even stumble and shuffle, rather than solid, confident building blocks of sound.

### 3.3

Another consideration has occurred to me. It is quite possible to hear the lines as having substantial breaks in other places than the written seven-syllable distances, which then offer ‘new’, and ‘near’ rhyme schemes. The possibility that a consistent cynghanedd scheme should be unearthed in an alternative arrangement of lines I will wait for you to reveal, or leave to the donkey work of others. Perhaps what “makes” the form is an avoidance of repetition rather than its predictable application. Only as late, anyway, as the second ‘division of four lines’ (I hesitate to insist on any ‘quatrain’), does the first occasion of a straight rhyme come: *child-defiled*. This phrase also gathers up two consonant sounds from the first line which have so far been left unmatched: the CH and D of *death nature’s*. The lone P of line two is now similarly caught up in the repercussive plosive of *but incomplete* and then *pain’s crowning couplet*, accompanied by a drone of the internal N in *prints* which collects in *pain’s crown*. *Nature’s faith*, with its provisional genitive Z, is also now safely caught up in *pain’s crown*. It is not striking, but pleasantly effective, I feel, that the isolated T of line one has to wait for its development until lines three and four, in the same way the exposed P of line two has to wait for its own retarded development in lines five and six. The N also begins to mutate to the M, under the close

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influence of its neighbour or partner P, in their joining in *incomplete*.

### 3.4

As if with the feeling of audible loose ends having been finally tied, the sounds set off in a new tone with lines seven and eight. I think it is worth the leisurely reader's while going into these 'alliteration' matters in detail, not mainly as they may well be a primary intention and purpose of the verse (a 'voluntary' drive has not been established), but because they will be of vital weight in the argument of the words when the 'message' comes to be attended to. Concepts of "equality, worth, fit, completion, mirroring", similarities in difference, the dual and the duel, the "making and beauty" of both poetry and mutually attracted lovers and their children, not to mention "figuration", have all been amply prepared for in the survey of the sound-behaviour. There is already a face-to-face war, a belligerence in the belletristic 'duo' of sound and sense. ('Bellum' in fact comes from duellum.) It is certainly difficult to ignore the semantic level of the lines when the couplet of lines seven and eight is read. In the visual middle of the couplet an obvious chiasmus is presented with the words *made mirrored* made to mirror each other not only in their inversion, but in the exchange of actor and object between the words as they appear in the two lines. (In other words, as a semantic digression, they can be construed like this, as an exchange of subject and predicate: "the made/ is mirrored" and "the mirrored/ is made". Alternatively, the contrast might be between *a)* a kind of thing, the "made-mirrored – as duet" – and as couplet and couple; and *b)* the "mirrored – made to do it".) Framing this cross, this X shape, are the 'anaphorical' *the's* voiced at the beginning and the varied doublet of voiced syllables at the end. These two words on D--T, already dealt with under end-rhyme earlier on, perform a passage from 'iamb' to 'trochee'. (*Dyuet* goes da-dum; *doowit* goes dum-da) I also hear the suggestion of another voiced CH sound (=DJ), in 'duet' as *juett*, an effect which works to link the lines with the foregoing pattern of elusive alliteration in the distant relatives *nature's//child*, and more importantly, to question the first impression of an easy

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mirroring in the rhyme. The written D, when repeated, is by no means a guarantee of “equal worth” in the “new coin”.

### 3.5

Neither do the last four lines of the poem completely dispense with new techniques for linking and varying their sounds. The Z sound (*admirerz*) and the word TO in line 9 derive directly from the odd words *as* and *to*, both antepenultimate syllables, in the preceding “made mirrored/ mirrored made” couplet, although both have led a chequered career already. The voiced S of *admirers* (first heard as *nature’z*) has already calmly survived the brief climax of many unvoiced TS earlier in the upper part (*prints, fights its*), to return *az painz*. As for the modest *to*, jumping ahead again a little into the semantic area of this discussion: not only does the multiplying mirror render up a plurality of admirers, but there is a supplementary equivocality of the very words “too” and “two” audible in the written phrases *to do it* and *take to*. And as for the modest *as*: the comparison signified in the word (the thought of ‘identity’, of ‘class’ and ‘representative’, *as, like*, of one thing in the guise, the place, the function of another), is confirmed in the exposed simile “like” in *like admirers*. This word’s consonance L & K continues broken in the words “take” in line nine and then “love” in line ten. Here it is clear, at the latest, that salient characteristics of sound patterning, without being aligned in frozen repeated ‘forms’, are pointing and prodding in the same direction as the words their noises carry. To take this passage as an example:

