

# **COMBINING METONYMY AND SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR AS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR POETRY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The challenges faced by readers in their understanding of literary texts lies in the nature of the language resources that have been employed by their writers. Sometimes, this results in a gap between the reader's expectations—being a result of the relationship between the wordings and their graphological realisations—and the writer's intentions. What happens then?

I have analysed the first 16 lines of a 40-line poem using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistic framework to achieve functional groupings of the writer's linguistic choices. Thereafter each functional grouping is analysed for the cognitive processes, specifically the Idealised Cognitive Models that the writer's choices may work within

With such a combination of the two linguistic sub-fields, an internally consistent interpretation and possible deep meanings of the literary texts are uncovered. This could become the basis for future pedagogical studies, teaching students to reach a consistent deep meaning of a literary text that may or may not include the array of literary techniques available to them.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The challenges faced by readers in their understanding of literary texts lies in the nature of the language resources that have been employed by their writers. Readers of literary texts which writers commonly create as personal, social and/or political commentaries may not be able to reconcile the author's lexical choices with the meanings he intended since most authors employ figurative language. This inadvertently results in a gap between the reader's expectations—being a result of the relationship between the wordings and their graphological realisations—and the writer's intentions. What happens then?

This gap has been described in Hasan's work in verbal art which describes how two semiotic systems—the semiotic system of linguistics and the semiotic system of poetics—can be employed to help readers achieve the 'deepest meaning' of the work. By analyzing the semantics of a piece in terms

of the experiential, logical, interpersonal and textual metafunctions as realized in the lexico-grammatical strata of the Systems of Theme, Transitivity and Mood, as differentiated in the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, consistent patterns of automatisation emerge (Nugroho 2009). The different contrasting elements are then said to be foregrounded. It is the consistency of foregroundedness that interests analysts of verbal art in that the foregrounded elements reveal the first stratum of the semiotic system of poetics—verbalisation (the deep meaning of a text) (Hasan 1989). As we analyse further, we will eventually uncover the deepest meaning of the text which Hasan concludes is related to the social man when we strip what we read from the peculiarities of the text (Hasan 1989).

This paper aims to elucidate the cognitive processes, specifically vis-à-vis the Idealised Cognitive Models (Lakoff) that the writer's word choices may work within. While we recognize that the analyst may follow the metonymic transfers that occur within individual ICMs to deepen their understanding of a literary text, we cannot ignore that since the words used are choices made by the writer, they perform certain functions; and in order to crystallise these choices for analysts, Halliday's framework divides a linguistic experience into the textual, the interpersonal and the experiential metafunctions.

Thus, I will first analyse the text using the SFG framework to achieve functional groupings of the writer's linguistic choices as realized on the aforementioned three metafunctions. Thereafter, I will analyse each functional grouping for the ICM(s) within which the linguistic choices may be acting. I will show that by doing so, an analyst can achieve, without the use of a variety of literary devices, an internally consistent interpretation and uncover possible deep meanings of the literary texts.

I shall be analysing the first 16 lines of Edwin Thumboo's poem—*Catering For the People*, reproduced in its entirety below.

1	These are delinquent days.
2	Brother kills brother in many islands,
3	While some who lose that simple anger
4	Take to town and politic each other.
5	That Christmas truce is cruel.
6	How to die thereafter?
7	With peace in the heart, handgrenade in fist
8	Goodwill in one hand?
9	The bombs rip villages,
10	Expose bowels of a race,
11	Slice off the head and leave
12	Balls in brutal harmony.
13	That simple folk too die.
14	It's dismal.

15	But we have to work at a destiny.
16	We stumble now and then. Our nerves are sensitive.
17	We strive to find our history,
18	Break racial stubbornness,
19	Educate the mass and Educated—
20	Evacuate the disagreeable,
21	<i>Bring the hill to valley, level the place and build,</i>
22	<i>And generally cater for the people...</i>
23	Set all neatly down into Economy.
24	There is little choice—
25	We must make a people.
26	We have a promising amalgam—
27	Youth, anger, a kind of will, a style of politics,
28	And bargain hard, sell common and unlikely things;
29	Are kind or rude or merely unreasonable.
30	Some stay awake to match the moon;
31	Eat bat, chateaubriand;
32	Sing old songs that have the rhythm of the sun;
33	Beatleise the stage; turn traditional
34	And keep our streets soft with the quiet of the night.
35	We are flexible, small, a boil
36	On the Melanesian face.
37	If it grin or growl, we move—
38	To corresponding place,
39	Keeping sensitive to trends, adapting,
40	To these delinquent days.

## 2. SECTION ONE

In this section, I am studying the possible ICMs in which the System of Theme and the participants of the System of Transitivity work.

These are delinquent days.

The *demonstrative* ‘These’ is the first *topical theme* that introduces the poem. It suggests proximity in location or time thus reflecting the poet’s involvement in the ‘delinquent days’ that he mentions.

‘These’ if seen as an important time frame is made all the more important as its position as a *topical theme*. With the use of this *demonstrative*, he has

referenced the part of the following *rheme* ‘delinquent days’. He has made this time frame a focal point in the text. Thus, all that the poet is describing about ‘these’ ‘delinquent days’ is central in this poem.

