

# SYNTAX AS EMOTION--HYPERLINGUISTIC EVIDENCE FROM THE POETRY OF DYLAN THOMAS

*for Robert O. Cleymaet*

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Analysis of a poem by Dylan Thomas supports the hypothesis that artistic language ("hyperphasia") can be used to the same ends as neurolinguistic data from aphasia and psycholinguistic data from normal speakers--i. e., as a test of linguistic theory. In *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night*, Thomas manipulates predicate adjuncts and other constructs in much the same way as they might be treated in a linguistic analysis, complete with implied contrasts between grammatical, grammatical-but-unusual and ungrammatical examples. These manipulations have implications for the psychological reality of the theoretical characterization of the constructs involved, as well as for the question of how much of linguistic competence is accessible to conscious awareness. Reciprocally, analysis of these syntactic devices helps deepen appreciation of the author's poetic intent--and even of the nature of poetry itself.

**Keywords:** accessibility to consciousness, "hyperphasia", poetry, predicate adjuncts, psycholinguistics, psychological reality

## 1. LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE AS THE UNIVERSAL BASIS OF LANGUAGE ART

The famous villanelle *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night*\* by Dylan Thomas (hereafter DT) is justly regarded as one of the finest in the English language (cf. Gross, 1989, p. 68; Shelby, 1990, p. 106) and is a particularly moving example of this poet's work. The theoretical premise of this paper will be that, despite its surface fluency, this poem's force derives in large part from the subtle manipulation of the semantic/syntactic structures on which its lyricism is draped.

The same linguistic competence which is universally present in all native speakers of a language is the bottomless bag of tricks from which a poet chooses his/her words and grammar, according to his/her message and his/her talent. The way the constructs of this competence--including

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semantic features, phrase structure and so on--are used in literary expression can be read as evidence for/against the psychological reality of the theories which attempt to describe them. As a potential data source, poetic and other forms of artistic language are equipotential with the language of brain-damaged patients ("aphasia") or the language of normal speakers under test conditions. Since such artistic language is not the result of damage, and since it is rare in its intensity, it will be useful to refer to it as "hyperphasia".

Hyperphasia thus defined is nevertheless also present in daily life to an extent perhaps not realized--in everyday puns, rock-and-roll lyrics, advertising copy--though in a less sustained manner. The very existence of hyperphasia--whether in Shakespeare or everyday usage--is evidence of just how far the cognitive potential inherent in linguistic competence exceeds all simplistic notions of "communication necessity" (see Chomsky (1980, pp. 229-230) for a critique).

In one version of a naive "communication" theory as applied to evolution, language is said to have conferred a "survival advantage" since it enabled humans to communicate and work together for their common needs. This is like saying the purpose of a rocket ship is "transportation", when, obviously, "from where to where" is what is unique about its purpose.

While not denying the importance of "communication" in this simpler sense, an idea closer to the theme of this paper is that the cognitive abilities conferred by language include the subtle objectification of emotions, whether for communication with others, or "with oneself" for the eventual attainment of personal solace, empathetic insights and even intellectual joy. The possible "survival advantage" of such hyperphasic cognizing will be discussed in the final section of this paper as a way of placing the results of the following analysis of DT's villanelle in the context of a broader research area--"hyperlinguistics"--whose goal is the study of exceptionally insightful language for use as data in a general linguistic and cognitive theory.

## 2. HYPERLINGUISTICS vs. A "SYMBOLIC" APPROACH TO LANGUAGE USE

There have been many attempts to bring linguistic theory to bear on the analysis of literary language; unfortunately, the phrase "linguistic analysis" in such contexts can be deceptive. A so-called "linguistic" analysis might describe, for example, the visual pattern formed by the occurrences of a certain word on the printed page.

Now, such patterns are sometimes intended by poets, including DT. However, their analysis is wrongly associated, in my view, with linguistic theory. Such analyses only qualify as "linguistic" in the sense that they focus on some aspect (often vocabulary choice) of the use of language. Unfortunately, the aspect of language thus singled out for attention is often treated as a symbol in an *ad hoc* fashion which needs no linguistic theory for its analysis. This type of "symbolism" is familiar from high-school introductions to literature--"so-and-so uses X as a symbol of Y". It is often true, but it almost always seems to bear an arbitrary relation to language structure *per se*. In this sense, "X" does not even have to be a **linguistic** category.

Of course, since the pioneering work of Roman Jakobson (*e. g.*, Jakobson, 1985) and Edward Sapir (*e. g.*, Sapir, 1985) in the early 20c, a tradition of genuinely linguistic literary analysis has evolved, and it might even be said that "the linguist whose field is any kind of language may and **must** include poetry in his study" (Jakobson, 1987, p. 93; emphasis added). Consequently, there have been many attempts to apply linguistic models to the enigma of literary language.

D. C. Freeman (1975) is one such example which focuses on DT's work and whose goal is the use of generative syntactic theory to deepen understanding of his poetry, and *vice versa*. Examples, like Freeman's, of linguistic theory applied insightfully to the analysis of artistic language suggest four criteria, or goals, which any hyperlinguistic analysis should meet.

**First:** The specific link between literary effect/message and linguistic technique should be explicitly stated in terms of linguistic structures and categories. These links might include anything from the phonological means whereby a poet achieves a fluent rhythm, to something



like the way Japanese zero-pronouns are deliberately manipulated in *Genji Monogatari* in order to create a “syntactic” feeling of ambiguity in its readers parallel to its author’s message about the ambiguity inherent in all human motivation.

**Second:** Linguistic analysis is often considered relevant only to poems with “experimental” language or deliberately “ungrammatical” usage. However, if there is to be such a thing as a linguistic analysis of literary language it has to be concerned with normal language, in the sense that whatever is analyzable must make some kind of sense in terms of a native speaker’s rule system. Paradoxically, this does not rule out innovation in actual usage—even what Mencken (1958, p. 195) calls the “constant transfusion of new blood”—either from native or non-native writers, since grammars are creative, and largely universal, devices. A poet might create normal language never before heard, and (I will argue) even incomprehensible normal language.

**Third:** Given that one of the fundamental goals of linguistic theory is capturing explanatory generalizations, a truly linguistic analysis of a work of literature should invite comparisons with what an author decided **not** to say, as well as with what he/she actually did say. This is what we expect from non-literary linguistic analyses, and there is no reason it should not be expected from analyses of literary language, since every artistic selection of language is also a deselection.

**Fourth:** Finally, the above criteria imply that, *ceteris paribus*, every truly linguistic analysis of literary language will yield data of relevance to tests of linguistic theories. In the least interesting case, these data might simply reconfirm categories and structures already widely supported by other evidence. On the other hand, there is no reason to doubt that **crucial** evidence for/against a particular linguistic theory, or a hint of areas which theories have overlooked, will also be forthcoming from such analyses. In addition, the linguistic analysis of literary art might be one of our best sources for data on the psychological question of how much of language structure is accessible to consciousness, and even on the general nature of cognition itself (*cf.* Gibbs, 1994).

Now, obviously, not all poems offer equally interesting opportunities with regard to these four goals, for reasons that are heterogeneous. Within his total *œuvre*, DT’s villanelle is generally viewed (*cf.* Tindall, 1996, pp. 203-206) as one of his least difficult and most accessible poems. Perhaps **because** of this approachability, it has not been the subject of the kind of extended linguistic analysis accorded some of his more overtly complex poems. It has even been suggested that the “violation of linguistic rules”—as opposed to “literary worth”—is the prime reason linguistic analysis has been applied to the works of poets “such as” DT and E. E. Cummings (Widdowson, 1980, p. 237)! (The question of possible grammatical “violations” will be discussed in detail throughout Section 5 and again in Section 6.3.)

In contrast, my contention will be that DT’s villanelle actually represents the highest achievement of his poetic art, a poem in which he was able to meld **normal** language of great underlying complexity with an emotionally intense message in a deceptively simple lyricism. The following passage (Jones, 1963, pp. 102-103) comes close to the view to be presented below.

In this poem he achieves the seemingly impossible, using the highly contrived form of the villanelle not merely to make poetry that has seriousness, but poetry that has pathos also...The combination of the artifice of the form and the passionate, monosyllabic simplicity of the words make this one of Dylan Thomas’s most moving poems.

An analysis of how DT’s villanelle achieves these profound effects—**beyond** the apparent surface simplicity of its words—satisfies the four criteria above for a genuinely linguistic analysis of a literary work, and thus constitutes a good example of hyperlinguistic research.

### 3. THE VILLANELLE AS POETIC PROVING GROUND

DT’s poem and a schematic representation of the form of the villanelle are provided in Notes (2) and (3), respectively. Essentially, the first and third lines of the first tercet of a villanelle are

alternately repeated throughout the poem as the final lines of the (in this case) four tercets which follow. The quatrain which closes the villanelle ends with these two lines.

It is worth thinking about this poetic form in its language of origin in order to appreciate the novelty of DT's version. First, the limited rhyme scheme of the form (only two rhymes, as shown in (3)) is possibly easier to manage in a natural way in French, with its high degree of word-final homonymy, than in English. Second, the extreme formal constraints of the villanelle lend themselves to decorative and/or abstract affect--consistent with the esthetic values of a large part of the literary period in which it experienced its greatest French popularity, as well as its popularity in late 19c British poetry (Tindall, 1996, p. 204).

In contrast, what is clear from even a first reading of DT's villanelle is that it unfolds with a natural fluency from its very first line--in a way reminiscent of the best sonnets of Shakespeare--which undoubtedly contributes to the ease with which its appreciative readers recall large portions of it from memory. The reader does not at all have the impression of trying to decipher a highly formalistic poem, and, in fact, might even be surprised by the full extent of its formalism once it is pointed out, although--paradoxically--the form also makes itself felt subliminally...

Finally, the emotional content of DT's villanelle is by turns tender and passionate, again in contrast to the types of content usually associated with villanelles. The poet seems to be telling us his message straight from the heart, with little or no "poetastic" artifice.

#### 4. *DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT.*

The narrative line of DT's villanelle is classically simple: It begins with DT's plea to his ailing father (David James Thomas) that in his decline he remain his normal self and retain his characteristic tough pride, even perhaps to the extent of not being "gentle" with DT. The following four tercets describe examples of the types of men who do not slip into an unnatural gentleness at the approach of death, along with their reasons for not doing so. The closing quatrain re-states the type of fortitude/behavior the son desires from his dying father, and ends with the imperative Lines 1 and 3 from the first tercet.

There is nothing in the formal design of a villanelle requiring the alternation of imperative and indicative sentential moods as made use of by DT to vary the force of the villanelle's different tercets: Lines 1 and 3 are imperatives in the first tercet and again in the closing quatrain, but they function as indicative VPs in the four intervening tercets, which each consist of one sentence. (In French it would not be possible to alternate second-person imperatives with third-person indicatives due to morphological differences.) The use of this isomorphy between Line 1/Line 3, which lack an overt subject, and the VPs of the middle tercets is one of DT's true inspirations.

The primary effect of this alternation in verbal moods is to keep DT's poem moving from the commanding tone of the first tercet, by way of four increasingly moving arguments, to the new and old commands, thus strengthened, of the final stanza. In addition, this alternation also sets up a slight tension on the part of the first-time reader as to what will be the subject of the successive repetitions of Lines 1 and 3, since he/she does not know from stanza to stanza whether to expect a (non-overt) second-person subject or something else. On subsequent re-readings, this initial uncertainty is partly responsible for the persistence of the imperative "ring" of even the repetitions of Lines 1 and 3 as indicative VPs--a point whose importance will become clear.

DT's semantic and syntactic devices are calculated both to pace the reader's emotional interest in the course of reading the poem and to channel it toward the content that was the motivation for the poem in the first place, namely, DT's feelings toward his ailing father. These feelings have been well documented (*e. g.*, Ferris, 1987), as well as the father's wishes for DT's success as a poet and their shared love of poetry.

The villanelle was possibly begun on the occasion of the father's serious illness in 1945, but it was completed and published in 1951 (Davies and Maud, 1988, p. 255). "It is not a poem that

was written quickly, one suspects" (*ibid.*). DT's father died in December 1952, aged 76; DT himself died eleven months later in 1953, aged 39.