*mirrored as ... made to ... like admirers take to ... love.*

(The singular *mirrored as* is made into the plural and cognate *admirers*. The lonely *made to* becomes the more promising and responsive verb *take to*. The compatible *like* returns “as” *love*.) There are no patterns which are not drawn attention to (or are they rather covered up?), by being repeated and transformed in some way. At least the purposely over-attentive reader is allowed an apt delight in the tricks and tics and tickling ticking of talking language.

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## ii.

The opacity yet allusiveness, the visible surface, that is, of mental meaning (that strange improbability: 'contents' of the speech), is a starker effect when the homonymic or same-sounding characteristics are put in exposed light. The initial alliteration beginning on an L sound appears once only in the poem and certainly succeeds in raising the question in my mind of the mirroring, mimetic, representational, even essential nature, on the one hand, or the merely arbitrary relationship of phonetic and grammatic patterns, figures, on the other hand, and their conveyed semantic content. What or who they 'stand for' – that is the real substance of the poem's 'statement'. In this case, the difference is made clear between "like" and "love". One is a simile or example and explanatory comparison, meaning "alike". Equals as. (The commonly appended suffix '-ly' in English, by the way, is vestigial likeness or atrophied residue of the word 'like': lovely is 'love-like'; likely is 'like-like'! Yes, but does *like* merely remind us, or do we desire it? We'll come to that, of course. As an adjective, lovely is a basic quality, as an adverbial ending it would be a special state, eg. It is lovely; it works 'lovelyly'.) "Like" is the attraction, the taking of a likeness, yes, the compatibility of two aspects, say, and in this sense a function of a sort of "love". Platonic mimesis. Instinctual, or magnetic: although that magnetic metaphor depends on the notion of the lure of opposite polarity, hetero-sexual, radical unlikeness. The conjugation and conjunction performed by *like* is literally of a 'copula'; it carries, bears, gives tongue, gives 'birth' to a predicate, a couplet, a doublet: like the further pairing of a signifier and signified. Yet "Love" who has darts to hurt with, is not only a noun, a nexus, and thus the situation of the aspect which 'loves'; it also might be a proper name distinguishing a 'character', a personage at work. Substantive, substance. Eros works not only *like* a procurer, Pandare, but *as* a pander. He IS one! (Cp: I live as a poet; I live like a poet.) The darts would have an artful purpose. Substantial. Dialectic, the comparison of unlikeness, wants to discover the true, the who: the 'what it is', the 'what it is like', really. No classification (section or sexual), no representativeness is sufficient to say THAT.

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**3.6**

After this digression on possible ‘plot’ and character, figure and person, the ‘individual’ which will need to be returned to later, I still want to ask about results possible from the survey of alliterations and half-rhymes. It is likely, that vowel assonances, or breathing spaces in between the ‘alliterations’, are less marked and easily overlooked, yet something like the groupings of various ‘i’ values in lines 4-5, maybe, is effectively, if not overwhelmingly echoed in line 9 and then the short couplet (*fit its/ child defiled ... like admirerers/ figured nativity*). A quibble now impatiently asks to be considered. Is the amount of what I have loosely identified as alliteration statistically more significant than in any random text, that is, in a text uninfluenced by any considerations of phonetic harmony or dynamic balance? I don’t know; and I don’t know how an exact experiment could be undertaken to judge. Where might we find language clearly uninfluenced by harmonies? (Perhaps a ‘random’ text would need to be specially constructed!) There is an endless regression of definition, and no effective empirical controls. (If poetry or prose is said to fulfill so and so requirements, then what fills so and so requirements is said to be poetry or prose; the same goes for formally harmonious and organic noisy musics. There is always more at work than the so and so.) I must stick to the personal assumptions and impulsive images I receive from being exposed to these patterns. Any user of language, not only a poet or a critic, getting ready to compose, to put something down or give it out – to put two and two together – is in this position: faced with the attractions and repulsions, the decorum of what you want to say, the arbitrary tastes. Language and its presumed ... how do I put it, potency? predication? has a priority before your own purpose.

