Chapter six Figurative Language 2

Symbol, Allegory

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**The Road Not Taken  
Robert Frost  
1874-1963**

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,

And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.

Oh, I kept the first for another day!

Yet knowing how way leads on to way,

I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

**A Noiseless Patient Spider  
Walt Whitman  
1819-1892**

A NOISELESS, patient spider,

I mark’d, where, on a little promontory, it stood, isolated;

Mark’d how, to explore the vacant, vast surrounding,

It launch’d forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself;

Ever unreeling them—ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my Soul, where you stand,

Surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space,

Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,—seeking the spheres, to connect them;

Till the bridge you will need, be form’d—till the ductile anchor hold;

Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my Soul.

**The Sick Rose   
William Blake  
1757-1827**

O Rose thou art sick.

The invisible worm,

That flies in the night

In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed

Of crimson joy:

And his dark secret love

Does thy life destroy.

**Digging   
Seamus Heaney   
b. 1939**

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound

When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:

My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds

Bends low, comes up twenty years away

Stooping in rhythm through potato drills

Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft

Against the inside knee was levered firmly.

He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep

To scatter new potatoes that we picked,

Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.

Just like his old man.

My grandfather cut more turf in a day

Than any other man on Toner’s bog.

Once I carried him milk in a bottle

Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up

To drink it, then fell to right away

Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods

Over his shoulder, going down and down

For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap

Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge

Through living roots awaken in my head.

But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests.

I’ll dig with it.

**To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time   
Robert Herrick  
1591-1674**

Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,

Old Time is still a-flying;

And this same flower that smiles today

Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,

The higher he’s a-getting,

The sooner will his race be run,

And nearer he’s to setting.

That age is best which is the first,

When youth and blood are warmer;

But being spent, the worse, and worst

Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,

And while ye may, go marry;

For having lost but once your prime,

You may forever tarry.

**Redemption  
George Herbert 1593-1633**

Having been tenant long to a rich lord,

Not thriving, I resolvèd to be bold,

And make a suit unto him, to afford

A new small-rented lease, and cancel th’ old.

In heaven at his manor I him sought;

They told me there that he was lately gone

About some land, which he had dearly bought

Long since on earth, to take possessiòn.

I straight returned, and knowing his great birth,

Sought him accordingly in great resorts;

In cities, theaters, gardens, parks, and courts;

At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth

Of thieves and murderers; there I him espied,

Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, and died.

**Fire and Ice   
Robert Frost  
1874-1963**

Some say the world will end in fire,

Some say in ice.

From what I’ve tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire.

But if it had to perish twice,

I think I know enough of hate

To say that for destruction ice

Is also great

And would suffice.

**Ulysses  
Alfred, Lord Tennyson  
1809-1892**

It little profits that an idle king,

By this still hearth, among these barren crags,

Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole

Unequal laws unto a savage race,

That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink

Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd

Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those

That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when

Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades

Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;

For always roaming with a hungry heart

Much have I seen and known; cities of men

And manners, climates, councils, governments,

Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;

And drunk delight of battle with my peers,

Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

I am a part of all that I have met;

Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'

Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades

For ever and forever when I move.

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,

To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!

As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life

Were all too little, and of one to me

Little remains: but every hour is saved

From that eternal silence, something more,

A bringer of new things; and vile it were

For some three suns to store and hoard myself,

And this gray spirit yearning in desire

To follow knowledge like a sinking star,

Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,

To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—

Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil

This labour, by slow prudence to make mild

A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees

Subdue them to the useful and the good.

Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere

Of common duties, decent not to fail

In offices of tenderness, and pay

Meet adoration to my household gods,

When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:

There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,

Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—

That ever with a frolic welcome took

The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed

Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;

Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;

Death closes all: but something ere the end,

Some work of noble note, may yet be done,

Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:

The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep

Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,

'T is not too late to seek a newer world.

Push off, and sitting well in order smite

The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds

To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths

Of all the western stars, until I die.

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:

It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,

And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'

We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

**Curiosity**   
**Alastair Reid**  **b. 1926**

may have killed the cat; more likely

the cat was just unlucky, or else curious

to see what death was like, having no cause

to go on licking paws, or fathering

litter on litter of kittens, predictably.

