

Does 'Ash Wednesday' enable a reader to perceive an altered state of consciousness?

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Abstract

This paper presents research into the hypothesis that an altered state of consciousness can be perceived by some readers whilst reading certain poetic texts. It examines how 'Ash Wednesday' by T.S. Eliot could be considered to contain the stylistic features of a 'meditative' text; the poem evoking composition of place, supporting diffuse perception and encouraging divergent ways of processing. In particular, I discuss the idea that some poetic texts 'don't only have meanings or convey thoughts, but also display emotional qualities *perceived* by the reader' (Tsur 2002 in Semino and Culpeper:279).

I then report the results of an empirical study which used think-aloud techniques to collect data from readers. The think-aloud data were analysed and examined alongside the text, demonstrating that in some places reader's reactions were triggered by textual features that worked against each other, producing cognitive overload and blurring perceptual organisation. In some readers this led to a regression of the perceiving consciousness and a perception of what could be termed an altered state of consciousness.

Keywords: perception, consciousness, think-aloud, empirical, Eliot

1. Introduction

In this paper I present the results of a small scale think-aloud empirical pilot study where four readers were asked to give responses to their reading of a poetic text. In this, the study takes inspiration from the work of Reuven Tsur who argued that some poetic texts 'don't only have meanings or convey thoughts, but also display emotional qualities *perceived* by the reader' (Tsur 2002:279).

Firstly, I present a brief outline of work into altered states of consciousness, which I hope to have organised into a potentially replicable framework for empirical work. I follow this by an analysis of my text which outlines the meditative qualities of the text following the framework. I then discuss the protocols collected in response to the text.

2. Work into altered states of consciousness.

Tsur states that certain poetic texts 'display emotional qualities *perceived* by the reader.' (Tsur 2002: 279) and that the reader gains some 'relatively immediate exposure to reality' (Tsur 1992: 25). In this he follows a long literary line, including Keats, Coleridge and George Eliot, who acknowledged there was something in a text to be felt by the reader.

Feeling and emotion have been two of the foci for empirical studies of reading in the recent past. Kneepkens and Zwaan (1994), Cupchik (1994), Cupchik, Oatley and Vorderer (1998), Miall and Kuiken (1994, 1999, 2001, 2002) and Oatley (1994, 1999) have all made valuable contributions to the field. I will briefly mention Miall and Kuiken's work on feelings (2002) which attempted to define how feelings function whilst reading is taking place. Interestingly they noted the controversy of the notion of the 'primacy' of feeling over cognition in the reader when reading the text and provide useful definitions of 'emotion' as referring to 'conspicuously discrete *psychobiological* states such as anger, sadness and fear' and 'feeling' as 'the *bodily* sense of all experienced affect.' (2002:223) (my italics).

Tsur goes beyond the analysis of the emotional qualities of a text to claim that it is possible to perceive an *altered state of consciousness* whilst reading certain meditative poetic texts. He defines an altered state of consciousness in the reader in their perception of the text as ‘a kind of regression of the perceiving consciousness from a state of cognitive stability [that discriminates between the physical objects themselves, as well as between ego and the physical objects perceived]’ (Tsur 2002: 290).

There is an argument that there is a distinction between meditation itself and *meditative poetry*: in reading meditative poetry the reader does not actually *experience* the meditative process but s/he only *perceives* a meditative *quality* in the poem (Tsur: 1994). In perceiving the meditative quality a reader may feel confusion or disturbance, but will not necessarily attain a state where meditation can be said to *have* taken place. In working with respondents, it is therefore not a necessity to be able to note the *experience* but the *perception* of the quality of meditation. Whether a reader experiences the state, or perceives the quality, or feels nothing may also be reliant on the reader’s absorption qualities

The requirements for considering the qualities of a meditative poem are described by Tsur and Benari (2001) (see also Tsur 2003: 87-118). I follow their definition of meditation as an ‘altered state of consciousness’: a mental state in which ‘adult persons relinquish to some extent their already acquired control of “ordinary consciousness”’ (Tsur 1992: 411).