**3.7**

First let me look at the final lines. With *beauty-bitter*, comes the first occasion of a complete unit of consonants being immediately repeated. (The closest premonition of such a clear repetition so far has only been the *-ete / out* pair between lines 5 – 6. A pale recurrence is the elision *...art-’urt*, followed then by the veiled reprise in *...ured-out*.) This proximate approximation, or more pointedly, this closeness,

**3.6**

After this digression on possible ‘plot’ and character, figure and person, the ‘individual’ which will need to be returned to later, I still want to ask about results possible from the survey of alliterations and half-rhymes. It is likely, that vowel assonances, or breathing spaces in between the ‘alliterations’, are less marked and easily overlooked, yet something like the groupings of various ‘i’ values in lines 4-5, maybe, is effectively, if not overwhelmingly echoed in line 9 and then the short couplet (*fit its/ child defiled ... like admirerers/ figured nativity*). A quibble now impatiently asks to be considered. Is the amount of what I have loosely identified as alliteration statistically more significant than in any random text, that is, in a text uninfluenced by any considerations of phonetic harmony or dynamic balance? I don’t know; and I don’t know how an exact experiment could be undertaken to judge. Where might we find language clearly uninfluenced by harmonies? (Perhaps a ‘random’ text would need to be specially constructed!) There is an endless regression of definition, and no effective empirical controls. (If poetry or prose is said to fulfill so and so requirements, then what fills so and so requirements is said to be poetry or prose; the same goes for formally harmonious and organic noisy musics. There is always more at work than the so and so.) I must stick to the personal assumptions and impulsive images I receive from being exposed to these patterns. Any user of language, not only a poet or a critic, getting ready to compose, to put something down or give it out – to put two and two together – is in this position: faced with the attractions and repulsions, the decorum of what you want to say, the arbitrary tastes. Language and its presumed ... how do I put it, potency? predication? has a priority before your own purpose.

**3.7**

First let me look at the final lines. With *beauty-bitter*, comes the first occasion of a complete unit of consonants being immediately repeated. (The closest premonition of such a clear repetition so far has only been the *-ete / out* pair between lines 5 – 6. A pale recurrence is the elision *...art-’urt*, followed then by the veiled reprise in *...ured-out*.) This proximate approximation, or more pointedly, this closeness,

this intimacy of sound is the sonic figure for the relationship of mirroring and imprinting of images which the text and the technique discuss. This is the relationship of marriage, mating, making love – certainly of falling in love and what follows: where beauty outside becomes bitterness inside and likeness becomes love within. The cordial, the gastric, the visceral. The vocal *duet* and the active *do it*, theory and practice respectively, similarly find their internal figure in the inner barb, the embedded *dart* point. The word *figured* is suitably conditioned by “out” rather than “in” (not the impression, say, but the expression). The word itself needs to look quite far back into the preceding lines to find its alliterative echo, finding a partner in the clot of words *fight* and *fit*, and perhaps with the interpolated G sound being prefigured by the scattered GH, QU, & C/K sounds having prepared the ear. The harmony hungry will have conserved the memory of this sound field, most recently in *take* in line nine, so that it resonates sympathetically in the G of *figured* – probably more than the silent and atrophied GH of *fight*. (Unfortunately any sense of an etymological link between “fight” and “figure” is a figment: I nevertheless always feel there is an essential struggle affixed to all fiction and configuration!) The word *love*, however, has had to wait no longer than a line for its fricative sound to be closely followed, not only somewhat by the word *figured*, but by the ‘final say’, the outcome: *nativity*, a word whose sound carries me back through all the T sounds, *near* and *new*, to *nature’s faith* and to *at* in the first position.

