

Preface

When I was a young high-school teacher in a youth-village near Jerusalem, I said during a discussion of Tchernichovsky's poem "Nocturno" that the poet expressed in it his wish to integrate with nature. One of the students asked "What does he mean by 'integrating with nature'? Does he want to sleep among the rocks?". It may have been intended as a mischievous, teasing question. But I decided not to handle it as such. I suddenly realised that I had been making unquestioning use of a Romantic cliché acquired at the university. It took me decades to come up with what I could accept as a fairly satisfactory answer. Years later I met that student at a students' reunion, and told him that now I had an answer to his question. But he did not remember that he had ever asked it. This book is for people who want to know what we mean when, by way of reading poems, we use such clichés as "The poet wants to integrate with nature", or "dissolve in eternity, or in nothingness"; or "this poem displays an ecstatic quality", "this poem conveys the union of a human ego with a non-ego", "the 'I' in this poem is deeply drown'd in self-oblivion" or "the poet has got a glimpse of an inaccessible reality", or "of the beyond", or "this poem conveys a mystic insight".

This is a book by a practicing nonbeliever who feels that he has had significant intuitions concerning religious and mystic poems, and who believes that it is worthwhile to try to account for them in a principled manner. It is not a monograph on the varieties of religious or mystic poetry. It has no claims for comprehensiveness of any sort. Rather, it explores selected strategies of coping with certain kinds of religious and mystic experiences in a limited area of religious and mystic poetry. Rather than offering a wide scope and a wide variety of texts, I shall go into minute details of a small number of poems. The choice of such a strategy may be justified by the purpose of my inquiry.

As the motto of this book suggests, it is not at all with ideas that one writes poetry; it is with words. This study does not try to explore religious ideas for their own sake, but rather how religious ideas are turned into verbal imitations of religious experience by poetic structure. We face a domain replete with paradoxes. It is not only the great paradoxes of religion and mysticism, but also those involved in the literary endeavour. We explore how poets attempt to express the ineffable by using words; and some of them are quite successful in doing this. Meditation aims at the voluntary surrender of voluntary control. Some meditative poems attempt to convey the resulting nonconceptual state of mind by using conceptual language.

The issue at stake here is how does the poet induce his readers to perceive a non-conceptual state of mind emerging from a stretch of conceptual language. In other words, we are dealing with the translation of perceived qualities from reality to some semiotic system, or from one semiotic system to another. Such semiotic systems not only open possibilities, but, at the same time, impose constraints. The preci-

sion of translation depends on how fine-grained the sign-units of the target system are. What we are after is the conditions which arouse an illusion that the experience suggested by the stretch of words is authentic. I have isolated four conditions the presence of which may induce a reader to perceive a group of signs (such as, e.g., a stretch of words) as displaying some nonconceptual, ineffable quality, that is, evoke a perception that the two are somehow “equivalent”:

- * the most salient features of the source phenomenon are represented;
- * a relatively large number of distinguishing characteristics of the source phenomenon are sampled for representation;
- * the target system is sufficiently fine-grained to capture the most salient features of the source phenomenon;
- * the nearest options of the target system are chosen to represent features of a source phenomenon.

These conditions would apply to compact disks rendering music as well as to mystic poetry conveying mystic qualities. A meditative or mystic poem does not *arouse* a meditative or mystic state of mind; it can only convey certain theological ideas or, at best, *display* some perceptual quality that may be perceived as equivalent to a meditative or mystic experience. It is the afore-mentioned four conditions that govern the conversion of ideas of religious or mystic interest into the verbal imitation of some meditative or mystic quality and evoke a perception that the experience and its verbal imitation are somehow “equivalent”. To paraphrase Gérard Genette on Rimbaud’s “Voyelles”, the global correspondence creates the illusion of a feature-by-feature analogy (Genette, 1966: 152; cf. Tsur, 1992b: 120): we detect, so to speak, a subjective mystic or meditative experience in the text. Moreover, the poetic codes of romantic and symbolistic poetry, for instance, are more fine-grained regarding the features required for conveying subjective experience than many other poetic codes. Consequently I found, paradoxically enough, that some of my best examples for the present conception of mystic and meditative poetry were secular poems—romantic or symbolistic.

