Towards Lifeworlds: Poetry as Sound in School Curricula

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Abstract

Poetry has a place in literature and language arts curricula across the world, but articulation of the conception of poetry underpinning curricular detail is rarely overt. Usually it can at best be inferred only from the organisational structure of a curriculum, its categories, headings and content. Existing structures suggest a view of poetry that readily assumes its association with printed text and the written word, though the possibility that poetry may just as much be a medium of sound, heard and uttered aloud, is relatively unelaborated. This paper attempts to articulate a rationale to underpin recognition in curricular detail of poetry's existence in sound as well as in print. In doing so it must attend to the aesthetic character of poetry, its very nature.

1. Introduction

Details from Australian, American, Canadian and English curricular documentation for schools convey subtle differences in attention to poetry. The phased national implementation of the Australian language and literature curriculum establishes a structure where the three key strands of language, literature and literacy are interwoven, fostering understanding of "aspects of Indigenous languages and culture in the English curriculum". This heritage supports attention to both "the inscriptional and oral narrative traditions, as well as contemporary literature"[1]. The related range of texts includes, among others, storytelling, poetry and song. Though the significance of the oral heritage is apparent in the general ethos, references to poetry are far less specific, with no direct association of poetry with sound: "how a poem creatively manipulates language" is the most precise description, leaving scope for the neglect of aurality. Elsewhere, broad items in the literature strand indicate pupils should "listen to teachers and others read and respond to reading", and poetry is once again included in the range. Finally, and though the immediate relevance may not be apparent, the same section has an emphasis that prefigures the progress of this paper, in its statement that "through engagement with literature they [pupils] learn about themselves, each other and the world". Consideration of the relationship between the aurality of poetry and such learning is an emerging theme in this discussion.

In the USA curricular detail is more diverse and less consistent, given that guidance is provided at state rather than national level. The Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools[2], for instance, has marked emphasis on pupils reading aloud, but less on listening. Third graders "read…poetry with fluency, rhythm, and pace, using appropriate intonation and vocal patterns to emphasize important passages of text being read". By Grade 11, pupils are still required to deliver recitations of poetry. Here, interestingly, these are marked out as a special case of the oral mode: all other forms of oral presentation are "targeted… within the written applications strand". The corresponding guidance for New York [3] is more precise in attention to the act of *listening* to poetry. Across grades 6, 7 and 8 pupils will "identify poetic elements such as repetition, rhythm, and rhyming patterns, in order to interpret poetry". In addition, they will consider how the items "affect the listener's interpretation of poetry".

In a Canadian example, drawn from programmes of study in Alberta [4], poetry as an oral medium has some significant emphasis in the early years. In kindergarten, children should have opportunity to "appreciate the sounds and rhythms of language in shared language experiences, such as nursery rhymes and personal songs". Here too they "listen to and recite short poems, songs and rhymes; and engage in word play and action songs". In grades 1 and 2 they are encouraged to "experiment" and "play" with sound still further. Nevertheless, poetry receives little further direct mention until the senior grades (10-12), where "poetry, including song" is named as a form for study by all. Its modality, however, is ambiguous, with poetry distinguished from three other overarching categories, those of "prose", "script" and "oral/visual/multimedia presentation".

In the UK, the curriculum for England and Wales similarly presents enjoyment of listening to poetry as something for the early years, prior to the developing literary apprenticeship of analysing poetry, primarily in print. In details applicable for pupils aged eleven and over, poetry is not referred to in the single programme of study for Speaking and Listening, though its print-based character is confirmed via its place in Reading and Writing [5]. The assessment criteria for examination at age sixteen priveleges sensitivity to patterning of sound in written response to literature, though pupils experience the poetry for study in a printed anthology. There is no associated requirement of pedagogy to develop listening to the poems in question. New curricular proposals due in autumn 2013 will continue to present poetry as a medium associated with the page rather than with the voice.

2. The stuff of poetry

To address the question of the appropriateness of the conception of poetry found in any curriculum it is necessary to consider the very nature of poetry, what makes it what it is, and what distinguishes it from prose. There is, of course, a prior assumption: that poetic encounters offer some potential for learning.