### 3.8

What strikes me in these irregular gentle waves, or rather hobbling gait, is the almost endless possibility of other words wanting to be said; like ghosts or unborn souls hovering around the maternity, or death bed of the writer’s desk, a whole cloud of further half-rhymes wait for a chance to be born among the sounded syllables. What seems to sing strongly in these lines is a chant of unsaid, silent words. This fullness of the air about the speaking head is also a sense of something missing. Maybe it is the point of similarity, too, between the reader and the writer. (Rapt and wondering what will come next.) It is the sense somehow already, even before much ‘explication’ has begun, of the

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living significances that want to be breathed and realised. Of mirrored reflections that want to be created selves. As an example, the repression or avoidance of full rhymes and of a demonstrative alliterative scheme opens the door for other choices of slanted sounds, for other untouched, as yet unspoken, unconsummated candidates to accompany the transforming letters T to TH, R to L etc (and thus find their way opened into the poem). In my reader's head I have heard dearth, dealt, dirt, defeat; I heard healed, head, heat, wheat, weed, word and wild world; I heard field, foil, foiled, fate and tilth and chaplet as well. These words are definitely 'present' in the poem as opportunities which could have been but were not taken, alternative destinies. Or, on the other hand, are they so sufficiently inscribed in the poem's utterance, that there is no need for them each to be written down? They could all definitely without difficulty feature in a paraphrase of the text. Between them, they are at home, for instance, in the lexical fields of 'the sword and the ploughshare', of 'bodily and spiritual passion'. (I remember in this connection a joke of Bysse Berkeley's in the note to his poem 'epilogic', that *arto-poiesis* is Greek for bread baking; and I think of Erda, the clod, and then the loaf too, golden brown, I think of the coin extracted and inserted in telluric currencies. This play of earth and art, as mode and mood, kind and mud, is one of the themes, or the theme of non-oneness, that will, yes! convincingly emerge as I discuss.) It is a modernist cliché: poetry's substance is discourse about poetic form; nevertheless I say: poetic form itself discourses on all that is poetic beyond the form.

### 3.9

After a glimpse of the erotic writhings which are the nature of not only gods, creatures and ideas, but bare and breathless words earthbound on the page as well, it still remains to listen again to the rhythms and the breaks of the lines. In the same way that the line endings want to avoid anything more than a suggestion of traditional rhyme, the seven syllable lines, in their way, intend, I think, both a swerve away and a pointer towards the regular rising and falling traditional line-rhythm, iambic or otherwise. Four of the twelve lines, in fact, do allow themselves to be read in an easy alternating rhythm: line 5 (a catalectic trochaic

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tetrameter?) and then the sequence 8 – 10 (a succession of rising iambic feet which is kept until *heart*, and then falls into another four-beat trochaic cadence for one more line). The two short final lines which follow this sequence can be rattled off if you like in a loose passage of four feet, as if they together made up a further single line; although they do add up to a total of eight syllables and therefore exceed the length of any of the preceding uniformly syllabic lines. Bearing in mind the regular disturbances which prevent traditionally flowing or rolling rhythms in the lines as a whole (disdaining finger-tapping anapests and dactyls as well, diddleydums, in favour of hard and more hesitant spondaic compounds, many heavy stresses near and next to each other), I think it is justified to classify the metre as syllabic and not as foot-orientated. In brief, the poem consists of five isometric 14 syllable couplets, say, followed by one of 8.

