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# Poetics: A Symphony of Ideas

Clayton E. Walker

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# Poetics: A Symphony of Ideas

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**Poetics: A Symphony of Ideas**

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*Poetry is prose bewitched, a music made of visual thoughts, the sound of an idea.*

-Mina Loy

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# I

## Bridging the Gap: Theory Forsaking Poetry

### Introduction

In a recent edition of the Publication of the Modern Language Association titled “On Poetry,” the PMLA Editorial Board issued a call for papers to respond to the following statement:

*Although many psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories are grounded in poetic discourse, critics who invoke these paradigms have seemed reluctant to take poems as objects of analysis. Has the time come to revisit the relevance of poetry and the pleasures of the poetic text in this changed interpretive universe? (Smith, et al 97).*

While directly indicting psychoanalytic and poststructuralist criticism as having overlooked poetry, the question posed by the Editorial Board seemed to strike a chord with PMLA members. With a total of one hundred twenty-nine submissions, the response to this gap between poetry and theory was overwhelming<sup>1</sup> (Smith 9). In one way or another, scholars submitted a broad range of essays that address “the problem of how theory can be related to poetry and poetry to theory” (Smith 12). However, while academics jumped at the call for papers on poetry and theory, the problem pointed out in “On Poetry” is not a new one.

Joseph Campana points to the history of poetry and theory. Campana writes, “poetry has been a problem” since Plato because “its practice was subject to charges of irrationality, irrelevancy, and immorality” (34). Each of these charges – poetry as irrational, irrelevant and immoral – indicate a failure in poetry to adhere to acceptable standards of meaning. Poets answered these charges in the form of apologies, out of

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<sup>1</sup> There had never been more submissions for any other PMLA special topic before.

which was born criticism itself (Campana 34). Thus, poetry and theory have a long history that revolves around semantically based accusations, defenses and criticisms. Sound, isolated from this semantically charged relationship between poetry and theory, has become a thing outside the structures employed to distill poetry into ‘truths.’

However, this is not to say sound has become irrelevant to poets, poetry or poetic meaning. Campana illustrates an early modern example of a theory focused on semantics and a poetics that gives weight to sound. In “The Defense of Poesy,” Sir Philip Sidney defends poetry “as capable, by virtue of a moral force” of defeating the challenge posed by other letters and sciences (in particular history and philosophy) in “asserting a privileged access to truth and a greater capacity to represent reality” (Campana 33). Sidney bases poetry’s claim of “privileged access to truth” on its creation of what Campana calls “clear rhetorical images of moral truth” (33). However, while Sidney exalts poetry based on semantically driven “rhetorical images of moral truth,” he also prizes the poet and poetry for its sonic qualities. Sidney writes that the poet is superior over other scholars and philosophers because “he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of music” (942). Although “delightful proportion” suggests the invocation of an aesthetic, Sidney does not describe poetry as musical itself but rather as a thing to be accompanied by music. So, although Sidney marks poetry as a thing closely associated with sound, he still values poetry, above all, for its semantic contents. Thus, Campana points out that Sidney excludes sound as a significant aspect of poetics for Sidney’s images of moral truths appear “only when language is divorced from what makes it resonate so powerfully with bodily experience: its recalcitrant physicality, its

vulnerability to time and change, and its capacity to excite and transmit affect” (33-34). Sidney favors the Platonic ideal over the powerful physicality of experience. Thus, theory, even in the early modern period, seems to turn its eye from the thing we feel in poetry, the sound of rhythm and music.

That sound is an obstinate force – a “recalcitrant physicality” – persistent despite being irrelevant to theory, suggests the real affect sound has on the poetic experience. Campana identifies this power in the poetry of Edmund Spenser, who does not write an apology (theory) for poetry as his contemporary Sidney did. Rather, Spenser writes poetry that foregrounds sound, the “most vital and moving [thing] about poetry ... giving poetry both its feeling of reality and its capacity to move” (Campana 34). Spenser turns away from the images of moral truths in favor of an energy that can be felt, thereby affecting meaning in its own way.

Excluded by theory, sound has continued to live (and will always live) in the heart of poetry, thus prompting Bruce R. Smith to pose the question, “has the time come to revisit the relevance of poetry and the pleasures of the poetic text in this changed interpretive universe?” (9). Smith points to the evolution of critical theories that fail to adopt poetry as objects of analysis, thereby distancing poetry from the efforts of academic scholarship. William Blake sheds some light on the alienation of poetics in the face of scholarship. Responding to the threat posed by an increasingly scientific enlightenment on poetry, William Blake foreshadows Bruce R. Smith’s call for more attention to poetics in his poem, “To the Muses.”<sup>2</sup> Noting that wherever one follows the

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<sup>2</sup> Part of the collection called *Poetical Sketches*

“Fair Nine” (sister goddesses from Greek mythology who represent all arts and letters, but most of all poetry), Blake laments the absence of poetry:

*Whether on Ida's shady brow,  
Or in the chambers of the East,  
The chambers of the sun, that now  
From ancient melody have ceas'd;*

*Whether in Heav'n ye wander fair,  
Or the green corners of the earth,  
Or the blue regions of the air,  
Where the melodious winds have birth;*

*Whether on chrystal rocks ye rove,  
Beneath the bosom of the sea  
Wand'ring in many a coral grove,  
Fair Nine, forsaking Poetry!*

*How have you left the ancient love  
That bards of old enjoy'd in you!  
The languid strings do scarcely move!  
The sound is forc'd, the notes are few!*

After discovering the absence of poetry, the speaker laments the loss of the “ancient love” that bards once enjoyed from the fair nine. Music is no longer natural, but is now forced for “notes are few” and “the languid strings do scarcely move!” Saddened by the loss of poetry, Blake foregrounds the aesthetic, the experience, the sound, the music.

Blake is not crying out for the loss of knowledge, but for the loss of knowledge expressed through the beauty of music, and poetry. In a time characterized by texts clamoring for philosophical and scientific truths, the aesthetic, poetry, is forsaken, thus, Blake suggests a call for a return of a form that reunites the aesthetic with meaning. Poetry’s music should not be isolated from critical evaluations of poetic form, divorced and isolated from the processes that work to reveal deeper meanings. William Blake eloquently laments the



very tragedy such an approach entails. On the contrary, there is something valuable in an approach that unites thing and theory (Knapp and Pence 664).

Bruce R. Smith points out an irony in many current critical ideologies. While “all the dominant critical methodologies of the twentieth century – psychoanalytic theory, Marxism in its western European varieties, new historicism, and deconstruction – began in engagements with poetry,” and “although many psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories are grounded in poetic discourse, critics who invoke these paradigms have seemed reluctant to take poems as objects of analysis” (Smith 10; 9). Why does theory insist on disengaging itself from poetry’s musical aesthetic even when it springs from poetic language? While theories such as psychoanalysis and deconstruction remain rooted in poetic discourse, poetry does not emerge as a frequent object of critical literary theory. Thus, we must “refocus attention on the potential of criticism to occupy this space between” thing and theory, “to facilitate productive contemplation in the face of the inconclusiveness of aesthetic experience” (Knapp and Pence 663). The process and the product of analysis cannot simply rely on theory as a tool for opening up the text, as the practice has been for the past few decades of academic scholarship. By fusing the process of the critical approach with an attention and recognition of the relevancy of form, we find that what is at stake goes beyond simply paying more attention to poetry, or the aesthetic of poetry. Rather, by bridging the gap between poetry and theory, we infuse the aesthetic with a “productive contemplation” of the text, thus constructing a product with ramifications beyond the art object.

While there are certainly strains of critical literary theory that directly and consistently address poetics, there remains a gap between poetry and theory. Therefore, I

will examine the main currents of the critical ideologies and relate them to poetics. In addition, I will consider these theoretical approaches in relation to the content of poetry as opposed to the poem as a product of the poet. To facilitate the discussion of critical ideologies, I have grouped the main theoretical approaches as follows:

1. Psychoanalysis
2. Political Criticisms: Marxism, Feminism, Queer Theory and Post-Colonial Theory
3. New Historicism

The discussion of each critical approach will outline the main tenets of the theory but look specifically at what it offers an application to poetry and what is neglected when the theory is applied. Following this group of academic theories will be a survey of the writings of poets over the course of the twentieth century. I will then contrast these poetic theories with the academic theories outlined above. Finally, in an effort to bridge the gap between poetry and theory, between trends in poetic theories and academic theories, I will invoke Julia Kristeva's essay "The Ethics of Linguistics." Kristeva, working from deconstruction and post-structuralism, makes rhythm relevant, through the ethical incorporation of the speaking subject into any model of poetic analysis. The model of rhythm and language will then be applied in a critical evaluation of Robert Frost's poem, "Directive."

### **Psychoanalysis: Freud's Dreams and Lacan's Letters**

Psychoanalysis primarily deals with literature as an expression of the author's conscious and unconscious. Psychoanalytical criticism was developed in the early twentieth century by Sigmund Freud "as a procedure for the analysis and therapy of neuroses" and was then applied to the arts (Abrams and Harpham 257). This theory

contends that literature, “like dreams and neurotic symptoms, consist of the imagined, or fantasied, fulfillment of wishes that are either denied by reality or are prohibited by the social standards of morality and propriety” (Abrams and Harpham 257). According to Freud, literature is a distorted expression of the repressed libidinal desires placed in the artist’s unconsciousness by the censor, which keeps the conscious in check with society’s “standards of morality and propriety.” This process of repression occurs as the ego negotiates the social standards represented by the superego and the libidinal desires inherent in the id. Freud argues that three mechanisms facilitate the expression of repressed desires: condensation, displacement and symbolism. In a text, Freud calls expressions of the consciousness the manifest, and expressions of the unconsciousness the latent content.

Also part of the unconsciousness are “residual traces of prior stages of psychosexual development, from earliest infancy onward, which have been outgrown, but remain as ‘fixations’ in the unconscious of the adult” (Abrams and Harpham 258). These fixations may be triggered later in life by an event, causing the repressed wish to be revived and transformed as a disguised form into a fantasy of satisfaction. The psychoanalytic critic, according to Freud, must “decipher the true content, and thereby [...] explain[ing] the emotional effects on the reader, of a literary work by translating its manifest elements into the latent, unconscious determinants that constitute their real but suppressed meanings” (Abrams and Harpham 258). Finally, Freud argues that the artist has the special ability to sublimate, to create “fantasied wish-fulfillments into the manifest features of a work of art in a way that conceals or deletes their merely personal

elements, and so makes them capable of satisfying the unconscious desires of people other than the individual artist” (Abrams and Harpham 258).

Psychoanalysis was developed by Freud to get at the unconscious and the latent desires it harbors. The method he installed, the talking cure, is based on language. In practice, the patient would describe a dream and the analyst would listen and then interpret the dream. The goal of Freudian psychoanalysis was to reveal the latent desires which would correspond to real people, situations, and events in the patient’s life. Thus language was a vehicle for revealing a real truth. Freud’s method functioned through language, but the unconscious remained separate from language. From here I turn to Lacan who reworked many of Freud’s theories later in the twentieth century.

While Freud’s objective is to access real truths that are extra-linguistic, Lacan emphasizes language as an intrinsic part of the individual’s development. For, in Lacan’s theory, it is through language the therapist may reach the desires and fantasies expressing desires and the fulfillment of desires. The Lacanian scholar, James Mellard writes, “The core of Lacan’s reinterpretation of Freudian theory “is its insistence in analysis not on the primacy of events, but on the primacy of language” (6). While Freud “is always trying to go through language to something else – actual persons, events, or happenings, for example – that accounts for traumas in the subject,” Lacan argues these real truths are unavailable and so “we must always forget primal scenes and recognize instead the primacy of the language of the subject, for it is in language that the subject, in the most philosophical sense of the word, subsists” (Mellard 7). Lacan looks at how language functions through the axes of substitution (metaphor) and connection (metonymy) as a mode of accessing the unconscious through the consciousness, as well as from one

subject to another, from patient to analyst and text to reader (Mellard 6). Lacan's "procedure is to recast Freud's key concepts and mechanisms into the linguistic mode, viewing the human mind not as pre-existent to, but as constituted by the language we use" (Abrams and Harpham 260).

