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As Hard as the Middle of Thunder:

Age and Love, Linguistics and Poetics, and Stanley Kunitz' "Touch Me"

Stanley Kunitz' *Touch Me* is a simple poem. From even the first line ("*Summer is late, my heart*") to the last ("Touch me, / remind me who I am."), the average reader can interpret this poem with minimal cognitive effort (288-289). It doesn't require background research, and an understanding of the literary tradition or conventions under which it was written is not necessary; meter, rhyme, verse form are all irrelevant. It is the straightforward story of a narrator's dialogue to his wife. And yet, the straightforwardness of the poem belies its inner complexity. So often in contemporary poetry, readers and analysts are inclined to ignore the hard-and-fast compositional elements of a complex poem in favor of a more ethereal personal response or interpretation; this inclination is due, in part, to the conventions of contemporary verse (that is, the lack of a codified system of constraints by which to evaluate a work in context). This inclination is a deadly one. In reading "Touch Me", one finds a basic and fairly universal interpretation; one can *feel* what the poem is "about." And one often stops there. However, to stop is to neglect the myriad elements employed by the author to inform a much more beautiful, much more exhaustive, and much more complex reading of this seemingly simple poem. Readers don't study poetry for the mere enjoyment of effortless entertainment; if the only

achievement of "Touch Me" were a quickly-born and quickly-fading warm and fuzzy feeling, one could scarcely call it poetry. No; Kunitz' work is much more ambitious. Whether known to the author—or reader—by name, the devices of linguistic complexity at work in this poem are tirelessly laboring to give the reader the illusion of a "simple" poem. Not only that, but—when significantly exhumed—those same linguistic devices also add a second or third lens of interpretation that, when looked through, reveals "Touch Me" to be a contemporary work of art. Kunitz' bold and intentioned use of metaphor orients the reader within an analogy of man to nature which is then capitalized upon in the author's use of blended spaces in describing the narrator and his surrounding world; the author concludes the poem with a sonorous echo of identical rhythmic patterning deftly achieved by phrasal stress and the promotion and demotion of crucial syllables.

It is not uncommon, when learning the basics of creative writing and literature, for students to be taught to define metaphor as "a comparison without using 'like' or 'as'." This conventional method of creating and interpreting metaphors is highly limited; in fact, the scope of metaphorical language is far more extreme. Humans use metaphors as a means of packaging information about our reality into manageable and conceivable chunks (conceivable being the crucial word). For example, one might consider trying to conceive of time without the assistance of metaphor. Common metaphorical comparisons for time include roads, lines, or circles; time is not a clear line or circle or course of any kind, nor is it even quantifiable or substantive. Our artificial formation of time as an abstract construct is one that allows us to conceive of its passing and its arrival; it allows us to catalog and anticipate—and we think

about time constantly as being one point of many along either a linear or a circular path. This is metaphor. In its most base definition, yes, it is a comparison without using like or as. But it is also an abstract organizer—a completely new set of containers in which we set and categorize ideas. Some metaphors are so engrained in our cognitive and linguistic processes that we often forget to consider them metaphorical; these are called "frozen" metaphors—and are also employed by Kunitz in "Touch Me". Probably the most common frozen metaphor in American English is the heart metaphor; the heart is the seat of all emotions, especially those pertaining to love. Rather than worry about the physiological or psychological implications of what it truly means for a human to feel *love*, we instead package the idea within an abstract re-conception of an entirely unrelated organ—the heart. In Elizabethan England (and still in other non-Western cultures) the liver was considered the emotional throne; this would also be a frozen metaphor but for a different society. Metaphor can be a new way of using language and parts of speech—verbs or adjectives for instance. When many readers think about metaphors they imagine only noun-to-noun comparisons, something like, "He was a tiger moving through the school." What they often don't consider is the same comparison (or at least a comparison to the same effect) using different parts of speech. For example, verbs—"He stalked through the school"—or adjectives: "He walked the halls with leonine attention." In this way, seemingly unobtrusive—but obviously poetic—comparisons situate the reader within a metaphorical understanding of a subject without explicitly stating the relationship. Kunitz uses this metaphorical device throughout the whole of "Touch Me" to establish a connection between humanity and Nature. He doesn't burden the reader with an

explicit comparison and he doesn't ham-handedly establish a typical poetic conceit;

his language use is subtle, adept, and intentioned.