Anne Stevenson provides a taxonomy of poetry, identifying its constants:

> speech sounds and rhythmic patterns derived from rhythms of heartbeat and footsteps, verbal images derived from things we can see, the unforced expression of emotion and above all compassion, a more than common psychological perceptiveness, a more than common instinct for matching subject-matter with form. [6]

She describes a poem by appealing to the craft of the poet in what becomes an intriguing elision of poet and poem: which is it that has this "more than common psychological perceptiveness"? Whatever the answer to that question, it seems axiomatic that the poem itself cannot possess the "instinct for matching subject-matter with form", though it is possible that subject-matter and form *in* a poem are not easily disentwined. This definition by poet Keith Douglas is similar and typical in its openness and reluctance to present a simple summary of poetry, which:

> is anything expressed in words, which appeals to the emotions either in presenting an image or picture to move them; or by the music of the words affecting them through the senses; or in stating some truth whose eternal quality exacts the same reverence as eternity itself [6].

Central to his definition is the importance of emotions moved *in response* to a text: a poem can only be described with recourse to its effect and affective power, though figurative language and rhythm are implied in the first two definitions he essays. These concern a test on the pulses, empirical and sensuous experience. Of a different level of significance is the third defining statement, Douglas' allusion to poetry's power to evoke reverence. He makes great claims for poetry: it commands awe as a result of its expression of an eternal truth, constitutes an existential jolt.

The value of poetry then, according to these definitions, resides in effects of hugely differing scope: the first two imply a test on the pulses, an empirical and to a degree sensuous experience; the third is effectively an epiphany. Taken as a triumvirate, the statements provided by Douglas offer up the possibility that in poetry both epistemological and ontological significance are likely to be combined. A poem is knowledge acting on the senses, on being, and vice versa, the senses engaged and collaborating in the construction of meaning. It is a symbiotic balance where subject matter and form not only match but combine.

Preminger and Brogan [7] attempt to explain the difference between the nature and purposes of poetry - what they call means and ends. Their initial definition of the term *poem* is

> an instance of verbal art, a text set in verse, bound speech… conveys heightened forms of perception, experience, meaning or consciousness in heightened language…

Their subsequent citation of Aristotle's *Poetics* provides some insight as to why Douglas cannot separate means and ends entirely:

> poetry differs from the other arts in that the **material cause** [i.e. words (their sound-shapes, visual shapes)] is not semantically neutral – as are stone in sculpture, sound in music, and colour in painting – but always semanticized. The webs of meaning which words create naturally when brought into conjunction with each other are compressed and given additional order when subjected to verseform, effects which

are also semantic, increasing semantic density in poetry over prose.

Here subject matter and form elide as in Douglas' phrase "anything expressed in words". He could mean an *idea* signified by a phrase and capable of paraphrase; or the semantic density identified here, suggested by the associative power of the images he mentions; or an individual's response to each word's particular music. Words heard can be intoned in manners perceived as joyous, aggressive or solemn (to provide only a few examples), regardless of their semantic attachments. Considering these possibilities respectively in the philosophical terms offered by Wittgenstein, whose primary interest was the relationship of language to reality: words in a poem may act as propositions referring to objects [8], but they may in combination as a poem also draw attention to the imprecise and unreliable nature of such reference. At the same time, given the inadequacy of words as propositions to reference objects, the poem as a propositional sign, its medium, becomes a source of pleasure in itself, given that entirely adequate reference is beyond possibility and its scope, and acknowledged as such.

In some cases of artistic creation, it would be true to say that material cause as Aristotle uses the term is just 'stuff', like stone for a sculptor: it has no prior meaning, it signifies nothing beyond itself. The 'stuff' a poet works with, words – conversely - come heavily burdened with purpose, each word already having an end or several ends in itself, independent of the poet and the end they may have in mind for their poem in its entirety (if intentionality can be supposed). As poet David Constantine says, "unlike music, poetry has as its medium something which is in common use for other purposes". Poetry is a bivalent medium [7]. In it, words operate in such a way that pure sound ("sounds in and of themselves, having aural textures, and sounds patterned") and meaning are in constant interanimation: "the verbal medium in poetry is not, therefore, a fully physical medium, as is sculpture, nor is it pure meaning, as in prose".