Much discussion of mystic poetry translates the poems into their own terms, that is, using and elucidating the terms of a conceptual system developed by the mystics themselves. Yeats’s poems are frequently discussed in terms of his *A Vision*, or by invoking Swedenborg. Blake’s poems are frequently interpreted in terms of a conceptual system abstracted from his visionary works. The same happens to Ibn Gabirol’s philosophical and devotional poetry, in which his poetic ideas are traced back to his philosophical treatise *Fons Vitae*, consisting of a series of Platonic dialogues between Master and Disciple. Such an approach frequently obscures the uniqueness of poetic expression. The present endeavour is radically different: it attempts to use a conceptual system involving cognitive, linguistic, and stylistic terms, to describe the interaction of verbal structures with their contents in a poem; and to account, systematically, for the perceived subjective quality regularly associated with such interactions between contents and verbal structures.

The present study was conducted at a relatively advanced stage of my professional career. This had both an advantage and disadvantage. On the one hand, over the years I have developed a conceptual system that may yield significant insights into the nature of religious and mystic poetry. On the other hand, I have already “used up” some of my most illuminating examples in earlier discussions. Much that I wrote on hypnotic-ecstatic poetry and the poetry of altered states of consciousness in my earlier publications, mainly in my *Toward A Theory of Cognitive Poetics* (1992 a) and *The Road to “Kubla Khan”* (1987b), should have been reproduced here. I particularly regret that I could not reproduce here my discussion of Baudelaire’s “Correspondances” (Tsur, 1992a: 455–470) along with Rimbaud’s “Voyelles” (Tsur, 1992b: 111–135), the ecstatic rhythms and mystic visions yielded by Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (Tsur, 1987b), and the stylistic distinctions between Whitman’s “illustrative” and “meditative” catalogues (Tsur, 1992a: 416–428). I have contributed a chapter on Cognitive Poetics to a recent book, *Cognitive Stylistics—Language and Cognition in Text Analysis*; it includes a detailed close reading of Keats’s “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles” as a poem whose structure suggests an altered state of consciousness. Here I have only reproduced in Chapter 1 part of my discussion of Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” (from Tsur, 1992a: 447–450). At the infernal pole, I regrettably had to leave out two of my favourite passages from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, on the Hellish perspectives suggested by “At once as far as Angels’ ken he views / The dismal situation waste and wild,” etc. (I: 59–64), and on Satan’s endless fall, headlong, “from the’etherial sky [...] to bottomless perdition” (I: 44–49). Elsewhere I have offered a close reading of the former passage (Tsur 1977: 180–185; 1992: 85–91), and discussed at considerable length the “perceptual forces” generated by gestalt and prosodic resources in the latter (Tsur 1977: 207–212; 1992: 148–153; 1998: 256–264). The last-mentioned reference also includes an empirical study of the rhythmical performance of that “endless” run-on sentence. I have published during the years three Hebrew books and a number of articles on mediaeval Hebrew poetry, a vast section of which is devotional. I could include only a very small part of this in the present book.

The paper that constitutes Chapter 11 was written back in 1972–1973, and has not been previously published in English. In time, I took from it the comparison of Milton’s “Nativity Ode” to corresponding passages in *Paradise Lost*, and included it in another book (Tsur, 1992a: 97–100); I thought, however, that that would not be sufficient reason to omit it from here. The paper that constitutes Chapter 13 was Chapter 3 in an earlier book of mine (Tsur, 1987a); I felt however, that the present book would be incomplete without it. Much of the theoretical machinery of this book has been developed earlier, and is reproduced here from earlier publications. Some chapters of this book have already been published in learned journals separately. The Chapter “Poem, Prayer and Meditation” was published in *Style* 1974. Chapter 12 has been published in *PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*, <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipasa/journal/articles/tsur02.htm> (1998). A drastically abbreviated version of Chapter 4 has been published in *Pragmatics and Cognition* (2002). The Hieronymus Bosch part of Chapter 10 is

going to be published in a special volume on the grotesque of the *Psychotherapy Patient* series; an abbreviated version of Chapter 8 will be published in a special issue on literature and consciousness in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*.

