

Self and Form: The Radicalization of American Poetry from Emily Dickinson to Charles Bernstein

Enikő Bollobás

HJEAS

ABSTRACT

Tracing the development of non-lyric traditions in American poetry, the author investigates ways the poet disappears from the poem while poetic form is seriously destabilized. Two fundamental “alternatives to the ego-position,” as Charles Olson writes in *Mayan Letters* (83), are identified: the poetics of attention on the one hand, and concrete poetry and language writing on the other. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetics of attention, the ego becomes an organ responding to experience, turning the creative self into an attentive mind that opens itself unto the world. Twentieth-century concrete poetry eliminates the self-expressive first-person subject while allowing the language material to take the place of the subject. The radicalization of American poetry culminates in language writing, which places the creative process under the control of language, thereby doing away with the self that formerly gave cohesion to the text, and allowing language, as opposed to meter and prosody, to perform a central structuring function. Conducting close prosodic and grammatical readings, the author demonstrates that in all these poetics—whether attention is directed to the world or to the word—the elimination of the lyrical self goes hand in hand with the disruption of regular poetic form. (EB)

KEYWORDS: poetics of attention, concrete poetry, language poetry, Emily Dickinson, William Carlos Williams, Charles Bernstein



To the memory of
Marjorie Perloff (1931–2024)

Introduction

Let me begin with a seemingly simple question: what is lyric? Marjorie Perloff’s definition seems most helpful, stating that the lyric is “a short verse utterance (or a sequence of such utterances) in which a single speaker expresses, in figurative language, his subjective vision . . . , a vision

culminating in a ‘unique insight’ or epiphany that unites poet and reader” (*Dance* 173–74). Perloff describes this form as an “‘internalized quest romance,’ whose hero is the poet himself” (175) and which often culminates in what Harold Bloom calls the Romantic or post-Romantic “crisis poem” (2, 29, 253). This poetry, Perloff continues, is always self-reflexive (*Dance* 179), and is never “‘about’ any subject external to the poet’s self” (180). In short, this kind of poetry is always “the expression of a moment of absolute insight, of emotion crystallized into timeless patterns” (181). Also, lyric poetry is self-reflexive in the sense that, as Jonathan Culler writes, it “exemplifies . . . the reflexive action of consciousness” (*Theory of the Lyric* 94).

Taking root in ancient Greece and Rome, lyric poetry began to flourish in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, to become the dominant tradition in the Romantic era. The romantic theory of the lyric, Culler insists, “as intense subjective expression, subjectivity coming to consciousness of itself, sees the poet as absorbing the external world, stamping it with inner consciousness, and giving expression to this enriched poetic inner life” (“*L’Hyperbole et l’apostrophe*” 85). Most often this consciousness is moved, moreover, by “an intense passion,” accompanied, as Culler emphasizes, by “a deictic apparatus of the here and now enunciation presenting itself as an event” (such as hyperbole and apostrophe) in “a distinctive present tense” (97). As a poetics of personality retaining its Romantic features, the lyric has survived well into the twentieth and twenty-first century as neo-Romantic lyric (see Perloff, *Dance* 181). Today it is practiced, as Perloff’s somewhat harsh verdict concedes, by “minor poets” only, while its alternative, involving a “departure from the lyric voice” (182), has grown stronger with every decade.

This alternative tradition is the topic of my paper. I will trace its development from Emily Dickinson up to Charles Bernstein, to demonstrate the continuity of a tradition, based on shared features, that has remained modestly withdrawn for over a century and a half in American poetry. In this poetry, as Douglas Barbour puts it, “the poet disappears entirely and is content to present a voice or voices or a story without intervening in that presentation directly” (19). Perloff sees this “new poetry” as “opening the field” in two directions, “to make contact with the *world* as well as the *word*” (*Dance* 181). I identify the former—making contact with the world—in nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetries, in what I call the poetics of attention, while the latter—making contact with the

word—in twentieth- and twenty-first-century concrete poetry and language poetry.¹

Emily Dickinson's poetics of attention

In the nineteenth century the departure from the dominant lyric voice took the form of what is best called the poetics of attention. Wordsworth can be considered one of its first proponents in English poetry, who, according to Thomas De Quincey's recollections, defined poetic attention as "an intense condition of vigilance," whereby "any beautiful, any impressive visual object, or collection of objects, falling upon the eye, is carried to the heart with a power not known under other circumstances" (122). Attention is understood here, in the sense William James defined the term a few decades later, as both a sensory and an intellectual process, "the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought" (403–04).