While we may assume that the ‘delinquent days’ is the intended referent of the *demonstrative*, we may also question why he chooses a *demonstrative* as a *theme* if this line is the start of the poem. If the lines that follow were to be about the ‘delinquent days’, why would that not be the *theme* of the starting line of the poem? Take the alternative “The delinquent days are here”. Would the *theme* in the alternative not allow more clarity?

To comprehend this, we turn the analysis of the metonymic transfer and the *participants* of the System of Transitivity below.

The *token* ‘these’ is a *demonstrative* that points very specifically to a certain time frame. It appears that considered together with the *value* ‘delinquent days’, the poet appears to be operating in the CAUSATION ICM—the state is taken for the thing that is causing it. The metonymic vehicle in this case is the EFFECT ‘delinquent days’. The delinquency of the days is directly seen to be the EFFECT of ‘these’ thus encouraging the readers to sense that what he describes thereafter are the CAUSES of the delinquency.

Also, it can be seen to be working in a CATEGORY-AND-MEMBER ICM as a SPECIFIC TOKEN of the days of the Christmas truce to actually represent the GENERIC TYPE of a WHOLE era of violence.

Having been accorded the role of *value*, the ‘delinquent days’ is the defining quality of ‘these’. We are introduced to a possibility that the resulting ‘delinquency’ of ‘these’ is what defines the era. If ‘these’ is the cause, then our initial question of the role that ‘these’ fulfills as a *textual theme* can be clarified at this point. As the beginning line of the text, the poet is drawing our focus to the causes of the problems that are described further on.

Brother kills brother in many islands,

The first ‘brother’ as an *actor* is the *topical theme* in this line. Thus not only does the poet put across the role of the identity but also show that this question of identity is what is central to the entire series of events that unfolds later on. Perhaps here, he also wants us not to forget the role of the people in whatever that is to be described in this poem.

The emphasis on ‘brother’ as a theme can be further understood when we study it as a *participant* as done below.

In L2, ‘brother’ has been accorded the role of *actor* and *goal*. As a reader, we immediately can see that the poet intends for us to understand that there is a familial relationship and thus there is presence of internal strife within a family. This, I would say, is a mere paraphrasing and perhaps a first level understanding of the line.

An experienced and mature reader, however, will be able to discern this as a metaphor for people who need not be of blood relation but are similar in some respect. What metonymic transfers help this discernment?

It appears that 'brother' works within the PART-WHOLE ICM and it becomes clear that 'brother' is PART of a larger group of identity, perhaps a racial, or national one or an even larger group, perhaps the human race. Because both the *actor* and *goal* are the same, they are attacking themselves.

While some who lose that simple anger

As part of the System of Theme, this entire line is a *topical theme*. The analysis based on the System of Transitivity further on will allow me to analyse the parts that make up this entire *topical theme*. Looking at this line as a *topical theme* gives 'some' a lesser responsibility with greater responsibility accorded to the entire *adverbial clause*. It is not just the presence of 'some' that has caused the violence that follows. It is rather that the 'some' lost 'that simple anger'. It thus becomes the loss of this anger that has led to the following violence. Thus even though the poet has given the 'brother' the responsibility for all the violence that follows, he, now, with the use of this *subordinate clause*, has further shown that it is not just a question of identity that has led to the protest. It is because they lose their anger. Further on, in section three, I will analyse the purpose behind the phrase 'that simple anger'.

In L3, 'some' is an *agent* which extends upon the concept of 'brother(s)'. Thus, here, we take it as a reference to 'some brothers'. Having been accorded the role of *agent*, 'some', even as it is used in the *active voice*, has a less active role. 'Some' *perceives* rather than *acts*. Thus, this line seems to comment on the instinctual response of 'some' rather than a purposeful one.

Alternatively, 'some' can be accorded the role of *actor* if we were to identify 'lose' in 'lose that simple anger' as a *material* process. If this were the case, 'some' has a more active role which is congruent with L2's 'Brother kills brother'.

An interesting point to note is that 'some' is an *agent* if we were to pre-interpret 'lose that simple anger' as a *mental* process of *affection*. Alternatively, if we note the corresponding *material* process 'take' in 'take to town' (L4), some is an *actor*. Then in L5, when we see it together with the corresponding *verbal* process 'politic' in 'politic each other', it is a *sayer*. What this shows is that 'some' takes on a variety of roles. It then seems like 'some' has a very active role in these lines.

This will be further clarified when I explore the *processes* of the same lines in section two

That Christmas truce is cruel.

‘That Christmas truce’ is a *topical theme* that narrows down what the poem is essentially about. We expect that every description that comes after is the consequence of this truce.