Motti Benari co-operated with me during part of the project and made valuable contributions throughout the study; in Chapters 1 and 4 he is outright co-author.

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

“Introduction: Means, Effects, and Assumptions”. The first section of this introductory chapter offers an overview of attempts to define varieties of religious, mystic and meditative experiences. The second section points out that there is a religious and a secular variety of mystic poetry. A close reading of Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” is proposed as an instance of a romantic ecstatic poem. The third section raises the problem of adequacy in the conversion of perceived qualities from reality to some semiotic system, or from one semiotic system to another. The issue is introduced via an excursus on onomatopoeia. A sound imitation is *perceived as* equivalent to the imitated reality if the target semiotic system is sufficiently fine-grained in the relevant respects, if as many salient features of the source phenomenon are represented as possible, and if the most relevant options of the target system are chosen. Different semiotic systems may represent different salient features of the source phenomenon. The same applies, with the necessary changes, to representing the salient features of mystic experiences in the verbal medium. This may explain why some of the best examples for my conception of mystic poetry are secular, romantic or symbolistic, poems. Poetic codes developed by romantic and symbolistic poetry are more fine-grained than some other poetic codes precisely in those respects that can best convey the salient features of a mystic experience, or display a mystic quality. Finally the problem of ineffability is addressed.

Chapter 2

“Poem, Prayer and Meditation”. Is the devotional poem a poem, a prayer, or a meditation? This chapter offers a distinction between these three notions in terms of Roman Jakobson’s model of language functions (Jakobson, 1960). In *poem* the poetic function is dominant, in *prayer* it is the “conative” function, whereas in *meditation* the “emotive” function. It is argued that these differences in the dominant function entail further logical, semantic, and structural differences. It also demonstrates that one and the same Holy Sonnet by Donne can be read as a poem, a prayer or a meditation at different times, following up the changing implications of the changing dominant functions. This chapter quotes the article “Aesthetic Ambiguity” by the psychoanalyst Ernst Kris and the logician Abraham Kaplan, who argue that ambiguity is beneficial for an aesthetic object, but detrimental to a liturgical one.

Chapter 3

“The Ultimate Limit—Transcendence and Appresentation”. This chapter adopts from Gordon D. Kaufman an archetypal situation in which, he says, people use “God-talk”, that is, language in which such terms as *God*, or *the gods*, *angels*, *demons*, *the other world*, and so on, occur. “In this respect the idea of God functions as a *lim-*

iting concept, that is, a concept that does not primarily have content in its own right drawn directly out of a specific experience, but refers to that which we do *not* know but which is the ultimate limit of all our experiences. What literary movements as different as Metaphysical poetry, Romantic poetry and Absurd drama or literature of extreme situations (e.g., Kafka) have in common is a feeling of human limitedness, being confined to the “here and now”; but against this common background of shared feeling illuminating distinctions can be made. Metaphysical and Romantic poetry strive, with different emphases, to transcend the absolute limit, whereas the Absurd assumes that “God is dead”, and that any attempt at transcendence is doomed to failure. Kaufman also puts forward two models of transcendence (and of God): the *interpersonal* and the *teleological*. These two models of transcendence lead to quite diverse theological conceptions, and different kinds of poetry.

Chapter 4.