The genius of "Touch Me" is that the author uses a series of three different

devices—each of which builds on the other and occurs after the other in the poem—to

inform an ingenious reading of the poem. The first of these devices is metaphor.

Kunitz utilizes highly metaphorical language, the initial purpose of which is to

establish an equality between Man and Nature—not that Man is just *equal to* Nature,

but that Man *is* Nature. The first instances of this occur in the poem's first nine lines:

> *Summer is late, my heart.*
>
> Words plucked out of the air
>
> some forty years ago
>
> when I was wild with love
>
> and torn almost in two
>
> scatter like leaves this night
>
> of whistling wind and rain.
>
> It is my heart that's late,
>
> it is my song that's flown. (288)

Kunitz uses verb and adjective comparisons in establishing the Man-Nature

connection. Throughout this first passage, he refers to the words he had spoken twice

in metaphorical language; he connects his words to Nature's processes and thereby

connects the humane with the natural. In the second line, he refers to the words he

spoke as being "plucked" out of the air—the word *plucked* specifically meaning to

remove from a place of growth as with fruit, flowers, or feathers. This nature

language is the beginning of Kunitz' subtle metaphors; he could've said "pulled,"

"grabbed," "swiped," "filched," or "tugged"—all of which would've had different

connotative results. Kunitz' diction is precise and intentioned. In the fourth line, the

narrator refers to himself as having been "wild" with love, another careful but

purposeful nature metaphor, this time in the way of an adjective. This works hand-in-

hand with the previous comparisons, further reinforcing the connection by moving

beyond just the man's words and talking about the man himself. Throughout this

poem, the poet uses synecdoche in concert with metaphors to compare the parts of

something and extrapolate them to offer commentary on a greater whole—this is the

case with the words of the narrator standing for the man himself and—by extension—

mankind. Kunitz returns to synecdoche again using a verb metaphor in line six to refer

to the words that "scatter"—a verb not explicitly Nature-related until coupled with

the rest of the line: "scatter like leaves". This phrase pairs a metaphorical verb

("scatter") comparison with a basic noun-to-noun comparison ("like leaves") in the

way of a simile—a type of metaphorical association. In the seventh line of the poem,

the author maintains his intention of relating Man to Nature but changes the roles of

those being compared; rather than connect the former to the latter, he instead

personifies the "wind and rain", thereby connecting Nature to mankind. In the line

"whistling wind and rain", the author personifies the two natural forces by giving

them an active duty; they are whistling. It is easy, at first, to not assume this is a

metaphor. However, the idea of *whistling* as a non-human function is, in fact, a

frozen metaphor; the process of whistling is defined by the pushing of air through a

small opening in the lips using the tongue. Over several centuries of comparing wind

whistling to human whistling, we now disassociate the word from something which is solely human. Therefore, Stanley Kunitz not only reverses the metaphorical template by linking Nature to Man instead of Man to Nature, but he also incorporates personification and frozen metaphors to do so. Although it's unlikely that the author sat down with a similarly named list of devices to use in his poem, it still benefits the reader to be able to understand the mechanical procedures which were internalized and undertaken by the author to produce the desired effect. Thereby, the reader is not just looking at the input and the output, but he is looking at the algorithm which determines how the input becomes the output. In one final use of the Man-to-Nature metaphorical verb, Kunitz refers to the narrator's "song" has having "flown"—a process which only occurs naturally in Nature; that is, man can fly but only artificially. Thus, by connecting his own song with a kind of bird- or cloud-like image, the narrator sets himself within the natural system. There is a slight metaphorical shift in this section of the poem—still within the paradigm of Man and Nature—that works with a different style of comparative language. Following the basic format of a noun-to-noun metaphor, the author stretches the relationship across a span of nine lines but reinforces the connection in a sort of chiasmic structure. The association of "*Summer is late, my heart*" and "It is my heart that's late" should be an obvious one—and the author sets it up as a kind of equation. If summer is late and the heart is late, then the heart must either be equal to or similar to summer. Therefore the human heart—warm and vibrant—is compared to Nature's summer (which is equally so). Kunitz again uses several literary devices to set up one metaphorical connection: the frozen metaphor of the human heart as the seat of the emotions *and* the chiasmus