At this point, I would like to compare the textual choice in this line and that in L1. Here, the ‘Christmas truce’ is *thematic*. In L1, ‘delinquent days’ is part of the *rheme*. Thus, while the poet brings the readers’ attention to a certain delinquency of the times, the focal point of the text is the ‘truce’. When this is analysed together with L1’s ‘These’ (refer to 2.1.1), there is further support that the poet is drawing the readers’ attention to the cause of the happenings not just the happenings which he proceeds to describe. This is an important conclusion because part of the text consists of descriptions of events that readers are to see past to get to the cause.

The switch from ‘These’ in ‘These are delinquent days’ to ‘That’ here, shows a distancing of the voice. Here, it is important that we analyse this *topical theme* with the role accorded it as a *participant* in the System of Transitivity.

Even as ‘That Christmas truce’ is a *carrier* which is functionally and textually important as a *theme*, metonymically it is SUB-EVENT that stands for a WHOLE EVENT. This is especially so when we compare it to the plural ‘These’ in L1. When we view this *carrier* in this way, we understand that the ‘thing’ that is cruel is not just the truce but the WHOLE EVENT which would include the violence, the disagreement, the unrest before a truce is reached. Thus, it is not the truce that is cruel but the entire series of events that has led to the truce. Analysed together with the above, we note that the poem is now about the truce as the WHOLE EVENT.

This *carrier* is given the *attributive* ‘cruel’. The entire line works metonymically in a CAUSATION ICM to signal a CAUSE that has been replaced by an EFFECT. It is the cruelty of various *actors* that has caused the ‘truce’ to be ‘cruel’. When we read on, the poet describes the cruel actions of certain perpetrators and those are what have caused this cruelty.

How to die thereafter?  
With peace in the heart, handgrenade in fist,  
Goodwill in one hand?

‘How’ is a *wh-interrogative* that is an *interpersonal theme*. L7 and 8 make up the corresponding *rheme* which consists of a list. ‘How’ is presented in a *non-finite clause* which is decidedly marked for emotion and uncertainty—whom is the question for? ‘How do *we* die thereafter?’ or ‘How do *they* die thereafter?’ or ‘How do *you* die thereafter?’ This uncertainty again shows a degree of distancing with an uncertain point on the ‘empathy scale’ (Stockwell 2002) or perhaps the poet values the importance of reader-centric interpretations. Whichever it is, for the readers, L6’s non-finite *wh-*

*interrogative* is in fact more rhetorical in nature and that increases the emotive value of the line.

These lines consist of mainly *circumstantial* elements and the analysis will be presented in section three.

The bombs rip villages,  
Expose bowels of a race,  
Slice off the head and leave  
Balls in brutal harmony.

The ‘bombs’ have been given all the responsibility as will be seen from the CONTROL ICM analysis below. As part of the System of Theme, it is given heavier weightage as a *topical theme* as well.

Tracing the movement of the *themes* in the text,  
These→Brother→While some [who lose that simple anger]→  
That Christmas truce→How→The bombs→...,

we note that ‘That Christmas truce’ is followed by an *interpersonal theme* ‘How’ and then ‘The bombs’. Thus, this *topical theme* is presented as an explanation to the emotive rhetorical question before that. Also, it draws the readers’ attention to the irony that has been presented in L6 to 8—‘With peace in the heart... Goodwill in one hand’.

‘Bombs’ has been accorded the role of *actor* which gives it an active role in this poem. In literary terms, it has been personified. The bombs have been given human qualities and with that, we start to analyse the use of this personification in terms of the qualities of the action ‘rip’ in that the bombs have been given the responsibility of ‘rip(ping) the villages’ and thus the perpetrator of the violence is not in question here.

Metonymically, the CONTROL ICM is in use here and this has resulted in the personification of ‘the bombs’ commented above. The ‘bombs’ do not rip the villages. It is the representation of the CONTROLLER. Thus, it is the controller of the bombs that ‘rip the villages’. By using the CONTROL ICM, the poet shifts the blame from the CONTROLLER to the CONTROLLED and we need to question this decision. He has removed the blame from the people who have released the bombs and concentrates on the violence itself. The active role of *actor* assigned to ‘bombs’ heightens the impact of the violence and emphasises the result of the controllers’ actions rather than the controller.

‘Bowels’ is a *goal* in ‘bowels of a race’ that the bombs are to expose. ‘Bowels’ is a PART of a WHOLE human body. It is the insides of a human body which gives credence to the preceding *material* process ‘expose’ in that the bombs bring out and show the insides of a race. Here, we are confronted with a metaphorical realisation of the true nature of a race.

Furthermore, 'Bowels', being PART of a WHOLE, in fact has the SALIENT PROPERTY of being on the inside of a body, and is associated with digestion and defecation. Thus, when we get to the end of the series of metonymic transfers, what we get is also the message of the poet in metaphorical terms—the actions of the bombs (belonging to their CONTROLLERS) show the ugly truth of a race. At first glance, we interpret it to mean that the bombs kill a race but now, the message seems to be that the actions of the bombs actually reveal the ugly side of the victims. The violence inflicted by the CONTROLLER has revealed the fault of the victims. The victims may not have been truly innocent.