Lacan looks at Ferdinand de Saussure's model of linguistics and argues one can access the binaries that construct the identity of the subject through the relationship of signifier to signified. Key to Lacan is the reorganization of Freud's theories of psychosexual development into linguistic terms. For Lacan, the individual progresses from the pre-linguistic imaginary to the post-linguistic symbolic; it is a progression mitigated by the mirror stage in which the individual recognizes itself as an other, an illusion that occurs and thus is described only through language. Once the individual enters the symbolic, it "assimilates the inherited system of linguistic differences" or binaries such as male/female or adult/child through which the individual constructs its identity (Abrams and Harpham 261). Psychoanalysis, through Lacan, roots itself in language, and many of its paradigms parallel the organization of language into poetics, specifically through the processes of metaphor and metonymy. In many ways, poetry is like a dream, for it is a condensation of real experience. Psychoanalysis gives the literary critic tools to disassemble both language and the condensation of meaning in its efforts to reveal latent expressions of the unconsciousness.

Psychoanalysis equips the critic to analyze poetry in many ways. Freud's concepts of dream interpretation may be extended to poetry as a text of condensation containing latent desires to be revealed by the analyst. Lacan attends to language as the gateway to the unconscious, as the unconsciousness is itself available only through the

relationship of signifier and signified. Beyond linguistics, psychoanalysis lends itself for application to mimetic texts, for in genres such as fiction, characters behave in ways that mimic the real world and the scope and form of prose provide ample room for substantial development of the characters and other events. Nonetheless, psychoanalysis offers many tools for the critic of poetry and yet, as Bruce Smith points out, psychoanalytical theorists are hesitant to adopt poetry as an object of analysis.

Underscoring the process of psychoanalysis is an attention to images.

Psychoanalysis, especially after Lacan, uses language as the tool for unraveling the constructed image of the individual in the form of the id. Furthermore, psychoanalysts work to uncover the results of the ego's negotiation of the id and superego and the individual's progression through particular psychological stages. The substance of their analysis, thus, consists of the results of words delivering meaning. Sound and rhythm, the process of expressing meaning, largely remain left to the side, dissociated from the process of analysis.

### **Cultural Criticisms: Mimetics over Poetics**

I have grouped Marxism, Feminism, Queer Theory and Post Colonial Theory under the category 'Cultural Criticisms' because they each work to reveal how various groups within a culture relate to one another. For example, Feminism examines the role and position of women within a patriarchal society; Marxism reveals the economic tensions between the base and superstructure; Queer Theory approaches questions of sex and gender within the confines of a predominately heterosexual society; and, Post Colonial Theory works to reveal the impact of colonization on both the colonized and

colonizing societies. Donald E. Hall describes the function of cultural criticisms as exploring “the complex relationship between a text and its social context, tracing the many ways in which the belief systems of a time and place are reflected in and potentially altered by literary and other forms of representation” (265). Key to these theories though, is understanding that ideologies such as racism and sexism “have been thoroughly entrenched in language, literature, art, and social institutions” (Hall 265). Ultimately, the goal of these political approaches is to reveal how certain groups occupy particular roles within a culture through analysis of the text.

Cultural theorists reveal these tensions between groups through many different techniques, including “‘textual’ explication, survey and interview techniques, historical inquiry, and institutional and ideological analysis” (Brogan et al. 262). However, while cultural critics may employ various instruments in their analysis, ultimately the object of their study is the relationship of people, things and ideas within the text. Thus while such critics base their inquiry within the text, they are analyzing meta-linguistic concepts and relationships. Again, sound and rhythm are pushed to the side in the name of academic inquiry.

However, the gap between cultural theory and poetry extends beyond sound and meaning. Bruce R. Smith writes that cultural criticisms “seem to have a more oblique relation to verse than they do to novels, films, and plays. The latter genres, in the eyes of many critics, bear a stronger mimetic relation with social reality” (10). Cultural theories harvest the most when the text they address contains narrative and characters with material, sexual or economical motivations. However, much of poetry does not contain clear or direct mimetic narrative and characters are often limited in action and identity

due to poetry's typically short length, especially in comparison to typical lengths of novels, plays and screenplays. Since cultural critics seem to favor genres other than poetry because they "bear a stronger mimetic relation with social reality," the question that begs to be asked is whether poetry is at a disadvantage because it is not clearly mimetically related to social reality.

While it may be impossible to answer why cultural critics have shunned poetry, it seems worthwhile to identify some of the major differences between poetry and the texts critics favor. Although texts, such as novels, employ metaphor and metonymy to complicate meaning, the text's literal meaning is often clear and arranged to present the narrative through a plot line. Also, narrative and characters are often clearly established and usually have a sense of believability that strengthens the believability of the overall plot. Analysts explore the literal relationships of the plot, but also probe other literary devices such as irony, puns, symbols, paradoxes, etc. In a word, novels, plays and other such genres operate under the pretense of telling a story. And while poetry uses many of the same literary devices as other genres, it is not encumbered by a demand for story. Rather, the literal narrative of the text may be very opaque, successive images may not be clearly linked on the literal level and often characters and their relationships (when characters other than the poem's speaker even exist in the text) are very limited because the poem itself is often much shorter than other texts from other genres. Consider, for example, Wallace Steven's "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock,"

The houses are haunted  
By white night-gowns.  
None are green,  
Or purple with green rings,  
Or green with yellow rings,  
Or yellow with blue rings.



None of them are strange,  
With socks of lace  
And beaded ceintures.  
People are not going  
To dream of baboons and periwinkles.  
Only, here and there, an old sailor,  
Drunk and asleep in his boots,  
Catches tigers  
In red weather.

There are several mimetic images in this poem. Stevens describes houses as being haunted, although he does not say what the houses look like or exactly how they are haunted other than the “white night-gowns.” Then, Stevens describes what the night-gowns look like (or really what they do not look like). Finally, he writes that people are going to dream of ‘an old sailor’ who is drunk and sleeping and will catch tigers in “red weather.” Stevens projects several images in the mind of the reader, and presents three actions: gowns haunting houses, people dreaming and a drunk, sleeping sailor who will catch tigers (however, which implies two other actions: drinking alcohol and falling asleep). However, more important is what Stevens does not do. Stevens does not construct a plot or a relationship between the sailor and the baboons that people will not dream of. The sailor will catch a tiger, but how? And what kind of tiger does Stevens mean – a saber tooth tiger, a Burmese tiger or a paper tiger? Stevens does not construct a narrative, although one is implied. Mimetics are employed, but in a way that fractures our typical experience as people. If Stevens were to write a story about how the houses were haunted, and exactly what happened in the dreams of the people and how the sailor hunted the tiger, he would create a text that presented the mimetic images into a clear narrative that would reflect human experience in a more direct and clear manner than the poem, “Disillusionment of Ten O’Clock.”

## **New Historicism: The Neglect of the Aesthetic in Poetry**

New historicism works to situate texts into a bed of cultural history, relating the characters, events, expressions, etc of a text with real historical attitudes, trends and other phenomenon. In textualizing history and historicizing texts, New historians argue that “literature does not occupy a ‘trans-historical’ *aesthetic* realm which is independent of the economic, social, and political conditions specific to an era, nor is literature subject to timeless criteria of artistic value” (Abrams and Harpham 192). Rather, a literary text is no different from any other historical document; it is the product of a particular cultural milieu and its value lies in what it reveals about the culture in which it is embedded. Like any other literary text, poetry has something to offer new historians and their efforts to historicize texts. However, while poetry may be subject to new historicism, poetry is at the same time alienated from analysis because of the primary position of the aesthetic sound of words. The difference between poetry and prose<sup>3</sup> is that prose does not concern itself with how words work together to create sonic rhythms. Rather, much of prose’s aesthetic remains embedded within the meaning and imagery of the text. When new historicism deconstructs the historical value of passages within a prosaic text, it also works simultaneously to analyze that which constitutes the aesthetic; the aesthetic is not divorced from analysis as in the case of new historicism’s approach to poetics. New historicism leaves little room for poetics in its brand of analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> Drama, often seems to straddle the line separating prose and poetry. However, for the purposes of this discussion of new historicism, I argue drama’s central function of spoken language positions it as being similar to poetics, as far as new historicism is concerned.

While a poem's literary expressions emerge from a particular historical and cultural milieu, to interpret poetry without consideration of the aesthetic is to read the poem breathlessly, denying sound existence and thereby removing the primary aesthetic of poetry from the product of such a critical analysis. Therefore, new historicism, in its application to poetry, is problematic if not contradictory. Bruce Smith illustrates this point in "Poetry and Theory: A Roundtable" through the following song by Thomas Nash in the play Summer's Last Will and Testament. Smith places particular emphasis on the last line, which represents the sound of a bird's song:

*Spring, the sweete spring, is the yeres  
Pleasant King,  
Then bloomes eche thing, then maydes daunce  
In a ring,  
Cold doeth not sting, the pretty birds toe sing:  
Cuckow, iugge, iugge, pu we, to witta woo (103)*

Smith points out that new historicism could have a lot to say about the play from which the poem comes,<sup>4</sup> but could say nothing about the poem itself. "What," asks Smith "has cultural materialism got to do with 'Cuckow, iugge, iugge, pu we, to witta woo'" (103-4). The words of the bird song Smith illuminates have no explicit semantic contents; there is no direct relationship between signifier and signified<sup>5</sup>. Ostensibly we are reading another language, that of the bird; an experience that Ezra Pound points out can be appreciated even though the listener cannot understand the meaning of the sounds ("How to Read" 939). The problem Smith points to is the lack of a direct, explicit, denotative semantic connection between signifier and signified.

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<sup>4</sup> The play is "a pageant played before John Whitgift, archbishop of Canterbury, in 1592" (Smith 103).

<sup>5</sup> While there is no direct link between sound and meaning, there is an indirect association via the connotation of sound

New historians work to situate the text into historical contexts, thus they are concerned with the historical logopoeia. While the bird song does not express a denotative meaning, the sounds themselves carry a connotative value that is perceptible. However, because we read this passage in the twenty-first century, more than four hundred years after it was written, the connotations we subtly perceive are necessarily different than the connotations associated with the text four hundred years ago. The point is, while we can uncover the historical denotative and connotative functions of words, we can not uncover the historical sound of words. Smith's example relies on the rhythm and sounds we delegate to the symbols and this experience is different than the way Thomas Nash or any other early modern reader would pronounce the line. Therein lies the problem of new historians. Historicizing the text of Thomas Nash's bird song divorces sound from analysis for no early modern speakers are still around to teach us how the language sounded and thus how the rhythms might invoke certain connotative associations. Rhythm and sound are functions of the living reader (unless recorded through technological means), and new historicism is not concerned with how we transform words into sounds. So, like Bruce R. Smith, I ask the question, what does new historicism have to say about poetry at all?

### **Predominant Critical Approaches and Poetry: A Review**

I have examined three different critical approaches and identified how they fail to address poetry. While psychoanalysis lends itself to discussion of language, metaphor, metonymy and the overall condensation of language, theorists hesitate to appropriate it to poetry. Furthermore, the sign and language driven ideologies of Lacan attend only to the

relationship between word and meaning, leaving the sound of the words alienated from the theory itself. Politically ideological criticisms prefer texts mimetically related to social realities and dismiss much of poetry because it does not try to construct situations that mimic the real world in a direct or forthcoming manner. And when a poem does contain a mimetic relationship to social realities, the possibilities of analysis are limited, because of poetry's brevity. New historicism alienates poetry's fundamental relationship of sound and sense, poetry's aesthetic, in its attempt to historicize texts by textualizing history. Because of this disassociation, much of what poetry expresses falls out of the scope of new historians. And so, while new historicism began in poetry, it fails to offer a sufficient algorithm of analysis.