So, what is “ordinary” consciousness? Ornstein (1975) describes it in terms of a personal *construction* and Knoblauch (1999 cited in Tsur 2003: 92) sees it as ‘an attitude of full attention to life’. A human being from an early age is able to take the flow of sensory information that his or her senses receive, and construct from this, stable categories. The sensory information is pre-categorical before it is oriented into stable categories. These categories, once constructed, make up a stable world for that person and instead of being in confusion from a huge flux of information a person is able to go to the same place twice or recognise the same person from different angles or understand a word when it is spoken by different voices. When sensory information is thus organised it places relatively little strain on the cognitive system as: ‘ordinary consciousness aims at maximum cognitive economy, by organising the overwhelming stream of sensory information into stable objects and rigid concepts or schemata’ (Tsur 2003: 65, see also 1992: 15-22).

However when sensory information overloads the cognitive system, delayed categorisation may occur and provide a period of confusion or uncertainty that some individuals find difficult to tolerate. It is in this loss of the sense of ordinary consciousness that I locate the present study in relation to a poetic text. I next consider how a text potentially presents itself as meditative.

2.1. The Meditative Text.

Tsur and Benari (2001) argue that three ‘main abilities of the text’ are responsible for the meditative quality, and that in order for a poem to be considered meditative these ‘abilities’ must exist to some extent within the text. The first of these is the text’s ability to evoke the orientation process. The second of these is the text’s ability to support diffuse perception and encourage divergent ways of processing. Finally, the third ‘ability’ is the text’s ability to integrate with the mental setⁱ required for this experience, the absence of purpose, and to supply the conditions that enable such a mental set to exist over time. I now examine each ‘ability’, in turn.

2.1.1 The Orientation Process

The Orientation Process is the process that the reader goes through in finding him/herself mentally in a place as described by the writer. In evoking the orientation process in the reader, the text can generate the ‘composition of placeⁱⁱ’, which has been described as the first necessary

step of meditation. 'Composition of Place' means the formation of a place through the orientation process in the mind of the reader. In order to supply an alternative a reader is placed in a defined setting as a substitute for reality.

In meditation the switch from left hemisphere brain activity (analytical/sequential) to right hemisphere brain activity (experiential) seems to be key. The meditator focuses by fixing an image in the mind and mental imagery in reading a text involves right hemisphere activity in orienting within the text and constructing spatial schemata (Jessen, Heum, Erb, Granath, Klose, Papassotiropoulos and Grodd 2000).

Because readers can usually manage with very general images, stable visual shapes and control would be created with description that is *too detailed*, as would strong *gestalts*ⁱⁱⁱ, so Composition of Place builds a setting that gives the reader a *sense* of control in a separation from daily life.

2.1.2. Diffuse perception and divergent ways of processing.

The second 'ability' is that of the text to support diffuse perception and encourage divergent ways of processing. The information can be paraphrased and the impression described. However, the features of the information as it appears in the consciousness are *diffuse* and *simultaneous*.

Emotion is connected to diffuse effects and is also connected to the formation of poor *gestalts*. More diffuse processing could be seen as increasing the emotional quality perceived in a text and decreasing rational control, causing confusion in the reader. This happens when the rational line of thought is obstructed by non-linear elements: the changes produced in the reader's sense of control and stability are elements that heighten the reader's attentiveness to emotion.

A *detailed* Composition of Place may have the effect of increasing perceptive clarity leading to a *lack* of diffuseness of perception as more creativity has to be used on the part of the reader if stable visual shapes are not formed. The less specific and detailed the poem's words are then the activation of the ideas of readers will be more diverse. Because diffuse information increases the emotional load and the amount of creativity used in processing the text, this leads to a more personal involvement in the text to the reader's own life and experience.

2.1.3. Experiential Set and Absence of Purpose for the reader.

Poetry reading and meditation are usually freely chosen activities where the participator has chosen to give up control voluntarily. Both meditation and poetry reading require a participator to invest resources of time and mental space or energy without immediate benefit or use in everyday life. The reading is thus experienced in the absence of a purpose.

Tsur (1974) refers to Jakobson (1960). In Jakobson's terms, the dominant language function of a poem is 'poetic', rather than 'emotive' as in meditation. Some poetry (Tsur uses the example of the 'Holy Sonnet' by Donne) can be used as a poem, a prayer or a meditation in which case the dominant function could change. Tsur argues that whilst prayer is purported to have a purpose, in meditation the discourse is emotive and, because the meditator is entering a state of openness to emotion, it is therefore *experiential* rather than *instrumental*. In a meditation the main characteristic is the meditator's attempt to intensify the emotional experience.