3. Only the half of it?

The dual nature of poetry is apparent in two traditions, not mutually exclusive, each poem somewhere on a continuum between the two. In the first, poetry is commentary on the world and experience, tending toward "the referential, propositional, and mimetic aspect of language", where it is assumed that words function predominantly as pure meaning: the associated poetic forms include descriptive and narrative verse, the epic and the lyric. This is poetry where words or their arrangement do not draw attention to themselves, rather they signify extrinsically. In the terms presented to us by Wittgenstein, this tradition assumes a faith in the accurate and secure correlation between object and proposition, an assumption that the philosopher himself would regard as false.

In the second tradition, conversely, poetry is at play, revelling in reflexivity, enjoying sound and language for their own sake. Words can be "pure sound form or visual form or both", employed with a self-conscious interest in their phonic or graphic character *per se*, as much as in - even in favour of - the phenomena to which they might refer, if they refer extrinsically at all: "poetry must signal its peculiarity, its otherness, by the means and the medium of its very existence: by language". This tradition thus entails an investigation of language in itself as much as it does any extrinsic topic or theme, and by doing so attempts to do what Wittgenstein viewed as impossible [8]. A recognised genre in this tradition is sound poetry, exemplified in the poetry of Kurt Schwitters. On the same side of the continuum, but not so close to the pole, we might include the Lower East Side poets, the early work of the Liverpool poets, dub poetry, black performance poetry, the traditions anthologised by Finnegan and Gleason [9], and slam poetry. In this tradition "meaning is not suppressed (which is impossible) but is made, at best, derivative from sound- and word-play" [10].

4. Poetry and the curriculum

Two issues presented surrounding these traditions are of significance to the conception of poetry in curricular detail. For one, the variety of aural and visual poetic modes of the second are said to be unmapped by critics: it follows they are not conceptualised in curricula. The other, related concern is that of the bivalent entity of any poem, the schizophrenic nature of poetry that arises from its history in ancient Greece and through the Middle Ages as a predominantly oral / aural medium, then as "aural-visual mixed" with the advent of the printing press in the fifteenth century [10]. Neither poetry seen nor poetry heard takes precedence, the poem is instead an abstraction which 'may exist in both types of substantial realisation – phonic and graphic'.

Curricular poetry, however, is not conceived as an abstraction prior to substantial realisation, rather the substantial realisation of

poetry is often assumed and taken as given (i.e. as poetry seen): the dominance of printed resources to teach poetry in many schools is testimony to the fact. As such, the substantial realisation of poetry in graphic mode comes to be understood as essential (i.e. of the essence) of poetry, dominating the conception of poetry in some curricula and therefore often in lessons which provide an arena for poetic encounters. Furthermore, the substantial realisation of poetry in the graphic mode delimits the nature of poetic encounter allowed to pupils in the classroom, with the consequence that the knowledge and experience substantiated *only* in the phonic mode is not available to them.

To respond to this state of affairs has implications both for *how* pupils respond to poetry and indeed *who* is given opportunity to respond to poetry in any sense that might be regarded as meaningful or educationally worthwhile on their own terms. A crucial statement about poetic encounters in the classroom from such a standpoint is this: that "these modes [i.e. phonic and graphic] are apprehended in radically different ways" [7]. If we do not understand ourselves how the phonic mode is apprehended, not only do we have a wholly inadequate conception of poetry, we also create a situation in which pupils capable of apprehending the phonic mode, to their potential pleasure and learning, are excluded. At the same time, those who demonstrate facility with the graphic mode, who think they understand poetry, only actually get the half of it. We must make some effort to understand how poetry is apprehended as a phonic mode to do full justice to poems and to pupils.

5. An appeal to the auditory imagination

T.S. Eliot's essays *Auditory Imagination* [11, originally 1933] and *The Music of Poetry* [11, originally 1942] influenced some mainstream curricular thinking in the UK [12] but there was little subsequent impact on the detail of the National Curriculum. For Eliot, the auditory imagination means 'the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word…' This statement defines the area at issue in this paper –about trying, somehow, to get at those areas 'below' consciousness, to understand them a little better and consider how pupils make meaning from the aurality of a poem rather than from what might be semantically transparent.

Of the 'music of poetry' Eliot is more specific – it is not 'something which exists apart from the meaning' expressed in the semantics of words:

> the music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association.