## II

### Poetics from the Poets' Perspective

#### Introduction

Poetry, as an art, encompasses thousands of years of artistic language construction, and the variety of poetic forms are countless. Traditionally, critics and scholars measure differences in terms of style or form, be it meter or thematic content. However, there are some poetic elements that span the many different manifestations of poetry and permeate the various modes of distinguishing different types of poetry. In “How to Read,” Ezra Pound writes “if we chuck out the classifications which apply to the outer shape of the work, or to its occasion, and if we look at what actually happens, in, let us say poetry, we will find that the language is charged or energized in various manners” (939). Predicated on what he calls ‘charged’ language, Pound puts forth three terms to describe the types of responses elicited by poetry: melopoeia, “words charged with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning;” phanopoeia, “a casting of images upon the visual imagination;” and logopoeia, “the dance of the intellect among words” (“How to Read” 939). Thus, by these terms, Pound means respectively: sound, image and meaning. Pound invokes these three terms to describe the three fundamental properties of the poetic experience and I will adopt them in my effort to describe poetics. Although by adopting Pound’s terms I retain their general meaning, I will expand, complicate and in some ways change their definitions in an effort to clarify what they represent.

In “The Object of Study,” Ferdinand de Saussure examines how language operates in a model of communication. However, this model only describes the process of speech, which is separate from language – a structure that exists only in conjunction to thought. De Saussure writes, “Speech sounds are only the instrument of thought, and have no independent existence ... A sound, itself a complex auditory-articulatory unit, in turn combines with an idea to form another complex unit, both physiologically and psychologically” (2). This relationship, between articulated speech sound and an idea, forms the basis for de Saussure’s model of the sign in “Nature of the Linguistic Sign.” The transmitted communication, the sign, consists of two parts that are independent of one another and arbitrarily connected. The sound pattern constitutes the signifier and the concept to which it refers constitutes the signified. The signifier is arbitrarily connected to the signified, even though this relationship may seem deliberate or natural.

Speech and language are likewise separate phenomena. De Saussure writes that language “is not a function of the speaker,” but rather is “the product passively registered by the individual. It never requires premeditation, and reflexion enters into it only for the activity of classifying” (“The Object of Study” 7). So, the speaker arranges a communication, already in terms of the speaker’s language, with the intention to communicate encompassing an intention to communicate in language. De Saussure argues that speech is an act of “the will and the intelligence” and we must discern two facets of the locution: one, “the combinations through which the speaker uses the code provided by the language in order to express his own thought” and two, “the psycho-physical mechanism which enables him to externalize these combinations” (“The Object of Study” 7). Here, de Saussure establishes a process in which a receiver of a

communication must understand both the system of signals, or language, and the concepts these signals signify. However, the speaker only transmits the signifier or the sound pattern. The meaning or the signified, which is attached to the signifier, is attached only when a subject receives the sign and understands it. Meaning therefore is a consequence of the implied social contract of a language and derived from the comprehension of received signifiers.

De Saussure's model suggests a necessary order of experience of the melopoeic, phanopoeic and logopoeic. Because the signifier is received first and consists of a specific sequence of sound patterns, the listener of poetry, or the subject, receives melopoeia first. The signified, attached to the signifier or the melopoeia, is "passively registered" by the subject. Melopoeia is a precognitive experience, while logopoeia is a cognitive experience. Melopoeia must precede the logopoeia because the signified is obtained after the signifier is received and processed into the cognition. In Velimir Khlebnikov's words, "these sound sequences constitute a series of universal truths passing before the predawn or our soul" (95). There is magic in sound and that magic remains powerful, without any loss of power even when the sounds are not understood (95). Khlebnikov points out the power of sound, that it is experienced precognitively, before the "predawn of our soul" and has a power even without meaning because it is musical. When melopoeia is understood, the result is logopoeia, or what Khlebnikov calls 'universal truths.' Logopoeia is universal because among a group of speakers of a common language, logopoeia refers to the signified, the unspoken agreement of meaning in any word, with emphasis on the implied and arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. Finally, the phanopoeic is constructed in the mind as the chain of signifiers



evoke or elicit a visual response. In this discussion, I will examine melopoeia, logopoeia and finally phanopoeia and identify how aesthetic manifests in each element of poetics.

Besides Pound, there is a long history of poets writing about poetry with particular attention to form. By illustrating these writings of poetics from the poet's perspective, I demonstrate how the formalism central to New Criticism has always lived outside of academia. The implication, though, is that academia has drifted away from formalism, as I argue above. Thus, before expanding the concepts of melopoeia, logopoeia and phanopoeia, I will situate this brand of formalism from the poet's perspective into a bed of poets discussing poetry. And in doing so, I invoke a particular relevance of form via sound, meaning and image which I will then relate to Pound's formula of melopoeia, logopoeia and phanopoeia.

I have already drawn attention to a few poet's, most notably Sir Philip Sidney, who was both a scholar and a poet in his theoretical discourse of poetry. The last critical movement to unify these two camps – academic and poetic – was new criticism. New criticism became popular with John Crow Ransom's *The New Criticism*, published in 1941, although several important works laid the ground work for new criticism in the twenty years preceding Ransom's publication (Abrams and Harpham 188). So, in the foreground of new criticism lies a considerable body of poetic theory. Among the most influential are the essays of T.S. Eliot and I.A. Richards. New critics generally believed that poetry should be treated as a poem and not a historical document. Thus new critics did not believe biographical or other largely cultural influences should be brought into the discussion of the text. Rather, the text, a collection of symbols and words on a page were the only source of information for the critic. New critics explicate a text and thus

emphasize “the ‘organic unity,’ in a successful literary work, of its overall structure with its verbal meanings” (Abrams and Harpham 189). However, by verbal meanings, new critics refer to the complex relationships of meaning found in such literary devices as figures of speech and symbols (Abrams and Harpham 258). Above all, new critics emphasize a close reading of the text that dismisses any discussion not from the text itself.

Many poet theorists locate the power of art within its form. W.B. Yeats, writing “The Symbolism of Poetry” in 1900, argues that art has a hypnotic power: he writes, “in the making and in the understanding of a work of art, and the more easily if it is full of patterns and symbols and music, we are lured to the threshold of sleep, and it may be far beyond it, without knowing that we have ever set our feet upon the steps of horn or of ivory” (32). Yeats implicates form here: patterns, symbolism and music are functions of the parts of the art form. In poetry, symbols refers to the distortion of meaning through metaphor or metonymy, for example; patterns may be construed as the organization into stanzas, regular meter or recurring rhythms; music is the sound of the poem spoken aloud. So, by drawing our attention to these structural components, Yeats argues on behalf of form.

While Yeats talks about the parts of form, Rainer Maria Rilke exalts the form entire. Rilke argues that the ‘art-thing’ represents the material ‘thing’ and although “the *thing* is definite, the *art-thing* must be still more definite; removed from all accident, reft away from all obscurity, withdrawn from time and given over to space, it has become enduring, capable of eternity. The model *seems*, the art-thing *is*” (36). Ultimately, according to Rilke, what he calls the “art-thing,” and I call “form,” is a thing of

importance. Rilke ascribes powers of endurance and transportability that position the form of the thing as more definite than that which it represents.

T.S. Eliot extends the importance of form in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” first published in 1922. He argues, “the poet has, not a ‘personality’ to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways” (101). Although Eliot admits there “is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate” he nonetheless removes the individual’s personal expression in favor of the medium, in this case poetry and poetic form. In “Reflections on Contemporary Poetry,” Eliot illustrates the value of attention to form. Examining the work of three poets, Eliot criticizes their works based on how successfully they create a cohesive form that affects the reader as a whole rather than as disparate parts (104-105). The point of Eliot’s work, a central tenet of new criticism, is that the salience of the art-thing is the medium, the form and not the experience or personality of the author. Furthermore, form is the only proper object of criticism.

In “How are Verses Made?” Vladimir Mayakovsky argues for the relevance of rhythm in the poet’s work of writing poetry. He writes, “this struggle to organize movement, to organize sounds around oneself, discovering their intrinsic nature, their peculiarities, is one of the most important constants of the work of the poet” (147). Through the poet’s attention to sound, as suggested here by Mayakovsky, Wallace Stevens argues an aesthetic peculiar to poetry presents itself. “The deepening need for words to express our thoughts and feelings ... makes us listen to words when we hear them, loving them and feeling them, makes us search the sound of them, for a finality, a

perfection, an unalterable vibration, which it is only within the power of the acutest poet to give them” (266). That we love and feel the sound of the words implies an aesthetic inherent in the way poetry presents the words. What is more, Stevens connects this aesthetic with what he calls “the deepening need for words to express our thoughts and feelings.” Thus the sound of words in poetry, itself an aesthetic, is attached to the meaning of words. But because we must listen to the words to satisfy this need for words to express, the sound must come first and therefore out of melopoeia emerges logopoeia.

As for imagery, Ezra Pound defines it as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (84). Imagery, then, is the collaboration of words to create an emotional or intellectual experience on behalf of the listener. It must therefore be considered a result of logopoeia, itself a result of melopoeia. In addition, there is an aesthetic in the image, as Vladimir Mayakovsky points out. He writes, “you have to bring the poem to the highest pitch of expressiveness. One of the most noteworthy vehicles of this expressiveness is the image” (148). Melopoeia occurs instantly as the poem is called to life by the speaker. After the listener understands the meaning of the words spoken, logopoeia enters the picture. Finally, projected into the mind are the various reactions and imaginations of the poem via phanopoeia. However, as Mayakovsky illustrates, phanopoeia has a part in the aesthetic.

Aestheticism in poetry is multi-faceted. It is manifest in sound, meaning and image. Guillaume Apollinaire gets at the importance of melopoeia, logopoeia and phanopoeia in his 1917 argument for France as the forerunner of modern poetry in “The New Spirit and Poets.” He writes of modern poetry that typographical artifices (by this Apollinaire means printed poetry) have brought a visual lyricism to life that was

previously unknown and have the potential to “achieve the synthesis of the arts, of music, painting, and literature” (76). While Apollinaire does not establish specific relationships between melopoeia, logopoeia and phanopoeia, he nonetheless argues that the unity of these three in poetry is of great value. Combined, they constitute the art-thing, poetry. And so from this point, I pick up the discussion elaborating each one of melopoeia, logopoeia and phanopoeia; explaining the function of the element and relating each element to the others and in doing so to the poetic form as a whole.

### **Melopoeia**

Melopoeia, the precognitive experience of the signifier, speaks without words to the soul of the listener. Lying underneath and inside each line, rhythm motors melopoeia, moving the words and their meaning according to the poem’s pre-formulated will, having already been orchestrated by the poet. Rhythm thus ushers in sense upon its own sonic waves. I say rhythm is pre-formulated because the order of words in a poem were determined prior to the act of reading the poem. The poem was written. I discuss melopoeia first because it concerns the act of speaking the poem. Also, logopoeia and phanopoeia emerge from melopoeia, and therefore, it is through or always with consideration of the melopoeia that the analyst reaches logopoeia and phanopoeia. Furthermore, because poetry is an art form intended to be spoken, melopoeia occupies a central or primal position in the aesthetic. In addition, in light of the primacy of speech in the poetic experience, I substitute ‘listener’ for the usual ‘reader’ to refer to the third person subject who is the general, anonymous and universal consumer of the text, and who in the case of poetry should listen rather than read.

