

## Tacit and Explicit Tulips

by

Diane Sautter

Syracuse University

Imagine that we could make a slow motion movie of the growth of a poem, much as an expert technician might make a sequential film of the growth of a plant from seed to its fully expanded form. In this manner, we can watch a poem develop from the moment of Denise Levertov's encounter with a constellation of perceptions of sufficient interest to its fully articulated form on the page. The focus of our attention will be on the interactions between tacit and explicit which provide the momentum for the writing.

Polanyi, as he discussed the operations of tacit integrations in the act of perception, found it convenient to describe perception through four "structures" of tacit knowing.<sup>1</sup> These structures, the functional, the phenomenal, the semantic, and the ontological, might also be called *realms* to amplify their existential fullness. In actual life, these four realms may occur in different patterns of combinations and emphasis: for instance, the functional structure of tacit knowing illustrates the way tacit integrations help us recognize a face or perform a habitual action, such as being a garden. Some actions and perceptions obviously happen primarily within the functional realm. Other, more complex events, such as the writing or reading of a poem, require the simultaneous occurrence of all four realms for fulfilled experience. The discussion that follows assumes the presence of the functional realm as a basis for pattern recognition in object identification or reading, without further comment. While remembering that Polanyi's phenomenal, semantic, and ontological structures operate concurrently during the full process of perception, we will move through these three realms sequentially in a "slow motion" evocation to more clearly experience and understand the dynamics of organic form in a poem.

First, however, let us look at the full grown poem all at once, holistically, before we trace out the *ritardando* of slow motion sequences. I have selected this particular poem because Denise Levertov herself, in an

interview with Walter Sutton in 1964, rather precisely details the poem's gestation and evolution. Here it is, all at once, for our tacit engagement, prior to any delineated awareness of its process, or of our process with it:

The Tulips

Red tulips  
 living into their death  
 flushed with wild blue  
  
 tulips  
 becoming wings  
 ears of the wind  
 jack rabbits rolling their eyes  
 west wind  
 shaking the loose pane  
  
 some petals fall  
 with the sound one  
 listens for<sup>2</sup>

Our poet explains the origin of her poem thus: "First, there was the given fact of having received a bunch of red tulips, which I put in a vase on the window sill." This is the external object which had "the intimation of something hidden, which we may yet discover,"<sup>3</sup> as Polanyi phrases it. Denise Levertov comments that the tulips drew her attention because, as she looked at the tulips, which were beginning to turn blue (a change engendered in red tulips as they die), she was struck by how the tulips were continuing to be fully alive, right up until the last moment, and she thought of Rilke's sentence about the "unlived, distained, lost life, of which can one die" (from *Letters to a Young Poet*, August 12, 1904). When a phrase springs into recall like this, as one looks at a bowl of tulips, it is an indication of a "tacitly known" connection, here, between the dying of the tulips and a feeling about death which Rilke's statement embraces.

In this instance, the memory came into consciousness, moving from the tacit area to a point of focus in the explicit bowl of tulips and produced a combined perception. The combined perception has become the tulips as they vibrate with life, apparently dying without any "unlived life, living intensely up to the moment of death." The focus is the tulips, but the tulips as they are already beginning to embody a tacit dimension. This process of projection of the tacit onto the explicit constitutes Polanyi's *phenomenal* realm of tacit knowing. It is the realm where we become "aware of that from which we are attending to another thing, in the appearance of that thing."<sup>4</sup> Our poet becomes aware of the line of Rilke in the appearance of the tulips. Thus, the first stanza:

Red tulips  
 living into their death  
 flushed with wild blue . . .

Denise Levertov comments that after writing the first stanza, "Then came a pause. A silence within myself when I didn't see or feel more, but was simply resting on this sequence that had already taken place."<sup>5</sup> The pause appears in the stanzaic structure of the poem: it is part of the kinesthetic movement of organic writing, which follows the silence of the poet within herself.

The momentum for the poem seems to come from the crossing of Rilke's words with the tulips, an example of how a constellation of experiences begins to form an inscape. The inscape brings a "demand" for the poem, and in the grip of this demand, the poet begins to "contemplate, to meditate." To be sure that we do not miss her meaning, Denise Levertov says, these words "connote a state in which the heat of feeling warms the intellect."<sup>6</sup> We may note this heat of feeling in the choice of the adjective "wild" for "blue."

As the poet observes the tulips, she sees the process of tulips living-into-their-death continue. She describes her perceptions as she was writing the poem: "When cut flowers are in that state, things happen quite fast; you can almost see them move. The petals begin to turn back. As they turn back, they seem to me to be winglike. . . .":

tulips  
becoming wings  
ears of the wind  
jack rabbits rolling their eyes . . .