Further to that, in L11, the 'bombs' continues on to 'slice off the head'. 'The head' is a *goal* that is also PART of a WHOLE. Then, the next intra-domain metonymic transfer reveals that the SALIENT PROPERTY of the head is that it controls all the actions that the body is capable of and it also represents the mental capacity of the being. The CONTROLLER has thus got rid of the leader of perhaps a partisan group or movement since the definite article 'the' in 'the head' suggests that this 'head' belongs to 'a race' in the preceding line. Understood together with the previous analysis, we see that the actions of the bomb thus reveal the ugly nature of a people and without a leader, the group or movement is without intellect. What is left is the oxymoronic 'brutal harmony'. The CONTROLLER has achieved harmony through brutal means and has removed the intellect of the people.

Textually (as a *topical theme*), experientially (as an *actor*) and now cognitively (as a replacement of the CONTROLLER), the 'bombs' have great responsibility and seem to have great power. Analysed within the CONTROL ICM, this *topical theme* emphasises the violence instead of the actions and decisions of the perpetrator.

The simple folk too die.

Immediately after the realisation of 'bombs' as the *topical theme* that has been given much responsibility experientially, cognitively and textually, there is now a switch to 'the simple folk' as a *topical theme*. If we were to compare L1's *topical theme* 'these' with this *topical theme* 'the simple folk', we note the difference in perspective as signalled by the change from 'these' to 'the'. The delinquent days as a time frame is thus something that is not within control of the 'simple folk'. When we note the ICM this *topical theme* is working within, we realise that we are drawn to this SALIENT PROPERTY of 'simpl(icity)' and that takes the responsibility away from the 'folk'.

The use of the definite article 'the' implies that the 'folk' has previously been specified and yet it has not been within the content of the text. Perhaps then, the poet implies that all along everything has been about them, everything has been done for them, the violence was OVER them. This SALIENT 'simplicity' takes away possible control from them especially since



it is derived from the topical theme. This is reiterated later in the analysis of ‘The simple folk’ as a *participant*.

In L13, the *agent* ‘the simple folk’ belongs to the ICM of CATEGORY AND PROPERTY—‘simple’ is a defining PROPERTY of those who have less needs, less education, and are possibly innocent of any of the atrocities described thus far. When we combine it with the functional role accorded it, we also realise that they are not *actors* of *material* processes but only *agents*. Things happen TO them. They do not make things happen. They are PART of a WHOLE of the people who have been mentioned earlier on. They have become incomplete with the removal of the ‘head’ as intellect. Now, they are ‘simple folks’.

Let us compare the functions that ‘bombs’ (L9) and ‘simple folk’ have been accorded. ‘Bombs’ is an *actor* with a *material* process while ‘the simple folk’ is an *agent*. The ‘bombs’, which the poet has highlighted as the CONTROLLER, plays the active role. Here, he emphasises the SALIENT PROPERTY of a category to highlight the aftermath of the violence inflicted by ‘the bombs’.

It’s dismal.

‘It’ is the *topical theme* here. ‘It’ is either an empty subject or is referring to the death of the simple folk earlier on. Whichever it is, being a *topical theme*, it refers us back to the death of the folk and to the preceding events that has led to his admission of emotion. However, because there is some interpretative vagueness in what ‘it’ is, we note that the poet is not investing his emotions in the events. It is merely an observation for him. Thus, we can infer that he is not part of the ‘simple folk’ especially when we compare the *topical theme* ‘It’ with the topical theme ‘These’ (L1). In the latter, he admits his involvement or at least proximity to the events and that is lacking here.

L14’s ‘it’ is a *carrier* that further refers to the death of the ‘simple folk’. As a *carrier*, it draws our attention away from its textual weight onto the *attribute* that follows. It is the first admission of an emotion albeit one that has been downplayed textually.

Clearly, the use of ‘it’, either as an empty subject or as a referent to ‘the death of the simple folk’, hedges the cause of the dismalness.

But we have to work at a destiny.

We stumble now and then. Our nerves are sensitive.

L14 begins with a *textual co-ordinator* that signals contrast. He pads the initial admission of emotion with this *co-ordinator* that is quickly followed by ‘we’ as a *topical theme*. Projecting his own belonging to the troubled days, he quickly sets himself apart from the ‘simple folk’ and perhaps even the

emotion that precedes this line even as there is a hint at some kind of responsibility.

The swift change to ‘we’ in this new stanza, in L14 and L15, shifts the topic from the violence in that specific time frame that he starts out describing and to the actions of ‘we’ perhaps as an explanation for the earlier violence. ‘We’ could have been the cause of the atrocities. Could it be that the very working at a destiny has caused the violence?

The poet perceives the sensitivities of the times and the people but chooses to write the perception of their nerves as *topical theme*. It would appear that the poet is placing responsibility of the actions of ‘we’ on the ‘nerves’ and instead of writing it as a perception, he has chosen to write it as a *topical theme* to draw our attention to it as the carrier of the blame. It is unlike the *topical theme* ‘it’ in L14 which loses its emotive effect due to it being a pronoun with a vague reference.