of the two related lines—with "heart" appearing after "late" in the first phrase and before "late" in the other. Kunitz' literary elements are plenty, but they are all wound together in the unified vision of metaphor.

A major metaphorical shift occurs in this poem, and—although it uses the same techniques as before—it is significant in the interpretation of the poem's main syllogism. The first logical connection is that Man is Nature. The second is that Nature has become mechanical. The poem will progress to prove that, if Man is Nature and Nature is mechanized, Man has become mechanized (or, more specifically, that the narrator has become mechanized). The author begins this second comparative sequence in line ten and continues it through line twenty:

> Outdoors all afternoon
>
> under a gunmetal sky
>
> staking my garden down,
>
> I kneeled to the crickets trilling
>
> underfoot as if about
>
> to burst from their crusty shells;
>
> and like a child again
>
> marveled to hear so clear
>
> and brave a music pour
>
> from such a small machine.
>
> What makes the engine go? (288)

Kunitz begins the process with an adjective describing the sky: "gunmetal". The gunmetal sky is deliberately industrial language that marks a very specific shift from

the natural diction of comparison used above. By characterizing the sky as "gunmetal" rather than simply "grey," the author is making a very specific choice. That choice is reinforced in the nineteenth line when the author refers to the cricket as a small "machine". In this case, the author is using a noun-to-noun comparison of the cricket as the machine. In all of these cases, Kunitz again employs synecdoche to make associations to the crickets which then represent the Nature as a whole as it exists in this poem. If one cricket is a machine and the cricket is natural, then Nature must logically be mechanized as well. Kunitz hammers this metaphorical series home with the final comparison: "What makes the engine go?". Kunitz is talking about the engine of the cricket, the mechanical force which motivates the repeated sound. This metaphor is bold; there is not easy language to lure the reader into the relationship— only the question standing alone. This is important for two reasons. On the first hand, it delivers the assured association between Nature and machines—it writes the second portion of the syllogism. On the second hand, the author's use of a bold and ambiguous final metaphor—likening to the cricket to an engine without specifically referring to the cricket first—opens up the poem to the next poetic process and the first proof of the poem's sprawling syllogism.

Blended spaces are like an extension of metaphor. Metaphor uses language with a specific double meaning to cause a clear association. Blended spaces use language with a more ambiguous double meaning to create two alternate realities linked only by the language that created them and sharing only that which the language simultaneously describes. As an example in the poem, the narrator—in line twelve— refers to "staking [his] garden down". In any other context, this can be taken entirely

literally. However, in the context of this specific poem (and informed by an initial surface reading of the poem), the language creates a second "universe"—or space—in which the language has an alternate yet corroborative meaning. In this example, in the initial literal universe, the words refer to the narrator staking down his garden—a process necessary to facilitate healthy and orderly growth. In the second connotative space, the words have more sprawling implications. A reader can generally deduce from the poem that the narrator's love and passion has cooled from the constant lap of life's tide; this deduction informs the reader's interpretation of the second blended space. Therefore, one second space might infer that the narrator's staking of his garden down refers to an alternate definition of *stake*—maybe to tether, secure, and pin down or to separate, close off, and make a barrier around. The garden could represent life, vitality, or growth; thus, to stake the garden down would also mean to tether or contain one's vitality. In this example, it is easy to see that blended spaces incorporate a number of different literary techniques including metaphor, symbolism, and double entendre. Blended spaces employed well can offer commentary on multiple subjects simultaneously without sacrificing logic in one or the other; a standard blended space will require some subjective interpretation, but that interpretation should not be arbitrary—rather, it will be informed by an intelligent first reading of the poem and any other significant elements of the poem that can lend credence to a thought-out elucidation.

