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Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

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Peter Hühn (Hamburg)

Generic Extensions in Contemporary British Poetry

This contribution analyses two complex examples of the generic extension of lyric poetry in recent British literature. Tony Harrison's film poem "The Shadow of Hiroshima" (1995) expands the lyric text into the visual dimension; Glyn Maxwell's collection "The Sugar Mile" (2005) arranges a large number of individual lyric poems into a dramatic scenario. In both cases the generic transition is coupled with a further generic extension – the elaboration of a distinctly narrative sequentiality. In two important aspects the generic extension of these examples affects the rendering of a particular experience, namely the perception of and reaction to massive violence and destruction. One aspect concerns the organization of speech situation and perspective, especially the relation between a superordinate authorial voice and possible subordinate voices, the other aspect pertains to the status of the represented experience in the ambiguity between factuality and fictionality, characteristic of the stance of the lyric utterance in various periods throughout the history of poetry. In both respects the generic expansion in Harrison's "The Shadow of Hiroshima" and in Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile" can be shown to utilize the representational potentials of lyric poetry in distinctly alternative directions.

Keywords: lyric poetry, drama, narrativity, film poem, sequentiality, generic transgression, generic extension, speaker, speech situation, voice, multi-perspectivity, novel in poems, visual narration, fictionality, factuality

I would like to discuss two very diverse examples of generic transition or extension of lyric poetry in recent British writing, which in different ways combine distinctly lyrical features with structural elements of other genres: with film and its extended narrative in Tony Harrison's "The Shadow of Hiroshima" (1995) and with drama and novelistic narrative in Glyn Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile" (2005).

Both are exceptional specimens indicative of sporadic, but in recent years slowly spreading transgeneric tendencies within the contemporary poetry scene in Great Britain (and more extensively in the United States). These two examples can be seen to stand in the context of different loosely defined hybrid sub-genres or quasi-generic conventions. In Harrison's case this is the spectrum of various modes of coupling a poetic text with moving pictures in what is termed a "poetry film" or a "film poem."¹ In Maxwell's case this concerns the conventions of mediating an extended story either specifically through a sequence of separate individual poems in what may be called a "novel in poems"² or, more broadly, conveying an extended story through a continuous narrative text in verse form or in stanzas in what is usually classified as a "verse novel."³ Generic transitions of lyric poetry within these two variants of that hybrid sub-genre have a long tradition.⁴ On the one hand, this is the tradition of the narrative or quasi-narrative arrangement of individual poems in poetry collections, primarily sonnets, which can be traced from Petrarca's "Canzoniere," Sidney's "Astrophel and Stella," Shakespeare's "Sonnets" to Barrett Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese," Meredith's "Modern Love," Tennyson's "Maud" and Seth's "The Golden Gate." On the other hand, there is the tradition of verse narratives,⁵ which stretches from Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde," Spenser's "Faerie Queene," Milton's "Paradise Lost," Byron's "Don Juan," Barrett Browning's "Aurora Leigh," Browning's "Ring and the Book" to Walcott's "Omeros" and Maxwell's "Time's Fool." Maxwell's "Sugar Mile" is transitional even to a higher degree in that it widens the transgeneric scope to comprise also dramatic features.

The following analyses of the two hybrid works are based on the premise that a lyric poem is generally characterized by two prototypical features: brevity together with prosodical overstructuring (which foregrounds the artifice of the text and causes self-reflexivity) and a monological speech situation⁶ (which tends to blur the speaker-author-distinction and may be perceived either fictionally or

¹ See Wees / Dorland (1984); see also Ieropoulos. <http://www.studycollection.co.uk/poetry.html> [29/10/2019].

² This is the specific term suggested by Henrieke Stahl in her comprehensive and systematic presentation and analysis of this genre in "The 'Novel in Poems' – an Emerging Genre" (Stahl 2021). See Adrian Kempton's more loosely defined concept of this genre in "The Verse Novel in English: Origins, Growth and Expansion" (2018: 9-24).

³ See the comprehensive overview in *ibid.* (2018); see Cadden (2011: 21-27).

⁴ Kempton (2018: 29-98).

⁵ For a discussion of the Romantic and Victorian verse novel, its status as a genre and the history of this genre see Detmers (2007: 185-203); see Fischer (1964); Bose (1976).