Metonymically, ‘Our nerves’ works within the PERCEPTION ICM. ‘Our nerves’ perceives certain sensitivities. The choice of ‘Our nerves’ as a *carrier* instead of ‘we’ highlights the PART of a being—‘nerves’. This is an attempt to lessen the blame on ‘we’ and offer a reason for ‘we(’s)’ ‘stumbl(ings)’.

‘We’ has been assigned the role of an *agent* here. ‘We’ is a generic TYPE that represents the SPECIFIC TOKEN ‘people of the place’. Why does the poet choose this conceptual transfer? Why does he not just identify the *agent*? From the PART-WHOLE analysis, it seems like he wants readers to be involved or at least to understand as if they were in the people’s position. However, here, the ‘people’ in question are not the ‘simple folk’. By using the generic TYPE ‘we’ in the line immediately following ‘the simple folk’, he hints at a delineation of society—‘we’ versus ‘the simple folk’.

‘Our nerves’ is a *carrier* that operates as part of the perception ICM. The nerves are what the poet is describing. ‘We’ are nervous. By operating in the PERCEPTION ICM, readers are invited to sense what is affecting ‘we’ instead of concentrating on the perception that ‘we’ has. In this way, as readers, we shift our attention to the sensitivities of the nerves of ‘we’ instead of plainly judging ‘we’ as being ‘nervous’ and possibly fearful. Note the differences in tone in the line ‘Our nerves are sensitive’ and a hypothetical ‘We are nervous’ or ‘We are sensitive’. In the first, there is an appeal to the readers’ emotions as readers equate that line with an instinctive reaction that stems from a PART of ‘we’ that was sensitive’. In the second and third, the pain and suffering seem to be the consequences of ‘we’ being nervous or sensitive as if ‘we’ had made a mistake. Because the poet has shifted focus onto the specified PART of ‘we’, now used as a *carrier*, the blame on the perpetrator lessens, the responsibility is not on the human *actor* but what that *actor* is made of. Contextually, in the preceding line ‘We stumble...’, there is an admission that mistakes have been committed. However, by using metonymic transfer, the blame on ‘we’ is reduced.

**3. SECTION TWO**

In this section, I am studying the possible ICMs in which the processes of the System of Transitivity work.

Turning to the processes in the *experiential* metafunction, I have organised all the processes into the table below.

Agent	Actor	Material	Carrier	Relational and corresponding functions	Sayer	Verbal
Simple folk	Brother	Kills (L2)	These	Are (L1)	Some	Politic (L5)
	Some	Take (L4)	Truce	delinquent days (value)		
	--	Die (L6)		Is (L5) cruel (attribute)		
	Bombs	Rip (L9)	It	Is (L13) dismal (attribute)		
	Bombs	Expose (L10)		Nerves		
	Bombs	Slice off (L10)	We			
	Bombs	Leave (L11)		We		
		Work (L14)	Stumble (L15)			

The *material* processes can be seen to be on a cline of violence. When taken in isolation, it alludes to an EVENT ICM and it becomes clearer that these processes are ‘message-episodes’ that are in fact SUB-EVENTS that when placed on a cline appear to show the EVENT in its entirety—from the increasing violence that culminates in death to the decreasing violence comprising the consequence and uncertainty.

The *relational* processes, when seen together, appear to show a topic—delinquent days—as the only *value*, followed by many *attributes* that are emotions experienced in those days. And when we view the *relational* processes together with their corresponding *attributes* and *values*, we realise that the poet is working within a CAUSATION ICM. All the emotions imply the cause of the emotions which he clearly states in one generic event ‘delinquent days’. Thus the *material* processes serves as pieces of evidence of a violence that culminates in an admission of some responsibility (we will explore this admission in section four).

The table reveals the identities of the perpetrators of the described violence. They are either direct referents (‘we’) or indirect referents (‘the bombs’). The only *agent* is the ‘simple folk’ with a corresponding *material* process ‘die’ which speaks the helplessness of the ‘folks’. The *carriers* of the *relational* processes consist of anaphoric referents, either contextually (‘These’ L1) or textually (‘It’ L14), that require a study of metonymic transfers to identify.

We may also analyse individual processes. Let us take for example the *material* verb ‘to die’ in L6. The poet asks a question ‘How to die...’ (L6). Superficially, the question seems to be a literal one. How does one die afterwards with all the contradictions that he presents in the lines thereafter? When we see it from the cognitive perspective and analyse the *material* verb ‘to die’, we can see it working within a SCALE ICM. One dies at the end of one’s life (obviously) so ‘to die’ represents the end of a scale. And when the poet asks ‘How to die thereafter?’, he is, in fact, using the UPPER END of a scale to stand for the scale as a WHOLE. How do we live a *life* of contradictions? How do we live a *life* when we want peace and goodwill, and yet try to achieve our goals with violence?

Another process worthy of special note is ‘lose’ (L3). It is tempting, here, to accord the clause ‘who lose that simple anger’ the role of *mental:affection*. However, that would be a result of a pre-interpretation of the clause preceding the definition of its role and would not be an honest analysis.

