

Jill Stanton-Huxton identifies two phrases in the poem that she herself particularly likes. One is *a hundred thousand stars fall from the night sky*, an image that came to her a few evenings after getting the original idea for the poem. This demonstrates the importance of remaining open to fresh ideas that flood into the mind while a poem is still in embryo form. It's as if the subconscious continues the hard work even while the conscious mind has moved on. She also likes the wording and message of *alone and free, solid in your solitude*. The wordplay of the second phrase is delightful, and the juxtaposition of *free* and *solid* is also pleasing.

The poet questions, however, her use of the Cyclops image, wondering whether it might be too obvious a simile. A simple way of giving a new flavour to the device is to turn the simile into a metaphor, so that the lighthouse is not like a Cyclops, but is one. A tweak to the wording would make the adjustment very simple:

*I can see you – my Cyclops –
winking at me
Your pupil dilating, hypnotising*
This version is offered in a

punctuated form, whereas the poet has made the decision to write the piece without punctuation. This is a bold move, as a lack of punctuation seldom helps a poem. There is, however, a case for the omission here. The whole theme of seas and tides is steeped in the concept of continuity, and the regular winking of the lighthouse hints at thoughts of perpetual motion. In the final revision, Jill may even choose to omit the two commas from the first stanza (or re-worked version of it) to produce a harmony of approach, and possibly to dispense with the use of capital letters, which seem a little awkward in an unpunctuated poem.

The one aspect of this poem that would benefit from some further attention is its lineation. Jill has, perhaps, missed an opportunity here. The beauty of writing in free verse is that there are no line length restrictions, and so you can enhance the reading of the poem by using line breaks as a way of making sense of the phrasing. A bonus is that there is always a fraction of extra emphasis on the last word of a line in poetry. This

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is brought about by the tiny pause, the hiatus between the eye reaching the end of one line and moving to the start of the next, or the voice establishing a suspensory pause when the poem is read aloud, indicating the enjambment. You can capitalise on this phenomenon by ensuring that a rich, significant word is placed at the line end. Adjusting the lineation is a simple task. See how easily it can be worked, using the example of the opening lines of the third stanza:

*And on summer days
when the horizon mingles sea
and land
a feint line with no tear
and the seabirds circle overhead*

All at once the advantage of emphasis is given to *days/land/tear* rather than *thelaland*.

The Lighthouse is a haunting piece. Its captivating refrain and fascinating stanzas create a rich network of images to fascinate the reader, producing a truly memorable poem. **WM**

Poetry in practice

Let your senses suggest themes for your poems, advises **Doris Corti**

In the fast pace of life today it is easy to think that we experience the world primarily through our eyes. But poets in particular need to bring our other senses into play, for example our sense of hearing.

It is well known that the sound of a ship's fog horn evokes feelings of a lonely, haunting quality.

If you are currently stuck for something to write about think of a number of sounds and consider the emotions that each of these evoke. The regular ticking of a clock, hiss of car windscreen wipers, a baby's cry. Each of these can bring a memory to mind – something for you to start writing about. Consider the sounds made by ordinary things.

A ticking clock – does this make a

loud noise or a quiet one? This 'tick' can be the title of a new poem, or a repetitive line.

Next time you are in a car on a rainy day concentrate on the sounds those windscreen wipers make – is it annoying or just repetitive? It might bring an idea for the opening line of a poem or a reaction of some sort that enables you to put a memory or an emotion into words.

Our olfactory sense can also be useful. The scent of flowers can be inspiring, with weddings and funerals brought to mind as well as certain gardens. A whiff of disinfectant might produce ideas about a hospital or other institution.

Our gustatory sense (taste) can be strong enough to induce an image which can be the start of a poem. Bite into an apple and ask whether it is sour

or sweet? Perhaps the taste of it reminds you of something from childhood? Something you liked or disliked – whatever your reaction it could be the basis for a new poem.

Think of the words you can use in such a poem: 'biting', 'munching', 'savouring'.

I have mentioned that the device of repetition may well be part of any poem you write, especially if you write about that 'ticking clock' or 'windscreen wipers' with their continual movements. This device would become irksome if used too often but placed on certain lines or on line endings it can strengthen a poem.

Observing an object or person might give you the basis of a poem but using any or all of the senses help to bring its description to life. **WM**

EXERCISE

Select an object from where you live or work and use one of the senses (see/hear/touch/smell/taste) to describe it. Use any style or form.

Now try the same exercise using a different sense.