This reminds me of what Ted Hughes has personified as 'the goblin in the word' [13], the multifarious meanings latent in each. Eliot's view is that this 'music' is itself intimately connected with the contemporary vernacular, the rhythms of 'the common speech of the time'. In fact, Eliot goes as far as to state that 'most poetry, in modern times, is meant to be spoken'. Currently this is not a position which informs poetry teaching in practice to any significant degree, though it is one that informs the approach of poets writing now. Fleur Adcock acknowledges that the voice in her head when she writes, her auditory imagination, 'speaks colloquial English of the age I live in' [6]. Filtered through various personae and accents, this idiom affects 'the rhythmical structure' of all she writes, regardless of the metrical form she chooses to use.

In using the idiom and modulations of speech around them, poets craft poems with the material to hand, an idea expressed in slightly different terms in the work of Theo van Leeuwen (1999). This notion of the poet as 'maker' with sounds as material, as clay, is most deftly described by Eliot thus:

'…we do not want the poet merely to reproduce exactly the conventional idiom of himself, his family, his friends, and his particular district: but what he finds there is the material out of which he must make his poetry. He must, like the sculptor, be faithful to the medium in which he works; it is out of sounds that he has heard that he must make his melody and harmony'. The notion of poet as maker with the stuff of sound harks back to the Greek origin of the word 'poem', literally 'to make' or 'to shape' (Hayhoe and Parker, 1988: 163) and to the Aristotelian concept of material cause already cited.

Eliot additionally describes the way in which the play of sounds in a poem can come to have meaning, first as generalised principle:

> a musical poem is a poem which has a musical pattern of sound and a musical

> pattern of secondary meanings of the words which compose it, and that these two patterns are indissoluble and one… and if you object that it is only pure sound, apart from the sense, to which the adjective 'musical' can be rightly applied, I can only reaffirm my previous assertion that the sound of a poem is as much an abstraction from the poem as is the sense…

and then with reference to the means common to music and poetry, deployed by the poet:

> I think that a poet may gain much from the study of music… I believe that the properties in which music concerns the poet most nearly, are the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure… a poem may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm before it reaches expression in words, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image…

As the earlier quotation and subsequent analysis of that phrase drawn from Keith Douglas - that poetry is 'anything expressed in words' - suggested, words express things sometimes transparently but often opaquely. It is interesting that Eliot contends that rhythm can bring forth an idea, not that rhythms are selected to match an idea. In this the parallel with music is also strong: numerous are the songwriters who would make a similar assertion. Ideas capable of conventional verbalisation are not then the primary or sole locus of meaning in poetry. It may be, in Eliot's view, that the converse is true: that sound patterns are the dynamic energy and origin of meaning in a given text.

6. Sounds in school

Eliot's remarks suggest the significance of rhythm and real, diverse 'everyday' speech. The contemporary voices invoked may be coterminous with the ends of poetry and poetic encounters in schools, may even be where means and ends in poems meet, particularly in the articulation of an educational rationale for the teaching of poetry. Poets have said much about this potentially nebulous, significant yet unmapped dimension of sound, though not all poets have an overt interest in this mode in their poetry. Some, by contrast, choose to foreground the graphic mode, beyond form to typographical play.

In *Poetry and Experience* [15] Archibald MacLeish discusses 'Means to Meaning', ways to make sense of poetry in general terms. This includes a chapter concerning 'Words as Sounds', in which he draws on Mallarmé's interest in 'words themselves' – what MacLeish paraphrases as 'words as sensuous events':

> what it comes down to is the proposition that it is exclusively in the relationships of words as sounds that the poem exists.

He asks 'how many words are there in which the sound of the word signifies?', and arrives at the conclusion that 'the sounds of words are obviously not the plastic material of the art of poetry', though 'the meaning of the sounds are also present cannot help but play a part' in the meaning of a poem as a whole. A later section of the book, 'The Shape of Meaning', illustrates the point with direct reference to the work of four wildly different exemplar poets (Dickinson, Yeats, Rimbaud and Keats). As is the case with the previous example of Eliot, MacLeish is aware of the role of sound, though he steps back from any intimation that poetry is a 'pure sound form'.