What I hope to achieve in this research is to reduce the derivative meaning of the poet’s choices before analysing the roles of his choices and the cognitive process employed to understand them. I hope to study the process of metonymic transfer bottom-up and not start the study in the middle.

Thus, I analyse that line as it is: ‘some’ remains unchanged as an *agent*. ‘Lose’ is now seen as a *material* process and will be added into the table of *material* processes:

Kills (L2)—**LOSE (L3)**—Take (L3)—Die (L6)—Rip (L8)—Expose (L9)—Slice off (L10)—Leave (L11)—Die (L13)—Work (L14)—Stumble (L15)

On the cline of violence, it becomes one of the SUB-EVENTS. It has added another message-episode/ SUB-EVENT to the entire event.

Let us now consider the *circumstantial* functions.

#### 4. SECTION THREE

In this section, I am studying the possible ICMs in which the circumstances of the System of Transitivity work.

Brother kills brother in many islands (L2)

L2’s ‘in many islands’ is a GENERIC type standing for SPECIFIC spaces occupied by the ‘brother(s)’. We can also use our understanding of the SALIENT PROPERTY of ‘islands’ being isolated.

When we process the metonymic transfer that occurs within a CATEGORY-AND-PROPERTY ICM, we note that the poet might not have been referring to ‘many islands’ as a location but as the SALIENT

PROPERTY. The ‘brother(s)’ are fighting each other on isolated spaces. There are many factions.

While some who lose that simple anger  
Take to town and politic each other. (L3 and 4)

‘Town’ in L3 is part of the *circumstantial* metafunction. ‘Town’ has the main SALIENT PROPERTY of being in a central position of a place. When we see the literal shift from ‘many islands’ to ‘town’ and then analyse the individual conceptual shifts, we are able to contrast the factional movement with the central one.

That Christmas truce is cruel.  
How to die thereafter? (L5 and 6)

L6’s ‘thereafter’ works on the SCALE ICM. ‘Thereafter’ is seen as a time reference of an entire period after the described event even though contextually, it refers to the time after that specific ‘truce’. Once we understand the conceptual transfer, we understand that the poet wants us to view this event as a defining one that would affect the people from then on.

With peace in the heart, handgrenade in fist  
Goodwill in one hand? (L7 and 8)

L7 and 8 contain a series of *circumstantial accompaniments*. It represents a series of SUB-EVENTS that stands for the WHOLE EVENT of the ‘truce’ (L5). By dividing the SUB-EVENTS further, we note the use of body parts ‘heart’, ‘fist’ and ‘hand’. These are PARTS of a WHOLE—the human whole. Again, the perpetrators of the violence are concealed behind the CONTROL ICM so we see only the works of specific PARTS but not the WHOLE human (reminiscent of the analysis of ‘our nerves’ earlier on). His purpose is to perhaps tell us of his intention of putting the blame only on the actual cause, to concentrate on the direct cause of the violence. These PARTS could also be seen as different PROPERTIES of the different battling factions.

But we have to work at a destiny. (L15)

L15’s *circumstantial* function (*circumstantial:cause:purpose*) ‘a destiny’ works within the CAUSATION ICM. If we define ‘destiny’ as ‘future’, then the poet is showing us the uncertainty as he shows an unknown generic EFFECT whose CAUSE is the *material* process ‘work’ that precedes it. He thus shows that this unknown EFFECT depends on the ‘work’. If we define ‘destiny’ as ‘fate’ which has already been predetermined, then we see that in his word choice, the EFFECT stands for an unknown CAUSE instead. Thus,

we get the sense that no matter what ‘we’ does, it is of no use, their fate is sealed. In other words, no matter how we choose to define the word ‘destiny’, we sense an uncertainty either through an uncertain EFFECT or an uncertain CAUSE.

We stumble now and then. Our nerves are sensitive. (L16)

‘Now’ is a *relative temporal location* type of *circumstantial* function that functions to show nearness while ‘then’ is a *temporal location* type that functions to show remoteness. They are at two ends of a spectrum as *circumstantial* functions that show location. Operating in the SCALE ICM, ‘now’ can be seen as being at the LOWER END of the scale while ‘then’ is at the UPPER END. Metonymically, ordinarily, the UPPER END of the scale is used to stand for the WHOLE scale. In this case, it appears that the two extreme ends of this scale are taken to stand for the entire scale. Thus, ‘We stumble’ *all throughout* as ‘we’ ‘work at a destiny’.

... lose that simple anger (L3)

Now, let us consider the *goal* that came with ‘lose’ as a *material* process (refer to the section two on processes). The word ‘that’ in ‘that anger’ shows that the anger is something specific that has some anaphoric reference point rather than a generic emotion. Because of the specific pronoun ‘that’, we are introduced to the possibility of an event prior to the text. If there is in fact a reference point for ‘that’ anger, then the use of ‘that’ here opens up a possibility that ‘that simple anger’ is operating within the CAUSATION ICM in which the EFFECT (being the anger) belies a possible CAUSE that is implied.