In the remainder of this paper I will outline the linguistic means whereby DT both paces and directs the interest of the reader, as well as his own unattainable wishes for the continued fortitude of his father, the source of his poetic creativity. (See Tremlett (1991, p. 152) on the direct role played by the father in DT's day-to-day poetic creation.)

## 5. FORM AS CONTENT; TECHNIQUE AS MESSAGE

Perhaps the most salient thing about DT's villanelle is the way its first line seems to resonate after only one reading--in fact, it is nearly unforgettable. (DT eventually chose this line, complete with period, as the title of the poem, crossing out his original choice, "Lament", which later became the title of another poem.) And central to Line 1's power is its central word, "gentle". It is from this word--its sound, meaning and position in Line 1--that stem all the linguistic devices to follow.

I intend "central" in the above paragraph literally, counting the non-overt subject "you" (*i. e.*, DT's ailing father). This non-present subject is the argument of which "gentle" is predicated as an adjunct (= "primary predication" in the terms of Napoli (1989) and Rothstein (1983)). Jackendoff (1990, p. 203) refers to such an argument as the predicate adjunct's "host".

As will be discussed below, on initial reading, Line 1's "gentle" is sometimes taken for a non-standard adjective used adverbially. Part of the reason for this reading, whether seen as grammatical or not, might be the absence of an overt host in Line 1. However, there are several other reasons to miss the predicate-adjunct sense of "gentle"--increasing the likelihood that this "miss" was intended by DT. I hope to demonstrate that, semantically and syntactically, Line 1's "gentle" plays the key role in the poem's total artistic effect, a role based on its **non**-adverbial nature.

A major part of the syntactic evolution in the villanelle consists of DT leading us from its initial sentence with its lack of an overt subject to the first sentence of the closing quatrain--which is also an imperative, but which **does** begin with the "you" that is DT's father. On a very first reading, not knowing the identity of Line 1's non-overt subject may contribute to the pressures which push the reader toward the closing quatrain. On subsequent readings, the knowledge that the addressee is DT's father (*i. e.*, the poet's knowledge) adds pathos to its initial absence for the reader/listener thanks to the poem's syntactic design which keeps its absence in Line 1 at the surface of STM.

DT exerts his syntactic arts to deny the impending disappearance of his father, and the poem's inner syntactic evolution represents a heroic attempt to contradict and replace the natural course of events threatening to deprive DT of his father forever: As illness conspires to remove DT's father from this world, the poet exerts the art learned from his father to make the subject of his imperative wishes--that very father--appear in overt form.

Now, the English imperative is usually **not** grammatical with an overt "you". There are, however, some apparent exceptions (as we will see, the exact grammatical status of these cases of "you" is an open question): imperatives involving **lists** of addressees, **comparison/contrast**, and **vocative** case. Examples of these three cases--which all share a common denominator of emphasis in the broadest sense--are given in Notes (4), (5) and (6), respectively. (Later, we will see that such cases can be distinguished from purely vocative uses of "you" in examples such as (28) and (33).)

As already mentioned, part of the effect of alternating imperatives with indicatives throughout the villanelle is that the middle tercets--which are all indicatives--have the force of arguments which form a bridge to the complex imperative which begins the closing quatrain. (The quatrain is made up of this new, two-line imperative followed by the two imperatives from the first tercet.) The overt "you" in the quatrain's first line is completely natural in terms of English syntax, since it

comes at the end of the **list** of types of men discussed in the preceding tercets (the “And” which begins the line makes this explicit), and is implicitly **compared** with them. The two appositive adjuncts which come after this “you” also contribute to its **vocative** sense.

The key word “gentle” in the poem’s first line provides both a “hint” of the existence of that line’s non-overt subject and acts to catalyze the semantic and syntactic means by which DT leads the reader/listener through the arguments of the middle tercets to an expectation of the almost inevitable appearance of its co-referential “you” in the imperative which begins the quatrain. These means crucially involve adjunct constructions and various other types of subject modifiers.

The pregnancy of “gentle” in the total structure of DT’s villanelle derives from three, interrelated factors: 1) its semantic acceptability in terms of selectional restrictions; 2) its position between Line 1’s verb and the following PP; and 3) the possibility/impossibility of its occurring in other positions in a variety of sentence types, hinted at by the villanelle’s syntactic design.

### 5.1 The semantic implications of “gentle”

Jackendoff (*ibid.*) points out that usually predicate adjuncts must be adjectives (or other lexical items) that denote a transitory quality. Adjectives which represent permanent states or qualities—*i. e.*, those that can not normally be changed into (or out of)—seem at least odd as predicate adjuncts. The example in Note (7) confirms this. Interestingly, non-transitory adjectives used as predicate adjuncts force metaphorical or bizarre transitory readings. The sentence in (7), for example, becomes acceptable if we assume that an experience at “the hospital” has given the subject new confidence which makes him seem “tall”—or that he has undergone an experimental medical treatment that has increased his height!

At first glance, “gentle” does not appear to meet Jackendoff’s transitory criterion, and this probably contributes to the mental hiccup sometimes engendered by Line 1. As already noted, some literary critics have seen “gentle” here as a nonstandard verbal modifier: “In terms of syntax, they [*i. e.*, “gentle” and other examples cited *supra* in the same text] must be termed wrong or mistaken...” (Chapman, 1973, p. 56; bracketed information added). And I have heard more than one English-native-speaker linguist—including some interested in predicate adjuncts—say that the villanelle’s first line struck them as non-standard, or that they expected an adverb in place of “gentle”, on initial hearing.

However, it is of prime importance that in the same critical passage just cited, Chapman also implies that the force of DT’s first line actually **derives** from this “incorrect” form of language (*i. e.*, “gentle”): “the writer masters language below the surface level and claims the right of performance beyond the normal competence” (*ibid.*). In terms of the theme of this paper, I will argue below that Chapman’s perception of “gentle” as an “error”—or at least as odd—is exactly the kind of response that DT probably intended as an early stage in the process of “syntactic realization” the reader of his villanelle is meant to go through. On the other hand, Chapman’s apparent perception of the intended poetic force of “gentle” in Line 1 is evidence that his own **tacit** linguistic competencesenses its importance (which lies beyond simplistic communication), and therefore its unusual appropriateness, **despite** his consciously-acquired prescriptive preconceptions (*e. g.*, the school-grammar rule that “adjectives are not grammatical after verbs”), and/or susceptibility to DT’s devices.

*The Oxford English Dictionary, Second Edition* (1989, p. 451, entry 8) cites only a single (ambiguous) use of “gentle” as an adverb, from 1611; and several cases of “gentler” as an adverb, all prior to 1850. With Line 1, DT is asking that his father not **be** in a “gentle” state as he approaches death. The common-sense distinction between DT’s line as written and what it would mean if “gentle” were replaced by its adverbial form seems to center on intention: DT is surely asking that his father not slip, through weakness or inattention, into a passive, falsely gentle state, rather than asking his father to cease an intentional, thought-out change of character toward true gentleness—or, still less, to change a character which is already truly kind/gentle. (In DT’s MS notes for a later poem, kept at the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at

Austin, he refers to his father as a “kind old man” (Watkins, 1956, p. 202.) The adverbial form in this context seems more likely to apply to intentional actions or changes in disposition, at least in my judgment.

Intentionality aside, as written, Line 1 is ambiguous as to whether “gentle” is meant to qualify the character/disposition of its host or merely observable behavior (the OED entry cited above includes both). This point touches on technique, since the former meaning is obviously less transitory than the latter (although “uncharacteristic” disposition lies somewhere between true disposition and behavior in this regard), and it is disposition which is the preferred interpretation in the absence of qualification (see Notes (8-9) for examples of both senses). Hence, another reason to pause at “gentle” in Line 1, which is without qualification as to disposition or behavior and is thus likely to be taken in the less-transitory sense of qualifying disposition, however “uncharacteristic” it is. Nevertheless, in the quatrain it is clear that DT is pleading both for a kind of fortitude in the disposition of his father and its outward sign in the father’s actual behavior toward him.

As mentioned above, I believe that the potential pauses for the semantic analysis and reanalysis of “gentle” on the part of the reader are integral to DT’s poetic design. The conscious or subconscious working out of the sense, grammaticality and, indeed, gentleness of the use of “gentle” in this position will help take the reader forward toward DT’s poetic intent by anchoring its host in the reader’s working memory.

Now, although “gentleness” does not appear to be a state that is easily acquired or lost, on reflection, neither is it absolutely permanent, as the above discussion of characteristic/uncharacteristic disposition entails and as the (albeit behavior-biased) example in Note (10) from the OED (*ibid.*) implies. Thus, the use of “gentle” in Line 1 is not ungrammatical, merely unusual in a way that suits DT’s poetic purpose. However, I believe DT uses “gentle” for several other reasons, besides his main one of making us pause at this point in the poem:

First, in terms of purely aural effect, the /nt/ of “gentle” contributes to Line 1’s consonance by fitting into the sequence of “not”-“into”-“night” in such a way as to preserve the syllabic symmetry of the /n...t/ and the /...nt.../ words in this line (*i. e.*, /n...t/-/...nt.../-/...nt.../-/n...t/). Furthermore, “gentle” might also contribute a sound/graphemic symbolism to the message of Line 1 in the sense that the (traditionally-termed) “hard” /g/ of “go” yields to the “soft” /g/ of “gentle”, before reverting to the “hard” /g/ of “good”, in a progression that is isomorphic with DT’s plea that his father not “go soft” on him before that “good night”.

Second, in semantic terms, “gentle” is much more positive in its denotations/connotations than any of the alternatives to it which come to mind—*e. g.*, weak, quiet, passive, unthinking, uncritical. DT himself provides us with two possible alternatives: “calm” in (11), a sentence from an unfinished work also addressed to his father (discussed in the next section); and “soft” in a spoken introduction to one of his public readings of the villanelle (see Note (12)). Also, the etymological associations with the “gentle” of nobility and “gentlemanliness” help lessen the impression of criticism and increase that of sincerity and respect engendered by Line 1.

All in all, “gentle” seems the perfect “hook” for DT’s line: basically positive in meaning, it does not make the reader feel that DT is criticizing his father, since even if the latter **does** continue in his “gentleness” it could hardly be seen as reprehensible. DT is merely pleading that his father be his normal, everyday self up to the end—even if that normal character/behavior includes a certain roughness toward DT.

There **were** moments of friction in DT’s relation with his father. For example, DT’s father opposed his marriage on the grounds that it would interfere with his poetic vocation (Tremlett, 1991, pp. 71-72). In his younger years, the father’s pride and aloofness kept him apart at the grammar school where he taught and DT studied (*ibid.*, p. 29). However, whatever “roughness” there was in the father’s behavior toward his son, it was probably also a proof of his love for him and his belief in his poetic ability. Hence, DT, the poet-son, does not want his father to change at all in this regard as he nears his end.



Thus, the reader pauses mentally over the word “gentle” in the first line, even as the poem’s lyricism leads on, partly because of the less-than-common view of “gentleness” as a transitory quality, and also perhaps because of the incongruity of DT’s rejection of such a normally positive quality and his desire for whatever is its opposite (honesty, a sign of strength and thus health, proof of caring...). **And its host hovers in the pause.**

Moreover, co-extensive syntactic factors both reinforce the semantic factors just discussed and point the way to other aspects of DT’s message. These syntactic factors will be discussed, beginning in *Section 5.3*, after the following discussion of the use of predicate adjuncts vs. adverbs in an unfinished work by DT consecrated to his **deceased** father. In fact, the MS notes for this work constitute one of the son’s last projects--if not his last.

## 5.2 *Adjuncts vs. adverbs in DT’s “Elegy” fragments*

As a corollary to Jackendoff’s observation that predicate adjuncts must be taken as referring to transitory states or qualities, stative verbs--i. e., those in which no change of state occurs--also often appear strange when followed by predicate adjuncts, as the grammatical and ungrammatical examples in (13) show. The use of predicate adjuncts with stative verbs often forces an interpretation which includes an assumed premise to the effect that the stative verb in question constitutes a **change** from a state somewhere in the explicit/assumed context. The ungrammatical examples in (13) have such possible grammatical readings, though with some difficulty.

Evidence that DT was aware of this relation between [+/- STATIVE] and the grammaticality and/or naturalness of using the predicate adjunct construction comes from his unfinished *Elegy*, written for his father after his death. Since this is one of DT’s unfinished poems, two published versions exist, both based on the autograph MSS kept at the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin. The adverb/predicate adjuncts DT uses in this poem do not differ across the excerpts in (15) and (16)--corresponding to the two versions--and are given in bold.