⁶ See, e.g., Lamping (1989: 21-22); Müller-Zettelmann (2000: 64-138); Hempfer (2014: 30-45). Hempfer adds further prototypical aspects but considers the monological speech situation („Äußerungsstruktur“) as fundamental (*ibid.*, 68-69).

factually⁷), but the two recent examples analyzed here are more radical in their generic extension.

Tony Harrison's "The Shadow of Hiroshima"

Tony Harrison's "The Shadow of Hiroshima"⁸ (1995) is a "film/poem" – as he calls it –, the coupling of an extended poetic text on a sound track with a visual track, on the commemoration of the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945, broadcast by the BBC on the 50th anniversary of that event in 1995. The poetic sequence – not a continuous narrative but a succession of longer or shorter separate passages of couplets subdivided, in print, by asterisks and made up of self-contained utterances or observations – is presented by an authorial speaker, the voice of the poet Tony Harrison himself, who leads through the preparations for the annual ceremony commemorating the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima, starting on August 5th and ending on the morning of August 6th, when immediately after the precise moment of the atomic blast, at 8.15h, the peace doves are released. The voice of Tony Harrison introduces – as a guide through part of the day – the subordinate speaker Shadow San ("Mister Shadow"), the imaginary figure of an anonymous man with a fan, whose shadowy outline had been stamped onto the ground by the blast and who functions as a representative of all victims of the blast. Shadow San is on "one day's parole,"⁹ as it were, and accompanies the narrative of the anniversary up to the recurrence of the moment when, exactly fifty years earlier, he had been incinerated by the bomb, what he calls his "burning time."¹⁰ The sequence consists of his recollections of the past and his thwarted longings for an ordinary life, especially his love for a girl, interwoven with the build-up for the annual ceremony of releasing the peace doves beneath the A-Bomb Peace Dome in the center of the city. Thus the progression of the poem is determined by the contrast between the details about the horrible deaths of the victims in the past, recollected and drastically described, and the present preparations by several keepers of the pigeons for the commemoration as well as the current activities of the present-day inhabitants of the city, such as performing the gymnastic exercises after instructions broadcast on the radio, practicing for a baseball match, visiting a Shinto shrine, playing pinball games, painting pictures of the Peace Dome, and making love in a "love hotel." The narrative ends, on the morning of A-Bomb Day, with the commemorative ceremony and with the release and flight of the peace-doves and their return, during which some of them fall victim to the attack of hungry hawks. In his concluding comments the authorial speaker then associates the

⁷ Hühn (2014: 155-168).

⁸ "The Shadow of Hiroshima and Other Film/Poems," Harrison (1995).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4, 15.

hawks' attacks with Japan's aggressive and brutal behavior against other nations before and during the war, pointing out that the threat of violence and war will persist in spite of these peace rituals:

Is the world at peace tonight?
Or are we all like Shadow San
facing inferno with a fan?¹¹

This attack can be classified as the *event* in the narrative progression of the poem – the unexpected significant turn in the happenings. The appeal and hope for peace as the reaction to the experience of a devastating war is suddenly undermined by disturbing prospects for the future.

The specifically lyrical quality of this quasi-narrative lengthy sequence consists *formally* in the conspicuous use of the brilliantly rhymed iambic tetrameter, the classical verse of narrative poetry in English, e.g. “Hiroshima hawks are glad to glut / and gorge themselves on peace-dove gut,”¹² and it consists *structurally* in the differentiated use of the subjective perspective, confronting and relating two different subjective views in the sequence of individual utterances, that of the superordinate authorial instance, Tony Harrison's own voice, and in the voice of the sadly deprived anonymous victim (Shadow San), who cannot speak for himself and is imaginatively, poetically re-created by the poet lending him his voice and his eyes. The re-created victim can thus address his creator:

“This voice comes from the shadow cast
by Hiroshima's A-bomb-blast.
The sound you hear inside this case
is of a man who fans his face
he used to have before the flash
turned face and body into ash.
I am the nameless fanning man
you may address as Shadow San.
The inferno flayed me as I fanned,
gold fan with cranes on in my hand.
In that fierce force but one degree
of quicker combustibility
separated fan and me,
but that one degree mean that the man
was stamped on stone and not the fan.
My shadow's fading and I fear
I may not make centenary year,
And so before I finally fade
Give one last outing to this shade,
And you will be my eyes to see
This fiftieth anniversary.”¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 17.