Within the phrase, the word ‘simple’ is a DEFINING PROPERTY of this ‘anger’ which when seen together with L13’s ‘simple’ in ‘the simple folk’ makes it the DEFINING PROPERTY of the category ‘some’ (L3) and ‘folk’ (L13). Thus it is the ‘simple’ people who ‘take to town’.

Then if the ‘simple folk’ die in L13, we are presented with two possibilities. Either the ‘simple folk’ share part of the responsibility for the violence that has resulted in their deaths or they have died unfairly since their actions are justified by an implied cause.

## 5. SECTION FOUR

In this section, I am studying the possible ICMs in which the System of Mood works.

The Mood System is analysed holistically. While the Mood System, in my research, does not lend itself to extensive analysis, I cannot ignore it as one of my assumptions is that the text is essentially still a message. As long as a text

is written by one and read by another, the *interpersonal* metafunction will have an effect.

- L1 These are delinquent days
- L5 That Christmas truce is cruel
- L13 It's dismal
- L16 Our nerves are sensitive

From the perspective of the *interpersonal* metafunction, there appears to be no difference among the processes 'are' in L1, 'is' in L5 and 's' in L13. They are all of *absolute modality* so readers sense a certainty in the message presented in those lines.

Metonymically, they all strengthen the message. These *absolute* verbs are all in the PRESENT form but here they stand for FACTS. The *complements* that follow are opinions but when we read the preceding verbs, metonymically, we want to think of them as facts. We can either take these verbs to be those that speak with absolute certainty or as those that present the following *complements* as facts.

In addition, if we were to take L16 as a fact and seeing how it follows L15's 'We stumble now and then', then as readers, we can be sure that the poet is presenting to us a reason for the violence and the death of the 'simple folk'.

- L2 Brother kills brother in many islands
- L3... lose that simple anger
- L4 Take to town and politic...
- L9 The bombs rip...
- L10 Expose...
- L11 Slice... leave
- L13 ...die
- L16 We stumble...

The writer presents the events in a way that involves his readers. It is as if he is currently experiencing or observing the events as they unfold. Because of the cognitive processes at play when we read, while the present tense verbs are not *absolute* verbs, readers tend to see them as conveying actual happenings much like the above. The present tense form works within the EVENT ICM and invites readers to believe what the writer has described are habitual events or even factual events. It is only when we identify the ICMs that these work within that we perceive a possible intention of the poet and uncover how he achieves in getting his readers to derive an interpretation with his word choices.

- L6 How to die thereafter?

Almost all the clauses are declarative ones except for this line which is presented as a question beginning with a *wh-adjunct* 'How'. This question actually is a rhetorical one which references the following *infinite clause* thus inviting readers to question the validity of what is presented there. Rhetorical questions can be seen as questions that actually stand for exclamative statements or for declarative statements that contain strong attitudes. The emotive value of the text at this point cannot be ignored. While the poet has hedged the presence of emotions in the text thus far (refer to section one on *theme and participants*), his emotions are clearer here.

L13 That simple folk too die.

The *additive conjunctive adjunct* 'too' is positioned in a decidedly marked position. An unmarked position would be 'That simple folk die too' in which 'too' serves simply to add 'the simple folk' to the dying rest. However, when 'too' is in the position 'The simple folk *too* die', it results in a different emphasis. The emphasis here is on 'simple folk' and that they were not the target of the violence that they TOO died. Metonymically, we have noted that the PROPERTY 'simplicity' is of interest. The *adjunct* 'too', coming immediately after the simplicity and seen together with the metonymic analysis of the property of 'simplicity', either highlights the incredulousness of the events unfolding in this poem or reflects an element of surprise at the death of 'the simple folk'. If we read it together with L11's 'Slice off the head...' taken metonymically to refer to the removal of the intellect or leader, it seems that in the light of the removal of the intellect or leader, the resulting 'simple folk' die but that may not have been the intention of the perpetrators.

L14 But we have to work at a destiny

An analysis of the mood system has revealed that 'have to' is of a high degree of *modality* which stresses that there is no question about the need to 'work at a destiny'. It is used as a reason for the violence that has occurred as if it is something that could not have been helped. If we were to analyse it for possible metonymic transfer, we see that 'have to' is a *potential modality* that signals an action that need not have happened but here it has already happened and is used as a reason for the consequences. It is operating in the EVENT ICM and 'have to' is a POTENTIAL event standing for an ACTUAL EVENT. As L14 is preceded by graphic imagery of violence that has ensued, the high *modality* in 'have to' serves as a justification of the actions.

L16's *conjunctive adjuncts* 'now' and 'then' when used as a phrase together, as used in colloquial verbiage, lighten the responsibility on 'we' as if everyone makes mistakes once in a while. It is only metonymically that we discern that 'now' and 'then' stand for an entire SCALE of a time frame. Thus, even as what comes through is that 'we' simply makes mistakes, it is



actually no longer about it being 'now' and 'then' but it should be seen as an admission of 'we('s)' responsibility albeit a half-hearted one.

- L9 The bombs rip villages,
- L10 Expose bowels of a race,
- L11 Slice off the head and leave...