A frequent and convincing commentator on the importance of sound in poetry is Seamus Heaney. That phrase of Mallarmé's, 'sensuous event', could apply to a poem as much as a single word, and could have been coined on hearing any recording of Heaney's reading his work. Heaney expresses his thoughts about words operating in this fashion in his own for teaching poetry: 'we teach it for the now of perception and for the then of reflection' [16]. When Heaney describes the thinking behind the two anthologies for schools he edited with Ted Hughes, (*The Rattle Bag* and *The School Bag*), he uses a vocabulary committed to sound: the two poets sought a 'bundle of work that rang true to our older ears', hoped it would be 'pleasurably audible to younger ones', 'poetry that was indeed soul music'. The key quotation is this:

> We proceeded in the faith that the aural and oral pleasures of poetry, the satisfactions of recognition and repetition, constitute an experience of rightness that can make the whole physical and psychic system feel more in tune with itself. We implicitly believed that a first exposure to poetry, the early schooling in it, should offer this kind of rightness, since it constitutes one of the primary justifications of the art.

In *The Redress of Poetry* [17], Heaney describes himself 'intent upon treating poetry as an answer given in terms of metre and syntax, of tone and musical trueness.'

The commentary of a non-poet is relevant here and provides a means of summarising the points considered so far. Bernstein [18] has this to say:

> It is precisely because sound is an arational or nonlogical feature of language that it is so significant for poetry - for sound registers the sheer physicality of language, a physicality that must be the grounding of reason exactly insofar as it eludes rationality. Sound is language's flesh, its opacity as meaning marks its material embeddedness in the world of things. Sound brings writing back from its metaphysical and symbolic functions to where it is at home, in performance. Sound, like poetry "itself" can never be completely recuperated as ideas, as content, as narrative, as extralexical meaning. The tension between sound and logic reflects the physical resistance in the medium of poetry. Rime's reason - the truth of sound - is that meaning is rooted in the arationality of sound, as well as in the body's multiple capacities for signification. Language is extralexical, goes beyond sense, and nothing shows this better than verbal performance, which, like the soundless performance of the body, exceeds what seems necessary to establish the substantive content of the poem - what it is saying, its metaphors and allusions.

He explains the possibility that sound in a poem is essential to its 'supralogical' working, this latter term coined by the poet Robert Graves and later invoked by the educationalist James Britton in his argument for the place and importance of poetry in English classrooms. Andrew Motion [6] has put it thus:

> With music, with cadence, with form, poetry speaks for what cannot be spoken, as well as what can. It does not baffle or confound the due process of thought, but opens a corridor between head and heart.

7. Hearing voices

An understanding of the way in which the phonic mode is apprehended necessitates reflection upon the reception of the *mode*, on the importance of listening, be it through 'outward' or 'inward ears'. Adcock would like those encountering her poems "to relax and listen as if to an intimate conversation (or to be honest, an intimate monologue)". Frost has provided a famous description of "the figure a poem makes" [6]. The short and widely known version is this: "It begins in delight and ends in wisdom". He also offers us a less frequently quoted elaboration:

> …it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in clarification of life – not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion.

Though this may apply to many different encounters with poetry, it is one that may be most apparent when a poem is heard. A listener's delight may be immediate, a response to the voice of the reader. It 'inclines to the impulse' in a manner very like Heaney's "verbal energy" [16], as a physiological jolt before semantic meaning is made or interpreted. But it is not just this: the remaining steps signalled by Frost can also have impact on a first hearing. The first line, "laid down", is a statement of intent, an orientation. What follows, the "course of lucky events", is the surprise, delight *again*, and comprises the sheer power that unheard, unknown words can have when breathed into utterance and onto the ear for the first time. Hearing a poem opens it up in time, the element of surprise often greater than that afforded by a poem in print, where a reader is generally aware of the stanza form and length of the text just by virtue of approaching the page, even before they direct their attention to the first line.

Grace Nichols [6] too is cognisant of the physiological force of poetry, true not only to the listener but also to the poet in the act of creation:

> In the act of writing a poem… your inner ear is attuned to the underlying rhythm and the actual sounds of words and in a way you're like a musical composer, also, creating almost unconsciously your own harmony.