The readiness of readers to be cut off from ordinary life will vary and some people may find the loss of control and power hard to tolerate. Tsur follows Tellegen in understanding that readers vary in their 'absorption' quality which is 'the propensity to adopt an experiential set' (Tsur and Benari 2001: 221). An altered state of consciousness needs an experiential set.

3. Features of the meditative text.

In what way is stylistic analysis to be applied to this field? How can these concepts or ‘abilities’ of a text be recognised *within* a text? What features within a text will provoke the orientation process, diffuse perception and divergent processing?

It is possible to identify a number of text features and I now outline the devices identified in Tsur’s work from 1987 to 2003 (Tsur 1987, 1992, 2003, Glicksohn, Tsur and Goodblatt 1991, Tsur and Benari 2001). For clarification purposes and in order to make the work replicable, I grouped these features into five sections which formed the framework for my analysis: General Features and then four sub-groups of textual features. A *regional quality* emerges when a number of these features occur in a poetic text, forming an overall gestalt that characterises the whole as a meditative poem without lending that quality to the individual parts. Possible further work will be to examine how these combinations work together and if some devices counteract others but this was not done at this initial exploratory stage.

3.1. General features.

- a visual paradox or impossibility offering space for orientation which is conflicting or baffling or non-rational
- a sense of going beyond human limits or a sense of a loss of stability
- a clear separation from daily life
- nature of the scene, i.e. something or somewhere described in abstract or vague terms but not something that can be perceived as a solid place or object
- dwelling on an emotionally-loaded imaginary situation
- negation of goals and/or
- psychological lack of progress or movement towards a goal or the willingness to dwell on a state without moving on, possibly expressed in “unnecessary” repetition

3.2. Text features.

Graphological features.

- typographic foregrounding
- hieroglyphic elements

Phonetic features.

- a closure in the rhyme scheme or rhythm of a poem which works against other features, for example metrical units^{iv} or one of the general features listed above (see also Glicksohn, Tsur and Goodblatt 1991, Tsur 1987)
- parallelism through alliteration or assonance
- epiphoric reference (Tsur 1992: 445)
- the building of an ‘emotive crescendo’ (Tsur 2003: 73) within the poem or its stanzas: ‘the poem begins with a regular, everyday tone or, at any rate, in a low emotive pitch; at the other end, there is an intense emotive tone or state of mind; between the two ends, we find elements that have a heightening effect.’ (Tsur 1992: 446)

Grammatical and deictic features.

- deictics which draw close attention to the immediate situation
- imperatives addressed to an immediately present audience
- the cumulative effect created by lists, particularly asyndeton
- closure in sentence structure or parallelism working against other features
- anaphoric reference
- a violation of the maxim of quantity through the repetition of assertions
- a lack of first person involvement as the subject of verbs
- the removal of self as a volitional agent although the first person may appear as a direct object

- passive verb constructions

Lexical and semantic features.

- little or no novel figurative language
- the repetition of similar metaphors
- simplicity or repetition in the text, which can be interpreted either as the writer's inability to express him/herself or a failure of conceptual language to express the elusive

4. The text: 'Ash Wednesday'.

The text comes from section five of 'Ash Wednesday' by T.S. Eliot. Whilst some critics received the work positively, 'an elaborate study in pure form' (Birrell 1930), others were not so impressed, 'there is too much ineffability about it...practically everything that Mr Eliot sets down offers a choice of meanings...he is indifferent which meaning one chooses' (Twitchett 1930) (both in Grant 1982).

Eliot himself wrote of the experience of reading literature:

...that thrill of excitement from our first reading of a work of creative literature which we do not understand is itself the beginning of understanding...*Understanding begins in the sensibility: we must have the experience before we attempt to explore the sources of the work itself.* (my italics).

(Eliot 1961, in Murray 1991).

In agreeing with Eliot's sentiment, I seek to examine how this might happen.

The text used contains 19 lines. The full text of section five of the poem contains 36 lines but a consideration of possible respondent fatigue led to the decision to use only the first 19 lines.

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
 If the unheard, unspoken
 Word is unspoken, unheard;
 Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
 The Word without a word, the Word within
 The world and for the world;
 And the light shone in darkness and
 Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
 About the centre of the silent Word.

O my people, what have I done unto thee.