First, note that “lightly” is salient as the sole adverb in either the villanelle or the *Elegy*, and that it occurs after the first “lie” in (15) and the “live” which replaces this “lie” in (16). In addition to its primary meaning, which has a stative connotation, “lightly” also forms a contra-association to “night” and “darkness”. Most importantly, as an adverb, “lightly” has the unrestricted possibility of grammatical usage even with a stative verb (as well as with non-stative ones).

Now, both “lie” and “live” have stative and non-stative uses which are not always easily distinguished, and sometimes the use of “lie” seems to approach the status of a copula. Nonetheless, the examples in (14) seem to indicate that, with appropriate context, grammatical/ungrammatical examples of predicate adjuncts with the non-stative/stative uses, respectively, of these verbs do parallel the clearer examples of (13).

In (15)/(16), “lie” and “live” both have as their subject the father whose state *vis-à-vis* DT now will not change, even in the version in (16) with its intentional catachresis. The reconstruction of the *Elegy* by DT’s friend Vernon Watkins (contained in Note (15)) was explained by Watkins (1956, p. 202) in the volume of DT’s poetry DT himself selected (Thomas, 1956). In his note to this reconstruction, Watkins (*ibid.*) quotes DT’s own outline notes about his father (contained in the same MSS at the University of Texas): “Now he will not leave my side, though he is dead.” Fitzgibbon (1965, between pp. 184 and 185) also reproduces a photograph of a page from the *Elegy* MSS which contains several fragments emphasizing the unchanging nature of (the memory of) DT’s father for him after his death.

On the other hand, further on in the same sentence cited in (15) and (16) the adjectives “lost” and “still” are used as predicate adjuncts after the negative stative verb “lie” in both versions (= this verb’s second occurrence in the case of (15)). Of course, here the grammaticality of these predicate adjuncts despite a preceding potentially stative verb is assured by the negative wish--“may he never lie”--which expresses the undesirability of a **change** from “lying lightly”, in effect rendering the total sense clearly non-stative.

**Thus, the passages in (15) and (16) demonstrate the natural, grammatical usage of both adverbs and predicate adjuncts after verbs which are usually stative, in the same sentence, given the appropriate semantic and syntactic conditions.**

The adverb "lightly" is syntactically moving not only for its uniqueness across both the villanelle and the *Elegy*, but also because of its grammaticality with what is probably intended--in (15) at least--as a stative verb (with which a predicate adjunct would be less natural). The use of "live lightly" in (16) expresses the vital nature of his deceased father's unchanging memory for DT. The predicate adjuncts after the second "lie" in (15)/(16) are grammatical because of the negative wish which contrasts with the affirmative "live"--and which also recalls Line 1 of the villanelle. "Lightly" functions as a syntactic signal in the *Elegy*, preserving the grammaticality of its VP, whatever the [+/- STATIVE] status of its verb, in a uniquely affirming way, just as a predicate adjunct (i. e., the adjective "gentle") is used in the first line of the villanelle as the catalyst for a chain of semantic and syntactic effects which could not be created with its corresponding adverb.

Thus, to read (15)/(16) in tandem with the first line of the villanelle gives the uncanny impression of a syntactic fugue whose subject is DT's dying/actual father (villanelle) and whose counter-subject is his deceased father/father's memory (*Elegy*). A discussion of conscious intent is perhaps best left to a later section, but one point should be stressed here. Namely, taken together, the first line of the villanelle and the passages cited above from the *Elegy* provide clear evidence of the poet's ability to manipulate complex semantic and syntactic conditions, on at least some level of awareness, toward a consciously intended artistic end.

As if to underline the conclusion that the *Elegy* was intended as a fugue on the villanelle, at the bottom of Page 2 in the University of Texas MSS, which contains (16), there is a sentence which seems to have been meant as a continuation of the *Elegy*--and which is included as the final two lines of Davies and Maud's (1988, p. 264) version of this unfinished work, though they were crossed out by DT. This version exactly reproduces Page 2 of the University of Texas MSS, which both Watkins and Davies and Maud (*ibid.*) see as the most complete version of the *Elegy*. Davies and Maud (*ibid.*) call these final two lines, already noted as Note (11), a "benediction".

- (11) Go calm to your crucified hill, I told  
The air that drew away from him.

The affirmative "Go calm" here suggests that, now that DT's father is deceased, it is both natural and desired by the son that he be calm, in contrast to DT's negative Line 1 in the villanelle. To complete the counterpoint to the villanelle's first line, which contains no overt "you" (in anticipation of the father's passing), the first line in (11) makes explicit its non-overt subject by means of the possessive adjective ("your") after the verb--as if to say that now, both despite and because of death, DT's father is ever and unchangingly with him, not as a burden, but light in the vividness of his memory.

### 5.3 The syntactic position of "gentle" in DT's villanelle

Since predicate adjuncts often refer to states which have changed, it is not surprising that their expected, canonical placement in a sentence should be at its end, as for example when a particular state has resulted from a series of events like those in the examples contained in (17). Even if this were merely a statistical observation it would still have relevance to a reader's parsing expectations as he/she goes through the first line of DT's villanelle.

However, as the examples in (18-21) show, there are also structural reasons to suppose that the canonical expectation for a predicate adjunct is at the end of a sentence. (Some of these examples come from Williams (1983) and Hornstein and Lightfoot (1987).) First, the pair of contrasting examples in (18) shows that subject-hosted predicate adjuncts are ordered **after** object-hosted predicate adjuncts. The pair of contrasting examples in (19) shows that predicate adjuncts are likewise ordered **after** VP adverbs. The contrasting pair in (20) shows that, VP-internally,



predicate adjuncts are even worse than manner adverbs before a direct object. Finally, the examples in (21) show that a manner adverb before “there”, though awkward, is far preferable to a predicate adjunct in the same position.

These structural facts taken together perhaps increase the reader’s expectation of an adverb where “gentle” occurs (recall the discussion of Chapman (1973, p. 56) above), and of course act to lessen expectation of a predicate adjunct. Hence, the reader might naturally pause to compute the exact syntactic function of “gentle”, which--again--involves the identification of its host, the non-overt subject of Line 1, in a way that an adverb would not (see Dillon (1978, pp. 82-89) on the mental computations involved).

Paradoxically, these effects occur concurrently with the (seemingly) antagonistic feeling of natural fluency induced by the first line, even when it is read for the first time. As noted, many factors contribute to this fluency, including rhythmic effects, assonance and consonance. The homonymy with the collocation “go gentle” (as in “become gentle”) might momentarily play a role as well, though this could cut both ways in terms of fluency. However, the naturalness of “gentle” in its VP-internal position in Line 1--**despite** data like those in (18-21)--is **above all** due to the effect of the following heavy PP (= “into that good night”, the second half of Line 1). The examples in (22) show that predicate adjuncts become more acceptable within VPs with increasingly heavy VP complements.

From reader to reader the sum total of DT’s semantic/syntactic effects, which both enhance and slightly hinder the first line’s fluency, might vary. However, it seems likely that the elements which contribute to forward movement push the reader ahead on a subliminal level--while the mild semantic and syntactic surprises of the central word “gentle” nag away, near-conscious, for some kind of resolution in a comparison with the sentences to follow. The semantic and syntactic memory-trace of “gentle” (and the desire for its host) also probably interacts with the structures of the succeeding tercets to suggest other semantic and syntactic associations to the reader. The sum of these associations constitutes a large part of DT’s artistic effect in this poem and “contrives to direct us toward the particular kind of meaning that must be apprehended in order to make sense of the poem,” as Nowotny (1962, p. 187) says of another of DT’s works.

At this point, it should be noted that a surface-level metaphorical/symbolic interpretation is possible for the first line’s structure. That is, DT’s first line could be taken as “saying” **with its very structure** that “gentleness” is not appropriate/desired before the end/death of his father--just as the word “gentle” is not desirable/expected in canonical terms before the end of a VP.

It is my thesis that while such a direct “symbolic” reading of Line 1 might be valid on its own terms--and certainly seems to agree with DT’s message--the truly **poetic** inspiration behind the poem’s first line lies in the parsing hesitation engendered in the reader’s/listener’s mind as the sentence flows gently forward, and in how DT manipulates the memory-trace of this hesitation throughout the rest of the poem. As the reader’s inner ear passes “gentle” it is left with a slight semantic/ syntactic puzzle. At this point, the reader’s mind both wants to make sense of Line 1, by itself, (syntagmatic pressure) and move on, trying to make sense of it in terms of what is to follow (paradigmatic pressure). And in what is to follow, there is fertile ground for comparison and the further associations which will determine the villanelle’s ultimate effect.

#### 5.4 *The possibility of “gentle” in other sentential positions*

Now, English imperatives permit primary predicate adjuncts as readily as indicatives, even though their host is a non-overt subject. This is evidenced both by the first line of DT’s villanelle and by many other sentences that could be imagined. In fact, the examples in (23) show that such imperatives are commonplace.

On the other hand, there are some crucial differences between imperatives and indicatives in terms of **where** predicate adjuncts can occur grammatically. In the middle tercets of the villanelle--which are all indicatives--DT manages to manipulate indicative sentence structure, and

in particular various types of subject adjuncts, so as to indirectly suggest these differences to the reader--as I hope to demonstrate below. These devices lead to expectations on the part of the reader which will be resolved/left unresolved (intentionally) in the closing quatrain, and which will ultimately help shape the reader's response to the whole poem.

First of all, note that the appearance of any overt matrix-clause subject is put off in DT's villanelle for almost five lines. (Line 2 is probably intended as a subordinate clause modifying Line 1.) It is only at the very end of the fifth line that Tercet 2's matrix subject "they" occurs. As can be verified in (2), the matrix sentence of the second tercet is "...they / Do not go gentle into that good night." The second tercet is unusual in DT's villanelle in the sense that its subject is so delayed. (In fact, only the appearance of the "you" that begins the quatrain is more delayed.) Tercets 3-5 all begin with their matrix subject NP, and, as previously indicated, all of the villanelle's tercets consist of a single sentence (*i. e.*, no sentence is spread across stanzas).

What comes before the matrix sentence of Tercet 2, and spans nearly two full lines of the poem, is actually two preposed, complex subordinate clauses which modify Line 6--complete with two instances of anaphora (!), which both look backward to the subordinate subject "wise men" and forward to the co-referential matrix subject "they". Since this "they" does not form a constituent with Tercet 2's preposed subordinate clauses, it is easily passed over on a hasty scanning. And since only Tercet 2 begins with such a long preposed element, this garden-path effect is probably intended by DT, who uses similar preposing to delay comprehension in other poems, where it suits his poetic purpose (see Note (41) for a sentence from one such poem).

Thus, if it were not for the punctuation, a reader could interpret the first two lines of Tercet 2 (up to "they") as a continuation of the final line of the **first** tercet (with, of course, different semantic implications)--and even DT's punctuation is not an absolute barrier to such a reading. In DT's own recording of this poem for Caedmon (1952), he pauses a little unnaturally for breath at the enjambement after Tercet 2's matrix subject "they", indicating the difficulty of reading aloud the preposed elements of this tercet **together with its matrix subject**, even for him.

The poetic implication of the second tercet's special structure is that, until the appearance of its easily-missed subject "they", the reader's parser might still be assuming that the subject of everything thus far is the host of "gentle", which remains unnamed. **And Line 6 of the poem--"Do not go gentle into that good night"--therefore risks being re-read as the imperative Line 1.** Thus, as mentioned in Section 4., many literary critics (*e. g.*, Davies, 1986, p. 74) have noted that the indicative VPs in the villanelle's middle tercets never completely lose the reverberation of their use in the first tercet as imperatives.

As the reader undergoes these effects, he/she continues reading the poem's surface structure, drawn along by its fluent musicality. Despite the length of Tercet 2's two preposed subordinate clauses, internally they are not syntactically challenging, and are as musical as the poem's earlier lines due to their assonance and rhythm. All the while, the reader's parser is perhaps also awaiting (on some level of consciousness) a confirmation of the exact function/host of "gentle".