She continues her description of writing this poem: "the flowers are almost going to take off on their winglike petals. Then, 'ears of the wind.' They seem also like long ears, like jack rabbits' ears turned back and flowing into the wind, but also as if they were the wind's own ears listening to itself. The idea of their being jack rabbits' ears led me to the next lines . . . 'jack rabbits rolling their eyes,' because as they turn still further back they suggest, perhaps, ecstasy."<sup>7</sup>

With suggestive insight, Denise Levertov details the event of writing this poem. She sees wings in petals. Again, the tacit dimension emerges. The poet feels winglike sensations as she regards the tulips, which actually are not visibly moving. She feels the tulips becoming wings tacitly and kinesthetically. The progression of movement continues – from wings to rabbit's ears, from jack rabbit ears through to ecstasy and rolled eyes.

This kind of progression where an image is tacitly suggested by an object, and then the image overlay on the object suggests another image, etc., is described by Richard Gelwick in his study on Polanyi succinctly as: "An increase in the tacit domain which, in turn, enables us to increase our explicit knowledge, and so on."<sup>8</sup> Here, for a poem, let us read it this way: An increase in the explicit domain of articulation also involves an increase in the tacit domain, etc. This is another aspect of organic poetry: the flow of lines is dependent upon an interaction between the tacit and explicit, between the integrations within the poet and the actual bowl of tulips. As words begin to express the interaction, the explicit bowl of tulips become more articulate, which repotentiates the tacit arena. There will be as many lines for these images as there are images forthcoming. It is a relationship of mutuality: the articulation of the experience feeds the "tacit dimension" within the poet which in turn increases the arena for verbal spontaneity.

In the next stanza, the poet is attentive to the changing environment around the tulips:

west wind  
shaking loose the pane . . .

She comments that these lines are "a sequence which is pure observation without all that complex of associations that entered into the others. The flowers were on the window sill, and the pane of glass was loose, and the wind blew and rattled the pane. This is background."<sup>9</sup> The apparently accidental event of the wind becomes part of the cross section of experiences in the poem in much the same way as Rilke's line. The moving picture of the tulips now has an auditory image, one which carries a suggestion of threat in that west wind. It is part of the orchestration of the poem and also, here, forms a transition to an emphasis on soundlessness forthcoming in the next stanza by engaging us in listening:

some petals fall  
with that sound one  
listens for

Denise Levertov continues her description of the writing of the poem: "there is a little sound when a petal falls. Now why does the line end 'one'? Why isn't the next line 'One listens for'? That is because into the sequence of events entered a pause in which was an unspoken question, 'with that sound one' and *suddenly I was stopped*: 'one what? Oh,: 'one listens for.' It's a sound like the breath of human being who is dying: it stops, and one has been sitting by the bedside, and one didn't even know it, but one was in fact waiting for just that sound, and the sound is the equivalent of that silence. And one doesn't discover that one was waiting for it, was listening for it, until one comes to it. I think that's all," she concludes.<sup>10</sup>

Organically, a breathlessness in the poet becomes reflected in the structure of the lines — as she says, "suddenly I was stopped." The contact between the poet and her subject is very intimate: intimate both physically and symbolically in reciprocal relation. We recall Polanyi: "In all our waking moments we are *relying* on our awareness of contacts of our body with things outside for *attending* to these things."<sup>11</sup> We experience our body "in terms of the world to which we are attending from our body."<sup>12</sup> In this tacit sense, projection is part of every act of perception. We incorporate the tacit integrations in our body or "extend our body to include" what we are attending to "so that we come to dwell in it."

Furthermore, the manner in which Denise Levertov comes upon the "sound one listens for" is a perfect paradigm for organic process. Line by line, the poem journeys into the unknown, and yet tacitly one is prepared for the unknown in such a way that what is appropriate is immediately recognized. There is a *rightness* to the words and lines' structure, a rightness confirmed by the poet's tacit awareness of the structure of the inscape of the experience. It is also true of the right word, or right line, that "One doesn't discover that one was waiting for it, was listening for it, until one comes to it." Organic form operates on the edge of this kind of discovery and affirmation.

Within the phenomenal realm, the poet allows herself to be drawn into these tacit-explicit interactions that lead to discovery, and a spontaneity of perception occurs. These tulips are unique: seen only in this particular moment by this particular perceiver, they come forth for us, phenomenally, as a once-only occurrence shared with us through words. The experience with the tulips is shared with us to the extent that we allow

ourselves to be drawn into tacit-explicit interactions of our own, and our interactions (with some latitude for individual variation) will follow the pattern of the once-only occurrence set down for us by our poet. The poem becomes real for us only to the extent that the phenomenal realm – the projection of tacit into explicit and their mutual potentiation – begins to happen for us, as for the poet. Then, the bowl of tulips moves phenomenally through its sequential images.

### Joint Meaning

Denise Levertov remarks that the writer, while working, is in a state which “although intense, is dreamy and sensuous, not ratiocinative.” “Sensuous” suggests incorporation of the experience into the body, and “dreamy” suggests an openness to the non-conscious areas, to the tacit dimension. The poet senses with her body the life the tulips are living, and projects her own sensitivity into the tulips. Hidden or subsidiary awareness is incorporated in the body of the perceiver, and knowing – the act of perceiving meaning – occurs as indwelling.