Where shall the word be found, where will the word
 Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence
 Not on the sea or on the islands, not
 On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land,
 For those who walk in darkness
 Both in the day time and the night time
 The right time and the right place are not here
 No place of grace for those who avoid the face
 No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny the voice

4.1. A brief note about methodology of textual analysis.

As noted before, I organised all the features into sub-sections. In the three I discuss in this paper I refer to stylistic points within the text and consider how they show agreement with Tsur's

hypotheses about the production of altered states of consciousness. I emphasise, however, that it is necessary to cross-reference between sections to validate the argument.

4.2. General Features of the Text.

This poem is a clear separation from daily life: it does not describe a readily understood situation and catches the reader in a 'breathless circling movement' (Leavis cited in Grant 1982). The nature of the scene is impossible to grasp fully: there is a focus on an abstract concept, along with vast amounts of space and negation. The tautologies of the beginning of the poem are baffling for a reader, unusually presenting a paradox. Stanza Two consists of an emotionally-loaded question. The rhetorical question in lines 11 and 12 displays an atmosphere of purpose and energy but no answers are supplied for the reader. Repetition is a significant feature of the poem.

4.3. Phonetic features.

The phonological patterning in the text bears close examination. The poem has a strong rhythmic hold on the reader: the rhythm seemingly more obtrusive than the lexis, especially in stanza one. Of the 159 words, 132 (83%) are one-syllable words, 24 (15%) contain two syllables and 3 (2%) contain three syllables. The first line is made up entirely of one-syllable words and the regular metre of the first line generates a strong rational quality, which may indicate simplicity for the reader and heighten the emotional quality of the line. The simplicity that is established creates a sense of false security that is undermined by the uncertainty of the lexis (not discussed in this paper) so here two textual features are working against each other creating cognitive problems for the reader.

Within the first stanza the repetitive use of the plosive voiced alveolar in 'unheard...word...world...whirled' and the confusion created by the repetitive use of 'word' and also assonantal 'word...world...whirled' work against each other to prevent a sense of complete closure. These elements have the effect of enhancing the sense of repetition, weakening the perceptual organisation of the stanza and generating a richness of subtle semantic and phonetic information. The last two of these effects contribute to cognitive overload on the part of the reader. The cognitive overload works against the regular rhythm and the repetition of sounds breaking the sense of control and security for the reader.

Because of the nature of the lexis the poem also contains a large number of alliterative or assonantal parallelisms that focus on the repetition of the same word or sound: 'lost...lost', 'spent...spent' (line 1), 'word...Word...unheard' (line 4), 'Word...word...Word' (line 5), 'unstilled world still whirled' (line 8) in stanza one. This has the effect of strengthening the phonological patterning.

The metrical patterning and the phonological patterning work across one another, which makes these patterns divergent rather than convergent. In line 3 the emphasis placed on 'Word' by the graphological foregrounding has the effect of breaking the anapaestic metrical patterning. Similarly the graphological foregrounding of 'Resound', whilst fulfilling the anapaestic metrical patterning set up in line 11, has the effect of breaking the rhythm because of its close proximity to the spondee in the next phrase 'Not here'. The gestalt that could be formed in a regular metrical pattern or rhyme pattern is not present because it is interrupted by attention to other features.

An analysis of the phonological patterning in the poem points towards the existence of the structure for an *emotive crescendo* in the text (Tsur 1992: 445, 2003: 24). The single syllable words of the first line, in both the parallel clauses 'If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent' foreground a slowness in the reading which is then reinforced in the 'unfinished' clause which begins line 2 'If the unheard'. However, here the introduction of two polysyllabic words and the internal grammatical deviation in breaking away from the equivalence that has been set up in line one has the effect of speeding up the reading of the text. In fact the clause is not unfinished.

Lines 2 and 3 contain 7 syllables each, lengthening the parallel pattern of the two 6 syllable clauses of line 1. In lines 2 and 3 the repetition of 'unheard' and 'unspoken' and their subsequent reversal set up a rhyme both at the line endings and internally in 'unheard.../'

Word...unheard'. The rhyme has the effect of intensifying and foregrounding the rhythmic patterning of the text, but the *law of good continuation* (Tsur: 1991) is broken.