If the reader is also required to backtrack and recompute the function of Tercet 2's preposed elements and locate its matrix subject, the psychological importance of this confirmation (of the host of "gentle", not to mention Line 1's subject) could be magnified, since "gentle" (and its host) might then be "flagged" as a potential parsing problem, to be held in STM for counter-checking while the reader continues through the following tercets and locates the subject of each.

These potential parsing contingencies are not intended so much to derail the reader's comprehension as to guide it toward other syntactic associations, either at a conscious or subconscious level. And it is primarily through such associations that "the reader's mind receives not only the information the passage may be said to **communicate** but also and at the same time the **significance** of the information" (Nowotny, 1962, p. 9; emphasis added).

The appearance of the subject of the third tercet--"Good men", the poem's first non-pronoun matrix subject--comes on the heels of the potential parsing problems just described, which *in toto*

function to keep the question of Line 1's non-overt subject salient in the reader's memory. Syntactically, "Good men" is thus poised to act as a magnet for the reader's attention, already focused on the host of "gentle". Semantically, Tercet 3's "Good men" could include DT's father in its collectivity--as could Tercet 2's "wise men". Therefore, given the likely presence in the reader's STM of "gentle" (and its unresolved host) thanks to Tercet 2's potential garden-path, the reader's parser might also try to store "gentle" in STM as an additional attribute within the subject-NP chunk of Tercet 3, thus: "gentle, good men"; or within Tercet 2's subject-antecedent NP, thus: "gentle, wise men"; or in a combination of both, thus: "gentle, wise, good men".

Any subconscious mnemonic re-sorting of "gentle" as a subject attribute could be extended to the subject of Line 1/host of "gentle", given the temptation to read Tercet 2's final sentence as the imperative which begins the villanelle thanks to DT's garden-path. Evidence for such an intermediate stage in the comprehension of the poem comes from at least one literary critic's interpretation of "gentle" in Line 1: Davies (1986, p. 75) cites various associations which might have been intended by DT for "gentle", including that of a headless vocative "gentle (one)".

Such a headless vocative, would not be in keeping with the apparently intended sense of Line 1, given the lack of commas around "gentle" (*pace* Davies), although it seems a (barely) grammatical reading and Line 1 is strictly ambiguous. In support of Davies's interpretation of DT's feelings toward his father, one could cite Watkins's (1956, p. 202) reproduction of one of DT's MS notes, in which DT refers to his father in similar terms: "he [the father] never knew what he was, a **kind** old man..." [bracketed information and emphasis added]. (As mentioned in *Section 5.1*, this note also indicates that, at the time of writing the villanelle, DT considered his father truly gentle of character.)

My point in citing Davies's suggestion regarding the possible readings of Line 1 is that his vocative "gentle (one)" interpretation is evidence that DT's syntactic devices are, in part, intended to draw the reader's parser into an attempt to fill the gap created by Line 1's lack of an overt subject. These devices probably produce a syncretistic effect with the ambiguity of Line 1 in the sense construed by Davies (1986). Thus, the reader's parser might store either or both of the following interpretations of Line 1 in STM--although, on internal evidence, only the first seems to be the primary meaning intended by DT. (Parentheses indicate implied items according to Davies's interpretation.)

Do not die gentle(, father).	(= DT's primary intended reading)
Do not die, gentle (father).	(= Davies's suggested vocative reading)

Of course, part of the fascination of art (including language art) lies in the fact that mutually exclusive meanings and images can sometimes be held in (conscious or subconscious) mind at the same time. It is at this point in the poem, and always with the "longing" for Line 1's non-overt subject as background, that what Nowotny (1962, p. 9) calls the "operation of syntax" as a cause of "poetical pleasure" shifts into a higher gear--and what is **not** said in the poem assumes as great an importance as what is, although the following scenario of the syntactic associations which might be aroused in a sensitized reader by the villanelle's central tercets is frankly speculative.

Notice that Tercet 3's "Good men" is also followed by an appositive, a construct that has certain similarities to a predicate adjunct. If the reader subconsciously attempts to associate "gentle" with the initial position in Line 1, but as a predicate adjunct instead of as a simple pre-nominal attribute, thanks to Line 1's lack of an overt subject, the result might be the following mnemonic reshuffling of Line 1 in the reader's STM.

\* Gentle, do not die(, father). (= predicate adjunct in initial position)

However, this sentence--with "gentle" as an initial predicate adjunct--is ungrammatical, even though in keeping with Line 1's primary sense, and the reader who is led to attempt such a restatement should thereby experience some *malaise*. Line 1 can not begin with "gentle" as a predicate adjunct. Indicative sentences like those in (24) **can** begin with predicate adjuncts, but

imperatives--like that immediately above--can **not**, as the affirmative and negative examples in (25) both show. (However, the semantic nuances of sentence-initial and post-verb predicate adjuncts do not necessarily overlap perfectly even in indicatives--a point to which I will return below.)

Notes (24) and (25) are given beside parallel versions with sentential adverbs in place of predicate adjuncts in order to demonstrate that the former--in contrast to predicate adjuncts--are grammatical sentence-initially in **both** indicatives and imperatives, although their precise semantic signification might also vary with their sentential position. Thus, it is specifically the predicate adjunct construction which is subject to special grammaticality conditions in sentence-initial position.

To recapitulate, the first two tercets of DT's villanelle are structured in such a way as to keep the reader's mind focused on the imperative sense of Line 1. Thanks to the villanelle's formal design, shown in (3), Line 1 frames these two tercets. DT makes use of the fact that Line 1 both begins the poem and closes the second tercet to set up a (slight) garden-path effect that keeps its imperative sense uppermost in the mind of the reader. Along with this effect, comes the continued psychological prominence of Line 1's "gentle" and the desire for its unexpressed host--perhaps even the mistaken assumption that this host is the matrix subject of the first six lines.

Thus, the subject "gap" in Line 1 remains a vacuum to be filled by the associations aroused in the reader's mind by the syntactic structures in the middle tercets. With the beginning of Line 7 and its non-pronoun subject, the associations that the poem might arouse in a reader--already alerted to the importance of the unexpressed subject of Line 1--take on a key role in terms of the poem's ultimate message by focusing the reader's attention on its initial position, normally the canonical subject position. Tercets 4 and 5 will maintain the reader's attention on the sentence-initial position as the canonical subject position.

Furthermore, the combination of DT's devices in the first seven lines of the villanelle might also have the effect of laying the foundation for a subliminal suspicion of the impossibility of "gentle" as a predicate adjunct anywhere in Line 1 outside its VP. The ultimate poetic function of this suspicion--as an association in the mind of a sensitized reader--might include a further emphasis of the lack of a host/subject in Line 1. The possible tension in the reader's mind between the lack of a subject in Line 1 and the canonical position of each tercet's matrix subject starting from Line 7 might then lead to the reader's desire for the poem's addressee to assume this place, a desire which will be subjected in the quatrain to the cumulative effect of DT's syntactic devices based on the possible positions of "gentle" and its host.

### 5.5 *Parallel structures in Tercets 3-5*

Each of the villanelle's two initial tercets has a unique structure. On the other hand, Tercets 3-5, which continue to build on the syntactic associations begun in the poem's first two tercets, share a largely parallel structure with each other. Some of these parallels are even shared with Tercet 2, despite its distinct overall structure. In brief, the parallels shared by Tercets 3-5 are a pre-subject adjective, an optional appositive or PP following the subject, and an extended relative clause or gerund following the subject and its (optional) appositive or PP.

Tercets 3-5 all share the occurrence of an adjective before their matrix subject; this adjective-noun construct is also present in Tercet 2, but as the antecedent of its matrix subject pronoun. The relevant adjective-noun pairs are as follows.

Tercet 2	wise men	Tercet 3	good men
Tercet 4	wild men	Tercet 5	grave men

The alliteration of these adjectives across their alternating tercets, as well as their partial assonance and consonance, attests to the care with which even this comparatively simple aspect of the villanelle's middle tercets' structure was decided. Tercets 3 and 5, which begin with the

above adjectives having word-initial “hard” /g/, also terminate with Line 3, whose verbs “rage, rage” have “soft” /g/ in final position--thus mirroring the sound/graphemic symbolism of Line 1 (see p. 7 above). The effect of these parallels, like the effects of the devices outlined in the previous section, is partly to keep the generalized role of the subject NP in the mind of the reader and, by extension, its surface-level absence in Line 1, where it plays a critical role as the host of “gentle”.

Tercets 3 and 5 each have an adjunct immediately after their matrix subject. Tercet 3’s adjunct--“the last wave by”, set off by commas--is ambiguous but seems to be an appositive. In Tercet 5, the adjunct, again set off by commas, is a prepositional phrase. (The exact syntactic status of this PP will be discussed below.) The fact that these two tercets end with Line 3, which contains no predicate adjunct like “gentle”, is certainly the reason for DT’s decision to include a short adjunct immediately after the matrix subject of each. In other words, these two short adjuncts are meant to remind the reader of the predicate-adjunct function itself--and, by extension, of Line 1’s “gentle” and its host--**in the only two tercets in the entire poem which lack Line 1.**

Tercet 4 contains no other adjunct between its subject and the following relative clause. Of course, both Tercet 2 and Tercet 4 end with the repetition of Line 1, which contains the poem’s catalytic predicate adjunct “gentle”. In schematic terms, then, the structure of the modification to the subjects of Tercets 3-5 is as shown below.

Tercet 3	ADJ-SUBJECT N-, <b>ADJUNCT</b> ,-GERUND	+LINE 3
Tercet 4	ADJ-SUBJECT N-REL. CLAUSE	+LINE 1- “gentle”
Tercet 5	ADJ-SUBJECT N-, <b>ADJUNCT</b> ,-REL. CLAUSE	+LINE 3

The extent of the adjunction between each matrix subject and its VP seems to be in increasing order across the succeeding tercets. Thus, in Tercet 3 there is a nominal adjunct plus a gerund. Tercet 4 contains a long relative clause (with pronoun), but no other adjunct. Only Tercet 5 has a PP adjunct **and** a relative pronoun + clause, and the PP itself can be analyzed as a reduced relative clause given its parenthetical commas/pauses (see Quirk *et al.* (1985, p. 1301) for other criteria). (Tercet 5’s PP is unambiguously adjoined to “Grave men”--rather than to the VP--thanks to its following relative clause.) Thus, Tercet 5 can be said to have the most extended post-subject adjunction among the villanelle’s stanzas--double relatives, in fact. In this way, DT’s modifications to the matrix subjects of Tercets 3-5 steadily escalate the importance of the subject function in the mind of the reader prior to the appearance of the quatrain’s “you”.

The gerund/relative clauses in Tercets 3-5 all involve complex subordination and coordination, though these are right-branching structures (DT makes use of left-branching ones in other poems and in Tercet 2), and as such present no special parsing difficulty. Such complexity or difficulty does not seem to be part of DT’s scheme here. For the most part, his goal in the villanelle seems to be to move his readers toward the poem’s most moving moment--the closing quatrain--like passengers on a raft in a river whose direction of flow is determined, but not greatly impeded, by the heavy boulders embedded in it: the various modifications to the matrix subjects.

*The role of subject adjuncts in the middle tercets of DT’s villanelle.* In Tercets 2-5, a major purpose of DT’s organization is to maintain the predicate adjunct “gentle” in the reader’s mind. Tercets 2 and 4 do this, of course, by repeating Line 1. Tercets 3 and 5 do this with an extra appositive/PP immediately after their subject noun, before a longer relative clause or gerund, as mentioned above. Again, the reason for maintaining the reader’s attention on the predicate adjunct “gentle” is to maintain the desire for the realization in surface structure of its host--the non-overt subject of Line 1, DT’s father.

On a first reading, the proposed elements in Tercet 2 are responsible for the possibility that the non-overt subject of Line 1 will continue to be thought of as the poem’s only matrix subject well into Tercet 2 (= DT’s intentional garden-path effect). However, after their actual function has been comprehended, they focus the reader’s attention on Tercet 2’s subject, as do the two cases of anaphora in these proposed elements. There is even a PP after “wise men”, though it is not set off by commas as are the adjuncts in Tercets 3 and 5. This lack of punctuation is probably not a



trivial matter (DT's works in general show great care with punctuation, as we will see in *Section 5.6*), if I am correct in the above suggestion that the latter adjuncts (in Tercets 3 and 5) are meant to help maintain the host of "gentle" in the reader's STM.