The blended spaces in "Touch Me" are significant; they are excellent connections that give the poem new dimension, and they serve as a proof to the major syllogism established by the unpacked metaphors. The majority of the blended

spaces occur between lines thirteen and twenty, but there are a couple of instances of blended spaces in the latter few lines of the poem—twenty-one through twenty-eight:

> Desire, desire, desire.
>
> The longing for the dance
>
> stirs in the buried life
>
> One season only,
>
>   and it's done.
>
> So let the battered old willow
>
> thrash against the windowpanes
>
> and the house timbers creak. (289)

As another example of blended spaces, lines twenty-six through twenty-eight both talk about natural occurrences that—in light of the rest of the poem—take on a second interpretation. The language is being used to describe a willow tree being blown against the house windows. However, that tree is "battered" and "old"—very particular words for a willow. The suggestive language is not entirely metaphorical (as in, not completely personification because "old" and "battered" are not solely human traits), but it is not entirely without implication. In light of the metaphors used in earlier phases of the poem to connect Man and Nature, a reader might find that these few lines open up a second space that is talking about the narrator or maybe the narrator's wife. The use of the word "thrash" definitely implies a human motion; if a reader is willing to accept the willow as being symbolic of the narrator's wife, it may be that the house being thrashed—the timbers of which are creaking—represents the

husband. Again, in their initial space, the words "house timbers creak" simply describe the house in which the narrator lives. However, a reader might see those words creating another separate space in which the "timbers" of the house are symbolic of or connected to the bones of the narrator; it is not the floorboards, it is not the trusses, it is the basic skeleton of the house—the timbers. Thus these three lines (twenty-six through twenty-eight) which might simply be working to create an ambience for the reader in their initial literal meaning, now take on a completely alternate meaning that still supports and is supported by the text of the poem; now the reader is granted a brief glimpse into what might be the unspoken or un-acted pressure between the man and the wife—that, in a storm, she might be tempted to thrash against him to enliven his fading love.

The major blended space construction in this poem is the blurred language between the man and the crickets. There are five major instances in which this occurs, all of which offer fascinating insight into the man and his psychological state. Because the narrator has already been made equal—through metaphor—to the natural world surrounding him, the reader is now prepared to see the connection of the man to the crickets and the crickets to mechanization through blended space as a furtherance of the poem's main conceit. The first example of the cricket blended space actually uses metaphorical language to establish the alternate space, and therefore works as a fine segue from one poetic device from the other. In line thirteen, the author refers to the sounds made by the crickets as "trilling" (which is a personified word because it refers to a human action of singing or playing with a vibratory effect); in line eighteen, the author refers to the "clear and brave a music"

which is pouring from the crickets. There are a couple of ways in which blended spaces are opened up in these lines. In the first instance, the use of "trill" and "music" make connections to author's previous declaration in line nine: his "song". Moreover, the fact that the author uses the adjectives "clear" and "brave" to describe the music should tip the reader off to a second figurative implication or, in this case, a blended space. By identifying this blended space, two purposes are served. In the first place, the readers are introduced to some sort of connection between the author and the crickets; the author *had* a song and *made* music and the crickets *have* a song and are *making* music. The similarity is enough to relate the two but their relationship differs from past to present. Therefore, in the second place, the reader is now granted insight about the man; the man hears the music and marvels at its clarity and courage.