“‘Composition of Place’, Experiential Set, and the Meditative Poem”. This chapter discusses two crucial aspects of Jesuit meditation and what Louis Martz calls “Poetry of Meditation”. Martz and some seventeenth century Jesuits claim that on the “well-making” of “seeing the place” or “the composition of place” depends all the success of meditation. We raise the question of what is the relationship between “seeing the place” and the success of meditation. Meditation involves an essential paradox: it requires that one abandon voluntary control voluntarily. This is the problem solved by “composition of place”. Ornstein (1975) argued that both meditation and orientation are typically right-hemisphere activities of the brain. “Seeing the place” activates the orientation mechanism and puts the brain into an operative mode which conforms with meditation. This hypothesis was supported by a recent SPECT-imaging study of the brain during meditation (Newberg et al., 2001). This issue is crucial for an understanding of a paradox in poetic communication, too: How does conceptual and sequential language communicate nonconceptual experiences? It will thus loom large in most chapters of this book. We also have to face the apparently unexplained fact that the “Composition of Place” is more meticulously observed in romantic nature poetry than in the “meditative poem” proper (Martz suggests that some of the best romantic nature poems belong to the meditative genre). It is in this context that we analyse Donne’s Holy Sonnet 7 (“At the round earths imagin’d corners, blow”). The other aspect discussed is that of mental set. Tellegen devised a test to assess the personality variable “absorption”. This is the personality variable that predicts hypnotisability. He distinguishes between “instrumental set” and “experiential set”. Absorption is defined as a propensity to adopt the experiential set. Again, for most people it is not easy to relinquish the instrumental in favour of the experiential set. Both hypnosis and meditation presuppose an experiential set. In the anonymous Spanish sonnet “To Christ Crucified” we follow the process by which it switches from an instrumental to an experiential set. We do not attempt to encompass meditation as a whole, only to point out certain cognitive links between structure and perceived effects.

Chapter 5.

“Mystic Poetry—Metaphysical, Baroque and Romantic”. An important assumption of the present study is that devotional, meditative, or mystic poetry is first of all poetry, shaped and constrained by the possibilities and constraints inherent in the various poetic styles. This chapter adopts from John Crowe Ransom (1951) a distinction between three “ontological” models: Physical, Platonic and Metaphysical poetry, of which I shall be using the last two only. In Platonic poetry, a variety of images illustrate one idea; in metaphysical poetry, the various aspects of one image may each suggest a different idea. Both neoclassical and romantic poetry are “Platonic”; but the former focuses on the ideas as represented by highly general images, whereas the latter typically subsumes the concrete images in a particular, coherent landscape. The orientation mechanism evoked by the landscape renders the compact abstractions diffuse, which may be perceived as an intense, supersensuous presence. This chapter discusses the handling of a metaphysical image in a very minor seventeenth century poem by Quarles (Metaphysical poetry at its height is discussed in chapters 2, 4, 6 and 8) and two exquisite pieces of “Platonic” poetry by the German baroque poet Andreas Gryphius, and the English romantic William Wordsworth. In both sonnets, the octet offers a landscape description in which the abstractions are perceived as some supersensuous presence; the sestet offers a “colloquy” that leads to an insight into the human significance of the preceding landscape description.

Chapter 6.

“The Sublime and the Absolute Limit”. This chapter takes up the issue of the ultimate limit and its transcendence from chapter 3, and the issue of orientation from chapter 4. The notion of the “sublime” is introduced as a means for rendering the ultimate limit apprehensible: that which is sublime exceeds the observer’s ability to perceive it in one intuition. In this chapter I first explore the sublime in biblical poetry. Then I examine how romantic and metaphysical poetry handle these problems. I discuss a quatrain from Keats’s sonnet “When I have fears”, and Donne’s Holy Sonnet 5 (“I am a little world”). In the former I examine how “Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance” and “to trace / their shadow with the magic hand of chance” arouse a vivid intuition of having had a glimpse of the world beyond the ultimate limit. In Donne’s sonnet, the apostrophe “You which beyond that heaven which was most high / found new worlds” reflects the crisis and disorientation when the ultimate limit turns out not to be the ultimate limit; when beyond the “ultimate” limit new worlds are discovered (we are in the seventeenth century). In another poem, Donne writes: “The New Philosophy calls all in doubt”—the same crisis is presented in the abstract. In Holy Sonnet 5, the self-specifying information of the orientation space is destroyed. Nonetheless, the numinous is revealed *within* the ultimate limits: the poem ends with a verbal allusion to a verse from *Psalms* which Rudolf Otto quotes as an instance of the numinous. This point is reached not through transcendence, but a painful psychological process: the fire of “envie and lust” is turned into a fire purifying the heart.