In other words, the PP attached to "wise men" differs from the (appositive or PP) adjuncts attached with commas to the matrix subjects of Tercets 3 and 5 in that the latter are meant to put a syntactic marker on their matrix subject parallel to that instigated in Line 1 by "gentle", and thereby increase--by association--the psychological burden on the non-overt matrix subject of Lines 1 and 3 (= DT's father). In contrast, the PP after "wise men" is not set off with commas because the latter NP is not a matrix subject, although it is the antecedent of one. Here, DT manages to maintain unity of structure and theme using the PP after "wise men" and still preserve a special role for the appositive/PP of Tercets 3 and 5, respectively. In other words, the PP after "wise men" plays a supporting role in DT's syntactic scheme *vs.* the leading role of the appositive/PP, with commas, in Tercets 3 and 5, respectively.

In semantic terms, the story of the absence/presence of these commas is especially interesting because the PPs after "wise men"/"Grave men" seem to have nearly **the same semantic import**. Compare "wise men at their end" with "Grave men, near death," (Tercet 3's "the last wave by," and the quatrain's "there on the sad height," also seem to have similar implications, though there is no felt redundancy across the tercets thanks to DT's varied imagery.) In DT's handwritten MSS at the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin, Tercet 2's "at their end"--following "wise men"--was amended to "at the end" and then changed back to "at their end" in his final, clean copy. The PP "at the end" would have sounded more adverbial.

DT's reversion to his original choice of words ("at their end") seems to indicate the realization that his original was preferable--**both** in the sense of being more nearly parallel with Tercet 5's PP "near death," (than the possibly adverbial PP "at the end") **and** in the sense of contrasting with it. (See *Section 6.1* below for a discussion of the implications of these changes for our view of the processes involved in the conscious creation of poetic structures.)

Although the effect on the reader of the simultaneous parallel/contrast between the PP after "wise men" (no commas) and Tercet 5's PP "near death," after "Grave men" might not be obvious, DT's method here is fully characteristic of the relation between structure and theme throughout his villanelle. The **parallel** between "at their end" and "near death," is structural and semantic--*i. e.*, in surface structure, they both consist of an N plus a PP, and they both denote the same thing. The **contrast** lies in the absence/presence, respectively, of commas/pauses (together with the corresponding underlying structural/semantic contrasts to be discussed below) and the fact that the two PPs are adjoined to a non-matrix subject and a matrix subject, respectively.

As already stated, one poetic purpose of the parallel between "at their end" and "near death," is to maintain thematic and structural unity, while the contrast helps keep the former from interfering with the role of the later appositive/PP adjuncts in recalling the relation of "gentle" to its matrix-subject host. The structural/semantic upshot for the reader of the contrast between the absence/presence of the commas around "at their end" and "near death", respectively, is that between restrictive and non-restrictive attributes.

In other words, "wise men at their end" is restrictive; it is only "wise men who are about to die" that DT is speaking of. In this restricted sense, "wise men at their end" does not logically **have** to include DT's father (although, below, I will argue that it does). The resulting gentleness of expression is what matters--*i. e.*, DT avoids a direct acknowledgement of his father's coming death. **However, the restrictive sense here does not necessarily constitute a denial of the father's decline: rather, it pays homage to his syntactic sensibilities.**

On the other hand, "Grave men, near death," is non-restrictive (*cf.* Napoli, 1993, p. 176). DT's recording (Thomas, 1952) of his villanelle for Caedmon confirms this, since it places slight pauses at the positions occupied by the commas, but not even the slightest of pauses around "at their end". The non-restrictive sense of "near death" surrounded by commas, together with the preceding collective plural, is that all "Grave men" are, in the sense that matters most, near death.

Thus, the qualification is pleonastic. This interpretation is strengthened by the pun on “grave” with its Shakespearean allusion (*Romeo and Juliet*, III, i, 98), since “all men near the grave are near death” by tautology. In addition, DT’s handwritten version of Tercet 5 on one page of the MSS at the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin also has “All” crossed out and changed to “Grave”! (This point will come up again in *Section 6.1*.)

In the poet’s discussion of different types of men throughout Tercets 2–5, it is natural that the progress of his argument should finally lead to the view that all men have to face death and should not do so gentle, with the exact time of their passing perhaps a less important matter, before he returns to the subject of his own dying father in the closing quatrain. In personal terms, Tercet 5’s non-restrictive PP reflects the fact that **the easiest way to view the death of a loved one—for DT as well as us, his readers—is to view it as an inevitable and universal fate.** (By extension, Tercet 5 might also be taken as an intimation of DT’s own death. In this connection see Tindall (1996, p. 205) on “Grave men” as (all) poets.)

*The unity of theme and structure in DT’s villanelle.* With the exception of Tercet 2—whose structure is partly determined by a different purpose as explained above—all of the middle, indicative tercets are constructed according to the same design. That is, they each consist of three elements: 1) a subject; 2) qualifiers on this subject; and 3) either Line 1 or Line 3 (used as an indicative VP). Thus, it could be said that everything in the poem that is not an imperative or a wish addressed by DT to his father is a matrix subject or its modification. Briefly put, the poem exhibits an extreme unity of theme and syntactic design, which is shown below.

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Syntactic parallel</u>
DT’s ailing father	subject + modifications
DT’s wishes for his father	imperative/indicative VPs

Furthermore, the men of the poem’s middle tercets could all be taken as aspects of the father, as can be documented from letters, other poems by DT and biographical writings. For example, the “wise men” of Tercet 2 must include DT’s father, who, while loving poetry, had “forked no lightning” with his words since he was not a working poet (see Tremlett (1991, p. 20) on DT’s father as a “failed poet”). Shelby (1990, pp. 107–108) notes the near-blindness of DT’s father in his final days, which is echoed in the “blind eyes” of the “Grave men” in Tercet 5. Other examples could be cited. Semantically, the modifications to the subjects of the middle tercets are, by implication, also attributes of DT’s father, Line 1’s subject. Syntactically, the poem’s subjects are all contiguous to adjuncts/appositives suggestive of mortality—i. e., “near death”.

The effect on the reader’s “poetical pleasure” of this unity of theme and structure involves the fact that the poem takes him/her from its non-overt subject through the following tercets using the various aspects of the father in each to build toward the “you” of the quatrain. On the way, the only structural devices besides DT’s imperatives/wishes are all various syntactic accretions/modifications to the “partial-father” subjects of the middle tercets, which point back to the non-overt host of “gentle” and forward to the quatrain’s “you” (also foreshadowed by the positioning of Tercet 2’s “wise men” before its two anaphors). In effect, **the two main things a reader is made to feel in the villanelle are DT’s plea, and an increasing longing for its addressee.** In so far as it is in language’s power to do so, DT’s quatrain will satisfy the desires thus aroused in the reader for a word of the father. But **only** in so far as it is within its power to do so...

## 5.6 *The subject and subjects of the quatrain*

The quatrain is made up of three imperative sentences, and the first contains two apparently contradictory verbs of the type that DT was fond of. The syntactic devices familiar from the preceding tercets pave the way for the long-awaited “you” of this imperative, and its position. First comes “And” which sums up the **list** of the men **compared** to the father from the preceding tercets, then the father’s “you” itself, then a **vocative** appositive (“my father”) followed by another appositive adjunct (“there on the sad height”) parallel to Tercet 5’s “near death”.



In the second line, first comes the double imperative--“Curse, bless me now” (gentleness in the sense of behavior). Gross (1989, p. 69) notes that DT’s iambic rhythm here stresses “bless”, which DT’s Caedmon recording confirms. The “blessing” DT desires is his father’s “fierce tears”, not tears of weakness. As a postscript to DT’s *Elegy*, Watkins (1956, p. 202) quotes another of DT’s MS notes about his father: “His mother said that as a baby he never cried; nor did he, as an old man; he just cried to his secret wound & his blindness, never aloud.”

Thus, the double imperative verbs of the quatrain’s second line are preceded by the double appositive adjuncts (which also parallel the double relatives of Tercet 5) to the imperative “you”, and DT’s syntactic devices merge in a mathematical summation with his thematic wishes, which are addressed finally, directly, to the father that began the son’s work--thus also completing the progression foreshadowed by the position of Tercet 2’s “wise men” preceding its two anaphors.

At this point, the reader knows that it is the father, now overtly present in the flesh of the syntax, who should not be gentle by default. His presence here, surrounded by the syntactic devices of the son, is not only natural (*i. e.*, grammatical) but fulfilling in the sense of the poem’s total intent and technique, and the two-line length of the double imperative underlines the significance of his syntactic appearance. In fact, the reader might be tempted to read on with this “you” in mind through the final repetitions of Line 1 (broadening the rejection of “gentle” to include disposition) and Line 3--thereby making of the quatrain one long, quadruple imperative following from the same resurrected “you”. This temptation might also be increased by the fact that all of the villanelle’s preceding stanzas are single sentences.

Taken this way, the quatrain would be sufficiently moving. However, such an interpretation might be just a little pat for the author who, as a nineteen-year-old, once referred to himself (tongue in cheek?) in a letter as a “freak user of words” (quoted in G. Thomas, 1990, p. 65; DT’s emphasis). In addition, the sensitized reader of the quatrain will not forget that Lines 1-6 also set up a garden-path effect leading to an incorrect interpretation of their actual subject--

**To say nothing of the period at the end of the quatrain’s first two lines, and again after each of the final two lines.** As mentioned earlier, DT is always careful about punctuation. The punctuation of the published version of the poem (reproduced in (2)) is confirmed in the author’s handwritten clean copy at the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin. Even the handwritten title--Line 1--in the MS contains a period, though published versions often omit it. The upshot: the quatrain’s punctuation suggests that it was DT’s intention (but not necessarily his desire) that the “you” which begins the quatrain **not** see the reader (or the author!) through its last two sentences to its end.

And how could it? Note (26) shows that negative imperatives--like Line 1--can not **begin** with the “you” of the examples in (4-6), whatever the exact grammatical status of this “you”. (*N. B.*--When judging the grammaticality of (26) and some of the ungrammatical imperative examples to follow, care should be taken to avoid the confounding influence of possible homologous indicatives, which themselves can be used pragmatically as strong commands.) Thus, the parallel condition on identity deletion is not met.

The “you” that appears--for various types of emphasis--in an affirmative imperative must appear after the auxiliary in a negative imperative, as in the grammatical example in (27). Furthermore, in most modern English dialects (including DT’s--as will be seen in Section 6.2) this “you” can only appear after the contracted auxiliary and negative clitic “not”, **and not in uncontracted cases** like Line 1 or the ungrammatical example in (27). Note that purely vocative “you” in negative imperatives would occur in sentence initial position as in (28) (*N. Hornstein, pc*), and in this sense the “you” of the first line of the villanelle’s quatrain is strictly ambiguous.

Uncontracted imperatives--both affirmative and negative--with a post-verb subject, like (29), can be found in Shakespeare and other works of a comparable age but would be ungrammatical in most dialects of English today, especially with “do not”. (Note, however, that we can not be sure that the uncontracted written form “do not” in the works of Shakespeare *et al.* was **not** contracted in actual speech: All we can be sure of is that printed contracted examples have yet to

be found in Elizabethan sources (Ronberg, 1992, p. 59).) I will return to the question of dialectal variation regarding “you” in imperatives below, especially in *Section 6.2*, since ultimately it touches the core of the villanelle’s technique.

**To repeat, the emphatic subject which occurs in sentences like (4-6) can not appear anywhere in Line 1 in its imperative sense.**

Finally, to verify that the reader can not read the quatrain’s third line assuming the “you” of its first line under some sort of identity deletion (and assuming it to be not a pure vocative), consider the effect of the quatrain’s first line placed before the quatrain’s third line (= Line 1) without the intervening second line, as in Note (30):

- (30) And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
 ...  
 Do not go gentle into that good night.

Read through, this seems more acceptable than (26). However, my own intuition is that the three-way distinction between 1) this near-acceptability of (30), 2) the clear ungrammaticality of (26), **and** 3) the grammaticality of (4-6) is that (30) has to be interpreted as having a long, sentential pause after its first line, as if it should be written with a colon or a dash or a period after “height”. Actually, such a pause after the “you” of (26) would also render it acceptable, as two sentences (as in the examples in (28)). The structure of the first line of DT’s quatrain, with its vocative and appositive phrases, and the following upper case “D” almost ensure a significant resulting pause, hence the **apparent** acceptability of (30). But the ungrammaticality of (26)—which is part of a native speaker’s tacit competence—should provide a hint to the sensitized reader that this apparent acceptability is just another garden path, a false hope.