“Meaning” has long been used to convey the sense of an objective reality which informs one of something. If a textbook has “meaning” we think traditionally of this as something which the textbook has and which we acquire by inquiring studiously. This model makes the inquirer the receiver of meaning from the outside. As we consider the meaning of “The Tulips,” we need to alter this model in favor of one which permits the kind of tacit-explicit interaction described by Denise Levertov in the preceding interview on “The Tulips.” Polanyi provides an adequate model for our appreciation of this poem at its semantic level: “It is not by looking at things, but dwelling in them, that we perceive their joint meaning.” His idea is that the knower participates in the meaning he or she discovers. Meaning arises through indwelling. The rising up of significance for the tulips is necessarily a “joint meaning” – a fusion of tacit and explicit, a participatory event rather than an appropriation. The poem’s “meaning” is understood simply as what the poem says to us, and since there is no communication without our listening, we are already involved in *what* as well as *how* the poem means.

Perhaps John Dewey’s aesthetic observations can help us further understand that participatory process of creative activity which enters into both *what* and *how* the poem means. Dewey, like Polanyi, focuses on perception as an interactive process: “Perception is an act of the going out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy.”<sup>13</sup> Dewey and Polanyi make such parallel observations that one can imagine Dewey convincing Polanyi that all knowledge is experiential, while Polanyi makes the case to Dewey that all experience is a form of knowledge. For instance, Polanyi says that “a heuristic process is a combination of active and passive stages”<sup>14</sup> and Dewey observes that “An experience has pattern and structure, because it is not just doing and undergoing in alternation, but consists of them in relationship.”<sup>15</sup> For Dewey, all experience is a process which continues until “mutual adaptation of the self and the object emerges and that particular experience comes to a close.”<sup>16</sup> He focuses on



the interaction between tacit and explicit with an emphasis on the *action* of the shaping similar to Polanyi: Dewey claims that "nothing takes root in the mind when there is no balance between doing and receiving."<sup>17</sup> Polanyi explains that a gestalt is "the outcome of an active shaping of experience in the pursuit of knowledge." He believes this shaping or integrating "to be the great and indispensable *tacit power* by which all knowledge is discovered and once discovered, is held to be true" (*italics mine*).<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, when we seek semantic meaning in a poem, we are entering an event created by a participatory process and coming to its meaning through our own participatory process. The *relationship* between doing and undergoing is what gives meaning: "the scope and content of the relations between doing and undergoing measure the significant content."<sup>19</sup> The scope and content of the relations between doing and undergoing in the bowl of tulip's moment with the poet, and the scope and content of the relations between doing and undergoing in the poem's moment with ourselves, forms what we may call the "joint meaning" of "The Tulips."

Meaning itself evolves only from relationship. Furthermore, it is not the intensity of the experience which makes meaning vibrate, but rather our awareness of the relations:

... a child's experience may be intense, but, because of lack of background from past experiences, relations between doing and undergoing may be slightly grasped, and the experience does not have depth and breadth.<sup>20</sup>

To rephrase this, using Gerard Manley Hopkins' terms, we could say that meaning arises in the awareness of the relationships between *instress* and *inscape*.<sup>21</sup> The poet both receives and acts, and meaning is the awareness of the interactions between receiving and acting.

What Denise Levertov was actively doing with the bowl of tulips was perceiving and writing down some words. What she was undergoing was a surrender to the presence and form of the tulips, a surrender to their "inscape of experience."

By focusing on the *inscape* of the experience, as she does frequently in her essays in *The Poet in the World*, she indicates her orientation toward the evolving whole, rather than on parts or loose collections of parts. Organic poetry, concerned with the evolution of the whole, "voluntarily places itself under other laws: the variable, unpredictable, but nonetheless strict laws of *inscape*, discovered by *instress*."<sup>22</sup>

This emphasis on the evolving whole beyond formal or traditional form establishes a heuristic poetry arising from interaction with life, from doing and undergoing, from *inscape* and *instress*. In other words, the poetry is "art as experience." Dewey reminds us:

... experience in the degree in which it is experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up within one's own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of the self and the world of objects and events.<sup>23</sup>

The "complete interpenetration of self and world of objects and events" is the gestalt or whole which grows in our aware interaction: an indwelling producing a "joint meaning." Furthermore, the significance of the experience is a *unique* or *newly forming* whole, not a repetition of a

previous gestalt. Both in Polanyi and Dewey, experience is drawn toward these "wholes" by the burgeoning potential in the doing and undergoing. Polanyi says:

This part of the universe, in which man has arisen, seems to be filled with a field of potentialities which evoke action.<sup>24</sup>

The field of potentialities creates a heuristic tension moving toward new wholes, new organizations. Dewey expresses it this way: the resolutions of tensions in experience, as new gestalts emerge, give us "our sole demonstration of a stability that is not stagnation but is rhythmic and developing."<sup>25</sup> The formation of new gestalts in fulfilled experience always leads to meaning: full experience is the "transformation of interaction into participation and communication."<sup>26</sup>