Chapter 7.

“Rhythmic Structure and Religious Poetry—The Numinous, the Infernal, and *Agnus Dei*”. This chapter attempts to establish reasoned, systematic relationships between poetic structures on the one hand, and, on the other, poetic qualities of religious interest, regularly attributed to them by generations of poets, readers and critics. It offers a theoretical framework which may account for perceived qualities of poems by relying on an interaction between the rhythm, stanza structure, and semantic, syntactic and thematic elements. It draws upon two notions: “convergent and divergent poetry”, and “double-edgedness”. Two poetic strategies are considered: that which evokes a stable world, and that which indicates a vague, unstable world; and both are “double edged”. By achieving cognitive stability, you irrecoverably lose evasive, undifferentiated precategory information, which is crucial for adequate adjustment to a world-in-flux. And conversely, by abandoning cognitive stability, evasive precategory information essential for adequate adaptation becomes accessible; but the sense of control and security is weakened or lost. The same holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, of prosodic structures. A fairly predictable meter may be perceived as rational, “trance-inductive”, or imposing a simplifying structure on reality. When meter is less predictable, and the clear-cut contrasts between prominent and non-prominent events become blurred, it may arouse awe, apprehension, and anxiety, owing to the undermining of security; or the sequence of blurred shapes and contrasts may be perceived as isomorphic with emotional processes and mystic experiences. According to Tennyson, it is the vagueness of Milton’s hell that renders it awful; it is vague on all levels: thematic, semantic, syntactic, and prosodic. In a nightmare passage from Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, by contrast, the symmetrical stanza and the all-too-regular rhythm appear to undermine the infernal atmosphere. The numinous, “spell-weaving”, potential of regular rhythms—as opposed to their simplifying, naive potential—is explored in Blake’s “The Tyger” and “The Lamb”.

Chapter 8.

“Visual and Auditory Ingenuities in Mystic Poetry”. One of the central assumptions of the present study is that mystic or religious poetry reaches the less rational layers of the mind by interfering with the smooth functioning of the cognitive system. In this way, the experience is affected not only by its contents, but also by the perceived quality of the structure of the underlying mental process. Mystic or religious poetry occurs in vastly different styles. The present study distinguishes between two prototypes of such styles, based on drastic and on smooth interference, respectively. The present chapter examines poems based on a very special kind of drastic disruption, of which George Herbert was the grand master. It considers the relationship between mystic poetry and “typographic foregrounding”. In this relationship both mystic and aesthetic principles are involved. At the same time I also explore certain psychoanalytic and cognitive mechanisms underlying the mystic and aesthetic effects. Two opposite tendencies are pointed out. On the one hand, the letters of the alphabet may induce magic and mystic processes of enormous force. On the other

hand, human society may apply defense mechanisms against such processes, fossilising them into stylistic mannerisms and ingenuities. A wide range of ingenuities are discussed in George Herbert's poetry: visual, as in the following less well-known poem,

Ana- $\left\{\begin{array}{c} \text{MARY} \\ \text{ARMY} \end{array}\right\}$ gram

How well her name and *Army* doth present,
In whom the *Lord of Hosts* did pitch his tent!

and auditory ingenuities, as, e.g., echo plays, or his "pruned rhymes", in which it is uncertain whether the mannerism is visual or auditory; and, eventually, such notoriously ingenious devices as

For who can look for lesse, that loveth $\left\{\begin{array}{l} \text{Life?} \\ \text{Strife?} \end{array}\right.$

or Herbert's famous "Easter Wings".

Chapter 9.