Nevertheless, to be curious

is dangerous enough. To distrust

what is always said, what seems

to ask odd questions, interfere in dreams,

leave home, smell rats, have hunches

do not endear cats to those doggy circles

where well-smelt baskets, suitable wives, good lunches

are the order of things, and where prevails

much wagging of incurious heads and tails.

Face it. Curiosity

will not cause us to die--

only lack of it will.

Never to want to see

the other side of the hill

or that improbable country

where living is an idyll

(although a probable hell)

would kill us all.

Only the curious

have, if they live, a tale

worth telling at all.

Dogs say cats love too much, are irresponsible,

are changeable, marry too many wives,

desert their children, chill all dinner tables

with tales of their nine lives.

Well, they are lucky. Let them be

nine-lived and contradictory,

curious enough to change, prepared to pay

the cat price, which is to die

and die again and again,

each time with no less pain.

A cat minority of one

is all that can be counted on

to tell the truth. And what cats have to tell

on each return from hell

is this: that dying is what the living do,

that dying is what the loving do,

and that dead dogs are those who do not know

that dying is what, to live, each has to do.

**The Writer  
Richard Wilbur b. 1921**

In her room at the prow of the house

Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,

My daughter is writing a story.

I pause in the stairwell, hearing

From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys

Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.

Young as she is, the stuff

Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy:

I wish her a lucky passage.

But now it is she who pauses,

As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.

A stillness greatens, in which

The whole house seems to be thinking,

And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor

Of strokes, and again is silent.

I remember the dazed starling

Which was trapped in that very room, two years ago;

How we stole in, lifted a sash

And retreated, not to affright it;

And how for a helpless hour, through the crack of the door,

We watched the sleek, wild, dark

And iridescent creature

Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove

To the hard floor, or the desk-top,

And wait then, humped and bloody,

For the wits to try it again; and how our spirits

Rose when, suddenly sure,

It lifted off from a chair-back,

Beating a smooth course for the right window

And clearing the sill of the world.

It is always a matter, my darling,

Of life or death, as I had forgotten. I wish

What I wished you before, but harder.

**Sun and Moon  
Jay Macpherson  
b. 1931**

A strong man, a fair woman,   
Bound fast in love,

Parted by ordered heaven,

Punishment prove.

He suffers gnawing fired:

She in her frost

Beams in his sight, but dies

When he seems lost.

Not till the poles are joined

Shall the retreat

Of fierce brother from lost sister

End, and they meet.

**Hymn to God My God, In My Sickness   
John Donne   
1572-1631**

Since I am coming to that holy room,

Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,

I shall be made thy music; as I come

I tune the instrument here at the door,

And what I must do then, think here before.

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown

Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie

Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown

That this is my south-west discovery,

Per fretum febris, by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits I see my west;

For, though their currents yield return to none,

What shall my west hurt me? As west and east

In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,

So death doth touch the resurrection.

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are

The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?

Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,

All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,

Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem.

We think that Paradise and Calvary,

Christ's cross, and Adam's tree, stood in one place;

Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me;

As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,

May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.

So, in his purple wrapp'd, receive me, Lord;

By these his thorns, give me his other crown;

And as to others' souls I preach'd thy word,

Be this my text, my sermon to mine own:

"Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down."

**I Started Early--- Took my Dog**  
**Emily Dickinson**  
**1830-1886**

I started Early - Took my Dog -

And visited the Sea -

The Mermaids in the Basement

Came out to look at me -

And Frigates - in the Upper Floor

Extended Hempen Hands -

Presuming Me to be a Mouse -

Aground - upon the Sands -

But no Man moved Me - till the Tide

Went past my simple Shoe -

And past my Apron - and my Belt

And past my Bodice - too -

And made as He would eat me up -

As wholly as a Dew

Upon a Dandelion's Sleeve -

And then - I started - too -

And He - He followed - close behind -

I felt His Silver Heel

Upon my Ankle - Then my Shoes

Would overflow with Pearl -

Until We met the Solid Town -

No One He seemed to know

And bowing - with a Mighty look -

At me - The Sea withdrew -