Through participation, through doing and undergoing, through indwelling, poetic art becomes the articulate revelation of the process of joint meaning which continuously occurs as the substratum of all organic life:

Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristic of the live creature.<sup>27</sup> (italics mine)

Consequently, although it seems we are theorizing about an art form, it is becoming apparent through Polanyi and Dewey that art is simply the focused event through which we may regard the whole of human experience. What we say of organic form is true of life, because organic form is an enactment of the tacit-explicit interactions, the undergoing and doing, that form the basis of all life. The poem does not *tell* us about life in words, it enacts the living perceptual process in a line by line, word by word discovery of awareness. Thus, Denise Levertov speaks of her poetry as a poetry of *enactment*: "We need a poetry not of *direct statement*, but of *direct evocation*: a poetry of hieroglyphics, of embodiment, incarnation; in which the personages may be of myth or of Monday, no matter, if they are of the living imagination."<sup>28</sup>

In organic poetry, the words are a way. Furthermore, the words become a way of transformation. The enactment "the envisioning, the listening, and the writing of the word, are, for that while, fused."<sup>29</sup> If we as readers can participate in these enactments, these poems, we too enter new gestalts as we become involved in interactions which change us through a perceptual process.

Let us now look at the "whole in perception" which the poem "The Tulips" makes, and consider its meaning. We need to see the poem again:

Red tulips  
 living into their death  
 flushed with wild blue  
 tulips  
 becoming wings  
 ears of the wind  
 jack rabbits rolling their eyes  
 west wind  
 shaking the loose pane  
 some petals fall  
 with the sound one  
 listens for<sup>30</sup>

The tulips transform before our eyes: we are witnessing a rare moment of pivotal change. Their rushing with "wild blue" is an existential demonstration: the tulips are doing what they are doing totally and passionately. Their change is given in the second stanza by a series of metaphors – the metaphors themselves are enactments, transformations, rather than mere comparisons. The tulips *become* wings – they move toward more rather than less, freedom. "Ears of the wind": the delicacy of their imagined listening refines our own listening; the tulips seem sensitive to their own process. Petals ready to fall become a visible way for the wind to listen to itself, as an effect of the wind's cause; they are the connection in this instance which grants the wind a meaning. The poet herself commented upon the ecstasy of "jackrabbits rolling their eyes." That the jackrabbit is called forth here makes a paradoxical interplay with the emphasis on death that is developing, since jackrabbits are lively, prolific, and very destructive.

And so the ecstasy of fecundity and life appears in the tulips at the moment of their death, and the paradox manifests mystery. But the west wind continues from its westerly direction; the suggestion of death evolves as the petals fall "with the sound one listens for."

Here we are at the end of the poem listening to the sound of death as witnesses to an inevitable and yet delicately transforming process, a change subtle yet definitive. We hear the sound – and the soundlessness – and that is all.

"It is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning." Now we are readers, looking at, or rather, risking ourselves to dwell in a poem. Dewey reminds us that as much as writing itself, perceiving is an act of doing and undergoing:

To perceive, a beholder must create his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent.<sup>31</sup>

The poem, brief as it is, presents us with an enactment of death going on right before our eyes (as before the poet's). This sense of being fully attentive and fully present is essential: the spare lines, devoid of excess verbiage, the concentration of imagery, draw us into the field of attention, the arena where significance is to be made by a process of living interaction, our interaction as well as the poet's.

In fact, the poet has set down a form for us, which can arrest our wandering fancy and brings us to the here-and-now of the tulips, a presentness which includes the past and future we are attending. The moment is the moment of transition, from life into death: the past life is there in the vividness of the red of the tulips's color, the future hangs on breathlessness, on the fall of the petals. (As Dewey comments, "Art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is."<sup>32</sup>

Nothing is explained, yet the tulips have transformed themselves with a totality of being, and intensity of doing and undergoing which is also a complete simplicity of doing and undergoing. The spareness of the poem and its vegetative subject prevents us from attaching the human emotions



of regret and loss, and instead we experience the moment of death simply and naturally, yet not as “no-account” phenomena, the way we might ordinarily see a flower die. Instead the quality of attention we bring through the poem to this event allows death to manifest its simplicity at the same time as we are fully sensitized to its hairbreath changes. The poem creates a tranquil and total acceptance of transformation along with an intense appreciation for the ecstasy of transformation. Now we can return to appreciate Rilke’s line, for the tulips have no “unlived life.” The tulips resist nothing. They are not conscious. We have the resistance to death which the tulips never experience. However, as Dewey notes:

... resistance that calls out thought, generates curiosity and care, and, when it is overcome and utilized, eventuates in elation.<sup>33</sup>

Overcoming some part of our resistance to death in the act of attending to the tulips, we experience an elation. Thus, Denise Levertov’s simple poem, which gives us the present witnessing of an ultimate transformation in an intense yet tranquil form, provides a subtle elation and expansion of our consciousness as we are freed from the resistances which normally accrue to our subjectivizing of the experience of death. There is winglikeness and ecstasy for us also, as we surrender to and witness this transformation. Thus the meaning – the “joint meaning” of tacit and explicit for each of us is also something we *enact*, rather than merely think. The power of this small poem is with its ability to be more than a verbal construct, to become a “rite.” As Denise Levertov remarks: “Poetry appears when meaning is embodied in the figure.”