Amy Lowell laments the disassociation of poetry from speech with the advent of printing in “Poetry as Spoken Art.” She writes “the ‘beat’ of poetry, its musical quality, is exactly that which differentiates it from prose, and it is this musical quality which bears in it the stress of emotion without which no true poetry can exist” (69). The high value placed on rhythm suggests its importance in the quality of the thing as art form. That rhythm distinguishes poetry from other literary art forms also suggests its salience in relation to the aesthetic. Lowell writes, “no art has suffered so much from printing as has poetry” for printing alienates poetry from its primary aesthetic: *melopoeia* (70). This alienation, apparent around 1918 when Lowell first gave her lectures that would later form the basis of “Poetry as a Spoken Art,” persists today. The primary source, the gallery for poetry, continues to be, as Lowell duly noted, the poetry book. We charge students, scholars, critics and analysts of literature to ‘read’ a poem when hearing is what the aesthetic requires. To ignore the sound of a poem is to ignore a significant part of its aesthetic. So, in the following section I will devote considerable space to the primal element of poetry’s aesthetic: *melopoeia*.

In many respects, poetry is often defined or categorized by its form. Poetic form often entails a certain description of rhythm be it villanelle, sonnet, couplet or free verse. The Oxford English Dictionary provides two definitions as its first entry of ‘poetry’ under the subtitle of “In Existing Use.” First, as the “art or work of the poet;” obvious that the thing ‘poetry’ is be created by someone called the ‘poet.’ Second, “with special reference to its form: Composition in verse or metrical language, or in some equivalent patterned arrangement of language; usually also with choice of elevated words and figurative uses, and option of a syntactical order, differing more or less from those of

ordinary speech or prose writing.” While this definition is complex, it reveals attention to meter, and optional use of figurative language and syntax, but above all, by “special reference to its form,” it thus suggests that the very definition of poetry must concern itself with form. Poetry may not be identified only by its form or semantic contents, but as I argue above, must consider the aesthetic. Such figurative elements as symbol, irony, pun, metaphor and metonymy, to name a few, live double lives in both poetry and prose, for they all concern semantic relationships between the signifier and signified. What the Oxford English Dictionary reveals is a special relationship between thing and form.

“Poetry and prose,” in the words of the poet and theorist Paul Valéry, “use the same words, the same syntax, the same forms, and the same sounds or tones, but differently coordinated and differently aroused” (241). This different coordination and subsequent arousal on behalf of the listener of poetry underlines the “patterned arrangement of language” submitted as the architecture of form that distinguishes poetry from prose and regular conversation in the OED. They are differently coordinated because in poetry the sound patterns created by the sequence matters and therefore the arousal on behalf of the listener goes beyond understanding in a cognitive sense to imply an experience of the aesthetic. While the OED provides a broad definition of poetry, it nonetheless exposes the intrinsic relationship of sound to sense suggested by de Saussure’s model and which I claim to be true here.

Working from Ferdinand de Saussure’s model of linguistics, Paul Valéry distinguishes between prosaic and poetic language by invoking a necessary relationship between signifier and signified that is attended to by the poet. Prosaic language has as its objective, the communication of the signified through various media (from conversation

to philosophical discourse to fiction). Such language employs the signifier only as a vehicle for the signified. Valéry writes that “in practical or abstract uses of language, the form – that is the physical, the concrete part, the very act of speech – does not last; it does not outlive understanding; it dissolves in the light; it has acted; it has done its work; it has brought about understanding; it has lived” (238). Because the signifier is no more than the vehicle for the signified in prosaic language, the signifier, articulated by the speaker, “does not outlive understanding,” which Valéry defines as the “more or less rapid replacement of a system of sounds, intervals and signs by something quite different” (238). According to Valéry, the signifier gives way to the signified and therefore does not outlive understanding. “But on the other hand,” writes Valéry, “the moment this concrete form takes on, by an effect of its own, such importance that it asserts itself and makes itself, as it were, respected; and not only remarked and respected, but desired and therefore repeated – then something new happens [...] We are entering the poetic universe” (238). For Paul Valéry, the importance of the signifier in relation to the text or the form of the text marks the line between prose and poetry. When the sound is attended to, organized and cemented into a concrete form, then the signifier no longer dies after being articulated. The poem “does not die for having lived: it is expressly designed to be born again from its ashes and to become endlessly what it has just been. Poetry can be recognized by this property, that it tends to get itself reproduced in its own form: it stimulates us to reconstruct it identically” (242). Valéry implicates in his model of poetic language the role of the poet. Because the poet orders words in a particular sequence with consideration not only to the semantic construction but also to the musical construction, poetry cements the relationship of aesthetic and semantic. The bond created



between aesthetic and semantic is permanent in poetry for it is the bond itself that separates poetics from other language, from prose – a distinction that shows “that the value of a poem resides in the indissolubility of sound and sense” (Valéry 242). While sound and idea or aesthetic and semantic are inherently joined together in poetic language, the connection between signifier and signified remains arbitrary. And as Ezra Pound points out, the signifier “holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation” or must be spoken in order to be produced (“How to Read” 939).

The sound and rhythm of poetry has been traditionally used to categorize poetry into different forms that transcend stylistic demarcations. Derek Attridge provides four categories of identifying poetry based on its rhythm. Stress meter, a common verse form, measures the number of stresses per line. Strong-stress meter measures strong stresses, although there may be additional weak stresses. Syllable-stress verse measures both syllables and stresses in each line. In this category we employ such words as iamb, trochee and spondee to describe the feet and tetrameter, pentameter and hexameter to describe the number of syllables per line. Finally, free verse provides no restrictions on syllables or stresses in any given line. Among the first three of Attridge’s formal categories (the prescribed forms are stress verse, strong-stress verse and syllable-stress verse) include such forms as the ballad, blank verse, the heroic couplet, pantoum, sestina, sonnet and villanelle.

Although meter and verse have long been traditional determinates of poetry, prescribed forms gave way to a more fluid concept of rhythm with the emergence of free verse in the late nineteenth century. Fluid because “in free verse we look for the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment,” and free verse poets “break the lovely form

of metrical verse, and [...] dish up the fragments as a new substance, called *verse libre*” (Lawrence 109). Free verse, drawing from the same poetic devices as metrical verse rearranges the parts without a prescribed form. Walt Whitman, for example, unlike his romantic colleagues such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Bryant, Whittier, Tennyson and Browning, who all strictly adhere to traditional forms, writes verse that shuns the devices which categorize as such in conventional forms; in particular, Whitman does away with meter, rhyme, and prescribed verse forms. Nonetheless, Whitman’s early free verse style is clearly poetry for it employs what we call poetic language. While symbol and other prosaic devices such as irony and metaphor figure prominently in Whitman’s poetry, it is the musicality of the verse that distinguishes it as poetry. For example, the first three stanzas from the beginning of the 1881 “Song of Myself:”

*I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

*I loafe and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.*

*My tongue, every atom of my blood, form’d from this soil, this air,  
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the  
same,  
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,  
Hoping to cease not till death.*

Whitman does not use rhyme, or prescribed meter, yet clearly writes what we call poetry. Using devices such as repetition, alliteration, assonance and other musical devices, Whitman writes in a style clearly musical but as idiosyncratic as the poem “Song of Myself,” itself.

The challenge Whitman poses to poetics in the late nineteenth century is to question what is poetry. Poetry had been considered simply the organization of literary

expressions into lines and stanzas that rhyme or feature particular rhythmic patterns, until Whitman. We recognize in the poetry of Walt Whitman the organization of words into patterns of sound that are pleasing or aesthetic yet retain the capacity for conveying a literary expression. When the poem is read aloud, the listener hears a rhythm that seems familiar. The first and one of the most frequently used melopoetic devices in “Song of Myself” is repetition: ‘myself,’ ‘assume,’ ‘belong,’ ‘loafe,’ ‘atom,’ ‘born here,’ ‘parents,’ and ‘same’ are all repeated in the first section. In addition, Whitman eases the listener into the poem by using two lines of four-beat rhythms, the most common arrangement of beats used in poetry of the English Language (Attridge 54). Whitman thus underpins the loafing of line four by inviting the listener, unobtrusively into the poem through the familiar and natural feel of four-beat rhythms. D.H. Lawrence writes in his “Preface to *New Poems*:”

*Whitman pruned away his clichés – perhaps his clichés of rhythm as well as of phrase. And this is about all we can do, deliberately, with free verse. We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the old hackneyed associations of sound or sense. We can break down those artificial conduits and canals through which we do so love to force our utterance. We can break the stiff neck of habit. We can be in ourselves spontaneous and flexible as flame, we can see that utterance rushes out without artificial form or artificial smoothness. But we cannot positively prescribe any motion, any rhythm (109).*

Creating a new form that would later be called free verse, Whitman dismissed the conventional hallmarks of poetry and boiled the essence of poetry down to the purposeful organization of words into musical passages. He broke the stiff neck of metered habit and created a new style that forged new, individual rhythms that were not handed down by tradition, but attended to by the poet just as the meaning and words were attended to by the poet. I draw attention to Whitman because he breaks from tradition, makes

rhythm more flexible and subject to as much manipulation as the semantic content of his poetry. Whitman's poetry demonstrates how rhythm may exist as a predominate aesthetic force without the trappings of tradition that distract the analyst because of the connotations and expectations elicited by a conventional form such as the sonnet. Gone are the trappings of prescribed form, which mask the poet's ability to manipulate rhythm.

Robert Frost also illustrates the salience of rhythm in poetics in his essay, "The Figure a Poem Makes," first published in 1939. Frost writes, "The possibilities for tune from the dramatic tones of meaning struck across the rigidity of a limited meter are endless" (235). However, while Frost points out that no set of poems composed in the same meter are themselves similar, he argues that the poet needs more than the tools of sound. Besides such sonic resources as "vowels, consonants, punctuation, syntax, words, sentences, [and] meter" Frost calls for attention to "context – meaning – subject matter" (235). And Frost is right, subject matter affects the sound of a poem for attached to any subject is a particular set of words, or jargon, which have their own peculiar tendencies. Business jargon is different from legal jargon, which is different from restaurant jargon, and so on. So I agree that when working with a line of iambic pentameter and given the breadth of the English language, the possibilities of word combinations are in fact endless.

Meter and verse, whether free verse or prescribed verse, are the language structures not regularly employed in prose or in regular conversation that characterize poetry. These forms connote music and implicate an attention to rhythm as that which distinguishes poetry from prose, for it is rhythm that motors music. We categorize poetry according to its form: sonnet, heroic couplet, villanelle, pantoum, blankverse,

quatrains, iambic pentameter, trochaic hexameter, etc. However, these categories really define rhythm. By describing the shape of the rhythm, we categorize the form of the poem. Therefore rhythm has an intrinsic relationship with poetry and poetic forms. Dennis Attridge defines rhythm as “a patterning of energy simultaneously produced and perceived; a series of alternations of build-up and release, movement and counter-movement, tending toward regularity but complicated by constant variations and local inflections” (3). So, rhythm implies a pattern of movement that is ‘complicated,’ or characterized by variations and accents when spoken. Because rhythm means movement, which, as Attridge points out, usually “implies travel in *space*, rhythm is what makes a physical medium (the body, the sounds of speech or music) seem to move with deliberateness through *time*, recalling what has happened (by repetition) and projecting itself into the future (by setting up expectations), rather than just letting time pass it by. Rhythm is *felt* as much as it is *heard* or *seen*” (4). Thus Attridge argues that rhythm is a sensual experience, it is felt. To project this argument into the Saussurian model, in reaction to the signifier when the listener receives the signifier physiologically through the ear and before the signified is processed in the cognitive faculty, I argue that one must experience rhythm sensually before the signified (meaning) is recalled through association to the signifier in the cognition. The process entails a chronology albeit an almost immediate sequence of events, the signified is recalled almost immediately but nonetheless after the signifier is received. As Dennis Attridge writes, “it is *in* sound – and above all in sound in movement – that [poetry’s] meanings are produced and performed” (3). Thus, there is a particular order of events in the communication of the sign through poetics: sound, meaning.