### 3.10

The possibility arises, that the lines did in fact originate in a more regular octosyllabic pattern and were later clipped and coped, or that the final line (what I have called the short couplet) has been extended from the regular mono-stich form that precedes it (by adding either the *out* or the *to*), in order to contribute a symmetrical, self-rhyming close, of a sort. To facilitate that feeling of finality. Without any early drafts of yours to go from (any 'foul proof' so-called!), this stays speculation. It is very interesting, on the other hand, how a compelling asymmetry of 4+3 syllables, or 3+4, usually in the form of four smoothly ticking ones with a more rhythmically pronounced prefix or suffix of the supplementary three, does seem to get established, but is NOT kept up throughout. Eg.

at war with death NATURE'S FAITH/  
PRINTS NEW COIN of equal worth/  
while overfull ART FIGHTS LIFE/  
to fit its near-EQUAL FILTH ... etc

It is interrupted, as I noted in the last paragraph, by stretches of more 'conventional' rhythm (lines 5 & 8). As in alternation of native and artificial styles, rough country and

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smooth city carping: as Franco-London Middle English once suppressed provincial varieties. (Or *trecento* taste, though not yet 'petrarchan', vs. Gamelyn and Gawain.) In the more broken, asymmetrically patterned line, the definite effect of caesura, or cut somewhere in the middle (as from lower case to capital in the example above), is a pleasant fact imprinted in the metric form of the first four lines at least, which gives a unity to the seven-syllable groupings, cements them as 'lines' even when their conclusive cadencing – giving a breath of rest or fermata and pause that justifies the severed line-ending – is blurred by the frequency of internal rhymes elsewhere.

ii.

In any case, I am reminded of the Welsh 'cywydd' form of poetic metre, which favours the longer couplet of two 7 syllable lines which rhyme alternately masculine and feminine, in either order (for example: 'the bridge' with 'knowledge'). There is also a shorter couplet form of four syllabled lines. These measures are called the 'cywydd deubar hirion' and 'cywydd deubar fyrion': Song of Long Dipstiches and Song of Short Dipstiches respectively. In these traditional, late medieval rather than archaic bardic forms, a type of strict 'cynghanedd', or choice of fixed alliterative-assonant patterns is demanded at least in every second line, but meagre knowledge of these convoluted rules does not make me competent to discern their possible application or chance appearance in the English lines I want to interpret here. (The difficulty of diction also draws to mind a vague Celtic vatic quality, an ollavian obscurity – from Irish pedant, 'ollamh' – or even a dusty and cluttered priestly pose, hermetic 'hortus conclusus' aura to the verses, what professing poets could though call a garden of merry science, gay and de bon air.) I am inclined to think a freer, even rhapsodic, variety is the style of the internal sonic patterns, the rhythm, alliteration and phrasing, the accent, enunciation and poise: in the same way that the rhymes pleasantly refuse to predictably chime.

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#### 4.1

The poem is not fully punctuated. It has neither capitals at the beginnings of lines or sentences, nor any full stops or other markings at the close of grammatical segments. There are no inverted commas or italic script to mark quotation or emphasis. There is neither title nor form or genre indicated, other than a subscribed signature and a date, given in both the ecclesiastical year and the duodenary calendar. There is, however, the sparse specification of three apostrophes and three hyphens given, in addition to the lower case letters, and of course the notation in twelve separated indented lines justified on the left, along with recognizable spaces between the individual words. Before going on to the greater organisation of the poem, its instrumentation of meaning or semantic strands into grammatic shape, the reader should consider the inchoate or seminal ordering of the single strophe into various moments and occasions. As a structure in time, a poetic quatrain can embody the human feeling for things like the four seasons in the 'temperate' European year, or the arrangement of four planet-orientated weeks into a series of months. On its miniature level, a poem can offer the symbolism of its syllables for days in the year, degrees in the astronomical circumference, or its lines for weeks or months or festival seasons. A ten syllable line might therefore stand for the denary deacon of the three decans of the regular zodiacal month. (This sort of 'magical', sympathetic thinking was de rigeur in the ancient world from whom we derive our secular reason and politocratic order.) In this poem, who knows (and even you as author have not the authority to conclusively prove the speculation!), the 7 syllabled stiches could stand for weeks, in that case making up a total of three months or one calendar season, or a total of twelve might intimate the cycle of normalised months in a solar year – in both case dwindling suitably with the light of the day-star in the decline of the 'Fall'. It is possible that the sensation of funneling and bottle-neck is justifiably present to my mind in the way the last short lines of the strophe contract to their final word. Instead of *nativity* returning to the "war of nature", the continuation turns out to be a signature, your name!