Thus, we are left with the conclusion that it is not possible to scan all the sentences of the quatrain assuming the same overt “you” in each subject position, **even though the near-acceptability of (30) suggests that DT actually wants the reader to try to do this. Thus, the quatrain repeats the garden path effect engendered by Lines 1-6—but this time with an overt “you” as the desired “subject”, which paradoxically can not be grammatical at the beginning of the quatrain’s third line despite its co-referentiality with that line’s non-overt subject!**

But the poetic *dénouement* of the villanelle does not end there; there might be one further “syntactic sadness” in store for the sensitized reader, as intimated by the speculative associations discussed earlier with regards to Notes (24-25). Namely, the ungrammaticality of the imperative examples in (25)—in contrast to the grammaticality of the indicatives in (24)—suggests that the lack of an overt subject in (25) might be related to the fact that predicate adjuncts can not occur sentence-initially in imperatives, though they can occur after the verb.

However, the examples in (31) and (32)—which parallel those in (25)—show that, even with an overt “you” in subject position, affirmative and negative imperatives also can **not** begin with a predicate adjunct. These data are significant since, taken together with the fact that (affirmative and negative) indicatives **can** begin with a predicate adjunct (as in (24)), they indicate that the overt “you” of examples like (4-6) and the quatrain’s first line are at least very different from indicative subjects (and the subjects of the villanelle’s middle tercets!) in terms of the range of syntactic structures they can enter into.

These data, in turn, could even be taken as suggesting that the pronouns in sentences like (4-6) might not be full-function subjects at all, but only shadow, or “ghost”, “subjects” used for a variety of emphasis. (Zwicky (1988) contains a list of the discrepancies between the seeming “subjects” of imperatives and those in other types of sentences.) However, they are not simple vocatives either, which would be accompanied by sentential or parenthetical pauses, as already shown in (28) and by other data, such as the fact that the two can co-occur in the same sentence, as in (33). Intuitively, the “you” in examples like those in (4-6) seem to be vocatives assimilated to the position, and many of the functions, of an imperative subject. *Section 6.2*—as well as

Bisazza (in preparation)--will consider the possibility that a sentence-initial predicate adjunct in an imperative followed by an emphatic "you" is **not** grammatical because of the non-argument status of this "you", along with other possible syntactic conclusions to be drawn from these data.

However, the question of whether it is the possible non-argument nature of the apparent subjects in imperatives like (4-6)--or some other factor--which prevents the grammaticality of predicate adjuncts in sentence-initial position in imperatives appears to be an extremely complex one, since post-verb predicate adjuncts in such imperatives are still grammatical despite the lack of an overt subject. The kinds of data relevant to pursuing these issues will be discussed in *Section 6.2*.

Whatever the exact linguistic factors which determine the distribution of predicate adjuncts in English imperatives, the evidence of the quatrain's garden path suggests that DT intended this syntactic pattern/distribution to have a specific effect on the reader's response to the quatrain. "The justification of syntactically difficult poems...is that we begin to respond before we **fully** understand..." (Turner, 1973, p. 99; emphasis added). Perhaps DT's syntactic hints regarding the uncertain grammatical nature of the emphatic "you" in imperatives are meant to continue to push and pull the reader in such a way that a clear resolution of the father's syntactic absence/presence in the quatrain's first line is **forever** subject to doubt: the syntactic mirror of a bereaved person's struggle with the **cursed** loss/the **blessed** memory of a deceased loved one.

### 5.7 *Summary of Section 5.*

From the very beginning of the villanelle, DT's semantic and syntactic devices seem designed to focus attention on the poem's addressee, Line 1's non-overt subject and DT's father, and prepare for its appearance in the first line of the quatrain. When it does appear as "you" in the quatrain, it is not only grammatical (whether as a vocative or something else); its affective significance is both underlined and undermined by its occurrence in the context of the totality of the son's artistic devices already seen throughout the poem.

In the context of DT's devices this appearance is not unambiguous, since the other associations aroused by the poem's devices--even if only faintly--also indicate that the "you" which begins the quatrain can not continue (despite the wishes of DT and the reader) into its third line (see again Note (26))--hence the need for a period after each of the sentences in the quatrain. Moreover, this "you" might not even meet all the relevant syntactic criteria for subjecthood.

Thus, whatever solace is achieved by the appearance of the father's "you" in the quatrain's first line is shown to be ephemeral, since even this "subject" might only be a ghost. A major paradox of DT's villanelle is that all of its overt and non-overt, matrix and non-matrix, subjects can be said to have the same referent--DT's father--if we consider the plural subjects of Tercets 2-5 as aspects of the father, but Line 1 (and its repetition in the quatrain) can not occur grammatically with the emphatic "you", which has the same referent, and to which--in the quatrain's first line--the whole poem leads. This syntactic paradox contributes to the pathos of DT's poem, in fitting parallel to the real-life pathos of the fact that the villanelle was the one poem DT felt he could not show to his father (Davies and Maud, 1988, p. 255).

The villanelle's unforgettable first line is therefore both pregnant with the quatrain's "you"--as the unseen host of "gentle", and with the negation of the poet's wishes--as an uncontracted negative imperative which does not permit an emphatic "you". In his "communication with himself" DT is thus both the author of his own best hope and its denial. With the quatrain's third line, the reader is brought back full-circle to the reality of the father's passing--even as DT's syntax struggles to ensure his presence. However, in accordance with the form of the villanelle, the final line of DT's poem is not its famous first line but rather the first tercet's Line 3: an **affirmative** imperative like the first sentence of the quatrain.

Thus, despite the syntactic evidence of the possible futility of doing so, the reader is still free--as is DT the son--to imagine an overt "subject" pronoun in the last line, a grammatical ghost raging against the dying of the light...

## 6. QUESTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, SPECULATIONS FOR LANGUAGE ART

In this final section I will discuss the following three issues: 1) whether the kind of poetic devices discussed in this paper could reasonably be viewed as the product of conscious intent; 2) the implications of the patterns revealed in these devices for linguistic theory and argumentation; and 3) the evolutionary role (the so-called "survival advantage") of those language abilities that collectively could be termed "hyperphasia". This third point will be discussed at length to situate my analysis of DT's villanelle within an evolutionary view of the human language faculty and within DT's views on the nature of his own work.

### 6.1 *The question of conscious intent*

Analyses of literary language like that presented above inevitably run into the same skeptical question: "Can we really be sure the author intended all that?" Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss (1987) certainly faced this kind of question with their famous analysis of Baudelaire's *Les Chats*. In response, Jakobson himself (cited in Jakobson and Pomorska, 1983, p. 116) has noted that "the written and oral statements of poets, not to mention their early drafts, often show a real understanding of the different hidden methods of work on linguistic matter, **especially when they work on grammatical material**" [emphasis added].

The intentionality question is especially vexing for those who would use the hyperlinguistic data from such an analysis to dis/confirm linguistic theory, since such data would be open to the charge of begging the issue if labeled "subconscious", and, of course, would be worthless if found to be merely coincidental. There is sometimes the statistical answer, which by itself is persuasive at least in the case of DT's work--*i. e.*, the number and the complexity of similar effects in DT's other works would seem to make mere coincidence an extremely unlikely explanation for the greater part of the analysis of DT's villanelle presented above.

But it is really the **wrong question** anyway. The point is that an analysis, a reading, **can** be made. And whatever linguists can analyze, poets can intend--and readers can appreciate. To deny this is to deny the universality of the competence which is the object of our study, and, ultimately, to become entangled in psychological solipsism masquerading as esthetic empiricism.

The difficulty in imagining that the effects discussed in this paper are intentional stems from the fact that it is hard to credit an artist with the ability to summon them up from his/her subconscious at will and for a predetermined purpose. However, here, our common-sense incredulity might actually be closing our minds to what evidence **does** exist of the conscious creation of literary art such as DT's.

Take the example of Shakespeare. Because we are so far removed in time from Elizabethan England, there is perhaps a tendency for non-specialists to regard his unique language art as the result of a mysterious inspiration unconnected with the education of his times. This impression is aided and abetted by the fact that even scholars know very little of Shakespeare's life. But this impression could not be further from the truth. Works like Joseph (1947) and Ronberg (1992) make clear the wealth of educational material contained in the "Elizabethan rhetorics" and the Renaissance intellectual milieu that Shakespeare must have had access to, and conscious access to: much more explicit syntax than a modern college English major is likely to have encountered in four years of study.

On the other hand, a different view of the psychological mechanisms of literary creation might also help remove some of our incredulity. Perhaps what happens in the creation of language art is something more like what happens when a professional photographer shoots a roll of film on motor-drive and auto-focus. It is often only after development and contact-printing that the photographer "sees" which shots can be cropped and developed and made into "art".

In certain meditative situations, the language module of the brain might analogously generate--even "over generate"--without conscious guidance a set of partial and complete sentence

structures, which a talented writer (or linguist!) can contemplate through introspection and even channel by free association with other semantic and syntactic ideas. This might be the way that unusually resonant lines like Line 1 of DT's villanelle (and unusually perceptive linguistic analyses!) come into being; their further elaboration into a poetic structure might at first proceed "automatically" like this for a while before eventually coming under greater and greater conscious control. (Which is not to say that an author could always explain even the latter steps in this process, since conscious awareness is only a necessary--and not a sufficient--condition for such explanations.)

DT's change of "at their end" to "at the end" and back again, discussed above in *Section 5.5*, is direct evidence of such a process. DT's first production of "at their end" might not have been fully intended as a parallel/contrast to "near death,"--hence his altering it to "at the end" (perhaps to eliminate a felt redundancy). Then, his reversion (either after writing or re-reading Tercet 5) to his first version was probably the result of a conscious realization of the more poetically interesting parallel and contrast provided by his original PP "at their end," to the PP in Tercet 5. The change of "All" to "Grave" in Tercet 5--also discussed in *Section 5.5*--is part of the same process and evidence of DT's dawning understanding that the meaning of "all" was already entailed by Tercet 5's generic subject and its following, non-restrictive PP "at their end."

Brinnin's (1955, pp. 125-126) account of DT's working methods can be cited as further evidence for some of the speculations about the creative process presented above, and is therefore worth quoting at length:

When another addition or revision was made, no matter how minor or major, he would then copy the whole poem again. When I asked him about this laborious repetition, he showed me his drafts of "Fern Hill" [a poem of 59 lines]. There were more than two hundred separate and distinct versions of the poem...He began almost every poem merely with some phrase he had carried about in his head. If this phrase was right, which is to say, if it were resonant or pregnant, it would suggest another phrase. In this way a poem would "accumulate." Once "given" a word (sometimes the prime movers of poems were the words of other poems or mere words of the dictionary that called out to be "set") or a phrase or a line (or whatever it is that is "given" when there is yet a poem to "prove") he could often envision it or "locate" it within a pattern of other words or phrases or lines that, not given, had yet to be discovered: so that sometimes it would be possible to surmise accurately that the "given" unit [such as "gentle" in the villanelle?] would occur near the end of the poem or near the beginning or near the middle or somewhere between. [bracketed information and speculative question added]

One shudders to imagine the effect of a pc's instantly changing screen on DT's method of work! DT himself (quoted in Fitzgibbon (1965, p. 334)) described his method in terms worthy of an Elizabethan rhetoric in response to a series of questions posed by a student in 1951:

Yes. I am a painstaking, conscientious, involved and devious craftsman in words, however unsuccessful the result so often appears, and to whatever wrong uses I may apply my technical paraphernalia. I use anything and everything to make my poems work and move in the directions I want them to: old tricks, new tricks, puns, portmanteau-words, paradox, allusion, paranomasia, paragram, catachresis, slang, assonantal rhymes, vowel rhymes, sprung rhythm. Every device there is in language is there to be used if you will. Poets have got to enjoy themselves sometimes, and the twistings and convolutions of words, the inventions and contrivances, are all part of the joy that is part of the painful, voluntary work.