Having laid out patterns of experience in the past, as rhythm occurs in the present, it establishes expectations for the future. There is a chronological movement associated with rhythm, thus it is neither static nor infinitely repetitive. D.H. Lawrence writes “there is no rhythm which returns upon itself, no serpent of eternity with its tail in its own mouth” (108). Rhythm always moves forward without returning to the place of its own genesis, yet it is always predicated upon its own past. However, as rhythm unfolds itself into the future, it always looks back on itself. Rhythm’s present is a negotiation of past repetitions and future expectations. By attending to rhythm, the poet may manipulate the expectations created by rhythm’s past. These expectations may then be fulfilled, deferred or denied as rhythm unfurls. Therefore, rhythm is the purposeful ordering of sounds into patterns to create an aesthetic experience. Syntax governs semantic relationships and the placement of a word in the larger order reflects the poem’s communicative function while the aesthetic sound of poetry reflects the poem’s function of producing pleasing orchestrations of sound and rhythm. Thus when a poet writes (a purposeful act of creation), a word’s aesthetic and semantic value must both be considered.

Using the same words and language structure as all other writers and communicators; drawing from the same well as everyone else, the poet creates what we call poetic language – poetry – by differently coordinating the words into patterned arrangements that elicit arousals on behalf of the listener. These arousals differ from those typically elicited by prose, for the poet injects an aesthetic by attending to the rhythm of the language and thereby constructing patterns that retain semantic conveyance yet are musical. This arrangement is unique to poetry and differentiates it from prose. Hence, poetic language is the fusion of aesthetic and semantic, sound and meaning. Poet

Mina Loy sums up the relationship between music and word; rhythm and meaning; aesthetic and semantic: “poetry is prose bewitched, a music made of visual thoughts, the sound of an idea” (132). Poetry as “prose bewitched” suggests a mesmerizing effect. The hypnotic power of the well-wrought poem, itself the “sound of an idea,” recited by the bard captures our attention and opens the imagination.

### **Logopoeia**

Out of melopoeia, the sound of words, comes logopoeia. It refers to the many layers of meaning. However, although logopoeia emerges from melopoeia, it is not simply an object of melopoeia. Rather, the poet manipulates melopoeia by attending to logopoeia as much as the poet manipulates logopoeia by attending to melopoeia. W.B. Yeats gets at this reciprocal relationship between melopoeia and logopoeia in “The Symbolism of Poetry.” He writes, the purpose of rhythm “is to prolong the moment of contemplation [logopoeia], the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols [metaphor and metonymy]” (31). By employing metaphor and metonymy, the poet creates opportunities for adjusting the order of words and multi-layers of meaning.

Metaphor, metonymy and syntax are the primary logopoeic devices that bear direct impact on melopoeia. The poet has control over these devices and may manipulate them as desired when writing a poem. Two other salient functions of logopoeia, however, may not be manipulated. Denotation and connotation draw from the social

properties of words, as they are applied by people everywhere and lie beyond the scope of manipulation. Nonetheless, the poet may invoke the denotative and connotative associations the signifier carries, imposing them upon the listener of the poem. All other semantic devices are functions of these five subcategories of logopoeia: metaphor, metonymy, syntax, denotation and connotation. In poetry, logopoeia's function is frequently to condense language, thereby creating complex meanings that retain their bond to the aesthetic melopoeia. Pound writes, logopoeia "employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play" ("How to Read" 939). Pound gets at an important aspect of logopoeia. Logopoeia concerns more than meaning for functions like metaphor, metonymy and connotation require great familiarity with the language.

Roman Jakobson opens up how the literary devices of metaphor and metonymy work. In "Linguistics and Poetics," Jakobson writes, poetic language focuses on the message of the verbal communication and "*projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*" (38). The axis of selection consists of several words that are, to one extent or another, directly related in meaning: "the selection is produced on the base of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity" (Jakobson "Linguistics and Poetics" 38). Poetic language, then transfers the "principle of equivalence" into the axis of combination. While the axis of selection considers many words that may each take any given place in a communication, the axis of combination concerns itself with the combination of these selected words. Jakobson writes that because "equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence"



syllables are equalized with syllables, word stress with word stress, syntactical pause with syntactical pause, and so on.

In “The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles,” Jakobson argues that metaphor is a function of the axis of similarity and metonymy is a function of the axis of contiguity. Metaphor unifies otherwise incongruent terms into a coherent expression that as a whole, means something other than the signs themselves represent. Similarly, metonymy uses contiguity, and so otherwise dissimilar words become unified in meaning. Poetry unifies words through a system of equivalence on the contiguous axis, and is therefore unified through such devices as rhyme, meter, syllable, stress, caesura, assonance, etc. When I generate an expression, the axis of similarity serves as the menu of options from which I may select an appropriate word to fit into the contiguous chain of signification.

However, poetic language, having “promoted” equivalence to the axis of contiguity, provides a different menu of options in which the words are related to each other in manners other than simply semantic similarity. Furthermore, “in manipulating these two kinds of connection (similarity and contiguity) in both their aspects (positional and semantic) – selecting, combining, and ranking them – an individual exhibits his personal style, his verbal predilections and preferences—“ which is an expression of aesthetics (Jakobson “The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles” 57).

Through metaphor and metonymy, poetry condenses language into complex meanings that function both literally and figuratively. Often these meanings work in concert to form a complex and condensed signification. Logopoeia’s charge is to reveal and discuss the condensation created by metaphor and metonymy. However, these literary devices are not the only tools at the poet’s disposal. Poetry also has a license to

modify standard syntax in favor of a more aesthetic expression. These three tools (metaphor, metonymy and syntax) provide avenues of aesthetic construction at the disposal of the poet. I have argued that sound and sense, aesthetic and semantic are inherently linked in poetry from the perspective of the melopoeic. While the melopoeic continues to demand a necessary association with the logopoeic, it is through the logopoeic the poet may organize signifiers into musical phrases that retain a coherent semantic content that is complex yet subtle.

### **Phanopoeia**

Phanopoeia, the third element Pound identifies, concerns the image constructed by the poem. Pound argues that it is the most stable of the three, because of its disassociation from language. Melopoeia consists of language in the form of the signifier and carries logopoeia, which itself encompasses language itself in the form of the signifier and the signified. However, phanopoeia stems from the images associated with the signified. Beyond the cognitive process of understanding, deeper in the intellect, necessarily after understanding, the mind constructs images based on the logopoeia: metaphor, metonymy, syntax, denotation and connotation. Although phanopoeia emerges from language itself, the relationship of signified to signifier remains arbitrary and therefore, as Pound concludes, phanopoeia may be “translated almost, or wholly, intact. When it [phanopoeia] is good enough, it is practically impossible for the translator to destroy it save by very crass bungling” (940). Melopoeia, though, is difficult to translate because the rhythms of a language are particular to the very structure of the language. As for logopoeia, denotation, connotation and the possible substitutions on the

axes of metaphor and metonymy as well as the syntax and possibilities of manipulating the syntax are all particularly related to the language structure in which the poet writes. Hence, phanopoeia, the farthest removed from the signifier, and projected onto the mind's eye, exists largely disassociated from the language structure, although predicated upon the language structure.

Phanopoeia is both an extension beyond logopoeia and motored by melopoeia as images are successively constructed, modified and altered. Phanopoeia unifies the elicited images attached to the chain of signification according to an order dictated by the melopoeia. In one sense, phanopoeia is a collection and organization of pre-linguistic images. The signifier is an abstract collection of sounds assigned to represent a concept, an image, the signified. But phanopoeia concerns more than simply photographic like images. Rather, phanopoeia concerns all of the thought provoked by the text that is metalingual or prelingual. By metalingual I mean that these ideas projected into the mind by the text are connected to the words from which they emerge, but do not operate in the realm of language. They are prelingual because they represent the very substance language tries to communicate, the 'tree' represented in Lacan's diagram explaining the faculty of the sign 'tree' to express the real and tangible tree (33). Phanopoeia thus refers to the process of thinking in images that may or may not relate to the visual faculties of the eye, but are images in that they constitute thought not tied down to language. I.A. Richards, describes the images arising in poetry as "various pictures 'in the mind's eye'; not of words but of things for which the words stand; perhaps of ships, perhaps of hills; ... Images of what it feels like to stand leaning on the parapet of Westminster Bridge.

Perhaps that odd thing an image of ‘silence’” (154).<sup>6</sup> Representing more than tangible things, imagery includes all metalinguistic experiences that operate outside the realm of language.

The projection of idea into the mind by words, is a process that Douglas Kahn describes as “an occasion to understand a myriad of overlapping ideas and worlds. [Poetry] takes me to other places, where I just wouldn’t go otherwise. It’s when those places start overlapping and intersecting and forming in different patterns ... that I find pleasure” (Smith et al. 100). While Kahn puts forth this description of the pleasure in poetry as a rejection of the superficial pleasure of poetry, he nonetheless gets at the experience motivated by the necessarily inherent link between the aesthetic and the semantic in poetic language: “I don’t find pleasure in the immediate thing, but I do find pleasure in the occasion, and the process” (Smith et al. 100); between the superficial musical associations and the semantic conveyances their unification underlies. And so, while Kahn may not take pleasure in the superficial experience of poetry, but only in the process of poetic language, or the peculiar movement of words and ideas constructed within poetry that combine to form “constellations” and “hot spots,” this phanopoeic process thus remains rooted in and predicated upon the rhythm that carries the meaning.

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<sup>6</sup> Although Richards believes images are less important than the image-bodies of words, he nonetheless argues that imagery emerges from meaning, itself a result of language and the sign. Furthermore, Richards sees a degree of personal preference in regards to the aesthetic value of imagery in that some people love it while others do not.

### **Poem: Synthesizing Melopoeia, Logopoeia and Phanopoeia**

Melopoeia, logopoeia and phanopoeia have a complex interrelationship that needs to be pulled together and clarified. I have argued above what each element entails, how it may be manipulated and how it relates to the aesthetic. But the purpose of those arguments is to put these three elements together and construct a model of the poetic experience in as broad of terms as possible. Melopoeia is the element first experienced, and from the experience of melopoeia emerges logopoeia. Melopoeia is the primary aesthetic but does not have a monopoly on logopoeia or aesthetic itself. Rather, it is through the logopoeic devices such as metaphor, metonymy and syntax that the sounds of words may be orchestrated into aesthetic arrangements (aesthetic in that they are composed into a 'musical' arrangement). Furthermore, there is an aesthetic in understanding dense language, figures of speech that convey more than what lies on the surface. So although logopoeia emerges from melopoeia, it is through logopoeia that the poet manipulates melopoeia. As for phanopoeia, it consists of the accumulation of the logopoeic experience for it is the projection of image, concept and emotion, themselves expressed through the semantic, onto the mind's eye. And there is an aesthetic in this, too for we enjoy the experience of poetry, fulfilled through the image. Phanopoeia becomes a bridge between the words expressed in the poem and the words we in turn use to react or describe the poem. It is a non-linguistic experience and therefore bridges the gap between the death of the words from which it arises and serves as the impetus for the birth of the words used to describe it. So, phanopoeia constitutes the unreal, pre-

linguistic concepts that the signifier and therefore melopoeia desires to express. Phanopoeia is both post logopoeic and pre-melopoeic, thereby unifying the three elements in a cycle of poetic experience. Nonetheless, because poetry is a spoken art form, melopoeia must come first and so the phanopoeia exists pre-linguistically through reflexive contemplation. These elements work in concert and span the articulation of the poem to the comprehension of the poem. What is more, they happen almost coincidentally yet remain successive, albeit an almost immediate succession. W.B. Yeats identifies the unity of these three elements in “The Symbolism of Poetry,” but he calls melopoeia ‘sound’, phanopoeia ‘colour’ and logopoeia ‘form:’

*When sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion. The same relation exists between all portions of every work of art, whether it be an epic or a song, and the more perfect it is, and the more various and numerous the elements that have flowed into its perfection, the more powerful will be the emotion, the poser, the god it calls among us (31)*

Yeats identifies the unity of melopoeia, logopoeia and phanopoeia in the poetic experience and draws a line connecting the strength or harmony of unity to the overall quality of the art form. Any critical evaluation of poetry must therefore engage all three elements of poetry: melopoeia, logopoeia and phanopoeia. Furthermore, because of melopoeia’s particular role in relation to poetry and the other two elements, I argue any cogent critical analysis of poetics must begin with rhythm and identify how logopoeia and phanopoeia relate to melopoeia. Doing so will reveal the condensation of logopoeia and the nature of phanopoeia.