"Oceanic Dedifferentiation, 'Thing Destruction' and Mystic Poetry". This chapter takes its point of departure from Anton Ehrenzweig (1970: 135), who speaks of "a creative ego rhythm that swings between focussed gestalt and an oceanic undifferentiation. [...] The London psychoanalysts D.W. Winnicott and Marion Milner, have stressed the importance for a creative ego to be able to suspend the boundaries between self and not-self in order to become more at home in the world of reality where the objects and self are clearly held apart. [...] Seen in this way, the oceanic experience of fusion, of a "return to the womb", represents the minimum content of all art; Freud saw in it only the basic religious experience. But it seems now that it belongs to all creativity". To illustrate what I *don't* mean by oceanic dedifferentiation, I quote Ehrenzweig on the Homunkulus episode in *Faust*. He claims that Homunkulus encased in a glass womb is a perfect image of oceanic dedifferentiation. I claim that, on the contrary, the focused gestalt of this image may be, at best, an allegory of this state. By contrast, Faust's "immersion in an abstraction" image, "Disciple, up! untiring, hasten! / to bathe thy breast in morning-red!", does evoke the detection of such an experience. Indeed, traditional *Faust* criticism claimed that these lines indicated that Faust had had a momentary mystic experience. The main bulk of the chapter is a close reading of three poems from three different cultural periods in three languages: a Hebrew text from the early Middle Ages, from the so-called Mercabah mysticism; a poem by the seventeenth century English poet Richard Crashaw; and a love poem by Baudelaire ("Hymne"). The chapter demonstrates that all three texts are based on strategies of dissolving focussed gestalts into thing-free and gestalt-free qualities and suspending the boundaries between self and not-self or, at least, between the objects. Most astonishing is the finding that the three texts tend to have recourse to similar grammatical manipulations for achieving these perceptual qualities.

Chapter 10

“The Infernal and the Hybrid—Bosch and Dante”. I assume that not only numinous, mystic, and meditative qualities can be conveyed in poetry by interference with the smooth functioning of cognitive and psychodynamic processes, but demonic and infernal qualities as well. These principles are applied here, in the visual medium, to traditional representations of the devil and Hieronymus Bosch’s infernal creatures; and, in poetry, to Dante’s *Inferno*. Hell can be rendered awful not only through threat of some painful punishment, but also by suspending the sense of intelligibility, control, comfort and security afforded by ordinary consciousness, that is, by suspending the clear-cut boundaries of objects, thought categories, and blurring the divisions into which the world is marked off. This, in the final resort, may evoke a response of “exasperated helplessness”, and “emotional disorientation”. The key term is the “grotesque”. In the devil’s image, the boundaries between man and goat are suspended; in Bosch’s tree-man between human, plant, eggshell, etc. In Bosch taboos related to excretions are flouted, too. In Dante we encounter plants or flames that reveal “the anguished workings of a human mind and heart”. In relation to both Bosch and Dante the weaknesses of source-hunting scholarship are pointed out, as compared to cognitive and stylistic studies.

Chapter 11.

“Let There be Light and the Emanation of Light—The Act of Creation in Ibn Gabirol and Milton”. This chapter has a thematic and a stylistic focus. From the thematic point of view I am taking up a problem of great theological interest: the fusion of the personal and the Neo-Platonic conception of the Creator. However, it is not the theological issue which I address here, but the stylistic problem of fusion. I make use of two dichotomies: “split and integrated focus” and “convergent and divergent style”. The terms “focus” and “convergent and divergent” have been imported into literary criticism from optics, suggesting that they refer to perceptual qualities. The two central texts in this chapter are one section from Ibn Gabirol’s “Kingly Crown” and the creation in Milton by the Son=Word. To use Dr. Johnson’s words, in both works “the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked together with violence”; but whereas in the former attention is focussed on their incompatibility, in the latter the transition is made, by linguistic manipulations, as smooth as possible. Finally, I present Milton versus Milton. *Paradise Lost* is usually categorised by traditional scholars as a baroque poem; Herbert Grierson included “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity” in his anthology of Metaphysical poets. In this last section of the chapter I compare strikingly similar passages from the two poems, pointing out the elusive cues the cumulative effect of which is to integrate focus in the former poem, and split it in the latter.