### The Comprehensive Entity

Initially, a bowl of tulips is explicitly there. The poet comes into the room; her gaze is drawn to the tulips, and a tacit area awakens. Now the tacit and explicit interact, each potentiating the other, until a heightened awareness occurs. Both explicit and tacit contribute to this awareness. It is not something merely *within* the poet. The new awareness of “form sense” (Levertov) occurs in the “between” (Buber) of the tacit and explicit. As she moves toward discovery of her poem the poet comes to dwell in the between, a situation of “heuristic tension” (Polanyi) between the tacit and explicit. Now, a “heuristic process” is “a combination of active and passive stages.”<sup>34</sup> It is not just doing and undergoing in alternation, but in relationship (Dewey). The doing is the artist’s active contribution: it is the result of the operation of the explicit on the tacit and vice versa. As the artist moves toward discovery of her poem, she comes to dwell in the heuristic between. The situation conducive to discovery is the situation of indwelling.

If we focus on the indwelling, we can see that a new “comprehensive entity” (Polanyi) is coming into being as the between of tacit-explicit conjunction. Polanyi defines this between as an ontological realm, where there arises an “understanding of the comprehensive entity which the two terms tacit and explicit jointly constitute.” This “comprehensive entity” cannot be analyzed or reduced to components without losing its identity. The comprehensive entity, never understood by rational analysis alone,

may only be understood through indwelling. The artist, as Dewey says, embodies in himself the attitudes of a perceiver as he works, and "to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience."<sup>35</sup> The experience is created through doing and undergoing, inscape and instress; in short, through indwelling.

Polanyi describes indwelling as an "unremitting pre-occupation" with precisely the "comprehensive entity" which is to emerge. The scientist solving a problem, the writer evolving a poem, both have to concentrate their attention on something they do not yet know explicitly. The poet concentrates, we have noted, through that "form sense," listening for the "horizon note" – the intuitive sound of the whole. According to Polanyi, the instructions for discovery are: "Look at the Unknown. Look at the conclusion." He continues:

This admonition to look at the unknown really means that we should look at the known data, but not in themselves, rather as clues to the unknown; as pointers to it and parts of it.<sup>36</sup>

So our poet looks at and listens not merely to the tulips themselves but the tulips as they are clues to an unknown, as pointers to the "comprehensive entity" which will emerge from the indwelling. The actual object of contemplation is the unknown; the conclusion; the poem. Buber says:

This is the eternal origin of art that human being confronts a form that wants to become a work through him.<sup>37</sup>

The form is not the explicit bowl of tulips: the form is the unknown, which the tulips themselves are a clue to. It is not there, literally, since the unknown cannot be literally indicated. "The form that confronts me I cannot experience nor describe; I can only actualize it."<sup>38</sup> This is why Levertov describes poetry as *enactment*. The form can only be actualized. The full length of Buber's statement is apposite:

The form that confronts me I cannot experience nor describe; I can only actualize it. And yet I see it, radiant in the splendor of the confrontation, far more clearly than all clarity of the experienced world. Not as a thing among the "internal" things, not as a figment of the "imagination," but as what is present. Tested for objectivity, the form is not "there" at all; but what can equal its presence? And it is an actual relation: it acts on me as I act on it.<sup>39</sup>

"It acts on me as I act on it." Polanyi will say this is not an objective process. Neither is it subjective – since it does not occur within the person. The person dwells within the relation. "It is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning."<sup>40</sup>

The form does not dwell within the poet, for the poet is drawn to the tulips. Yet the "intimation of something hidden, which [she] may yet discover" does not come merely from the tulips themselves. The intimation of something hidden comes from the tulips' relation with the poet. Their impact upon the poet asks for a response: "What is required is a deed a man does with his whole being: if he commits it and speaks with his whole being the basic word to the form that appears, then the creative power is released and the work comes into being."<sup>41</sup>

Verbal expression of meaning happens in poetry by virtue of a transformation of language. Words in poetry are not merely semantic counters. Once language is actively "indwelled," as Polanyi would say,

words constitute a relational event for the poet, and, potentially, for the reader. The best poets have always known this: language is "not a set of counters to manipulate, but Power."<sup>42</sup> (Levertov, quoting Robert Duncan). Language has the responsiveness of being a "form of life."<sup>43</sup> Through *poesis*, words may present us with reality as directly and non-analytically as the tree outside my window presents itself, rippling its sun-filled presence in flickering shadows across this page. The power of presence in language originates in the experience of presence for the poet.