### III

#### **Kristeva's Interjection of the Speaking Subject**

##### An Explication of "The Ethics of Linguistics"

Julia Kristeva takes up her argument in "The Ethics of Linguistics" from a consideration of de Saussure and points out a discrepancy between the process of communicating the sign and what she terms the speaking-subject. She writes, "once linguistics was established as a science, it was 'hemmed in' and the 'problem of *truth* in linguistic discourse became dissociated from any notion of the *speaking subject*'" (208). Because de Saussure's model describes an exclusive link between signifier and signified, it alienates the function of the speaker as the agent of locution and so "determining *truth* was reduced to a seeking out of the object-utterance's internal coherence, which was predetermined by the coherence of the particular metalinguistic theory within which the search was conducted" (Kristeva 208). In a theory of communication, the speaking subject must therefore occupy a position "not only of structure and its regulated transformation, but especially, of its loss, its outlay" (Kristeva 208). The structure of language does not simply provide a finite system of signs with fixed relationships between signifier and signified, which the speaker uses indiscriminately. And, the speaker does not only operate language and its systems, not only occupies the place of linguistic origin, but occupies a position of linguistic end, wherein language lays itself out. Kristeva thus argues that language structure lives and dies, begins and ends according to the agency of the speaking subject.

The model proposed by Kristeva submits that the speech practice, which should be the object of linguistics, consists of a signified structure, defined by boundaries that can be “shifted” by a semiotic rhythm. Rather than the ever fixed relationship of signifier and signified, Kristeva’s model contains a mobile sign affected by a semiotic rhythm that originates in the speaking subject. This subject leaves its imprint: a perceptible impact that manifests in the dialectic between articulation and the process of the sign (Kristeva 208). This interposition of the speaking subject between the sign and the sign’s articulation establishes “*poetic language* as the object of linguistics’ attention in its pursuit of truth in language” (Kristeva 208). For, the process of the sign occurs through the speaking subject. Thus, Kristeva aims to remove the barriers that segregated the speaking subject from the linguistic processes that worked to acquire ‘truth’ and argue that any effort to obtain ‘truth’ must channel itself through the agency of the speaking subject.

The agency of the speaker to modify Roman Jakobson’s two poles of metonymy and metaphor echoes the imprint of the speaking subject Kristeva suggests must exist. Furthermore it thrusts the poet into the logopoeia with appropriate tools for manipulating words into orders and thus relationships other than clearly semantic. The process that has encapsulated this history of linguistic research has been problematic in Kristeva’s view. Kristeva admits that while Jakobson serves as both “precursor and predecessor” to linguistic study, he has done so through a discourse that maintains “science’s limitative requirements” and so “he defined the origin and the end of the linguistic episteme” (210). Kristeva criticizes this history of study categorizing it “merely as a symptom of the drama experienced by the Western subject as it attempts to master and structure not only the



logos but also its pre- and trans-logical breakouts” (210). Thus the gap between linguistics and truth remains the speaking subject.

To bridge the gap between science and truth, Kristeva offers an object of study: “the poem, in the sense that it is *rhythm, death, and future*” (210). The building blocks for a “new model of language” reside within the poem and Kristeva argues the linguist will extract these building blocks because he “projects himself into” the poem and identifies with the poem. While ultimately, the linguist locates and extracts the building blocks of a new model, he realizes through engagement with the poem that the “signifying process is not limited to the language system, but that there are also speech, discourse, and within them, a causality other than linguistic: a heterogeneous, destructive causality” (210). Kristeva refers here to semiotic rhythm. Within speech and discourse, lies the semiotic rhythm called into action by the speaking subject. The process entails the unification, through speech, of both the semiotic and the semantic through the processes of sign and articulation, which thus implies a movement or succession from one sign to the next. The semiotic rhythm thus destroys itself in order to become what it will be.

To clarify this model, Kristeva borrows an allegory from Vladimir Mayakovsky. Kristeva identifies “*rhythmic rapture and the simultaneous affirmation of the ego*” as two dominant tendencies of Mayakovsky’s work (210). Writing early in the twentieth century, Mayakovsky criticizes efforts to dictate how poetry ought to be composed in such places as writing books for really describing how poetry used to be written (145). Poetry is tendentious, according to Mayakovsky, and such conventional tropes as iambs and trochees have become irrelevant in poetics; he refers to such tropes as “time-worn

patterns” that lose their effect because of their repetition like an inspirational move in chess loses its effect at surprising the opponent into defeat (145). Rather, Mayakovsky sees rhythm through speech as providing the engine of creative expression in poetics.

As the engine of expression, rhythm consists of an organization of sounds that in turn generates an organization of meanings. Rhythm, in the words of Mayakovsky, comes from “all kinds of repetitions in my mind of sounds, noises, rocking motions, or in fact of any perceptible repetition which comes to me as a sound shape” (147). And such events as the sound of the sea crashing on the shore, or the slamming of a door every morning as a servant enters may provide such a production of sonorous phenomena. Together, these rhythmic events create a dull roar from which words begin to emerge. Among these, “the word that most completely conveys the meaning of the poem, or the word that underpins the rhyme” emerges first and the others come forward in an order and assume positions according to the first word. Rhythm, then, creates a hierarchy of meaning in which attention is directed at words in a sequence according to the relevance of the word to the meaning of the poem.

Rhythm is a source of energy, a function of the poet who concerns herself with organizing it in a meaningful way. Furthermore, Mayakovsky writes, “this struggle to organize movement, to organize sounds around oneself, discovering their intrinsic nature, their peculiarities, is one of the most important constants of the work of the poet” (147). Later, he identifies rhythm as “the fundamental force, the fundamental energy of verse” (Mayakovsky 147). And, while Mayakovsky relates this force to other physical forces such as magnetism or electricity, he differentiates it in a significant way. Unlike other empirical forces subject to specific scientific fields of study and research, rhythm is a

thing the “poet must develop: a feeling for” rather than rules to define it or try to contain it (147). However, above all, Mayakovsky establishes rhythm as an energy force that motivates the discovery of an “intrinsic nature” or inherent meaning of sounds.

In poetry, rhythm functions like a sort of agitating glue. All poetic work is based on rhythm and as the “rhythm is established and takes shape,” it resounds throughout. Rhythm, then, could be described as an adhesive that keeps the poem together. But the “dull roar” that resounds throughout gradually eases words free from the poem. Here, Mayakovsky’s model of the hierarchy of words becomes relevant: using the crown of a tooth as an analogy, Mayakovsky states that when there is a “little syllable or sound missing” the poet begins “to shape all the words anew” as if the adhesive property of rhythm has lost its effect in such a situation. He writes, “it’s like having a tooth crowned. A hundred times (or so it seems) the dentist tries a crown on the tooth, and it’s the wrong size; but at last, after a hundred attempts, he presses one down, and it fits” (147). To shed light on this analogy, I now return to Julia Kristeva.

There is a struggle in Kristeva’s estimation between what she terms the poet and the sun: “once the rhythm has been centered in the fixed position of an all powerful ‘ego’, the poetic ‘I’ thrusts at the sun” (211). Velimir Khlebnikov describes the struggle between what he terms sound and sense: “this struggle between two worlds, between two powers, goes on eternally in every word and gives a double life to language: two possible orbits for two spinning stars” (96). Kristeva describes one side of the struggle as:

*rhythm; this repetitive sonority; this thrusting tooth pushing upwards before being capped with the crown of language; this struggle between words and force gushing with the pain and relief of a desperate delirium; the repetition of this growth, of this gushing forth around the crown-word, like the earth completing its revolution around the sun (211).*

Occupying the place of tooth, rhythm exists as a force that pushes upward, causing a pain only to be relieved by the placement of the crown. Rhythm is movement, ever-flowing and thus connotes time. On the other side, Kristeva describes the crown as “the ‘ego’ situated within the space of language, crown, system: no longer rhythm, but sign, word, structure, contract, constraint; an ‘ego’ declaring itself poetry’s sole interest” (211). Language system occupies place, albeit in a realm of idea, but space nonetheless. The ‘ego’ negotiates the conflict, the struggle of tooth and crown; it is the process of crown placed on tooth. Rhythm, like a river of energy, never stays put to occupy one space, but flows ever onward transcending place, forever occupying and vacating space in one, eternal, fluid movement. Language structure, while spatially fixed, never moves; it transcends time for it is always accessible; it has never passed and is always present. However, when language structure is thrust downward like the crown onto the tooth to cover the upwards-thrusting rhythm, the two conjoin; space and time conjoin and create form. Because space becomes affixed onto time and movement; defining it; molding it; thus rhythm becomes limited. Rhythm continues to move, but with a new found form. No longer is it free flowing. Now rhythm flows always carrying a particular shape as it moves. Kristeva sums this limiting agency of the crown: “sun: agency of language since it is the ‘crown’ of rhythmic thrust” limits rhythm as it imposes structure, is “paternal law abrading rhythm, destroying it to a large degree, but also bringing [rhythm] to light, out of its earthy revolutions, to enunciate itself” (212). Kristeva writes, “there would be no struggle but for the sun’s agency” and so rhythm must always be extant although in a position of non-engagement, for without the engagement of the sun and the sun’s agency, “rhythm incapable of formulation, would flow forth, growling, and in the end would dig

itself in” (212). Rhythm is a force without structure, a current of energy and so “only by vying with the agency of limiting and structuring language does rhythm become a contestant – formulating and transforming” (212). Before structure, rhythm is therefore a force without direction, without object, not a contestant.

Because rhythm, before joining structure, is formless, it is bound to the sun without the agency of engagement yet thrusting upward from its foundation of energy. The agency of engaging rhythm and structure resides in the ‘I’ or the ‘ego.’ Structure is the ideal, the sun while rhythm, energy, the real is the earth. Rhythm, always thrusting upward, revolves around structure like the earth around the sun. The two, eternally attracted like magnet to refrigerator, are denied satisfaction of their struggle to conjoin until the ‘I’ – bound to the sun – articulates. So, Kristeva writes, as much as the ‘I’ “wants to enunciate rhythm, to socialize it, to channel it into linguistic structure if only to break the structure, this ‘I’ is bound to the sun. It is a part of this agency because it must master rhythm, it is threatened by it because solar mastery cuts off rhythm” (Kristeva 212). Like a cookie cutter, structure cuts off rhythm, yet moves by rhythm. The ‘I’ negotiates rhythm and structure by adopting each, internalizing them to assemble them into a product of articulation. And, because the process of crown on tooth is analogous to the infinitely repetitive revolution of the earth around the sun, the ego is threatened, but never destroyed. So, poetic formulation emerges as the product of the ever-constant struggle between language and rhythm. As long as language and rhythm compete, poetic formulation will occur. Kristeva therefore provides a model describing poetic language as a process that is the product of the struggle between rhythm and language. The poet

serves as the ego negotiating the two opposing forces, organizing linguistic structures into rhythms that convey meaning in a manner we ascribe as poetic.