In the second of the blended spaces opened by the language, it may be that the crickets' song mirrors that of the man; the man is sad and envious of crickets' song because it has the clarity (which could, in this space, refer to decisiveness) and bravery to be bold and loud. It could be, in this second space, that the man's feelings toward the comparison of his song to the crickets is emblematic of his problem in the poem; his song has flown and with it has that which, in him, was clear and brave. The second occurrence of the cricket blended space appears in lines fourteen and fifteen: "as if about / to burst from their crusty shells". The words "crusty shell" tip us off that maybe this line is not just talking about the crickets, but about the crusty shell of the man as well. In that case, readers see that he is truly "about to burst"; the condition of a marriage gone cold and a passion forgotten has the man prepared to

explode. This blended space is pretty straightforward, but there is one particularly beautiful piece of commentary brought to light by this association. In the second space—talking about the man—it is significant that he is about to burst "from" the crusty shell; if the crusty shell represents the bent and brittle body created by his severe age, then the act of bursting from it is an act of rebellion strictly against his age. The author mentions in the early lines of the poem that his love song was from "some forty years ago"; the reader is then aware of the maturity of the narrator and can see that maturity as one of the major roadblocks between the narrator and his love for his wife.

The third instance of blended space connecting the cricket and the man is the system of references to machines and engines in lines nineteen and twenty. Although the metaphorical language therein serves to establish the mechanization of Nature, it also uses duality of language to talk about the narrator. The fact that the word "machine" is used in reference to that which is pouring out the music (a blended space connection that has already been made) begins to generate the blended space between the machine and the man. When the poet asks, "What makes the engine go?" the reader should be suspicious; his suspicions are confirmed in line twenty-one as the poet answers: "Desire, desire, desire". Crickets cannot desire—not in the way the word is used in this poem, at least. This line serves a couple of purposes, but, in regards to blended space, it opens up a major connection to the man. In the first space, the author uses the sound of desire to reflect the sound of the cricket; he also uses it to suggest that all of the engines of the world—all of the living things—are driven by something. It is in this same vein that the second blended space is opened—

the which deals solely with the man. As the engine of the cricket is "go"-ing (producing music), the engine of the man is stagnant; if the engine is not going, it's not accepting input—not accepting desire. This second space is crucial to the poem as it shows the reader exactly what the main poetic conflict it. The reader can clearly see the old narrator's frustration in struggling with his own age and his own desire and his knowledge that, in order to function, his engine needs desire. It is in the opening of this second space that the reader can see the man's pain and confusion and his being at a loss for where his life as taken him; the reader understands the last three lines of the poem only because of the complexity and power of this blended space. It is in this space that the man learns that he needs to *desire*.

The fourth and fifth instances of blended space are closely linked to one another and to those coming before them. Lines twenty-two through twenty-five present two couplets of seeming disconnectedness to the poem; a reader might be tempted to wonder why the author is supplying such a long description of the cricket and why that description is so ambiguous. In the first occurrence, the author says, "The longing for the dance / stirs in the buried life"; in the second, he continues: "One season only / and it's done". Relating to the first line, the blended space is almost automatically established because of the existing association between the cricket and the man; the vagueness of the language confirms that the pre-written relationship will continue through these next few lines. Thus, the reader learns a handful of things about the man. In lines twenty-two and twenty-three, the "buried life" might refer to the crickets hidden deep in the loam of the garden; it may also refer to the life of narrator which is *buried*—both held beneath the weight of living