If DT had been asked whether negative imperatives can contain an emphatic "you" (and assuming no terminological problems between him and his interviewer), he might not have been able to give a satisfactory answer at the moment of completing the first tercet of his villanelle.

However, if asked the same question--even for the first time--on the morning after completing the villanelle, he probably would have been able to...To summarize with another quote from Jakobson (1987, p. 90):

The poetic resources concealed in the morphological and syntactic structure of language--briefly, the poetry of grammar and the grammar of poetry--have been seldom known to critics and mostly disregarded by linguists but skillfully mastered by creative writers.

Put differently, humanity's first artists of oral and written language were also its first linguists: Language Art precedes Language Science.

## 6.2 *Linguistic implications*

There are many aspects of DT's villanelle which confirm the essential characteristics of well-known linguistic categories and conditions. For example, the different semantic and syntactic constraints on the use of predicate adjuncts and adverbs are clearly manipulated in the villanelle and the *Elegy* reconstructions. Perhaps such a confirmation is not strictly necessary to establish the psychological reality of these constructs; nonetheless, it is still a part of the total theoretical picture, especially in terms of the important cognitive question of how much of linguistic competence might be accessible to conscious awareness.

A large part of the purely syntactic interest of DT's villanelle derives from his use of predicate adjuncts and the conditions on their use, and some of the written and unwritten data provided by DT's poem are relevant to theories which have as their goal the description of the rules governing these phenomena. In fact, some of the syntactic associations aroused by the villanelle suggest relevant data which such theories have heretofore missed.

In other words, I believe the analysis presented in this paper shows that DT made use of language structures which are still not adequately characterized by linguistic science--even at the level of "descriptive adequacy" (Chomsky, 1965, pp. 30ff.)--and that he might thus have been the first "linguist" to deal with some of these issues.

My purpose throughout this section will be to show something about how hyperlinguistic data from language art--including data merely hinted at by such art--can be used both to evaluate linguistic claims and to reveal the scope of the phenomena that such theories should account for. Moreover, I also hope to show that care should be exercised when using hyperlinguistic data in this way--as when using any other form of language performance data--since multiple formal/performance factors might be involved.

For example, the fact that some literary critics have considered DT's Line 1 deviant has to be resolved before an accurate theoretical characterization of its structure can be attempted. (It is axiomatic that grammatical theories should not allow the end-generation of ungrammatical sentences.) One way to rule out such putative deviancy in the case of Line 1 is to show that there are plenty of grammatical, everyday imperatives which follow its pattern in permitting predicate adjuncts without a phonetically overt subject, and these have already been given in the above discussion (see again the examples in Note (23)).

Another necessary step in ruling out a charge of deviancy for Line 1, is to show precisely that the causes for its rejection by some native speakers is a matter of processing limitations, expectations *etc.* which have nothing to do with grammaticality as defined by the structure of linguistic competence. This was, in effect, what was done in Sections 5.1 and 5.2, although there the purpose was to point out the special semantic and syntactic qualities of "gentle" in Line 1 as they relate to DT's poetic purpose. For example, the less-than-purely-transitory character of "gentle" suits DT's purpose in making the reader pause, but it might also be the cause of some readers' (*e. g.*, Chapman, 1973) labeling it as deviant. However, neither of these effects would render Line 1 deviant in terms of the competence model.



Consideration of the methodological requisites for drawing conclusions about linguistic theory from DT's villanelle lead eventually to the theoretical questions it raises. There are three syntactic issues which are crucial to the effect of DT's villanelle and which have yet to receive a descriptively adequate account in current theoretical work: 1) the impossibility of sentence-initial predicate adjuncts in any kind of imperative, with the corresponding grammaticality of predicate adjuncts occurring post-verbally in the same type of sentence; 2) the status of the "you" that appears in examples like those in (4-6), and indeed the general question of the syntactic status of the "subject" of imperative sentences; and 3) why the imperative "you" can appear in some imperatives but not others, and its sentential position when it does appear.

These three issues play a concerted role in creating many of the poetic effects in DT's villanelle, and their eventual scientific explanations will also probably be linked to each other. I will discuss these three issues in turn--both in terms of their role in the villanelle and in terms of a potential theoretical account of their patterning.

*The impossibility of sentence-initial predicate adjuncts in English imperatives* is perhaps intended by DT to have several effects on the reader of the villanelle. First, given the unusual position of "gentle" in the middle of Line 1's VP, the reader might try to relocate it within its sentence as an intermediate parsing strategy. This relocation can only go one of two ways: either toward the end of the sentence (which is where it should be in symbolic terms, *i. e.*, "after death" as in the *Elegy* reconstruction) or toward the front of the sentence. But at the end of the sentence "gentle" sounds odd because of the heavy PP. On the other hand, moving "gentle" toward the front of Line 1 might be encouraged, as already noted, by the canonically placed subjects of the middle tercets and their adjuncts. In any case, the result of such a parsing strategy should be a *malaise* on the part of the reader resulting from the fact that "gentle" would be ungrammatical here; this in turn might serve to emphasize the lack of anything in the sentence-initial position of Line 1--thereby increasing the "longing" for Line 1's subject/the host of "gentle".

Why predicate adjuncts should be ungrammatical in sentence-initial position in imperatives is something of a mystery, given their grammaticality after the verb in the same type of imperatives, such as Line 1, and their grammaticality at the beginning (or end) of indicatives (see again the examples in (24-25)). If DT was using this distributional fact intentionally for poetic effect--and that is not so farfetched an "if" when one considers the totality of his poetic output--he must also have wondered about its cause. To my knowledge, no explanation has been offered in the literature which has attempted to describe the distributional characteristics and internal structure of predicate adjuncts and "small clauses" (*e. g.*, Hornstein and Lightfoot, 1987; Williams, 1995); in fact, I am aware of no mention of such examples at all.

Broadly, the explanation for the lack of sentence-initial predicate adjuncts in imperatives might come from one of three areas, or some combination thereof: configurational effects, the exact argument status of "you", or the incompatibility of the semantics of the adjunct predication with the imperative predicate. Each of these potential approaches are complicated by other English imperative data.

First, the configurational approach will have to explain both the acceptability of the post-verb predicate adjuncts in imperatives and the fact that, even with the explicit "you" subject of imperatives like (4-6), sentence-initial predicate adjuncts are still ungrammatical (as (31-32) show). This leads to the second possible approach to explaining the ungrammaticality of imperative-initial predicate adjuncts: the status of imperative "you", which will be discussed in the next sub-section as one of DT's poetic devices. Another aspect of the configurational approach is the possibility that post-verb predicate adjuncts should be analyzed as forming a complex VP with the verb and any other complement, while sentence-initial ones should be VP-external (*cf.* Williams, 1995, pp. 88ff.)

Third, as a result of the preceding point, a preposed predicate adjunct could have a different sense from a post-verb one, which might be inconsistent with an imperative predicate. However, (34) argues against such an approach, since its grammatical indicative and its un-grammatical imperative, each with a sentence-initial adjunct, have identical predication structures.



A similar point can be made for foregrounded predicate adjuncts with AUX-subject inversion (see (35)) and in interrogatives (see (36)). That is, the acceptability of sentence-initial predicate adjuncts despite complex differences of predicate relations in these cases argues against such complexity being the sole reason for the ungrammaticality of sentence-initial predicate adjuncts in imperatives. If the interrogative examples in (36) are not as good as those in simple declaratives, they are also not as bad as imperatives with sentence-initial predicate adjuncts. E. Williams (pc) has pointed out to me that parallel contrast has no effect on imperatives that begin with predicate adjuncts but improves interrogatives that do so (see (37) and (38), respectively).

*The question of whether imperatives have subjects in any sense* is crucial to DT's syntactic design since it is the villanelle's addressee which is both the subject of DT's love and wishes and, therefore, the potential syntactic subject of his imperatives. This goes well beyond the symbolic use of a grammatical form in the villanelle to the creation of a kind of syntactic emotion or longing. The appearance of the "you" that begins the quatrain is poignant in a way that has been carefully prepared throughout the villanelle: although the reader knows the poem is about the impending death of its addressee/DT's father, the appearance of this "you" is a kind of syntactic negation of the implacable process of ageing and death.

However, this syntactic defiance is grounded on a structural uncertainty, just as many human emotions are founded on an unclear reality. To begin with, the occurrence of "you" in the first line of the quatrain is ambiguous between a pure vocative and the kind of "you" seen in (4-6). Second, the problem with sentence-initial predicate adjuncts may have already called into question the subjecthood of any such "you" for the reader; and the subjecthood/argument status of the "you" in examples like (4-6) is a point of ongoing contention in syntactic theory. Potsdam (1998) argues that such instances of "you" are full subjects, while Zwicky (1988) presents a summary of the problems with such a view, including the fact that, if "you" is really an imperative subject, it is strange that there are contexts in which it is prohibited from appearing, as already seen in the ungrammatical example in (27). Still another non-subjectlike aspect of the "you" in imperatives is that its presence can change the preferred reading of such sentences, as the examples in (39) show.

*Where overt "subjects" can occur, and whether they can occur, in imperatives* is one of the main arguments raised in Zwicky (1988, p. 441) against the older transformational analysis of imperative "you" as an underlying element which can either be deleted or retained in surface structure. The determination of this, as for many of the questions raised above, can only be given relative to an entire theoretical framework. However, one datum that is not in doubt is that with uncontracted "do not" this "you" can not appear in standard English imperatives, as the ungrammatical example in (27) shows. In addition, (26) also shows that "you" can not appear sentence-initially in negative imperatives (unless as a pure vocative, in which case the vocative is properly not part of the same sentence, although punctuation conventions vary).

Again, this is a key point for DT's villanelle—which is unambiguously written in standard English—because this fact is responsible for the syntactic sadness which results when Line 1 follows the first sentence of the quatrain with its overt "you". The reader is prevented from reading the quatrain's third line assuming the quatrain's initial "you" as subject under identity deletion because of the ungrammaticality of "you" with "do not" in negative imperatives in standard English, and **also** because for such identity deletion to work the deleted "you" would have to occupy a parallel position, which is not the case. Hence, the period at the end of each of the sentences in the quatrain.

Overt "you" with imperative "do not" can, however, be found in Shakespeare (and perhaps more recently in deliberately poetic language) as (29) shows. Henry (1995) has documented the frequent occurrence of imperative "you" after main verbs and "don't", but not after "do not", in Belfast English (see (40)). Informants in Laugharne, Wales (the last home of DT and his wife Caitlin) have confirmed that examples similar to Henry's data could be heard in the past in "Wenglish", but are dying out, although these same informants do **not** think that a "you" after an imperative "do not" is likely. (Welsh language imperatives contain an overt you, though this does not necessarily have to be the substratum or origin of its appearance in Wenglish, since the

same usage already existed in older forms of standard English like Shakespeare.) In any case, both Henry (pc) and my Welsh informants report that imperative-initial predicate adjuncts are ungrammatical in their respective dialects **even** with post-verb “you”.

It is of course probable that DT knew of Shakespeare’s use of “you” with “do not”; DT’s father enjoyed reading aloud to him from Shakespeare’s works when DT was as young as four (Tremlett, 1991, p. 26). Perhaps future field work will also confirm he could have heard its use in Wenglish. In any case, since identity deletion is still ruled out in the third line of the quatrain by the lack of parallelism with the quatrain’s first sentence, the possibility arises that part of the syntactic sadness of the quatrain’s third line is also a meta comment on an older way of speaking, perhaps a way of speaking associated with a way of life which, even as DT wrote, was also in the process of passing away. This extended syntactic sadness of the quatrain could thus be read as a sadness both for the father and the older language--the two being hard to separate in terms of their formative effect on DT.

This brief discussion of the three syntactic issues above--which form the basis of the main part of DT’s artistic effects in the villanelle--reveals complex syntactic patterns of the type which are usually only consciously considered by linguists specializing in such aspects of syntactic theory. It is therefore hard to escape the conclusion that a large part of DT’s creative processes involved the kind of thinking about language that linguists are used to practicing as part of their formal analyses. The quotes from Brinnin (1955) and Fitzgibbon (1965) cited earlier also support this.

Again, the larger point is that the linguistic analysis of a literary work should and does end up looking a lot like a purely formal linguistic analysis--in this case, a discussion of the associations suggested by DT’s poetic structures ends up yielding the kind of data relevant to an explanation of the grammatical occurrence of predicate adjuncts in certain positions in imperative sentences but not in others, along with other questions about the structure of imperatives like the presence or absence of a subject in such structures.