In terms of the Mood System, these lines make up one declarative sentence with the processes 'expose' and 'slice' making up a list of processes performed by 'the bombs'. However, when we read the lines one by one, L10 and L11 appear to be imperative ones. Here, because of the manner in which the message is presented with the processes in the present tense plural form appearing like root verbs and being at the start, it would appear like the declarative stands for a few imperatives. This, thus, is in continuation of the analysis that 'The bombs' have been given the responsibility and that the controller is being hidden only to be uncovered metonymically. Thus the bombs have been given orders to 'Expose bowels of a race' and to 'Slice off the head and leave...'.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The poet retells the events of a violent era with a concentration on the causes as seen from the *topical themes* and the CAUSATION and CATEGORY-MEMBER ICMs that he uses at the start. The resulting delinquency is something that he then to explore further now.

He then speaks of an infighting among the 'brother(s)' as both the *actor* and the *goal* with it being part of a larger group. It is only with the exploration of the ICMs within which the functional groups of words work that we sense that there are different groups fighting each other. The members of the larger group fight each other on 'islands' which has the SALIENT PROPERTY of isolation. We further get a sense of a self-destructive force that has overcome this era. While the 'brother(s)' are PART of a larger group, they destroy themselves because they see each other as belonging to different groups.

He goes on to suggest that it is the instinctive nature of 'some' 'brother(s)', not the 'some' themselves, that has caused the start of the violence with 'some('s)' protests with the *topical theme* in the same line being an adverbial clause. Thus, it is the act of 'some' 'los(ing) that simple anger' that has caused the events that follow. 'Some' is then accorded not only the role of *actor*, but also *agent* and *sayer* with the corresponding *material*, *relational* and *verbal* processes. In this way, 'some' has many roles but because it is part of a *thematic adverbial clause*, it is the instinctive reaction of 'some' that precedes the actions.

Next, it is the WHOLE event of 'That Christmas truce' that holds our attention. We read the line as one that tells us the truce is cruel. In actuality,

because it works within the CAUSATION ICM, the poem is more about the CAUSE of the cruelty and that description is what follows. With the poet's use of body parts as PARTS of a WHOLE human being, we tend to see the act of the specific PARTS rather than the human WHOLE. This places responsibility on the acts of violence rather than the perpetrators. Then, he presents a question that shows his emotions and yet his reference is vague. Readers do not know to whom his question is referring.

Moreover, the following contradictions highlight a level of hypocrisy. This hypocrisy coupled with the vague reference in the preceding question hints at insincerity. This hypocrisy is further extended to the next few lines in which the actions and commands of the perpetrators are hidden behind 'the bombs' as *actor*. The blame on the perpetrators thus decreases. It is only if we work through the CONTROL ICM can we see the perpetrators in control and in command. It is they who have caused the violence so described. With this, we see the true ugly nature of human beings as the 'bowels' of the victims as a PART has been revealed to show 'human nature' as a WHOLE. We see the poet trying to understate the actions of the perpetrators and perhaps justify the act of bombing because ultimately it reveals certain ugly truths of the victims.

When he goes on to mourn the deaths of 'the simple folk', through metonymic transfer, we are drawn to the PROPERTY of the 'simpl(icity)' of the people. In this way, while we sympathise with the 'folk', we also get a sense of a divide between the 'simple folk' and 'we' who has to act for them because they are unable to look after themselves. However, when he follows this with 'It is dismal', with 'it' being a vague reference, the *attribute* 'dismal' that follows is inadvertently downplayed. The 'folks('s)' death, if that is what is referenced, is not unexpected and not that bleak after all.

The *textual co-ordinator* 'but' that starts the next line shifts the focus of the text to 'we' and here begins his justifications for the violence previously described. Through the ICM that 'our nerves' works within, he lessens the responsibility on 'we' to the effect that it is not 'we('s)' fault that the violence and death previously mentioned have happened.

Overall, the title 'Catering For the People' prepares us that the poem is about a group of people who provides for a generic group of people. When the poet is describing the violence, the only time when he uses clear references of an unhidden *actor* is when he speaks of the actions of the 'brothers'. Once he starts on the violence on 'the simple folk', he shifts the responsibility for the violence to the violence itself through metonymic transfer and attaches little significance to the true perpetrators of the violence. The true perpetrator is hidden. Then in the quick justifications in L14-16, he references a clear *agent* 'we' but through a series of ICMs, the responsibility of this *agent* for the violence is lessened.

Altogether, the poet seems to bravely confront the truth behind the violence of an era when in fact, he is defending and understating the actions

of the perpetrators of the violence and shifting some blame to the victims themselves.

My analysis thus far shows that combining SFG and analysis of metonymy working within various ICMs offers us a structured, systemic way to arrive at a deeper understanding of both the poetic language and also of the poem itself, without relying on our understanding and application of separate literary devices. It generates a singular, internally-consistent interpretation of the poet's message.

While my analysis has been on only the first 16 lines of the poem, the combination of the SFG framework and the Cognitive Linguistics concept of metonymic transfers with ICMs has yielded an interpretation that reveals more than just a message but also, a possible attitude of the poet.

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