but also close to death. It is the narrator's sedate life that is longing for the dance; in this instance, "the dance" could refer to an abstract notion of movement and beauty (as it does in the first space when applied to the cricket), but it could also refer to— or at least be somewhat connected with—an actual dance, such as between the narrator and his wife. Because the reader knows the context of the line within the whole poem, the poet's choice to use the word "dance" is even sweeter and more evocative. The lines about "One season only" are also evocative—but more bitter. Just as—in the first of the two spaces—Kunitz talks about the seasons during which crickets are most active (just before their deaths in the late fall or winter), he also talks about a similar season in the second space, but makes a more far-reaching suggestion. If the line is, in fact, a blended space, then Kunitz' conclusion at the end of the line is that mankind has only one "season" of excited and desire-driven fertility before eventually being done—thrown into the hibernation of the death-like sedateness of life's winter. The blended spaces occurring in these few lines are extremely sad in their implication; not only do they imply that all mankind has only one "season" of activity, but they also show that this is that narrator's view of life. At this point in the poem, the man has—effectively—lost hope and resigned his fate to a wintry death without song, without dance, without desire. This blended space serves the same ends as the others in the poem—a deeper insight into the heart of the narrator through beautiful poetic conceit. Stanley Kunitz does not resort to a lengthy psychological profile; he shows his intricate understanding of the poetic process by ignoring simple unattractive devices and utilizing the beautiful and complex. A reader who can decipher them certainly reaps the benefits of doing so.

Kunitz' triumphs in "Touch Me" are not solely in figurative language; although the poem is not written to meet a particular rhythmic or metrical standard, it does display incredible facility with the sounds of free verse. One instance in particular is the second and final proof of the poem's main conceit. The poem's use of metaphor lays the groundwork; if Man is Nature and Nature is mechanized, then Man is mechanized. The blended spaces in the poem prove this equation by relating it directly to the crickets in the garden and, by extension, the man; the mechanization of both Nature and the narrator are reinforced. In his final proof, Stanley Kunitz uses a complex system of phrasal stress to make the final line of the poem—the words of the narrator to his wife—an echo of the call of the crickets. The idea of phrasal stress is a simple one; rather than be concerned with the natural stress of polysyllabic words, a reader or writer might instead consider the word in the context of its phrase—hence the name, phrasal stress. However, before dealing with phrasal stress, one should first understand lexical stress. All polysyllabic words have their own inherent stress as a natural property of language. When two syllables are put together, there will always be a system of stresses; usually, one is stronger than the other, but sometimes both are equal. A word's inherent natural stress is called it's lexical stress—the pattern of stresses appropriate for that one lexeme. In line twenty-one, the engine of the crickets is driven by "Desire, desire, desire"—a sort of onomatopoeia that, in its strict iambic composition, replicates the pulsing surge of the crickets. This is an example of lexical stress because the same word is repeated three times; whether used one time or many, the word will retain its own lexical stress because there is not a phrase to promote or demote different syllables.

Therefore, the lexeme *desire*—which has a natural iambic stress of weak/strong—when used in line twenty-one will continually we stressed the same way: *des-IRE des-IRE des-IRE* (or, weak/STRONG weak/STRONG weak/STRONG). In conventional scansion, this line would be iambic trimeter—three iambic feet. The author then seeks, later in the poem, to echo this line of iambic trimeter; by creating an echo effect, the author can further reinforce the connection between the crickets and the man and take that connection one step further. In the utterance of a similar iambic trimeter line—a cricket call—the author is starting his song again; he is creating clear and brave music and is reminding the reader of the "Desire, desire, desire" call that is not being reawakened within him. However, the process of achieving a matching iambic line is not entirely simple. As the last three lines of the poem go,

> Darling, do you remember
>
> the man you married? Touch me,
>
> remind me who I am.

The phrasal stress of the final line is what gives it the matching iambic construction. Reading the line in iambic trimeter is simple enough because the rhythm is natural; it is inherent to the line. Nine readers out of ten will stress the line: re-MIND me WHO i AM (weak/STRONG weak/STRONG weak/STRONG). What's peculiar about this line is that "me" and "I" are actually unstressed—atypical for words of such importance. This is not just arbitrary hap that makes it so; there is a quantifiable method behind this line, and that is phrasal stress. Each word has a lexical stress that will almost never change; the second syllable of desire will always be stronger than the first—but that doesn't mean it will be a stronger stress in the phrase as a whole. Phrasal stress

