

Poetry Explorer



Poetry Explorer is for anyone interested in getting inside a poem or prose excerpt, and seeing interactively how it works — rather than leaving it as a dead two-dimensional thing, flat on the page, like a set-text.

We also hope it may be attractive to younger people who like apps but don't think they like reading on the page. Or to people who, naturally enough, are sceptical about 'poetry' as if it were a remote, difficult and specialist arty thing.

There is a split-screen option so two people can do it together – two friends, parent and child, teacher and student. Or just you making two different attempts that you wish to compare.

This guide on how to use the app spells out the processes and what we think is at stake in their use.

Please use and enjoy.

Philip Davis
Phil Jimmieson
University of Liverpool

Poetry Explorer enables you to paste and copy, or to type, any text onto your screen, prose or poetry.

It has **two modes** of working:

1) 'Mark-up' mode, to highlight and connect:

you can use **highlights** and arrows to play with how one word or phrase stands out, or links with another earlier or later in the poem.

The idea here is

- a) *pointing, rather than explaining*: on instinct you just highlight what seems intuitively or emotionally to stand out. It is like *doing* poetry not just talking about its themes - rather as in a music masterclass the teaching violinist does not use many words to explain to the pupil what is wanted but plays it, shows it, demonstrates it in action instead.
- b) *then tracing how the poem's 'brain' works*: following research we have done with eye-tracking and brain-imaging, readers of poetry do not scan straightforwardly, they hesitate, they go forwards and backwards, looking for underlying inner connections

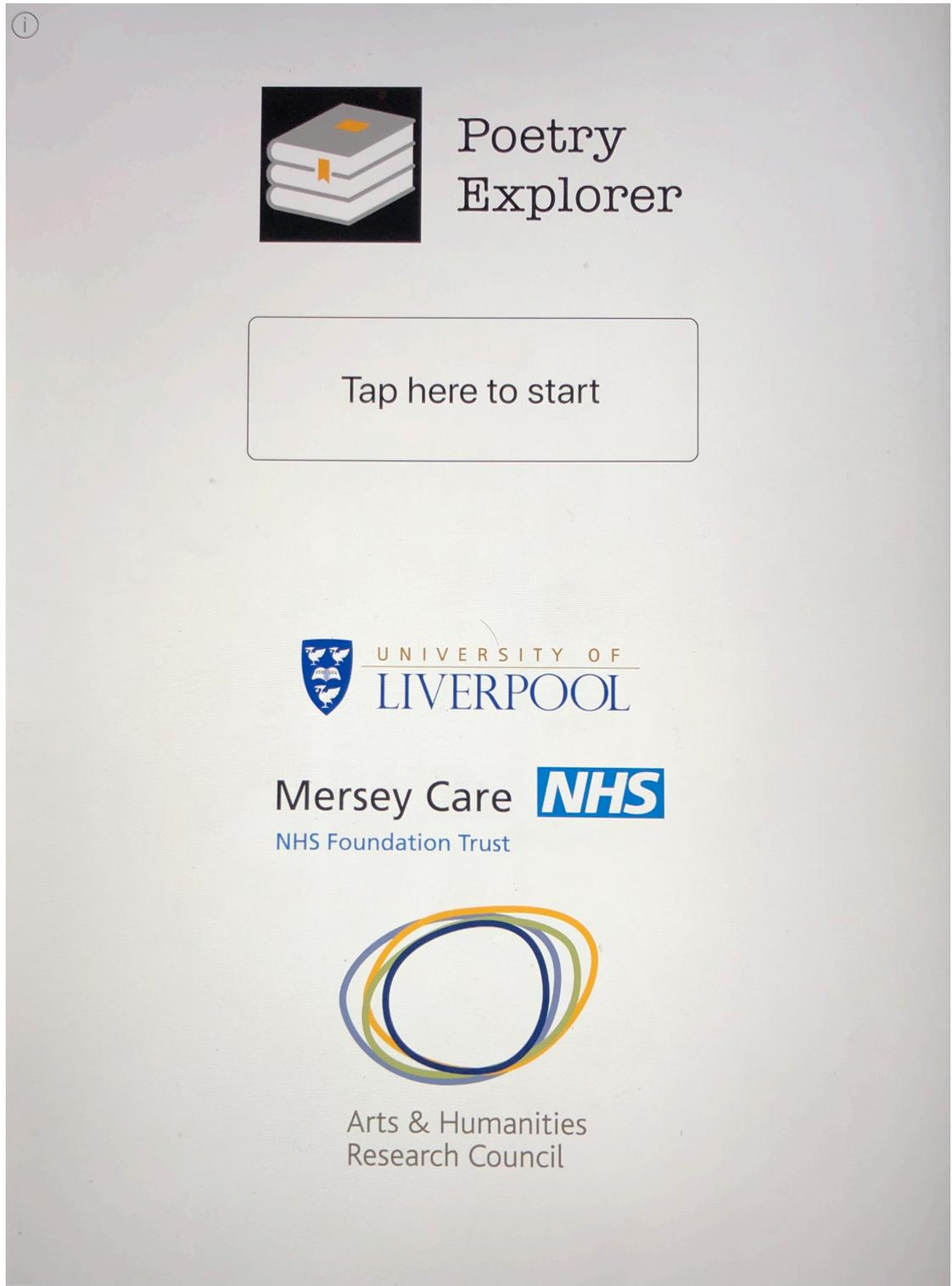
2) 'Fridge Poetry' mode: you can substitute one word for another of your choice, or change the word order, to see if it works better that way.