*Focusing on poetic technique and effect*, the crucial linguistic points for an analysis of the artistic effectiveness of DT’s villanelle are 1) the fact that the predicate adjunct “gentle” is only possible after the verb, and normally expected at the end, of Line 1; and 2) the fact that the pronoun “you” (DT’s father) can not be overt sentence-initially or anywhere else in Line 1 (*qua* uncontracted negative imperative in standard English), despite its co-referentiality with the host of “gentle” in the same line. This is especially important in Line 1’s crucial recurrence in the quatrain.

*Focusing on linguistic theory*, the analysis of DT’s poetic devices as presented above results in a portion of the linguistic argumentation necessary to determine the linguistic cause(s) (Chomsky’s descriptive level of adequacy) for the points in the preceding paragraph and, in fact, provides more than a hint of the type of data which will have to be considered to clarify these issues. Stated as linguistic problems these are 1) the question of whether structural configuration, the nature of imperative “you” or the semantic differences between sentence-initial and post-verb predicate adjuncts can explain the patterning of predicate adjuncts in imperatives; and 2) the exact nature of the overt and non-overt “subjects” of imperatives, and their patterns of distribution in terms of other constructs such as predicate adjuncts, negatives *etc.*

Ockham’s razor would prefer that as many of these disparate facts as possible be explained by the status of a single variable, although the linguistic reality, in terms of the knowledge that people really have in their head, might turn out to be the result of a complex interaction of factors. Either way, the complex surface patterns of the data ensure the cumulative nature of DT’s poetic effect.

The promising areas for research suggested by the above discussion are, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper (but see Bisazza, in preparation). However, if the analysis of DT’s villanelle is capable of suggesting the same kind of significant research questions that we would expect from a non-literary linguistic analysis, it might even be the case that in his own poetic meditations DT found the answers to some of these questions, whether or not any such insights ultimately found their way into his poetic devices...

### 6.3 Language art and human evolution

The dates of the composition of DT's villanelle (see p. 4 above) are significant for confirming that the poem precedes Noam Chomsky's influence on syntactic theory, though not by much. In addition, DT's other poems which are sometimes described by literary critics as having syntactic "violations" or "twisted syntax" also predate the influence of Noam Chomsky and the advent of generative theories of syntax.

In such famous poems as *A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London* (1945)--the first sentence of which is reproduced in Note (41)--DT was already making use of left-branching structures and center-embedding, which caused his more severe critics to label these works as incomprehensible. (See Stephens and Waterhouse (1990, pp. 180-181) for discussion.) Of course, such performatively difficult syntax could hardly be unintentional. I hope that I have made a good case for the same kinds of intentional manipulation in DT's villanelle, although the villanelle has a surface fluency and ease of comprehension to suit its theme, which is obviously very different from that of DT's *A Refusal to Mourn*. At any rate, the villanelle was also possibly begun in 1945, at a time when DT's father was seriously ill (Davies and Maud, 1988, p. 255).

Twenty years later, Chomsky (1965, pp. 10-15) argued that such performatively complex structures as center-embedded sentences (see (42)) had to be considered grammatical--i. e., as following from the normal rules of the competence grammar that speakers really have in their head and which linguistic theory attempts to discover. Chomsky's main argument has since become classic: There is no natural way to exclude such structures from a theory of the competence native speakers really possess without **also** ruling out simpler ones--which, like (43), pose no comprehension problems. That is, the same kind of recursive functions are needed to produce both (42) and (43), and these seem to be necessary to all languages.

Chomsky also pointed out the effect of semantic cues in improving the processing ease of these complex structures (compare (44) to (42)), and the role of memory limitations in the opposite direction. Example (45) is even easier than (44) and almost as easy as (43), because its semantic cues and punctuation both help a reader match its arguments to its predicates. **But, in terms of syntactic structure, (45) is no different from (42).**

The thought process poets go through when producing artistic language which sometimes strikes us as "difficult" or "unusual" (or the reverse) is analogous to the reasoning just presented as to how performative factors might influence native speakers' reactions to different sentences which are all grammatical, even grammatically identical, in terms of the competence model:

Put simplistically, what poets do is make complex language or simple language according to their artistic intent. The existence of the grammatical-but-incomprehensible structures they sometimes create is proof of the open-ended creativity of the grammar; these structures can not be eliminated from a competence theory (e. g., by labeling them as "ungrammatical") without also setting false limits to poetic expression--to say nothing of thought itself.

The reactions of the linguists who objected to Chomsky's arguments on these points echoed those literary critics who chastised DT for utilizing similar structures. Indeed, DT's works are still relevant as hyperlinguistic evidence for Chomsky's position. Conversely, one could also ask if Chomsky's view of competence was influenced by poets like DT ("colorless green ideas sleep furiously" certainly fills the bill)! But there is a still more intriguing paradox suggested by the existence of grammatical-but-incomprehensible language:

Namely, the frequent misreading of unusual language (such as the function of "gentle" in DT's Line 1) even by native-speaker literary critics, is evidence of the degree to which the language "organ" (as Chomsky now terms it) is independent of naive notions of "communication necessity". Why would an organ responsible only for simple "communication", and selected for in the course of evolution on that basis, have evolved in such a way as to make possible complex utterances which, at first glance, do not "communicate" anything to normal listeners?

The mystery is even more puzzling when such performance difficulties are intentionally used to esthetic ends! That is, our linguistic competence makes possible language we can not immediately understand but which, paradoxically, we can learn to **create** and **enjoy** to an extent which depends on our own talents and the length of time we devote to trying to understand. Furthermore, the existence of such "enjoyment" suggests that the ability to create and appreciate what Nowotny calls "poetical pleasure" by conscious or subconscious hyperphasic means is evidence of the profound connection between those aspects of language that are "beyond our communicative ability" and what it **means** to be human. In other words, there must be a "survival advantage" to linguistic pleasure.

Poets and their biographers sometimes speak of the "therapeutic" role of language art and how it is only through such art that an author's extreme sadness, for example, can be managed, controlled, accepted, "sublimated"—in short, there is a word for almost every school of psychology or philosophy of life. DT's remarks quoted above in *Section 6.1* point beyond this "therapeutic" view of poetry to a more joyful and fundamental view, although DT's poetry and his all-too-brief life have been fully psychologized in the 20c manner (e. g., Holbrook, 1972).

The trouble with the view of poetry (and indeed all art) as ersatz therapy is, again, that it is so narrow and negative as to say nothing about why such "therapy" seems to require expression in a form at the limits of our ability to communicate—what I have termed "hyperphasia". Of course, the answer is that these "therapeutic" aspects, like many aspects of "communication" (cf. Chomsky, 1980, pp. 229-230), are but elements of a broader evolutionary development which is more positively and all-pervasively tied up with human nature and human cognition.

The hyperphasic aspect of DT's poems can indeed be said to "communicate" something. But that "communication" is both directed toward others and meant to occur within the author—as **well as within each reader**. And what is "communicated" is not a "message" as normally construed by pragmaticists. The message is the backward and forward movement between affirmation and ambiguity. It is the phrasing of passions which defy tragedy in a grammar where no defiance is possible—and *vice versa*. It is "communication" above all in form as well as in meaning: what Nowotny (1962, p. 9) calls the "significance of the information".

G. Thomas (1990, p. 85) has tried to capture this aspect of the way DT's poetry qualifies as "communication" at a higher level:

...the best of his work...is **about** the difficulty of sharing this knowledge with other human beings, which is the great consolation that we as human beings can provide for one another. It is **about** the desire to communicate honestly, and the anguish of not knowing to whom or for whom one is writing.

One could hardly ask for a better example than DT's villanelle of the human intellect—including its hyperphasic ability—in the service of the inner contemplation of inchoate, ineffable and ambiguous emotions.

The human hyperphasic ability might not have been selected-for because it helped the cognate *Homo sapiens sapiens* win any battles with mastodons by making it easier for them to plan a silent attack on their prey. But it has surely contributed to humans' ability to feel humanly, and to lead their lives **aware of this ability in themselves and each other**.

That is, poetic language helps us to look at and re-feel the nature and depth of our human feelings (including the joy of hyperphasic creation/appreciation!), and can in turn lead to the enlightened understanding that these feelings must exist in others. The survival advantage of literary, and other artistic, abilities must thus be that they contribute to human solidarity: humans feeling for other humans at the limits of their defining cognitive/linguistic abilities.

"The joy and function of poetry is, and was, the celebration of man, which is also the celebration of God" (DT quoted in Fitzgibbon (1965, p. 336)). And if intra-species solidarity is not a "survival advantage" for human beings, "communication" by itself could never be.

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## NOTES

- (1) This paper is dedicated to my friend, Robert O. Cleymaet, my first and best teacher of linguistics, who also contributed most to its contents by his suggestions over many years and many friendly conversations. Any insights it contains are due, directly or indirectly, to him, and any errors to myself alone.

(2) *DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT\**

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.  
And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

(Thomas, 1988, p. 148)

\* DT's handwritten MSS at the Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin have some words crossed out and written over, but his final clean copy is the same as the published version (reproduced here) in all respects, except for the fact that in the MS the poem's title **does** include a period.

(3) STRUCTURE OF DT'S VILLANELLE

ABA-ABA-ABA-ABA-ABA-ABAA  
1 2 3      1      3      1      3      1 3

RHYME PATTERN  
LINE REPETITIONS

- (4) You<sub>i</sub> go to the store; you<sub>j</sub> clean up the house; and you<sub>k</sub>... (list emphasis)  
(5) You<sub>i</sub> go to the store, but **you<sub>j</sub>** stay here! (comparison emphasis)  
(6) You<sub>i</sub> there! You<sub>j</sub> come here and help me! (vocative emphasis)
- (7) \* The boy came home from the hospital tall.
- (8) He is gentle. (character bias)  
(9) He is gentle to me. (behavior bias)
- (10) You have grown more gentle toward me and have left off scolding.  
(Jowett, *Plato* (ed. 2) III. 226; cited in OED, second edition, 1989, p. 451, entry 8)
- (11) Go calm to your crucified hill, I told  
The air that drew away from him. (Thomas, 1988, p. 264)

- [illegible]

- (28) You! Do not do that!  
You! Don't (you) do that!
- (29) Come, 'tis no matter, do not you meddle... (*Much Ado about Nothing*, V, i, 101-102)
- (30) \*?And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
...  
Do not go gentle into that good night.
- (31) \* Sober, (\* you) come home! (as imperatives with a predicate adjunct)
- (32) \* Drunk, don't you come home!
- (33) Tommy, you stop that whining!
- (34) Drunk, you should not come home. vs. \* Drunk, do not come home!
- (35) foregrounded predicate adjuncts in indicatives  
Heavy do I journey on my way... (Shakespeare, Sonnet 50)  
Naked did you come into this world.
- (36) foregrounded predicate adjuncts in interrogatives  
Full, did the plane get off the ground?  
Naked, did he make a good impression?
- (37) Full, the plane couldn't get off the ground. Empty, did it manage to?
- (38) Unprepared, you'll never pass the test. So,  
\* prepared, come to the exam! vs. come to the exam prepared!
- (39) Watch out! (warning meaning preferred)  
You watch out! (threat meaning preferred)
- (40) Belfast English imperatives  
Go you there. (Henry, 1995, p.52)  
Don't go you away. (*ibid.*, p. 54)
- (41) From *A REFUSAL TO MOURN THE DEATH, BY FIRE, OF A CHILD IN LONDON*  
  
Never until the mankind making  
Bird beast and flower  
Fathering and all humbling darkness  
Tells with silence the last light breaking  
And the still hour  
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness  
  
And I must enter again the round  
Zion of the water bead  
And the synagogue of the ear of corn  
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound  
Or sow my salt seed  
In the last valley of sackcloth to mourn  
  
The majesty and burning of the child's death.  
... (Thomas, 1988, pp. 85-86)



- (42) The boy the girl the man saw kissed smiled. (grammaticality/performance ease)  
(grammatical / impossible)
- (43) The boy the girl kissed smiled. (grammatical / easy)
- (44) The book the man the dog bit read was long. (grammatical / difficult)
- (45) The book, the man (the dog bit) read, was long. (grammatical / not difficult)

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