Kristeva posits the death of rhythm as the birth of meaning. Relying on the model of linguistic communication proposed by de Saussure, Kristeva underlines the necessary gap between signifier and signified. Because the sign is expressed in phonological terms; as a prescribed pattern of sounds that relate to the intended concept to be communicated, there must be a gap between the physical process of hearing and the psychological process of understanding. As the hearing faculties receive a sound pattern, a signal is sent to the brain which must be de-ciphered and recognized as a prescribed sound pattern; in the words of Velimir Khlebnikov, “there is no doubt that these sound sequences constitute a series of universal truths passing before the predawn of our soul” (95). Because sounds are communicated in a particular order, there is a chronological sequence that must remain intact throughout the communicative process. Therefore, as the brain identifies the sound pattern, there must be a gap between the identification of the first phoneme and the last phoneme. This suggests there must also be a gap between initial identification of phonemes and the recollection of the signified according to the prescribed conditions imposed upon the sound pattern by the language structure. Thus, the end (death) of sound heralds the beginning (birth) of meaning.

Nonetheless, Kristeva writes, “Murder, death, and unchanging society represent precisely the inability to hear and understand the signifier as such – as ciphering, as rhythm, as a presence that precedes the signification of object or emotion” (213). Rhythm, always thrusting up to meet language structure in its quest for organization, faces an imminent death as the placement of the crown of language necessarily limits and

confines the expression of energy capable within rhythm. The poet, the channel through which rhythm and language structure flow on their way to an inevitable struggle, also faces death “because he wants to turn rhythm into a dominant element; because he wants to make language perceive what it doesn’t want to say, provide it with its matter independently of the sign, and free it from denotation” (Kristeva 213). Besides being the force that motivates language, rhythm reveals meaning and frees it from its denotation, projecting it into the realm of connotation. Rhythm is the energy force of the speaking subject; and through articulation, words are freed from their confining structure, sent into the psyche as carriers of meaning.

Because communication and meaning emerges from the speaking subject’s negotiation of the struggle between rhythm and structure, meaning is always a “future anterior;” and an “important element of this ‘future anterior’ of language is ‘the word perceived as word,’ a phenomenon in turn induced by the contest between rhythm and sign” (215). The signified is always perceived as that which is most immediate, as an element of the present. However, the signified (meaning) is itself a future result of the struggle between rhythm and structure. Moreover, the signifier, occurring before the signified, is nonetheless revealed through a reflexive process, anterior to the signified. Kristeva writes, “the rigid, imperious, immediate present kills, puts aside, and fritters away the poem. Thus, the irruption within the order of language of the anteriority of language evokes a later time, that is, a forever” (214). Poetry demands attention to rhythm, yet meaning and the signified retain a monopoly on understanding and thus the present fritters away the poem. By “the anteriority of language,” Kristeva means that because “the irruption of semiotic rhythm within the signifying system of language will

never be a Hegelian *Aufhebung*, [...] it will not truly be experienced in the present” (214); because the result of the irruption of meaning constitutes the perceived event, the event must always be anterior, it can never truly be experienced as present<sup>7</sup>.

As sun and rhythm engage one another (and they always will), the struggle occurs. The signified (which itself is a result of the signifier) is forever perceived first as the event and only in reflex (anterior) is the true event, the signifier, revealed. The struggle between semiotic and semantic is a result; the struggle is future and because the irruption of meaning is anterior to the perception of meaning, Kristeva writes “the poem’s time frame is some ‘future anterior’ that will never take place, never come about as such, but only as an upheaval of present place and meaning”(214). Kristeva implicates rhythm here for meaning is a result of the marriage of place and time; structure and semiotic, language and rhythm. To upheave place and meaning, rhythm must be invoked, employed. Rhythm is the remainder in the division of language structure from meaning. Thus, by attending to rhythm, meaning may be examined, taken apart, analyzed.

Kristeva assigns poetry as “the very nucleus of a monumental historicity” (214). Because the present perception of a word as a word belies the past “irruption” of meaning, the present moment is suspended, in favor of the future. As word is perceived as word, rhythm engages language structure and their struggle puts forth meaning that is future from the present act of perception. Kristeva sums up the joining of future and anteriority as such:

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<sup>7</sup> Because rhythm occupies this anterior position in Kristeva’s model of communication of the sign, there is a defamiliarization of semiotics for the receiver of the sign. While I take up the question of how a sufficient model of poetic analysis should be constructed, and rely on Kristeva’s work here, her arguments also seem to suggest a reason why academics tend, as Bruce R. Smith and I argue above, to employ critical approaches that disassociate rhythm from the analytical process.



*Anteriority and future join together to open that historical axis in which concrete history will always be wrong: murderous, limiting, subject to regional imperatives (economic, tactical, political, familial...). Although, confronted with such regional necessities, poetic language's future anterior is an impossible, 'aristocratic' and 'elitist' demand, it is nonetheless the only signifying strategy allowing the speaking animal to shift the limits of its enclosure (214)*

The agency to “shift the limits” of enclosure on behalf of the speaker must entail the act of thrusting the crown of language upon rhythm and engaging the two into their inevitable struggle. Paul Valéry writes in “Poetry and Abstract Thought” that the poem “does not die for having lived: it is expressly designed to be born again from its ashes and to become endlessly what it has just been. Poetry can be recognized by this property, that it tends to get itself reproduced in its own form: it stimulates us to reconstruct it identically” (242). Valéry gets at the adhesive property of rhythm, for it keeps structure together. Kristeva argues in order to deconstruct meaning, we must attend to the rhythm that is such an integral part of the expression. Meaning implicates much more than an exclusive and arbitrary bond of signified to signifier. The sign exists in the realm of ideal, but is not born until the speaking subject calls forth structure on the waves of semiotic rhythm. Rhythm, though, remains the avenue of analysis for it is earth, real, energy and perceptible – rhythm is accessible because surrounds us, taking part in all aspects of our lives. On the other hand, structure, riding the waves of sound, resides in the unreal, it is the sun and thus independently out of reach. Only by deconstructing the bond manifested by the speaking subject of semiotic and structure may we obtain semantic.

Imamu Baraka wrote, “art is one of many products of thought. An impressive one, perhaps the most impressive one, but to revere art, and have no understanding of the process that forces it into existence, is finally not even to understand what art is” (386). The speaking subject binds the material and ideal into a form that is palpable. To study poetry, to analyze it, deconstruct its meanings in pursuit of a truth without consideration of rhythm in direct relation to meaning is to not understand the poem as what it is: art. To analyze poetry without sound is like talking about what a painting means without ever having seen its rich colors or talking about how a song makes you feel without ever filling the caverns of your ears with the tones and melodies that yet pass you by. Poetry exists in a myriad of different forms. Whether the object of analysis is the old English epic poem “Beowulf,” the richly metaphoric language of Shakespeare’s sonnets, the pithy verse of Emily Dickenson, the colorful imagery of William Carlos Williams, or the narrative-challenging poetics of John Cage<sup>8</sup> a sufficient model of poetic analysis must be flexible enough to apply to any poem yet capable to say something about it. Therefore, I propose a model of analysis that engages the text through melopoeia in pursuit of the text’s logopoeic and phanopoeic contents. By opening the space between rhythm and language, this model makes room for the analyst to probe with a lantern of critical theory.

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<sup>8</sup> In particular I am referring to “Writing through the Cantos.”

## IV

### Critical Applications of Rhythmic Analysis

#### Frost's "Directive," or a Form That is No More a Form

In Robert Frost's *Directive*<sup>9</sup>, the speaker, a guide "who only has at heart [our] getting lost", leads us down a road to a house that is not a house. The imagery Frost conjures up moves from a general, natural scene to a more specific place in the "house that is no more a house" where he has hidden a grail for us. We move from "marble sculpture in the weather" to a road marked by the "wear of iron wagon wheels" in terrain lined by "the chisel work of an enormous Glacier." While being watched by "eye pairs out of forty firkins," we move through a forest of new trees "that sends light rustle rushes to their leaves" and are reminded of the former "old pecker-fretted apple trees." Just ahead on our road may be someone on foot "creaking with a buggy load of grain," as we are headed for a small field with a "children's house of make-believe,/ some shattered dishes underneath a pine,/The playthings in the playhouse of the children." We arrive at "the house that is no more a house," now reduced to a lilac covered cellar hole falling in itself "like a dent in dough." This house is near a brook with water "cold as a spring as yet so near its source" that never rages, and along the waterside is an "old cedar" with an "instep arch" hiding "a broken drinking goblet like the grail" that our guide stole from the children's playhouse. In a form without stanzas, and a beat pattern that lingers and gives way to pauses, Frost moves us with rural imagery down a road to our waters and a

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<sup>9</sup> See a copy of "Directive" in the appendix.

“goblet like the grail” where we are to find peace and become whole again, beyond confusion. While I have provided a condensed version of the primary images, the poem fills the gaps with long, elaborate and vivid sequences that are moved by the rhythm and music of the poem.

Frost writes in an easy diction that is available to any reader. Frost’s words are neither technical nor refined, rather, they are familiar and clear, leaving nothing to be hung in tatters on barb and thorn. Consider the first line. Frost uses what Dennis Attridge terms function words, as opposed to content words that have their own, independent meaning (27). Words such as ‘back,’ ‘out,’ ‘of,’ ‘all,’ ‘this,’ ‘now,’ ‘too,’ ‘much,’ ‘for,’ ‘us,’ ‘in,’ ‘a,’ ‘by,’ and ‘the’ do not conjure clear or specific images in isolation from the context. Generally, their meaning relies heavily upon the context words they buttress. Moreover, the words listed above account for seventeen of the first twenty words of the poem. Frost makes the poem more familiar through its words; yet, the words’ meanings and images are deep and opaque – not clear after a first reading. Frost layers *Directive* with many complex meanings that belie the apparent simplicity of words and form. Throughout my analysis I reveal the complexities of meaning by attending to the poem’s melopoeia: rhythm and sound.

First, some general notes on the poem’s melopoeia. “Directive” has sixty-three unrhymed lines and almost all of them are iambic pentameter. Frost writes in Blank verse, the form most closely associated with normal English speech. Only a handful of lines vary the rhythm; the most frequent variation is initial inversion from an iamb to a trochee; about a quarter of the lines adhere to an iambic structure, but add an extra syllable. Another major diversion from iambic pentameter occurs in lines fifty-five and

fifty-six: in the third and fourth syllables, Frost uses two stresses after two unstressed syllables to highlight the place and hidden condition of the goblet.

The five-beat rhythm used in blank verse creates self-sufficient lines for the beat does not drive forward in a predictable sing-song fashion as many four-beat rhythms do. Rather, the lines have a little extra time to develop emotional and rhythmic qualities. Because each line is self-sufficient, as Dennis Attridge points out in Poetic Rhythms, they “don’t arouse an expectation [of the reader] to unfold a larger pattern and so allow more easily a pause in reading both within lines and between” them (166). Frost writes many lines that consist of only monosyllabic words: “Back out of all this now too much for us;” “There is a house that is no more a house;” “Then for the house that is no more a house;” and, “Cold as a spring as yet so near its source.” Not to mention the many lines that have only one polysyllabic word. Frost magnifies the familiarity to normal speech inherent in blank verse forms by organizing several lines of iambic pentameter into single syllable words. The diction, already simple and familiar, underscores the familiarity of the form itself. In many passages, Frost uses alliteration to drive the beat, often in three syllable sequences. Consider for example, “has at heart,” “wagon wheels,” “forty firkins,” “rustle rushes,” “weep for what,” and “dent in dough.” Other significant uses of alliteration occur in line fifty-one, where Frost repeats the /s/ sound seven times so that nearly every syllable mimes the sound of the brook the words describe, and lines fifty-eight and fifty-nine where /s/ sounds repeat ten times in the description of the spell on the goblet.

Frost creates a series of paradoxes as the listener begins the journey. Although we embark on a journey, thereby implying time and a chronology that begins now and ends later or in the future, we travel to the past and to a place that does not exist. Frost

does not allow us to consider how we might visit this house that does not exist as he sends off on this road with our guide who only wants to get us lost. Who would really follow this guide? We do, and the road takes us through a journey by glacier haunting mountains and observant cellar holes. Finally, after a new forest, we arrive at the field where our house apparently exists.