The idea here is that *composition is competition*: in a writer's mind, different words and different formulations *compete for selection*. If you put in a different word, it is like going to the optician for an eye-test and with each new lens you are asked, 'Is this better or worse? Does it help you see more clearly?' What difference does a different way of putting it make? Revise the poem in your own terms, see the possible choices the writer might have made.

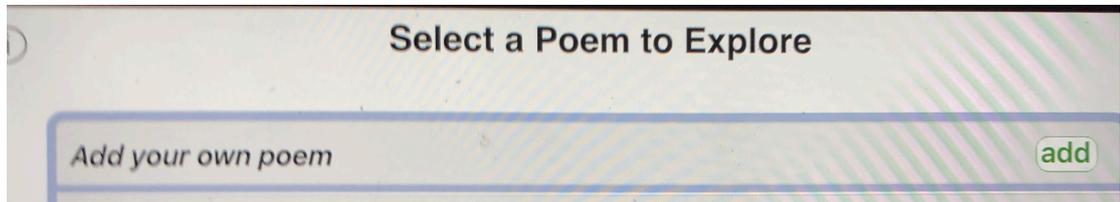
Move to and fro between modes 1 and 2 — by tapping the bottom left hand icon in each.

Instructions for using Poetry Explorer

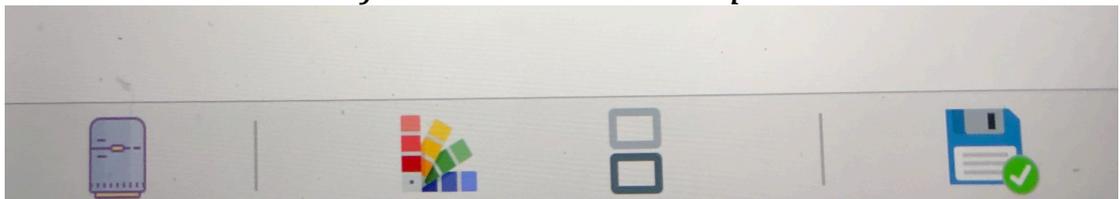
1. Getting Started



- **Open app** and follow instruction 'Tap here to start' to get to 'Select a Poem to Explore' screen
- Tap 'add' to right of 'Add your own poem'



- Type in whatever you want as your 'Title' at the top. In the large blank main area below, type in or copy and paste any poem or prose excerpt you wish to work on. Save it by tapping 'save' button at bottom of screen, (removing the keyboard if necessary by tapping the icon bottom right on keyboard). If you forget to save, you will get a reminder when you quit. You can save several versions of your work with a particular poem. You can 'view' these versions on the 'Select a Poem to Explore' screen and 'delete' there any versions you no longer want.
- *4 icons at bottom of screen beneath the poem:*



Fridge icon extreme left: enables switch to a different screen where you can change the words of the poem and see what difference that makes.