acknowledges the fact that a word, when placed next to another in a phrase, may have a different sound. For example, when said alone, the *ire* of des*ire* is the strongest syllable present. However, when coupled with the single syllable *I*, as in "I desire", then *I* becomes the stronger stress. The second syllable of *desire* is still stronger than the first syllable of *desire*, but it is not the strongest syllable on the page. The weight of *I* as the subject of the sentence and as a personal pronoun causes it to overshadow the verb in the sentence. In the example "I desire that", suddenly *ire* and *I* take a back seat to the object of the sentence, *that*. At this point, if a reader were asked to pick out the syllables with the strongest stress, *I* and *that* would be the favored responses, leaving *ire* behind; suddenly the strongest syllable on the page has been demoted to among the weakest. The integrity of its lexical stress is still maintained (it is still stronger than *des*), but the context of the phrase around it has changed how it is perceived by the reader. In this way, semantics—the exploration of meaning in a system of language—plays a slight but crucial role in the evaluation of phrase and meter. This idea of syllables made stronger or weaker by context—syllable promotion or demotion—is the foundation of phrasal stress. It is also the primary device employed by Kunitz in the final line of "Touch Me". This idea of an echo appears between the twenty-first and the thirty-first lines; the author places the first word of the final sentence ("Touch me,") on the thirtieth line, leaving the thirty-first to begin mid-stream. It would make sense for the author to have contained the entire sentence on one line, yet he deliberately put the line break in the line above to draw the reader's eye to that peculiarity. Once drawn, the reader can see the equality in the number of syllables between this line and the line that it attempts to echo.

Because the phrase begins with the word "remind", the meter is already begun with the word's inherent lexical stress. Using "remind" is an imperative directed to the wife as a command; the object of that command is "me". By its nature, "Remind" licenses not only a direct object but also an indirect object; it can be thought of as, *You remind to me about [indirect object]*. In the final line of "Touch Me", the indirect object is "who"—or, more completely, "who I am". It is because "remind" calls for an indirect object that the reader is then going to put the stress on *who*; the reader is curious and expecting an indirect object, and this expectation informs the sound of one's reading. The phrase surrounding the words "me" and "who" influences how those words are heard; "me" is demoted to an unstressed syllable and "who" is promoted to a stressed. The same process happens with the next two words in the demotion of "I" and the promotion of "am"; it is the use of the interrogative "who" as an indirect object that causes the reader to expect the stress on "am". If the order were reversed ("Who am I"), then the stress, too, would be reversed and placed on "I". However, in the phrasal order of "who I am", the emphasis is promoted on "am", completing the iambic rhythm. The phrase therefore reads: *reMIND me WHO i AM* and is a perfect echo of the cricket meter *des-IRE des-IRE des-IRE*. This resonance ends the poem happily—or, if not happily, at least hopefully. The reader gets the sense that the narrator has kick-started his engine of desire and is once again pouring out brave music for his wife and his love.

Stanley Kunitz' "Touch Me" is a simple poem—done complexly. Although the poem can be read and easily understood without a thorough linguistic exegesis, it is through that thorough process that many more deep and beautiful connections can be

found. Maybe the true art of the poem is that it can be received and accessed by so many different audiences—and that a dedicated and informed literary scholar can still read it with as much attention to detail as he would John Donne. Contemporary poetry is every bit as difficult and rewarding as the poetry that came before it; one only needs to know what to look for. Kunitz' complex metaphors are a wonder to unpack, and his use of language is as masterful as it is subtle. The blended spaces between the crickets and the narrator are a careful way of giving the reader an in-depth psychological profile of the protagonist without bogging the poem down with tedious exposition. Finally, Kunitz' use of sound and phrase are possibly the most impressive; he does not limit himself to only his words as an instrument, but, instead, uses the reader's own internal voice and inherent cognitive processes to deliver his magnum opus. "Touch Me" is, indeed, a work of art—of careful artifice—but never artificial.

Works Cited

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