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## 4.2

Perhaps an attempt ought to be made to punctuate one or more sentences. After a few deliberate readings, it appears that a colon might be inserted in the middle of the poem after line six. (...*pain's crowning couplet: the made mirrored as duet...*) That is a place where the sense comes to a pause and continues in another mode. The analysis of rhyme and sound had also shown this point as one place of elementary division. This minimal articulation gives a first formal division of the poem into two more or less equal halves: the first a statement, the second a demonstration or exemplification of that statement. The poem would then be a single sentence. The whole second half following the colon a subsidiary or additional clause lacking a main verb. The subjects and main verbs predicating the sentence would be *nature's faith "printing"* and *art's "fighting"*. These the primary processes. The principal subject and verb of the second half would be the *admirers "taking" to heart*, conditioned by the pre-positioned simile "*like*".

### ii.

There must be other alternatives. Possibilities left available by the lack of ordinary punctuation would include an imperative addressed to the reader, an injunction: "take to heart!" It is possible that both instances of made and mirrored can be interpreted as main verbs in the perfect tense (eg. "a couplet, which the 'made' did mirror, as a duet which the 'mirrored' did make, in order to do it..."); it is possible that *love's* is a contraction of "love is dart hurt", etc etc. The very first line could be construed as the same sort of contraction, which means it would constitute a statement of its own: "nature is faith, (when/ if) at war with death". The question raised by these uncertainties is always 'who is the agent at work?' (Subject? Identity? That which is the transcendental ontology of the poem. Who is to say, IT is itself? Only the presentation, after all, is what preserves a poem's 'integrity'.) I will let these grammatical ambiguities be for the present. Or rather, without approving, or disproving them, I put them to one side and concentrate on a more standard version.

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There is, however, a feature of the grammar in the first half which should be elucidated. In contrast with the colon which effectively would divide the sentence into a potentially complete first half and an additional, ad libitum second part, there is an insertion in the second clause of the main sentence (line 3 onward) by which its flow is interrupted – before it can gather into the cadence of *pain's crowning couplet*. In other words, allowing that the first clause can be read as complete on its own (*faith prints coin*), and everything that follows as a non-obligato supplement or enrichment, then there is quite a different division in the centre of the second clause, which leaves it incomplete, suspended, and waiting a little anxiously to be resumed and brought to a close. I read line five, that is, as a parenthesis, a penetration, inserted in the second clause (lines 3 – 6): “art fights wealth to fit its filth// out as crown etc.” There is a space, a punctuation, a break, a copulation in the verb *fit// out*. (I am made aware, here, of that really quite physical reaction which every reader feels in their relationship to the different punctuation signs or functions: full stops, dashes, colons, dot dot dot. Expectation and relaxation. We are teased and led on, contented or excited – or left to our own devices – by the complex formal etiquette of grammatical arrangement. Not every break is a period or place of rest.) But back to the space included within *fit//out*. The parenthetical line 5 is interestingly the first to carry a regular, in this case trochaic, succession of alternating accents, which is then broken by the return to the main sense at “out” in line six. In the grammar, then, there is a movement of increasing complexity. First, a self sufficient statement “nature’s faith prints new coin”, is preceded by a phrase which conditions the subject of that action (nature’s faith being – *at war with death*). The basic statement is followed by another phrase conditioning the object of that main action (new coin being – *of equal worth*). In fact, a more basic unit is presented right at the start of the poem, preceding as it does the main statement. This is the phrase “at war with death”. It is like a title. A raw state is indicated, demonstrated by pointing and naming, a bit like a parent or a child points and makes a relevant noise. Ejaculation. The deictic. (Professional grammarians and

