

IMAGERY

The creation and crafting of images is of central importance in writing poetry. An image is a picture conveyed to the reader's mind. All the senses can be drawn on to create imagery, not only sight. As a poet you can think and feel through your images. They should not be showy, drawing attention to themselves. As defined by Aristotle, a good metaphor 'implies the intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilar'. The art is to see a common quality underlying two quite disparate things, bringing them together to create an arresting image. Similes are comparisons that use the words 'like' or 'as' – they make an imaginative link between two things, but keep them separate: for example, 'when the evening is spread out against the sky / like a patient etherized upon a table' (T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'). Similes are one of the most popular poetic devices, entering common speech in expressions such as 'wet as an otter's pocket'. Metaphor collapses this distance, uniting the two things compared, as in 'the glossy black cocoon of her PVC dress'. It is in this transformation that the power of metaphor lies. Metaphor redefines, sees something fresh in the ordinary, everyday world, defamiliarizing the familiar, fusing two dissimilars by giving one the properties of the other. Do not strain after your comparisons, forcing the images.

In Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy' she refers to her father as

a black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years,

a metaphor which encloses a simile.

A poem reverberates by means of a pattern of images which refract each other and interrelate: the pattern is also part of the structure and meaning. In my poem 'As Mad As a Hatter's Child' various images of roundness (bowler hats, barrels, horses' flanks, men's stomachs, bonnets) reflect the key image of pregnancy and also evoke the nineteenth-century world of this poem with its theme of the deaths of hatters' babies and young children.

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