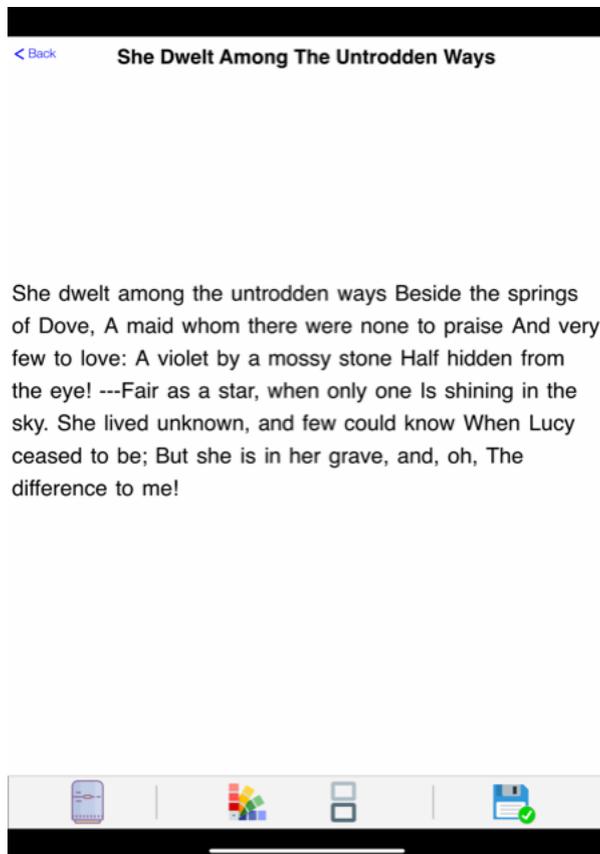
The **colour wheel** second from left enables you to change the colour of your work on the poem, if you wish.

The icon *second from the right*, showing **One box on top of Another** allows *two users* to work on the poem in split screen.