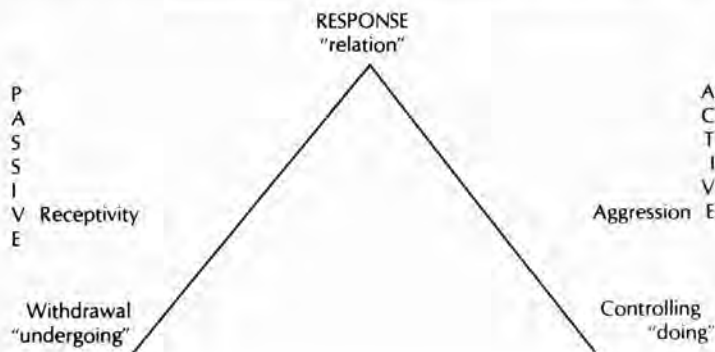
In other words, the power of presence in language is relational. The "inscape" which confronts the poet has presence: the presence is perceived by virtue of "instress":

... there can arise, out of fidelity to instress, a design that is the form of the poem – both its total form, its length and pace and tone, and the form of its parts (e.g., the rhythmic relationships of syllables within the line, and of line to line; the sonic relationships of vowels and consonants; the recurrence of images, the play of association, etc.).<sup>44</sup>

This is to say that language, also, for the poet, has presence: the right words in the dialogue of the poet's response ring true, vibrate with the form presence or "form sense." "The pressure of demand and the meditation on its elements culminate in a moment of vision, of crystallization, in which some inkling of correspondence between those elements occurs, and it occurs as words."<sup>45</sup>

For Denise Levertov, the "pressure of demand" means the necessity of responding, and her definition of *meditation* is "a state in which the heat of feeling warms the intellect." The synonym she cites for meditate is "To muse," and, she tells us, "to muse comes from a word meaning 'to stand with open mouth' – not so comical if we think of inspiration – to breath in."<sup>46</sup> Again, we have that sense of bodily participation in indwelling. Buber uses the word "behold" where Levertov uses meditate. Buber clarifies that by "behold" he means "heeding," "receiving," and "freeing."<sup>47</sup> By "heeding," Buber seems to mean what Levertov means by "listening," and "receiving" and "freeing" are words which correspond well with Dewey's undergoing and doing. The stance is responsive, with action generated by a deep taking in, an inspiration, an opening of self.

Perhaps we can define this delicate sense of participation by a suggestive diagram of a continuum of interactions. Both the left hand and right hand



leg of the pyramid begin at points of little or no interaction: on the passive side, interaction is blocked by withdrawal; on the right hand "active" side, interaction is blocked by excessive action, excessive control. Both passivity and action carried to extremes are conditions of blocked energy flow, and both, incidentally, are forms of ego-dominance. Neither can let the *other* enter the event with full presence. Both are opposite manifestations of an inability to let go. Moving along up both sides toward interaction one finds a condition of greater openness; yet, until one reaches the apex, both receptivity and aggression fail to find an *interactive balance*.

Let us consider again Dewey's description of this balance as an appropriate juncture of doing and undergoing and a perception of their relations:

Experience is limited by all the causes which interfere with perception of the relations between undergoing and doing. There may be interference because of excess on the side of doing or of excess on the side of receptivity, of undergoing. Unbalance on either side blurs the perception of relations and leaves the experience partial and distorted, with scant or false meaning.<sup>48</sup>

Balanced response requires both great fairness and great awareness: fairness to oneself and the other, and awareness of the subtlety of the balancing.

Action unbalanced on the right hand side of our pyramid, the situation of excessive doing, Dewey describes as follows:

Zeal for doing, lust for action, leaves many a person . . . with experience of an almost incredible paucity, all on the surface. No one experience has a chance to complete itself . . . what is called experience becomes so dispersed and miscellaneous as hardly to deserve the name. Resistance is treated as an obstruction to be beaten down, not as an invitation to reflection. An individual comes to seek, unconsciously, even more than by deliberate choice, situations in which he can do the most things in the shortest time.<sup>49</sup>

What happens in this kind of excessively active pattern is that the outer world itself makes little real *input* to the person. Not taking time nor attention to *receive* from the world, there is neither *inscape* nor *instress*, but rather mere habitual action based on stereotyped pattern recognition or pursuit of desire. There is only superficial engagement with the world. Excessively active or controlling persons who keep the content of their experiences manipulated toward structured "ends" lack the capacity to be "reconstructed" by the world, to be taken out of themselves and changed; they lack the capacity for undergoing.

When we undergo an experience, we do more than "place something on top of consciousness over what was previously known."<sup>50</sup> More is happening than archeological layering. We actually reconstruct, often painfully, from the bottom to the top, so to speak the hologram of the world-as-we-know it *changes*. Consequently, according to Dewey, every time we truly undergo an event in our lives "there must be an element of undergoing of suffering in its largest sense, in every experience."<sup>51</sup> In the ontological realm, beauty and pain become companions.