¹² Ibid., 16.

¹³ Ibid., 3.

The authorial voice, on the one hand, impersonates Shadow San, emphatically and memorably rendering the past experience of loss and destruction with great emotional intensity up to moment, where the shadow has to depart, re-living the moment of his nuclear incineration: “I saw the saddened shade retire / to face again the flash and fire.”¹⁴ On the other hand, the authorial voice describes and comments on the superficial and trivial present-day activities forgetful of the past inferno (such as breeding and looking after pigeons or visiting pinball arcades). The sound track corroborates the intensive emotionally suggestive impact of the text through the sonorous emphatic voice of Tony Harrison himself and intermittently through emotionally intensifying music. The authentic presentation of the poet’s own voice, endorsing the *factual* stance of the utterance, is a particularly intensive – sensual – reinforcement of a feature pervasively characteristic of lyric poetry, the association of the speaker with the author, which cannot be rendered on the printed page and relies on the acoustic mediation of the poem. This particular feature is even more prominent in another of Tony Harrison’s film/poems, “The Blasphemers’ Banquet” (1989), the passionate polemic defense of Salman Rushdie against the Islamic fatwa, where the acoustic presentation of the poet’s original voice is corroborated by the visual presentation, on the visual track, of Tony Harrison in person acting as the host of the banquet in honor of Salman Rushdie.

The visual track of “The Shadow of Hiroshima” serves two functions: On the one hand, the pictures illustrate what is being described or mentioned in the text (Shadow San’s silhouette burned into the pavement, details of the city of Hiroshima and its buildings, people’s activities such as morning gymnastics and baseball training, the flight of the doves and later of the hawks); on the other hand, these illustrations function as a mundane and trivial contrast to the remembrance of the devastating blast and the complete destruction of the city and its inhabitants. The double medial extension – both acoustic and visual – of the poem thus corroborates the effect of the poetic text in two ways: The sound track (voice and music) intensifies and thus supports the effect, the attitude and the meaning of the poem *directly*; the visual track serves this effect *indirectly*, by offering pictures of present-day phenomena which are in blatant contrast to and deliberately forgetful of the past catastrophe. Strictly speaking, the transmedial extension of the text does not noticeably transcend the meaning of the poem but underpins it and intensifies its impression, authenticating the narrative with respect to the mediated subject matter as well as to the mediating instance. The transmedial extension thus serves to deepen the impact of the poem.

¹⁴ Ibid., 17.

Glyn Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile"

Glyn Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile"¹⁵ (2005) deals with two historical scenes of massive urban destruction by interlinking them via monthly date and extent of destructiveness: the terrorist suicide attack on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11th, 2001 and the German air raid of London on September 7th, 1940, which is known as *Black Saturday* or the beginning of the Blitz. Both aerial attacks on cities happened in early September, 61 years apart.¹⁶ These two incidents are further linked by the presence of one identical witness in both scenes, Joseph (Joey) Stone, an adolescent in London in 1940 and an old man in New York in 2001. The two situations are conveyed via 59 poems, monologues (or soliloquies) spoken by characters present in the respective scenes, in New York *before* and in London *after* the attack. The scene in New York is set in a bar on Broadway on September 8th and 9th (i.e. the weekend before the attack), where three characters meet: the barkeeper Raul, the regular customer ("bar-fly") Joey Stone and the author, who himself does not speak and who is only seen writing, addressed by the other two as Glenn or Clint (inaccurately for Glyn, Maxwell's first name).¹⁷ The scene in London, set in an area just devastated by bombs, is represented by young Joey Stone together with his grandmother (Granny May), by members of the Pray family, mother Betsy and her five children Harry, Robby, Sally, Julie and the baby Lily as well as by diverse officers of the city administration. The Prays have been bombed out and are later evacuated to a school in a neighboring area of London, together with other victims. These areas are close to the Tate & Lyle sugar factory in the East End of London, to which the title "The Sugar Mile" refers.

The individual monologues and soliloquies are composed as elaborately structured lyric poems, displaying a great variety of forms and devices, some traditional (like *sestina* and *terza rima*), others (the great majority) newly invented, all distinctly rhythmic and with a broad spectrum of sound devices, such as pure rhymes, identical rhymes, pararhymes (assonances and consonances), internal rhymes, different stanzaic forms and varying line lengths, interspersed with rhymeless verses and sometimes even prose. Stylistically the poems deliberately avoid conventional poetic diction, extensively employing colloquial speech, both English and American, to various degrees. One example, in colloquial speech and, almost exclusively, with identical rhymes is Joey's first attempt to start a conversation with Glenn in the bar, having observed him write in a notebook:

¹⁵ Maxwell (2005).