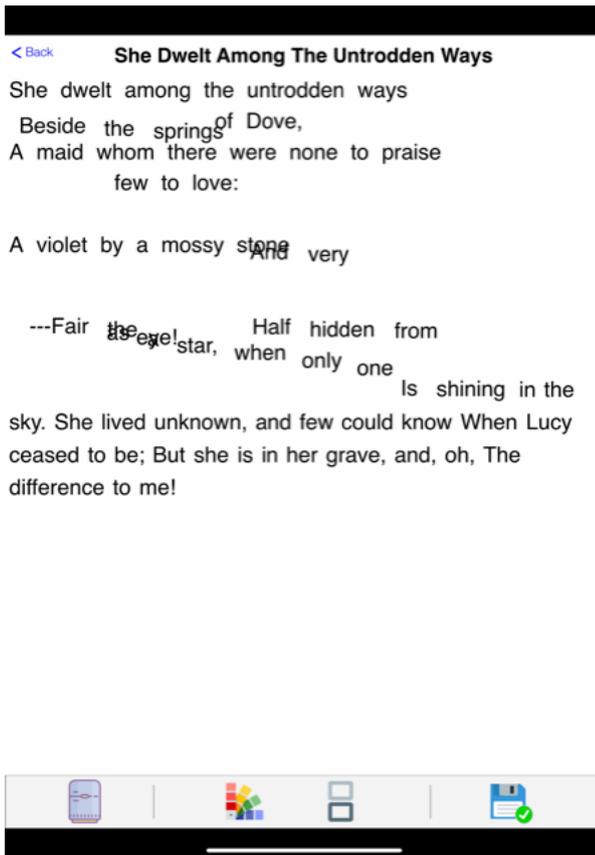
To save is extreme bottom *right*

2. To work on a poem: in 'Mark-up' mode

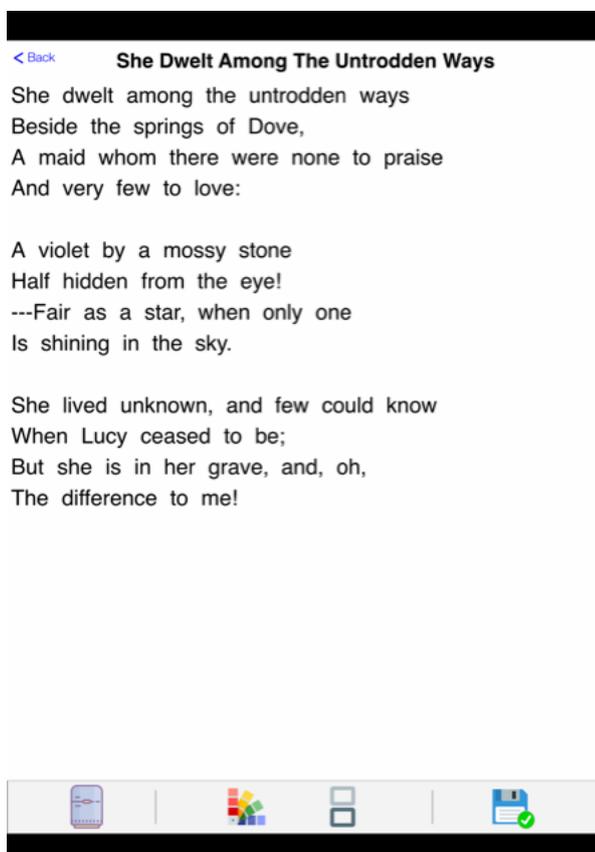
- Add your poem – for example this by Wordsworth:



- Then watch the poem reassemble itself on screen, showing the formation of its lines, so you see how in poetry lines themselves make a difference:



You see what a difference the use of lines makes in poetry

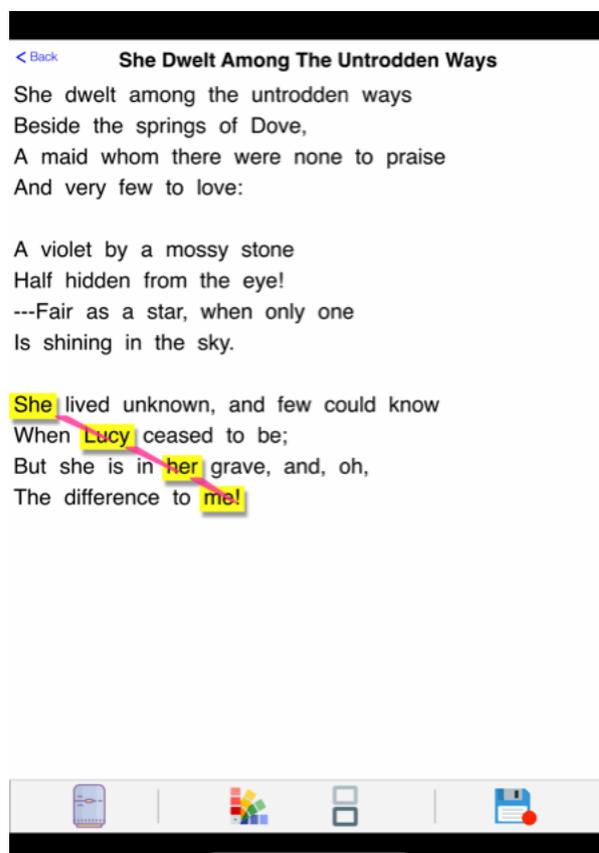


- To do completely new work on a previously uploaded poem, tap 'new' under the poem title on 'Select a Poem to Explore'.
Or to resume working on a previous version, tap 'open'.
- After that, start at the top of the poem and tap (we suggest) on just *one word per line* that seems intuitively to stand out for you. Or less than that: just pick out a few words as you go along, moving down the lines. *You need not know why*: the word may seem exciting, important, baffling etc. The word will then *stand out in yellow* (unless you use the colour wheel to change colour).
- If you wish, you can choose *more than one word* on a line by placing your finger on the first word in the phrase and drawing your finger left to right (again you are advised not to choose too many phrases, but still remain selective). Or you can choose two separated words on the same line. *There is no right or wrong answer*: we just want you to encourage you to get into it and choose whatever seems to you to stand out.
- Carry on down the lines, again choosing intuitively.
- If you wish to un-highlight a word, simply tap it again.
- At the end, see if you think any of these stand-out words link together. To show your sense of some link — by connection *or* by contrast, up *or* down the poem, *or* across words on the same line — put your finger on the highlighted word and go either forward or backward or along to another highlight.

A tapering pink line will show the connection if you are travelling forwards, down the poem; *a tapering blue line* will show the connections if you are travelling back, up the poem. It may be interesting if, in your experience of the poem, more changes are found going backward than made forward, or vice versa.

- Save your version by clicking on bottom right icon, putting in a name, and tapping 'Save'. If you do not wish to save, tap 'Back' top left of screen and you will be offered 'save' or 'don't save' options.

Here is an example from the last four lines of the poem 'She dwelt among untrodden ways' by Wordsworth:



Or this might be another attempt:

[< Back](#) **She Dwelt Among The Untrodden Ways**

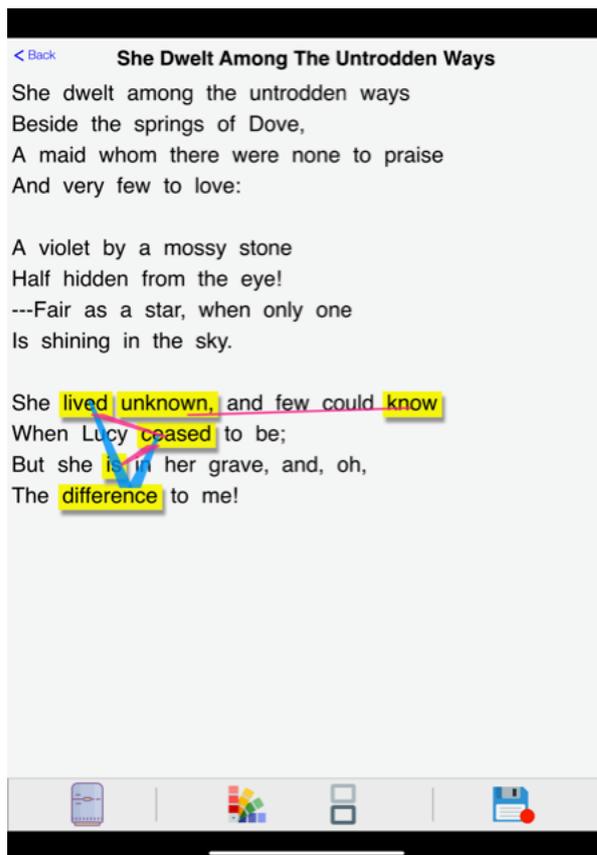
She dwelt among the untrodden ways
 Beside the springs of Dove,
 A maid whom there were none to praise
 And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone
 Half hidden from the eye!
 ---Fair as a star, when only one
 Is shining in the sky.

She **lived** unknown, and few could know
 When Lucy **ceased** to be;
 But she is in her **grave,** and, oh,
 The **difference** to me!



And here is a way you might link back from 'difference':



This shows you your version of the *internal brain* of the poem: its pathways and movements, and its excited synaptic links.

And here is an example from prose, from Dickens' *David Copperfield*, on how his marriage is not as ideal as he had hoped — it shows, as Dickens himself says, his *mind* on this *paper*:

[< Back](#)

David copperfield

In fulfilment of the compact I have made with myself, to reflect my mind on this paper, I again examine it, closely, and bring its secrets to the light. What I missed, I still regarded—I always regarded—as something that had been a dream of my youthful fancy; that was incapable of realization; that I was now discovering to be so, with some natural pain, as all men did. But that it would have been better for me if my wife could have helped me more, and shared the many thoughts in which I had no partner; and that this might have been; I knew.