On the other side of the pyramid, excessive undergoing also truncates experience. If we are too receptive, our consciousness becomes a screen for fleeting impressions, irrespective of meaning. We become gatherers of sensation, believing life to be something like a photograph album of feelings. In this manner, there is no engagement with reality. One may

have fancies and impressions, but the undergoer emotes in a cycle of subjectivity. This also is habitually patterned behavior. Without active interchange, excessively passive persons lack the opportunity to be "reconstructed" also. They do not *engage* with anything that would bring new perspectives, but prefer to stay trapped in their own feelings or security system. To act with integrity is to integrate. In Dewey's words: "nothing takes root in a mind wherethere is no balance between doing and receiving. Some decisive action is needed in order to establish contact with the realities of the world."<sup>52</sup>

The balance point at the apex of our pyramid represents the situation of RESPONSE rather than passive reception or aggressive action. To respond means to *receive actively* or to *act responsively*:

An act of perception proceeds by waves that extend serially throughout the whole organism. . . . Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy. . . . To perceive, a beholder must create his own experience.<sup>53</sup>

This means that the world and the person require each other in order that spontaneity may arise. New patterns arise through new *combinations* of perceiver/world relations. Even as in chemistry, it is the meeting of *reagents* that counts. But even in the coming together of the person and his event (say, a bowl of tulips), there must be the balance of *beholding* – a way of apperceiving with the willingness to respond – without control or its opposite, passivity.

The two lower ends of the pyramid belong to the realm of "thinging": the passive, to experiencing "inner" things, the active, to experiencing "outer" things. In both arenas, there is a subjective appropriation of experience. In both arenas, the *other* is not adequately known or encountered as *other*. In the passive, the other is avoided through withdrawal, in the active, meeting with the other is avoided by superficiality and control.

The point of balance, what Buber calls the "I-Thou" relation, occurs when the other and the self are mutually present. When both self and other are equally and totally present for each other, a unique condition results – a spontaneity with pattern and structure derived from the intrinsic "inscape" of the relation.

This exchange of potentialities in a response seems to be initiated from both participants in the event. Both the "I" and the "Thou" are active agents. For this reason, the I of the I-Thou is wholly personal, a fully integrated I. The Thou also is wholly personal – even if the Thou is a tree or bowl of tulips. The relation is responsive, as between persons. Treating a tree as an it, on the other hand, one can "classify it," "recognize it as an expression of law," etc. – in this regard, the tree remains one's object. However, when one becomes "bound up in relation" with the tree, the tree becomes not an It, but a Thou. Within this bonding of relation, everything about the tree becomes a unified whole, an organic harmony:

Everything belonging to the tree is in this: its form and structure, its colours and chemical composition, its intercourse with the elements and with the stars, are all present in a single whole.<sup>54</sup>

The words "single whole" are Buber's acknowledgement of the ontological realm. Within this realm, relation "is mutual." There is doing and undergoing for the I – hence, if one undergoes, there is action from both



sides. Buber asks: "The tree will have a consciousness, then, similar to our own?" He answers, "Of that I have no experience." But he cautions us against disintegrating that which cannot be disintegrated. The relation is necessarily mutual – or it could not be relation. Within a genuine response in the ontological realm, there are no objects, but only agents; the one agent of which I have knowledge is the fully personal I. When the I is fully personal, it says Thou to creation, engaging in relation.

Denise Levertov phrases the mutually potentiating effect of relation this way, as she discusses her relation with writing:

Readers who are not themselves practicing poets often assume there is a hiatus between seeing and saying; but the poet does not see and then begin to search for words to say what he sees; he begins to see and at once begins to say or sing, and *only in the action of verbalization does he see further.*<sup>55</sup>

This is the tacit-explicit mutual potentiation which occurs in varying degrees, according to Polanyi, in all perception. Yet all perception does not develop to fulfilled experience in the ontological realm. Only when *all* of myself becomes bound up in the relation, as I become whole, or total in my perception, does a change occur from subject-object thinking into mutually potentiating relating. For the act of writing, Denise Levertov is saying that as the poet engages the whole awareness in attention, words come. The poet engages in a doing. As she writes, the undergoing increases, which in turn enables more doing. Or, as the poet enters relation with the tulips, she says Thou, and as she says Thou she becomes the fully personal I:

I become through my relation to Thou; as I become I, I say Thou.

All real living is meeting.<sup>56</sup>

And so, in the ontological realm, beyond and through the "meaning" of the poem "The Tulips," we are concerned with encounter, *meeting*. This meeting may seem like an elusive ultimate dimension, partly because of the use of words like "ontology." In fact, meeting, or relation, is the primal origin of our lives. "In the beginning is relation."<sup>57</sup> The world of relation, the undivided primal world that preceds form, "is what the child in the womb knows from the beginning of his perceptions." Subsequently, the inborn I-Thou is realized in lived relations, as the newborn infant explores the world. Ultimately, a self-conscious ego develops from these relational events:

The I confronts itself for a moment, separated as though it were a Thou; as quickly to take possession of itself and from then on to enter into relations of consciousness with itself.