¹⁶ Cf. Kempton's discussion of "The Sugar Mile" (2018: 172-176), which in some – few – points differs from the one presented here.

¹⁷ Another oblique reference to the actual author is Joey's garbled repetition of Glenn's answer to the question "where do you come from": "Well-in-the-Garden", for Welwyn Garden City, Maxwell's birth-place (Maxwell 2005: 29).

Some poems,
Right some poems.

I'm a lover of poems.
And yes, we lovers of poems

Must stick together. Don't mind me. Pardon? Glenn?
Glenn? Glenn. It is nice to meet you, Glenn.

You are thinking you are in luck.
Because look,

a strange old man has joined you at the bar.
How fortunate you are

This fine day. I beg your pardon? Indeed.
The secret's out. I am indeed

a man with English, how do you say Raul, *issues*,
Exactly, English *issues*.

No, not for fifty years.
Hoboken Italian now for fifty years.

I'm English when there are wars,
I was English when there were wars.¹⁸

Stanzaic forms are specifically used to differentiate the various characters: Joey speaks couplets (as in this example), Raul sestinas, Harry quatrains, Robby free verse. Among the monologues only one dialogue poem stands out – spoken by Joey and Julie¹⁹, indicative of the central importance of their relationship for the plot of the collection. What these various prosodic devices achieve is imposing a foregrounding poetic superstructure on the realistic experiences and utterances in a historically, regionally and socially specific setting. The poems (with that one significant exception) are unified by another common lyric feature, the *monological* speech situation.

While thus the individual monologues and soliloquies are conspicuously lyrical in their prosodic and rhetorical set-up, the overall arrangement of these poems is both *dramatic* and *narrative* (quasi novelistic). On the one hand, the collection is *dramatic* – or, more precisely, *quasi-dramatic*. Two different groupings of monologues – specifically in the form of *dramatic monologues* (in Robert Browning's sense) – convey the situation of 2001 and that of 1940, with the respective constellation and interactions of the two sets of characters. The dramatic set-up is stressed by the headings of most of the poems, which function like stage direc-

¹⁸ Ibid., 25.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 86-91.

tions: “Raul Chalking up Specials,” “Joey Awake Now,” “Robby Biting His Nails,” “Chief Warden Atop a Piano.” The dramatic dimension also shows in the speech-situation of the poems, which shifts between silent self-reflection and spoken or mute address to another character, e.g. in “Raul Emptying Ashtrays:”

The guy’s asleep, are you done, you British guys?
 Are you done contributing?
 Do we what, do we go alone?
 Is it time now?

I’m kidding. Give us a signal, give us a sign!
 Give us the thumbs up, Joey.
 He’s out of it, I tell you.
 Hey Brits,

You want us to save your ass again? You guys
 You nap, we’ll take the watch.
 We’ll wake you for the next one,
 Are you in?

I’m kidding with you Clint. Clint can take it,
 Clint’s smiling in his beer.
 He’s thinking *this dumb ass!*
 Or is it *arse?*

He’s thinking *this silly arse!* Hey Joe you with us?
 It’s the middle of next week!
 Easy now, it’s okay,
 It’s Saturday

Still, and it’s still, or it was, an awesome day.
 The ladies are gone though, Joey.
 Clint scared them off with some poems,
 You missed it all!²⁰

In addition, one poem is dialogic (as mentioned), with two speakers talking to each other, “Joey and Julie at the Picnic Table.”²¹

On the other hand, the collection is *narrative*, in the form of a “novel in poems” or “Gedichtroman” (Henrieke Stahl).²² In a particularly complex manner the monologues are ordered by two chronologies constituting two different narrative sequences, one set in New York in 2001, the other in London in 1940. The primary time level is September 2001, with the meeting of Raul, Joey and the author in the bar on Broadway, from which the situation in London 61 years earlier with the experiences of the Pray family, Joey and his grandmother together

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 24.

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 86-91.