First the journey begins. Frost opens the poem strong and uses initial inversion: two trochees “back out” and “back in” set a contrast to the following iambs and create more space between the stresses that drive the listener to the beat. Also, the repetition of the word “back” emphasizes the past or that which is behind us, leaving the listener open only to that which is ahead, projecting him into the future, as if walking down a road. Moreover, Frost underscores this paradox of time invoked by expressions, emphasizing the past by juxtaposing two antonymic prepositions: “back out” and “back in.”

Nonetheless, we follow Frost, with irony ahead, through a road that takes us “back in a time made simple by the loss/ of detail.” The first four lines of the poem move somewhat awkwardly and the beat seems to resist falling regularly; for example, the second line “Back in a time made simple by the loss” could be scanned as four beats as easily as five. The use of initial inversion delays the sense of iambic pentameter suggested by the last four feet of the first two lines and evidenced by the fully iambic pentametrical third line. Because of this delay of iambic pentameter and regularity, the beat becomes difficult to locate and thus the passage takes on an awkward feeling. Also, two strong syntactical links drive the enjambments of lines two and three forward and leave little room for the reader to breathe at all in the first four lines, even though caesuras appear in the first and third lines. Thus, Frost connects the awkwardly moving

beginning to lines five through seven, where the subject and destination of the road is revealed in three consecutive lines of iambic pentameter.

After the first four lines, including two lines marked by initial inversion, one fully regular iambic pentametrical line, and the fourth line containing an extra syllable, the blank verse form opens up as Frost writes lines five, six and seven in regular iambic pentameter. The change from the breathless, awkward and ambiguous meter and phrasing of the first four lines places greater emphasis on the beats of the following three. By setting up lines that allude to iambic pentameter, yet deny its full bloom, Frost enhances the experience of discovering the object of the past made simple through iambic pentameter. Moreover, the enhanced expression of the house is undermined by the immediate denial of its existence, a pattern he repeats in the following two lines. Frost tells of this paradoxical house that exists “back in a time made simple by the loss of detail” before beginning down a road in line eight.

So Frost projects the listener into the future by invoking the past to a place that does not exist, and provides an unreliable guide “who only has at heart your getting lost.” This set of paradoxes seem to present a difficult obstacle to overcome if the listener is to follow Frost into the poem. However, Frost uses several melopoic devices to move the listener along before she realizes the problems the paradoxes present. Frost situates the poem into the past in the first two lines, but does not reveal that a journey is required to reach the past until the road is mentioned in the eighth line. The sheer structural and syntactical similarity of the three lines that describe the house, farm and town must be recited quickly. The iambic pentameter, finally realized, flows off the tongue and the listener embraces the realization without pause as Frost denies caesura until the period of

the seventh line. And so Frost denies the space Attridge argues blank verse provides for the listener to develop an emotional or intellectual reaction. The last phrase of the first twelve lines establishes the guide and the road to follow. The road is the subject of the phrase, and Frost writes the guide only as a clausal anecdote.

Following a strong caesura at the end of line twelve, Frost finally projects the reader into the fiction of the poem and along the road he previously described. Following the line “and there’s a story in a book about it:” is a list of landmarks and features of the road Frost’s guide directs the listener to. First, Frost describes the condition of the road and landscape without implying any movement. However, following two lines that add extra syllables to the iambic pentameter paradigm, Frost describes a “serial ordeal” of being watched which thus illustrates a movement along the road. These two lines emerge as they are surrounded by lines that are nearly iambic pentameter for they keep a pattern of iambs, but add an extra unstressed syllable at the end of the line. Also, in lines thirteen through seventeen, Frost alternates iambic pentameter with iambic pentameter plus one syllable. So Frost, using rhythm, projects the listener onto the road and down along its path. Frost later illustrates a movement along the road in lines twenty-three through twenty-five and unites the passage in iambic pentameter. Without a caesura in the first line, the listener is driven into the next line where the iambic pentameter is strengthened by alliteration of /s/ and /r/ as well as the assonance of the middle syllables “rustle rushes” that look and sound nearly alike.

Sometimes, as I have shown, Frost interjects irregular lines in these passages of iambic pentameter to create an exclusion or to provide additional information. The result is that the irregular lines stick out and catch the reader’s ear. For example, in lines



twenty through twenty-eight, Frost describes a new forest the reader travels through along the road. In one line, Frost uses initial inversion to place the beat earlier in the line and stress the first syllable: “Where were they all not twenty years ago?” The rest of the line returns to iambic feet, but the initial foot catches the reader and gives itself additional attention. In another line, Frost adds another syllable. The strangeness of eleven syllables underscores the strange image the line conjures up: “As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.” But the use of eleven syllables sometimes ties together parenthetical remarks that enhance the description, but do not necessarily contribute to the main theme. Describing the glacier “that braced his feet against the Arctic Pole,” Frost uses two eleven syllable lines: “You must not mind a certain coolness from him/ still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.” Both lines begin in iambs and end in trochees with a rising group of three syllables in the middle. The effect is a smooth transition back to the iambic pentameter in the next line as Frost begins a new statement.

Line thirty-four is an example of an eleven-syllable line that connects, with a strong enjambment, two lines of iambic pentameter. “The height of the adventure is the height/ of country where two village cultures faded/into each other. Both of them are lost.” The first line of the group repeats “height” and has the strongest enjambment of the three, which drives the reader into the eleven-syllable line. Line thirty-four begins with a rising foot that quickly subsides to a falling foot after a sequence of two stressed syllables, which each have their own beat: “two village cultures faded.” Another syntactical link drives the enjambment to the end of the statement in line thirty-five. Alliterative music helps hold the passage together even more with the repetition of height and /v/ sounds in adventure and village and /k/ sounds in country and culture. The

caesura works well here, completing the line's meter in line thirty-five and including a new statement that adds poignancy to the previous passage.

Once the listener arrives at the house that is no more a house, the situation is described and the speaker moves breathlessly through a list of the things left in the small field. The passage begins with initial inversion and seems to deny the caesura both within and between the lines. Attention is caught by the alliteration and swinging rhythm that opens line forty-four and is carried through all eleven syllables and five beats. The rhythm is syncopated and catchy. However, in the next line, the iamb returns stridently in iambic pentameter as in the first time Frost introduced the "house that is no more a house." The poem seems to open up as Frost redefines the "house that is no more a house," by first recalling line five and describing it: "Then for the house that is no more a house/ But only a belilaced cellar hole,/ Now slowly closing like a dent in dough." The second, additional description of the house is supported by the alliteration pattern of /k/, /s/ and /d/ sounds: "belilaced," "cellar," "slowly," "closing," "dent," and "dough." Frost begins the poem describing a place of departure that exists in the past and subsequently leads the listener on a journey that arrives here, in the house that is not a house but a lilac covered hole closing in on itself. To emphasize this, he uses irregularities that create a contrast with the regular movement of iambic pentameter that we expect. When the beat returns to this regularity, the passage sounds clearer and feels more natural. However, before arriving at the house, Frost reminds the listener of the paradoxes required along the journey. As Frost writes, you must be "lost enough to find yourself."

But Frost subsequently reveals that our true destination (and destiny) is “a brook that was the water of the house.” After an eleven-syllable line, iambic pentameter returns and the caesura works well separating the similar sounding “destination” and “destiny.” Frost describes the brook in line fifty-one using initial inversion and alliterative use of the /s/ sound. Toward the end, the iambic pentameter persists, and we discover the “broken drinking goblet like the Grail” with which we are to drink the water of the house and “be whole again beyond confusion.” The water flows through the former location of the house, it used to be the water of the house. These waters, yet flowing where the house used to be, are the true destination and destiny of the journey. Frost reveals the hidden location of the goblet in line fifty-five and fifty-six. Following two unstressed syllables, a pair of stressed syllables highlight the hidden condition of the goblets and their location at an old cedar. The goblet is informed by the following three lines that reveal, through words aligned by alliteration of /s/ sounds that the “broken drinking goblet like the Grail” is “under a spell so the wrong ones can’t find it, so can’t get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn’t.” The editors of the fifth edition of the Norton Anthology of Poetry cite the passage from the Bible that Frost refers to: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (qtd in Ferguson, Salter and Stallworthy 1245).

Frost directs the listener along the road to a house that is not a house only to arrive at a water side. The speaker then says “here are your waters and your watering place./ Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.” After the breathless passage from line fifty-five to fifty-nine, Frost employs strong caesuras to provide ample room for the message and the reaction of the listener to develop. First, a period at the end of line fifty-

nine ends the breathless passage. In a paranthetical line, Frost reveals where he got the Grail and strong period caesuras end lines sixty-one and sixty-two.

The journey through the poem and along the road ends at the waters, which lie in the place of the “house that is no more a house.” Rhythm, as I have shown, projects the listener along the road and over obstacles such as paradox throughout the journey and poem. However, once the listener has arrived, the pace slows down and the landmarks and buggies that marked the path along the way, give way to the spiritual waters of baptism that Frost urges the listener to drink in order to become whole again. Rhythm flows throughout the poem “Directive “like the waters that flow along the old cedar in the place where the house that used to be a house, but which has since closed in on itself like a dent in dough and is now covered in lilacs. Throughout the poem, Frost deconstructs the objects along the road in search of something more than these landmarks. Among the objects along the road that Frost deconstructs are the house, farm, town, road, new trees that send light rustle rushes, the buggy load of grain, the two cultures that faded into each other, the individual’s identity lost enough to be found and the playhouse of make-believe on the field the size of a harness gall. The brook is the only thing left, but also the only thing with the power to restore the traveler to wholeness. So, there is another parallel between rhythm and the waters. Like the things Frost deconstructs, above and upon melopoeia resides logopoeia and phanopoeia.

In a form that lends itself to long and meditative poetry, Frost writes a long and meditative poem that is not instantly clear. Without stanzas to separate ideas or units of musical unity and disunity, and in a form tightly regimented by a strict meter (iambic pentameter), Frost uses variations in the regular pattern to indicate important passages

and supports these movements with small rhythmic changes, alliteration to tie together lines and phrases and caesuras to which the form lends itself. The result is a metaphysical poem that describes a journey during which the listener transcends the physical to a place both in the past and in the present but through diction clear, simple and pure and in a form fluid and natural. Moreover, the meanings and experiences to be had along Frost's road to salvation are accessible through the rhythm that organizes each step along the way.

## V

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## VI

### Appendix

Robert Frost, "Directive"

*Back out of all this now too much for us,  
Back in a time made simple by the loss  
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off  
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,  
There is a house that is no more a house  
Upon a farm that is no more a farm  
And in a town that is no more a town.  
The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you  
Who only has at heart your getting lost,  
May seem as if it should have been a quarry-  
Great monolithic knees the former town  
Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered.  
And there's a story in a book about it:  
Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels  
The ledges show lines ruled southeast-northwest,  
The chisel work of an enormous Glacier  
That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.  
You must not mind a certain coolness from him  
Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.  
Nor need you mind the serial ordeal  
Of being watched from forty cellar holes  
As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.  
As for the woods' excitement over you  
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,  
Charge that to upstart inexperience.  
Where were they all not twenty years ago?  
They think too much of having shaded out  
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.  
Make yourself up a cheering song of how  
Someone's road home from work this once was,  
Who may be just ahead of you on foot,  
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.  
The height of the adventure is the height  
Of country where two village cultures faded  
Into each other. Both of them are lost.  
And if you're lost enough to find yourself  
By now, pull in your ladder road behind you  
And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.  
Then make yourself at home. The only field*

*Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.  
First there's the children's house of make-believe,  
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,  
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.  
Weep for what little things could make them glad.  
Then for the house that is no more a house,  
But only a belilaced cellar hole,  
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.  
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.  
Your destination and your destiny's  
A brook that was the water of the house,  
Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,  
Too lofty and original to rage.  
(We know the valley streams that when aroused  
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)  
I have kept hidden in the instep arch  
Of an old cedar at the waterside  
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail  
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,  
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.  
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)  
Here are your waters and your watering place.  
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.*