The beginning of line 4 with 'Still' has the effect of a caesura because the metrical pattern is disrupted for a reader by the graphological arrangement of the words which is not discussed in detail in this paper. This effect disturbs and arrests the emotive crescendo which then restarts in the rest of line 4. Internal rhyme in line 4 in 'word...word...unheard' produces the same intensified rhythmic effect as in lines 2 and 3. The pace of the reading potentially increases from line 4 to line 7 and from there to the end of the stanza. This stanza is almost like the verbal equivalent of a musical fugue movement, with a reintroduction of the 1st subject of the fugue before the elaboration of the theme.

The familiarity for some of the found poetry from John (The Gospel According to St. John: Chapter 1. Christian New Testament) in line 7 'the light shone in darkness' may increase the pace of the reading. This is also the first line to contain no punctuation and there is no further punctuation until the end of stanza one.

Stanza three also contains evidence for the substantiation of an emotive crescendo. There is a pattern established at the beginning of the stanza in lines 11 and 12. Here two interrogative clauses reflect and parallel the phonological patterning of the beginning of stanza one. The parallel syllable patterning is repeated with the deviance appearing graphologically in placing 'Resound' at the beginning of a separate line. The emotive crescendo is further emphasised by the asyndeton in lines 13 and 14 and the lengthening of the syllabic patterning in lines 16 to 19, line 19 being the longest in terms of syllables in the whole extract.

4.4. Grammatical and deictic features.

The poem contains four sentences. In terms of relative length they can be split into two groups. The two long sentences are sentence 1 (64 words) which makes up stanza one and sentence 4 (75 words) which is contained in lines 12 to 19. Together these occupy 87.4% of the text. The two shorter sentences: sentence 2, at 9 words, and sentence 3, at 11 words, occupy the remaining 12.6%. Sentences 1 and 4 are particularly deviant: making reading the poem an even more complex task. The two shorter sentences both function as questions although only sentence 3 is graphologically marked as such with a question mark. Both questions are indicated by wh words, with 'what' in line 10 functioning as an object pronoun and 'where' in line 11 introducing an adverbial clause of place.

The poem opens with a series of tautological subordinate conditional clauses before the main clause 'Still is the unspoken word' is reached in line 4. Each of these tautological clauses is a flout of the maxim of quantity (Grice 1975). Each is also an example of opting out of the maxim of quality (ibid): in using a subordinating conjunction the writer is not making a definite assertion. As a group, the three initial clauses also flout the maxim of quantity in their repetition of assertions, illustrating one of Tsur's general features: "unnecessary" repetition. The structural parallelism of these paratactic clauses foregrounds them and the passive form of the clauses reflects one of Tsur's ideas about the grammatical features of meditative poetry as does the omission of any actor or any human involvement as a volitional agent. The reader is not made aware of how the 'lost word' is lost or by whom. Here there is also anaphoric reference to a time outside the scope of the poem. There is a lack of first person involvement in the poem as a whole with the first person only appearing in stanza two, when it is arguable that this, in being an example of found poetry (Micah Chapter 6:3. Old Testament), is not the writer's persona but a 'God' figure.

The close deictic emphasis of time in the text implies both the past and the future: 'If the lost word is lost' implies the word has been lost in the past, this contrasts with 'Still is the unspoken word' where the word has not yet been spoken. This dichotomy has the effect of rooting the reader in an unspecified present, where they become disorientated.

The simplicity of the premodification is marked in the noun phrases. Frequently only the definite article is used with no use of the indefinite article. This has the effect of presenting only given information. It is therefore an assumption that the reader already has knowledge of 'the

word’ and that this is an anaphoric reference (Emmott 1997) as is ‘the light’. When other premodifiers are used these are negative and speak of futility: ‘lost’, ‘spent’, ‘unspoken’, ‘unstilled’. Postmodification of nouns is markedly negative: ‘the word unheard’, ‘the word without a word’. The series of postmodifications in lines 4 to 6 lengthen in their structure as the paratactic phrases are listed. This intense asyndeton in the postmodification has a cumulative effect as does the listing in stanza three. It has the effect of intensifying the negativity, which cuts across the Composition of Place.

5. A brief note about the empirical methodology.

This was a very small scale pilot study. The poem given to each respondent (RA to RD) who was asked to read it aloud before beginning the think-aloud. The title and the name of the poet were not disclosed. The purpose of reading the poem aloud was to hear how each respondent read the poem (for example if performance errors were made) and to ensure each respondent was already talking aloud before the think-aloud collection: therefore making a more natural transition for the respondent.