²² See footnote 2. Stahl (2021).

with the occasional appearance of other bomb victims and of representatives of the city administration (chief warden, home guard man) is recollected or imaginatively recreated (by Joey) and inserted likewise in the form of monologues or soliloquies. The second sequence (London 1940) is intertwined or intercalated with the first (New York 2001).

The combination of the three generic dimensions of the collection – lyrical, dramatic, narrative or novelistic – provides a complex overview of these two historical and national situations. And their interrelation creates imaginative extensions in various respects. The texts of the individual lyrical poems present a subjective focus in each case at one specific moment separating and isolating it both from its relation to other personal perspectives, those of the other characters involved or present at the scene, as well as from its own further development in time. The effect consists in a slowing down of the reading process and in the detailed imaginative recreation of a particular experience from a specific personal perspective. The dramatic constellation of these moments then extends the individual point of view to a wider inter-personal angle, establishing the condition of *multi-perspectivity*, which allows for the contrasting and relativizing of each individual view but also for the highlighting of its specificity. The temporal succession of these momentary experiences constitutes a *narrative* of the changes of the situation and of the development of the various characters over time, more precisely in the form of two narratives, one set in 2001, the other in 1940 – the latter re-constructed from within the narrative of 2001.

The narrative of the past development in *1940* concerns the bombing out of the Pray family in London's East End, their temporary accommodation in a school building, their announced but never accomplished evacuation to the country on buses provided by the city government and their total extinction by a direct bomb hit on the school. The central phase inside that sequence, however, is the developing friendship and intimacy between the paper boy Joey Stone and the highly imaginative Pray daughter Julie (once called the "ghost girl"²³), whom he first met during the preceding winter of 1939/40, with whom he had one intimate conversation, presented in the dialogue poem,²⁴ and whose secret diary with indications of her affection for him he dug up in the garden after the first raid and then copied out. This discovery counts as the happy *eventful turn* within the narrative sequence, happy for Joey, who as an old man in New York is apparently the actual narrator of this past story or, rather, the self-effaced ultimate purveyor of the imagined monologues. The positive event is, however, almost immediately followed by the *negative event* of Julie's annihilation – together with that of her entire family – in the bomb blast. Joey alone had been spared because he had gone back to the Prays' garden to dig for the buried heir-

²³ Cf. Maxwell (2005: 15).

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 86-91.

loom – tragically refusing to take Julie with him because it was too “dangerous.”²⁵

The primary narrative sequence, set in *2001*, features two different *events*, one foreseeable for the immediate future: the death of Raul, who – as he proudly announces – will begin his new job in a restaurant in one of the Twin Towers on September 11th, the other happening at the end of the collection, the handing over of the “yellow envelope.”²⁶

Maxwell’s collection “The Sugar Mile” thus tells two stories in the medium of poems: the (subordinate) story of two families affected by the Blitz attack in 1940, the Prays and the Stones, and the (superordinate) story of how the narration of this story, by a witness and victim, comes about in 2001. One further aspect concerns the composition of the poems as well as of the entire collection, on one level further up, as it were. The two chronological sequences together are framed – that is, opened as well as closed – by the same poem of almost identical wording spoken by – or rather: attributed to – the author in his own person, functioning as the prologue and epilogue to the quasi-dramatic presentation of the novel in poems. This poem is the only manifestation in the collection of the poet’s voice. However, the poet as the superordinate recording and composing instance is present throughout the collection in that he is being observed while writing and even spoken to by the other two characters in the Broadway bar, Joey and Raul. The precise information about date and place, “September 8th, Broadway & 86th”²⁷, preceding the untitled opening poem defines the scene: Manhattan three days prior to the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001. A proleptic reference to the future attack is contained in this poem, when the speaker – the poet – describes people jumping and falling (in a desperate attempt to escape from the burning tower), among whom will also be the barkeeper Raul. Thus, the opening poem establishes a wider temporal perspective for the reader, who – unlike the characters – is therefore aware of the impending catastrophe, which makes the two situations in 1940 and 2001 directly comparable.

The other *event* on this level is the handing over of the *yellow envelope* from Joey to “Glenn, Poet and Gentleman” (136), apparently to the author Glyn Maxwell himself, from one writer to another, as it were, presumably Joey’s recollections and imaginary reconstructions of his experience of the Blitz in London and of his acquaintance with the Pray family, especially Julie, and thus the source for all the monologues set in 1940 that we have been reading.²⁸ This interpretation is indirectly corroborated by the closing poem, which almost ver-

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 112.