### 4.3

There is, however, a feature of the grammar in the first half which should be elucidated. In contrast with the colon which effectively would divide the sentence into a potentially complete first half and an additional, ad libitum second part, there is an insertion in the second clause of the main sentence (line 3 onward) by which its flow is interrupted – before it can gather into the cadence of *pain's crowning couplet*. In other words, allowing that the first clause can be read as complete on its own (*faith prints coin*), and everything that follows as a non-obligato supplement or enrichment, then there is quite a different division in the centre of the second clause, which leaves it incomplete, suspended, and waiting a little anxiously to be resumed and brought to a close. I read line five, that is, as a parenthesis, a penetration, inserted in the second clause (lines 3 – 6): “art fights wealth to fit its filth// out as crown etc.” There is a space, a punctuation, a break, a copulation in the verb *fit// out*. (I am made aware, here, of that really quite physical reaction which every reader feels in their relationship to the different punctuation signs or functions: full stops, dashes, colons, dot dot dot. Expectation and relaxation. We are teased and led on, contented or excited – or left to our own devices – by the complex formal etiquette of grammatical arrangement. Not every break is a period or place of rest.) But back to the space included within *fit//out*. The parenthetical line 5 is interestingly the first to carry a regular, in this case trochaic, succession of alternating accents, which is then broken by the return to the main sense at “out” in line six. In the grammar, then, there is a movement of increasing complexity. First, a self sufficient statement “nature’s faith prints new coin”, is preceded by a phrase which conditions the subject of that action (nature’s faith being – *at war with death*). The basic statement is followed by another phrase conditioning the object of that main action (new coin being – *of equal worth*). In fact, a more basic unit is presented right at the start of the poem, preceding as it does the main statement. This is the phrase “at war with death”. It is like a title. A raw state is indicated, demonstrated by pointing and naming, a bit like a parent or a child points and makes a relevant noise. Ejaculation. The deictic. (Professional grammarians and

scholars have a battery of specialist terms to analyse all these things. (Participles, conditionals.) I am trying spontaneous descriptions (as lay scholar of lewd song!), contingent and non-categorical. Any study of iconography and terminology through the epochs demonstrates how referents slide.) So this initial statement is stated, say, without a statement. A 'theme'. Of course it is not the simplest of indications. It is not just a name, a word on its own, an interjected monosyllable. There is already a more dynamic complexity in this first thematic summary: *at war with death*. Anyway, the main complete statement, flanked by its assistant phrases, gives a relatively stable and single-minded impression (lines 1-2). This autonomous proposition, contained in a couplet with at least the pretence of classical closure, is then followed by a second statement with a mirrored and similar structure, seemingly modelled on and matching the first. It is introduced by the comparative word "while", both connecting it and announcing its disjunction from the situation of the first proposition. *While* "faith prints coin", "art fights wealth" etc. Here, in the second clause, is more than merely an enlarging, adjectival phrase like *of equal worth*. It is being further specified why or for what imaginable purpose the action is undertaken: in order to fit its filth etc. But there is nothing pithy or self-explanatory about this explanation, as was the grand gesture "at war with death". If *nature coins* in order to wage *war on death*, say, then *art fights* in order to *fit the near equal*. There is a tolerable rationality and a convincing enough symmetry in this. Nature is "at war" and prints "equal worth"; art is "overfull" and fights (or fits) wealth (or filth). The effect, though, is worlds apart. There is no satisfactory equilibrium here, no rejuvenating state of war. Nature's war WITH death is really, equally as much, the war OF death. Nature renews – and discards. It doesn't accumulate, sentimentally. Art, overfull as it is said to be, needs to give away, express, lose itself somehow, lose weight beyondward, transgress. It doesn't "fit". The sentence itself is forced to continue. But not in a closed cycle. This explanation (in order to *fit its near-equal*) is further cluttered, specified or enriched, if you like, magnified and appreciated, or covered and concealed, by the parenthesis of line 5 enlarging on the nature of the filth.

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