Glyn Maxwell's phrase is apt: "poetry is an utterance of the body… language in thrall to the corporeal" [6]. To read a poem aloud is "to express the very shape of a self, to sound it". The 'inner ear' is acknowledged by poets as essential to making poetry. There are also those too who believe that it needs to be voiced aloud, presented to the outer ears of others, unequivocal in their belief that "poetry, like music, is to be heard". Basil Bunting's argument in this case is persuasive and thorough, worth quoting in detail:

> It [poetry] deals in sound – long sounds and short sounds, heavy beats and light beats, the tone relations of vowels, the relations of consonants to one another which are like instrumental colour in music. Poetry lies dead on the page, until some voice brings it to life, just as music, on the stave, is no more than instructions to the player. A skilled musician can imagine the sound, more or less, and a skilled reader can try to hear, mentally, what his eyes see in print, but nothing will satisfy either of them till his ears hear it as real sound in the air. Poetry must be read aloud.

6. 'Possibilities of being human' – rhythm and individuality

Many are the poets who consider rhythm an essential element, central to poetry's nature and its capacity for meaning. Pound [6] outlines in his 'Credo' a sense of poetry as physiological and essential, a medium of being, of being uniquely:

> I believe in an 'absolute rhythm', a rhythm, that is, in poetry which corresponds exactly to the emotion or shade of emotion to be expressed. A man's rhythm must be interpretive, it will be, therefore, in the end, his own, uncounterfeiting, uncounterfeitable.

The individuality in rhythm is felt too by Graves, the good use of rhyme in a poem like "free will within predestination". It acknowledges external frameworks, but sings itself in and against them. Poetry is often characterised as a life-force, and poems as living things. For Auden "a poem is 'like a natural organism, not an inorganic thing" [6]. The first attribute he identifies to draw this comparison is that a poem "is rhythmical". As with Graves and Pound, rhythm is equated with distinctiveness, individuality: "temporal recurrences of rhythm are never identical". Auden even goes so far as to call a poem a "pseudo-person" where "meaning and being are identical": "like a person it is unique and addresses the reader personally". At the same time, these examples suggest rhythm to be a phenomenon that combines corporeality with cognition: "the experience of thought is a rhythmic one, because the experience of consciousness is rhythmic".

For Tom Paulin poems as pseudo-persons - as individuated voices speaking aloud - come to be distinct from institutions and bureaucracy, and we are set down a path that suggests once again that what a poem is cannot easily be separated from what a poem might do [19]. His central term *vernacular* has a definition beyond the "use of dialect words or regional accents" encompassing what he terms "a gestural tactile language". Such a mode represents "the intoxication of speech, its variety and crack and hilarity". Through a series of examples, Paulin identifies "self-delighting speech", "visionary actuality", oral community where "vernacular imagination distrusts print in the way that most of us dislike legal documents", and – citing Robert Frost – "sentence sounds", gathered "by the ear from the vernacular". If what Paulin says of the vernacular voice is true, that it has the power to "intoxicate", we must reflect on whether curricula present scope for poetic encounters where such intoxication can occur. In the description of a conflict between diverse textures of speech and a dominant received accent we also find further confirmation that sounds do come to have meaning relative and in opposition to each other, that voicing publicly and communally is significant. In short, to utter aloud places the speaker in a relationship with others, a societal relationship, thus voicing becomes a purposive assertion of individuality. For Kennelly [6] this places his voice in relation not only to the living but also to those of the past, the dead. Indeed, as a speaker of Irish and English he has no unified voice, utterance itself a site of conflict or resolution, of two cultures and two ways of being. For both he and Paulin, it seems "poetry engenders a condition in which the single personality dissolves and we enter into other lives, other possibilities of being human". There is a significance here related to the communal nature of classrooms, to groups of pupils as societies, and to the fact that encounters with texts in classrooms occur in a public environment.

7. Lifeworlds – conceptualising poetic encounters in the classroom

That poetry is difficult to justify in the present day, inside educational institutions and out, is a problem with very specific origins. The poet Eavan Bolland [6] provides an analysis of poetry through the twentieth century, where – she feels - poetry took a wrong turning when the dialect of poetry was "deliberately" sundered from our everyday vernacular. Poetry became "infinitely more exclusive speech", losing a readership in the public at large and bringing to an end a relationship between people and poet that had lasted centuries. By implication, she regards poetry's character as democratic, of the

common voice – a *less* exclusive speech. Somewhere, however, institutions have lost hold of her conception, and the voices people hear are not ones they recognise as their own:

> In trying to pre-judge, re-make and re-train the reader away from the old joys of memory and sentiment and song, the secondary modernist project cut deep into the root and sap of the art.