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 108, 136.

²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 3.

²⁸ This attribution is implied by Joey, when he first mentions the “yellow envelope:” “it’s just something // committed to paper, you know / my element, the paper boy” (108). Kempton, wrongly, I think, attributes the poems to Julie (Kempton 2018: 175).

batim repeats the untitled opening poem but is now given the title “The Sugar Mile” and is dedicated to Joseph Stone²⁹. The implied affinity between author and Joey is also underlined by the fact that the opening and closing poem is composed in couplets like all of Joey’s monologues. Both (almost identical) poems thus implicitly refer to the composition of the entire collection of poems, naming its source and inspiration.

This overall setup and the specific wording of the poet’s opening and closing poem point to one significant feature of Maxwell’s collection: the absence or, more precisely, the withdrawal of the authorial voice, generally considered to be a potent feature of lyric poetry. This absence is expressed – somewhat enigmatically and obliquely – in several phrases in the opening and closing poem:

I wrote at the top of breath
not having reached it. At the top of breath
the skyline is a shoreline
seen from high above. Buildings are sand
and peter out. All land
is a ledge, all space is a drop, all steps have a nerve.

There can be no first person.
I fill my lungs to go and the first person’s
yards ahead. Then he jumps.
Then I look and he falls and falls until my lungs
are veal and I’m alone.
I write *I* and it leaks like a first inkpen.
The poet is any stranger
seen today, whose past is an empty notebook
[...]
whose past is an empty *moleskine*.³⁰

In both cases the text is followed by a number of lines crossed out, implying that the author attempted to continue and complete the poem but finally abandoned the attempt. The poet withdraws and delegates perception and utterance to the characters, like in a drama, indicating that *vis à vis* such experiences the superior position of a superordinate voice is no longer possible.

Conclusion

In different ways the two examples, Harrison’s “The Shadow of Hiroshima” and Maxwell’s “The Sugar Mile,” can be said to transcend the limits of individual, single lyrical poems. What is achieved by the generic transitions of poetry in “The Sugar Mile” is the *temporal* expansion of the isolated lyric utterance into a longer – *narrative* – sequence and the *interpersonal* expansion of the isolated

²⁹ Cf. Maxwell (2005: 139).

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 139-140.

voice into a broader – *dramatic* – constellation and dynamic progression together with the foregrounding of the act of poetic imagination and composition. In this respect there is a remarkable contrast to Tony Harrison’s “The Shadow of Hiroshima.” While Harrison emphasizes both the presence and the creative activity of himself as the author, Maxwell explicitly denies any active participation in the composition of the poems, at the same time, however, repeatedly and conspicuously (and ironically) drawing attention to his presence at the scene and to his fruitless attempts at writing as well as his final decision to abandon the attempt altogether (“empty notebook”, “empty *moleskine*”, 3, 4, 139, 140). Although, ultimately, he still remains the author, of course, fully responsible for the composition in every detail, he effaces his presence and his attitude completely behind the reality of the characters and their situation – in the interest of heightening the intersubjective relevance of the experiences he mediates. This interest is connected with the suggested *factuality* of the details of the depicted situations.³¹ In that respect Maxwell concurs with Harrison, who also stresses the factuality of the presented happenings, specifically by means of the visual extension of the poetic text, pictures of the atomic blast, details of the city of Hiroshima and of the annual commemoration of the catastrophe.

Finally, the transgeneric extensions of the lyric poem make different demands on the activity of the recipient: Tony Harrison uses the transmedial – acoustic and visual – extensions of his text to intensify the immediate, sensual impact, while Maxwell requires the reader actively and pertinaciously to puzzle out – from the indications contained in the isolated quasi-dramatic subjective utterances – what actually happened and to understand the hidden driving force and motivation behind people’s behavior. This difference is directly conditioned by the presence and absence, respectively, of the authorial voice and its central perspective, prototypically characteristic of lyric poetry. This difference extends also to the problem of the source and the authority of what is being presented in the two texts: While the problem is not thematized at all in “The Shadow of Hiroshima,” this question is explicitly raised in “The Sugar Mile” (both in the two identical “authorial” poems opening and closing the collection and in the reference to the “yellow envelope”) without providing a clear answer.

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³¹ The factuality is also stressed by Maxwell in an interview he gave to Jennie Renton about the collection (Renton 2005).

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