Between these two irreconcilable conclusions: the one, that what I felt was general and unavoidable; the other, that it was particular to me, and might have been different: I balanced curiously, with no distinct sense of their opposition to each other.



3. Second attempts or bringing in a second reader

- You can later review/revise what you have done and save it as a separate version
- Or you can use the second icon from the right to create a *dual* screen, with two versions of the poem: you and/or a friend/colleague/teacher can then *either* review your decisions in the second, lower-half screen and make changes or additions, *or* un-highlight in the lower-half screen and set up an alternative (if you wish using a different colour by means of the colour wheel) to compare your choices.

For example once again, William Wordsworth's poem on a young woman who was a sort of nobody —

[< Back](#)

She Dwelt Among The Untrodden Ways

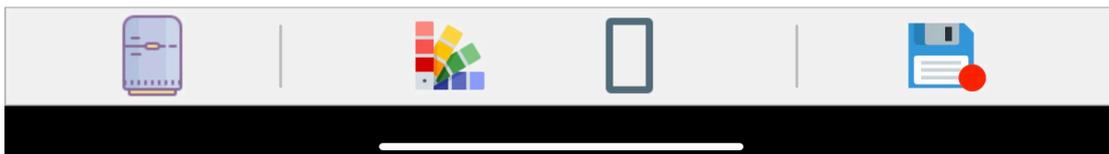
A violet by a mossy stone
 Half hidden from the eye!
 ---Fair as a star, when only one
 Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
 When Lucy ceased to be;
 But she is in her grave, and, oh,
 The difference to me!

A maid whom there were none to praise
 And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone
 Half hidden from the eye!
 ---Fair as a star, when only one
 Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
 When Lucy ceased to be;
 But she is in her grave, and, oh,
 The difference to me!



The idea here is that you are *doing* poetry together: not explaining it, but actively reassembling it, and comparing your choices.

4. **Deletion:** if you wish to delete a version of your work, go to the 'Select Poem to Explore' screen, press 'delete' and confirm.

5. **To work on a poem: in 'Fridge Poetry' mode** – switch by tapping left hand fridge icon at bottom of screen. By putting in different words or changing the word order, you can re-create the poem, and learn more about key choices, by (so to speak) looking over the shoulder of your writer.

- In the top part of the screen, tap the tab 'new word' top right and type in the new word you wish to use in the poem. Then drag it onto the word in the poem you wish to replace.
- Reverse the process if you want to take your new word back out and up to the top: the old word it replaced is waiting for you there if you want it.
- If you want instead to insert the new word without replacing any others, drag it to the place *between* words where you want it to go.
- You can take words out without replacing them
- You can move words around, changing their order
- If you tap the eye icon at the bottom of the screen, it will highlight the words you have changed.
- Remember: you can move backwards and forwards between 'fridge poetry' and 'mark-up' by tapping the bottom left hand icon in either case.
- If you save your new version of the poem in fridge poetry mode, you will be able to work on it again later in the 'mark-up' mode.

Here we see what difference it makes if we begin by replacing 'She' with the more direct 'You':

< Back

She Dwelt Among The Untrodden Ways

new word

and but if he they man his She You
 were a did did Lucy, Lucy When you
 are That your only one Half When

You dwelt among the untrodden ways
 Beside the springs of Dove,
 You were a maid whom none did praise
 And very few did love:

A violet by a mossy stone
 hidden from the eye!
 ---Fair as a star, when only one
 Is shining in the sky.

You lived unknown, and few could know
 Lucy, you ceased to be;
 But you are in your grave, and, oh,
 The difference to me!

ck came, and on
 ss snow, or as th
 ince, but gently, at
 sunbeams tickled



Taping on the eye at the bottom of the screen enables to see (or tap again to unsee) the substitutions you have made. You can tap the far left hand icon to take this version into 'mark-up' mode for further investigation.