The essence of poetry for Bolland – personally and historically – is as an aural medium enjoyed communally, in a sense where "communally" can be interpreted as the actual gathering of people socially, or as referring to a psychologically real, emotional inner world of folk voices and memories. In the present day, this leads us to a point where:

> Poetry which once followed a man or woman through life, whispering in their ear from their first infatuation to their final sickness, which was at the centre of a society's self-definition, is now defensive and on the margins.

Poetry is described as a life force, a companion, an edifying and supportive voice – a source of emotional nourishment and a locus for identity. It provides what Auden [6] has described as "a *way* of happening, a mouth".

Louis MacNeice's metaphor for the poet as "not the loudspeaker of society, but something much more like its still, small voice" [6] implies that poetry is the unshowy, honest voice of communities. It equates with humanity, individuality and the expression of emotion as well as thought, and thus draws the three parts of Douglas' attempted definition together in unity. Those two carefully chosen adjectives describing the voice, "still" and "small" evoke a similar peaceable awe as the former poet's "reverence". Both poets seem to wish to acknowledge a serene calm, or measured control, in the effect of a poem or the attitude of a poet.

Tony Harrison [6] similarly infers a degree of control over expression when he says

> …poetry, the word at its most eloquent, is one medium which could concentrate our attention on our worst experiences without leaving us with the feeling, as other media can, that life in this century has had its affirmative spirit burnt out.

Eloquence presupposes a facility with language, probably cultivated and honed, while the potential he attributes to the medium again invokes quasi-religious experience by suggesting that poetry has a redemptive power unequalled by other media. Harrison is sufficiently knowing to use a word such as "spirit" with care: its etymology covers not only the notion of soul, but also the breath (as in 'inspire', to breathe in), and the phrase "affirmative spirit" echoes MacNeice's confident and self-possessed "small, still voice", but also John Burnside's contemplation piece, 'Strong Words' [6]. Burnside cites Heidegger in a description of poetry, the "lyrical experience", as a means of centring "a human being in his or her world in a spiritual way, and this spiritual centring (or its absence) precedes and defines the social and political life of a person and of a social group. The making of a world – of *home* – is determined by the spirit which the participants bring to the process". Heidegger's words are these:

> Projective saying is poetry… Poetry is the saying of the unconcealment of beings… Projective saying is saying which, in preparing the sayable, simultaneously brings the unsayable as such into the world.

8. Conclusion

The combined remarks of MacNeice, Harrison, Burnside and Heidegger frame a conception of poetry that can inform curriculum design and rationale. Their comments, respectively, suggest the following: that poets are the voices of their societies, subtle and self-possessed; that the controlled voice they project is unique in its meaning-potential; that poetry is a hyper-human means of expression, an invocation of spirit for individuals and for communities; and that poetic utterance brings into being what has not previously been presented to the world. Such means and ends make a persuasive case for poetry *per se*, and offer a conception of poetry which elaborates upon, with impressive humility and insight, what is meant by the term "lifeworld" as used by the New London Group [20]. Their framework now informs curricula detail globally, especially in attention to modality. To invoke lifeworlds here in relation to poetry affords intellectually consistent and coherent location of the medium in the same framework, while avoiding the marginalisation of poetry as an 'old' medium in the face of the shiny new.

Burnside used the word *home*, but I would like to conceive of every individual poem in itself as a "lifeworld", an articulation of the voice, history and culture – the *life* - of an individual (the poet or an adopted persona),

with all the complexities suggested in the views of poetry expressed in this article. The term is appealing too because it allows for a conception of poetry that includes response, that any poetic encounter is a meeting of two *lifeworlds*, the first that of the listener or reader, the second that newly unconcealed world projected as poem. The notion helps us conceive of classroom encounters with poems too, allowing for the multiple *lifeworlds* represented by thirty-or-so pupils, encountering a poem in the *lifeworld* of a classroom. This elaborated notion of *lifeworld*, following Burnside, MacNeice, Heidegger et al, has voice at its centre. It returns us, in the present, to a view of poetry that might reinstate what Bolland felt was lost.

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