Now the separated I emerges, transformed. Shrunken from substance and fullness to a functional point, to a subject which experiences and uses, I approaches and takes possession of all *IT* existing "in and for itself."

... the man who says *I-IT* stands before things, but not over against them. [i.e., does not behold them] in the flow of mutual action.<sup>58</sup>

Let us note that the I-It of objectification and separation arises when the I takes *possession of itself* (or becomes self-conscious), and that the ontological relation I-Thou is described as occurring only in the "flow of mutual action." It stands to reason that this flow of mutual action can occur, then, only if the I of I-It *lets go of itself*. Polanyi tells us that letting go of the self is the task of contemplation and surrender:

The task of inducing intelligent contemplation of music and dramatic art aims likewise at enabling a person to surrender himself to works of art. This is neither to observe or handle them, but to live in them.<sup>59</sup>

At the moment of this surrendering, the "bounds of disciplined thought" are burst in an "intense, if transient, moment of heuristic vision":

While it is thus breaking out, the mind is for the moment directly experiencing its content rather than controlling it by the use of any pre-established modes of interpretation. . . .<sup>60</sup>

Thus, within the ontological realm of "The Tulips," the poet is directly experiencing the "content" of the tulips (which is the joint tacit-explicit comprehensive entity). This is a direct experience and not an analysis. Readers sensitive (those who have eyes to see, let them see, and ears to hear, let them hear) to the ontological possibilities of a poem will be reintroduced to the relational event of their origin, to that "undivided primal world," the "single whole," the concurrence of all realms of perception. In this fullness of perception readers will also directly experience the joint tacit-explicit "content" of the poem. Thus to attend to the comprehensive entity that "The Tulips" makes is to enact the inscape of an experience. The poetry arises in the enacting of the inscape, the enacting of being. Within the realm of being, song alone (the deep form of the experience made audible) can express the ontological event:

The being of things has inscape, has melody, which the poet picks up as one voice picks up, and sings a song from another, and transmits it, into tones others can hear. And in his doing so lies the inscape and melody of the poet's own being.<sup>61</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 11-13.

<sup>2</sup>Denise Levertov, *The Poet in the World* (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Polanyi, pp. 22-23

<sup>4</sup>Polanyi, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>Levertov, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup>Levertov, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>Levertov, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Gelwick, *The Way of Discovery, An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 77.

<sup>9</sup>Levertov, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup>Levertov, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup>Polanyi, pp. 15-16

<sup>12</sup>Polanyi, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup>John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn, 1934), p. 53.

<sup>14</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 126.

<sup>15</sup>Dewey, p. 44.

<sup>16</sup>Dewey, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup>Dewey, p. 45.

<sup>18</sup>Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>Dewey, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup>Dewey, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup>As Hopkins used the terms, "inscape" is the deep form of things, and "instress" the deep bodily response felt by the perceiver. See the *Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by Humphrey House (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1937), pp. 105-217.

<sup>22</sup>Levertov, pp. 14, 15.

<sup>23</sup>Dewey, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup>Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, p. 90-91

<sup>25</sup>Dewey, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup>Dewey, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup>Dewey, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup>Levertov, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup>Levertov, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup>Levertov, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup>Dewey, p. 54.

<sup>32</sup>Dewey, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup>Dewey, p. 60.

<sup>34</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 126.

<sup>35</sup>Dewey, *Art As Experience*, p. 54.

<sup>36</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, pp. 127-28.

<sup>37</sup>Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Scribners, 1970), p. 60. Hereafter cited as Buber-Kaufmann.

<sup>38</sup>Buber-Kaufmann, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup>Buber-Kaufmann, p. 61.

- <sup>40</sup>Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, p. 18.
- <sup>41</sup>Buber-Kaufmann, p. 60.
- <sup>42</sup>Levertov, p. 54.
- <sup>43</sup>Levertov, p. 53.
- <sup>44</sup>Levertov, p. 10.
- <sup>45</sup>Levertov, p. 8.
- <sup>46</sup>Levertov, p. 8.
- <sup>47</sup>Buber-Kaufmann, p. 90.
- <sup>48</sup>Dewey, p. 44.
- <sup>49</sup>Dewey, p. 44-45.
- <sup>50</sup>Dewey, p. 41.
- <sup>51</sup>Dewey, p. 41.
- <sup>52</sup>Dewey, p. 45.
- <sup>53</sup>Dewey, p. 53.
- <sup>54</sup>Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribners, 1958), pp. 7-8. Hereafter cited as Buber.
- <sup>55</sup>Levertov, p. 73.
- <sup>56</sup>Buber, p. 11.
- <sup>57</sup>Buber, p. 18.
- <sup>58</sup>Buber, p. 29.
- <sup>59</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 196.
- <sup>60</sup>Polanyi, p. 196.
- <sup>61</sup>Levertov, p. 17.