Chapter 12.

“Light, Fire, Prison: A Cognitive Analysis of Religious Imagery in Poetry”. This chapter explores the cognitive foundations and the literary applications of spatial im-

agery. There seem to be several good reasons to have recourse to spatial imagery; this chapter explores two of them. On the one hand, concrete visual images constitute a bundle of features and, as such, allow for the efficient coding of information. This, in turn, grants the cognitive system great flexibility and efficiency both in creative thinking and in poetry. A single image encoding a variety of meaning units can be regarded as an instance of the aesthetic principle “unity-in-variety”. This also can be said to save considerable mental energy and, according to a Freudian conception, one possible source of pleasure is the saving of mental energy. On the other hand, the recoding of information into spatial imagery may help the cognitive system to overcome some of its inherent limitations. Thus, fast-changing or lowly-differentiated information may be recoded into a more stable and differentiated spatial template, as in the case of sound pitch recoded into musical scales; or conceptually presented information may become less differentiated in perception, owing to recoding into Gestalt-free and thing-free imagery. Such lowly-differentiated qualities may be reinforced by the mechanisms of spatial orientation, or the mechanisms for alleviating cognitive overload. From such a perspective, the Lakoffean conception of conceptual metaphor based on spatial imagery appears to be congenial to human cognition, but only a small part of a complex situation. This chapter recapitulates two stylistic modes, “Metaphysical” and “Mystic-Romantic”. Surprisingly, the techniques by which these opposite effects are achieved are quite similar. The Metaphysical mode seeks to yield an insight into matters of religious significance in a flash, through a sudden transition from complexity to unity. The phenomenological quality of this kind of insight is typically witty. The “Romantic” or “Mystic” mode seeks to achieve the verbal imitation of some experiential contact, of an intuitive rather than conceptual nature, with some reality that lies beyond the *absolute limit* of our experience. Some poems, at least, are remarkably successful in translating those mystic ideas into verbal imitations of mystic experiences. We shall discuss at great length the handling of the images of light, fire and prison in Akhnaton’s old Egyptian inscription, in the works of four English poets, Sir Philip Sidney, John Donne, William Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot, and of two Mediaeval poets, Hebrew and Armenian, Shlomo Ibn Gabirol and Kostandin of Erznka. Ibn Gabirol’s and Kostandin’s texts also touch upon the problem of fusing the personalistic and Light-emanation conceptions of creation.

Chapter 13.

“The Asymmetry of Sacred, Sexual, and Filial Love in Figurative Language”. Speaking of sacred love in terms of sexual and filial love is more natural than the other way around; they give rise, therefore, to opposite stylistic effects, emotional and witty respectively. Some sixteenth and seventeenth century poets, such as Michael Drayton and John Donne, do indeed achieve a witty effect by speaking of sexual love in terms of sacred love. After many small-scale examples from English and Hebrew poetry, a whole sonnet is discussed, Spenser’s “Most glorious Lord of Life”. The first twelve lines elaborate on the love of Christ who sacrificed himself for humanity. In the final couplet there is a surprise: “So, let us love, dear love, like

as we ought / Love is the lesson which our Lord us taught". Such a punch line would be more appropriate in one of Donne's libertine poems than in Spenser's love poem. Two literary traditions are relevant to this sonnet. Viewed in these different traditions, two opposite effects arise in the poem. According to the Platonic conception, love between the sexes is the first step toward the higher harmonies that govern the world (this Platonic principle is reflected in Ibn Gabirol's verses as well, quoted above, in chapter 3). In such a reading wit is rather moderate. By contrast, according to the conventions of the English sonnet, the final couplet should effect a surprise ending, even a reversal of all that's said in the preceding lines. In such a reading the poem offers some extreme metaphysical wit.