6. The Protocols.

The protocols indicated that there were textual nexuses around which the respondents’ understanding fluctuated and that these can be related to the framework for a text supporting an altered state of consciousness.

Figure 1. : Comparative Summary of the Protocols.

Line no.	Text	RA	RB	RC	RD	
1	If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent	focus on ‘word’	confusion	confusion with no composition of place	confusion-divergent processing	
2	If the unheard, unspoken					
3	Word is unspoken, unheard;					
4	Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,	initial reaction confirmed heightened feeling growing to a crescendo	understanding starts	understanding starts after later processing	confusion and whirling at speed into a void	
5	The Word without a word, the Word within					
6	The world and for the world;					
7	And the light shone in darkness and					
8	Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled	highest feeling reached and sustained	understanding	understanding starts on initial processing		
9	About the centre of the silent Word.					
10	O my people, what have I done unto thee.	amusement relief	balance		sadness	
11	Where shall the word be found, where will the word	intensity which diminishes	composition of place which is diffuse	understanding easier than stanza one – composition of place in Nature		
12	Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence					
13	Not on the sea or on the islands, not					
14	On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land,			confusion-divergent processing	comfort	composition of place difficult – sees a globe – visual paradox
15	For those who walk in darkness					
16	Both in the day time and the night time					

17	The right time and the right place are not here			hope	
18	No place of grace for those who avoid the face				isolation
19	No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny the voice				

6.1. Stanza One.

Respondent A reported some awareness of heightened feeling within the first stanza of the text. She indicated an emotive crescendo in the first stanza which she described as feeling ‘broadening sort of like frames of reference to world...that it’s more, more general perhaps.’ This started, for her, on line 4 and continued to the end of the stanza. Later she modifies this to indicate the highest feeling on line 7. Stanza one begins with ‘lost word’ and ends with ‘Word’. The repeated use of ‘word’ supports the idea that the two ends of an emotive crescendo are often marked by similar elements (Tsur 1992:446).

Respondent B remarked that stanza three seemed to be easier than stanza one to understand initially. When asked to express her problems she elaborated ‘The repetition of **word** used so many times, I’m trying to distinguish which word, whose word, um...this is simply repetitions of words...but I’m not able to break [it] down’, ‘who’s saying what to whom about what really there, I need to keep reading verse one... it doesn’t seem to be the end of an idea...I haven’t got a finished idea’. ‘It’s raised questions that if, by the use of the word **if**, that it hasn’t answered... and it’s this repetition as well it doesn’t seem to be taking me forward’. Here the epiphora has caused confusion and seems to be working against the sense of stability or security in developing a cognition of place. There is also the awareness of a lack of progress or movement towards a goal in the respondent.

In response to a question about how the respondent was feeling she replied ‘agitated... because I can’t actually grasp it...it’s not making sense to me and therefore I’m having difficulty progressing to the next section.’. Here, for this reader the information is diffuse and this is increasing the confusion. She responds with an emotional reaction.

Further clarification later on in the protocol raised another issue in this part of the poem: the parallelism is working against the typographic foregrounding of the enjambment, ‘these run on lines in the first verse, that made some of the, for me, the lines that I might have caught or understood, they made them a little incomprehensible **if the spent word is spent/ If the unheard** then the pause **unspoken** it was difficult that to make sense of that’.

Discussion of this section of the poem hinged on the place where understanding became clear and although clarity came through after the semi-colon at the end of line 6, the respondent spoke of ‘some glimmer of understanding’ after the first semi-colon where ‘I’ve started to access it in my terms’.

Lines 4 to 7 seemed to clear the confusion for the reader (perhaps as a result of the asyndeton which clarifies the qualities of **the word** in the pre and post modification or perhaps the respondent’s ability to assimilate the found poetry in line 7 without acknowledging the paradox). The next instance of confusion is expressed in relation to line 8 ‘I’m losing it a bit now...the bit that I’m struggling with now is **and/ Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled**...difficult to understand, ... you see, **Against the world** seems to have turned it round, because we had **for the world,**’ and ‘I can understand the single words...but I’m not clear on the meaning’. This seems to be an example of where the composition of place has been abandoned. The parallelism in the alliteration and assonance here is working against the closure in the rhyme creating cognitive overload again.

Respondent C focused mainly on the lexis of the poem. She reported confusion in comprehending the first six lines ‘I hadn’t a clue what I was reading, or what it was about’, ‘I still don’t understand that, I need to spend more time on it...can’t get it I find it really difficult to understand that’, ‘It’s kind of riddley...I feel as if I have to draw a chart’ and physical problems with reading aloud ‘not being able to get my words round’. She didn’t provide any particular reasons that were related to the text.

However, as Respondent B, she commented ‘as I came to the second part of the first stanza, you’re beginning to understand, or rather recognise, from...other sources’, ‘it’s almost with a relief that you come to the next bit where you’re beginning to get some imagery that you can hang something on’. In clarifying the respondent pointed initially to line 7 but later on elaborated and pointed to lines 5 and 6 as respondent B did, emphasising the effect of the same text features.

Unlike Respondent B this respondent reported emotively positive comments about line 8 early on in her protocol ‘I love that line thought it was fantastic...reading it a second or a third time I think it’s even more fantastic I really love that’. In developing the comments on this line she reported a feeling of calm ‘I’m also feeling it as well...it’s obviously something really calm and comfortable and...that feeling of sort of rock-like calm and security...I like that’ and ‘the world is whirling against it, so there’s a feeling that it’s hitting but coming round...that it’s not knocking it over or going through it...like a rock sticking out of the sea’. This was the only respondent to feel something beyond the poem and she felt ‘this one [the poem] is coming to me’ and she elaborated ‘it’s bringing out feelings...of a oneness in the world...the word is in the world and the world is sort of whirling around it but it’s there and it’s there to be found and that’s the...rather nice feeling’.

Respondent D didn’t express as much confusion initially as respondents B and C but tried out a variety of interpretations. She noticed the foregrounding of **word** through capitalisation. Then the sounds of the poem including rhythm and rhyme were discussed. She did express some points of concern about the poem ‘I don’t know who’s speaking’ and after more probing focused on the word ‘Still’ (line 4). ‘I’m not sure what that means there it could be ambiguous, it could be ambivalent’. Her confusion could be linked to the grammatical ambivalence in the function of **still**. Towards the end of the protocol she continued to express confusion about the first four lines which seemed to have deepened. She remarked that there were ‘uncertainties’, ‘it’s someone who’s in a turmoil...maybe that’s why I get the sense of sort of darkness...I do get the sense of nothingness’.

This respondent didn’t find calm in the poem but felt ‘it’s almost like a void...it’s the darkness and it’s the whirling...into nothingness...a sort of eddying into a void’. ‘It’s the feeling of the movement I think in the rhythm and the rhyme. Here she is responding to a lack of closure as the alliteration and assonance and the asyndeton in lines 4 to 7 are working against the epiphoric effects of ‘word’ ‘world’ and ‘whirled’.

Like Respondent Band unlike Respondent C she seemed to find the disorientation and diffuseness worrying. For her the semi-colon on line 6 was not a point of first reference where some sense begins for B and C but ‘it just seems to pick up pace em... and it doesn’t stop and I find it’s quite frightening, it’s quite frightening it’s not stopping until we get to the silent word’, ‘It’s the repetition and it’s the speed um of that, it’s all one sentence...despite the punctuation there.’ so in this respondent the emotional state is indicative of the loss of rational control and confusion is created as a result of delayed categorisation.

7. Conclusion.

This study was an attempt to devise a replicable framework for empirical work. It was a small scale pilot study. In perceiving the meditative quality a reader may feel confusion or disturbance, but will not necessarily attain a state where meditation can be said to have taken place. Respondents A,B and D were able to *perceive* a meditative *quality* in the poem and some sense that respondent C was able to *perceive* a meditative *quality* in the poem and experience the state of meditation.

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ⁱ The readiness to respond in a certain way. (Tsur 1992:11)

ⁱⁱ a term coming from the Christian Jesuit tradition

ⁱⁱⁱ 'the tendency of the human brain to make wholes out of parts, and wholes which are more than simply the sum of the parts.' (Wales 2001) Emmott (1997) gives a useful description of how seeing the front wheels and bonnet of a car around the side of a building lead us to assume that the whole vehicle is there even if we cannot see its entirety.

^{iv} When stressed syllables converge with metrical strong positions, and unstressed syllables with weak positions, metre is regular and predictable. This may not be the case in meditative poetry.