Attention and perception serve as the primary creative faculties, allowing the poet to turn a sensory experience into an intellectual one as the minute details apprehended by attention are captured by the mind. As a poetic method, "the practice of attention," to quote Katy Wright-Bushman, "is marked by an active openness to the other, and eventually, the Other" (370)—which can be, we might add, a person, an object, or a concept. Wright-Bushman quotes Simone Weil on how emptiness is the prerequisite of this openness: "Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object. . . . [O]ur thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object which is to penetrate it" (qtd in Wright-Bushman 372). Applying these observations to the practice of poetry, one might claim that the poets of attention allow for the withdrawal of the lyric self, having emptied their minds in preparation for being taken over by the world. No subjectivity is coming to consciousness here, no unique insight is revealed, no deictic apparatus accompanies passions. Instead, the traffic between mind and world becomes a two-way process: the mind is taking possession of the world in such a way that the world penetrates the mind emptied of its content. The self is withdrawn, thoughts are suspended, both waiting to be filled by the objects before the senses, objects ready to be taken possession of by the mind.

I consider Emily Dickinson the starting point of the American tradition of attention, of capturing the minutest details of the world, its

inner and outer processes, then carrying them “to the heart” (in the Wordsworthian sense), as well as “taking possession of them by the mind” (in the Jamesian sense). Dickinson performed a veritable paradigm change in her poetics by replacing, in the 1860s, the lyric impulse of intensive subjective expression with the non-lyric desire to be absorbed by the world; phrased differently, of opting for the Wordsworthian “intense condition of vigilance” and attention focused on the world, instead of the “internalized quest romance” of the self that Perloff emphasized in connection with the lyric mode.

One poem by Dickinson, “Four trees” (J742/Fr778), will illustrate this paradigm change. As was her general practice, Dickinson left behind no definitive version but wrote alternatives to some words (as in line four of the poem under discussion), which can be traced in the Franklin Variorum Edition (*Poems*), as well as Fascicle 37, Packet XII, the Emily Dickinson Archive (see the link to this page under “Four Trees” in Works Cited). In the poem below, I followed the Houghton Library’s version in marking both alternatives for line four, bracketing “Do reign,” the less frequently used form.

Four Trees – opon a solitary Acre –
Without Design
Or Order, or Apparent Action –
(Do reign) Maintain –

The Sun – opon a Morning meets them –
The Wind –
No nearer Neighbor – have they –
But God –

The Acre gives them – Place –
They – Him – Attention of Passer by –
Of Shadow, or of Squirrel, haply –
Or Boy –

What Deed is Their’s unto the General Nature –
What Plan
They severally – retard – or further –
Unknown – (*Poems* 733; “Four Trees”)

This poem does not belong to those widely read and anthologized, let alone to those critically discussed, even though it gives a very straightforward presentation of Dickinson's radical aesthetics, while accepting both the Wordsworthian and—in a proleptic manner—the Jamesian positions on attention. Not only does the poem focus attention on an everyday place informed by four trees arranged in a random fashion, but it proposes a theory of attention itself. For, as L. C. Knights claims, it is attention exactly that the four trees give the solitary acre: “attention from a ‘Passer by’; . . . the undifferentiated light into shadow that gives depth and solidity” (373). Not only do the trees make the acre noticeable to any “Passer by,” the boy and the squirrel alike, who then take possession of what they see, but it is this attention-generating capacity of the trees that divides light and darkness, while also giving solidity to the objects. While attention creates forms, shapes, and colors, perception is amplified into a heightened sensory experience.

Following the Jamesian definition, attention soon turns into an intellectual experience, as it touches upon a peculiar topic, the absence of order in nature, that is, of outer order expected by humans; order is informed simply and purely by attention. It contains nothing of the nature philosophy dominant in the middle of the nineteenth century: here nature does not obey divine order, nor is it the veil hiding God or a sacred text presented by God in codes and symbols. The poet is not Emerson's “transparent eyeball” capable of recognizing the divine in the quotidian. In vain does the poet look for systematizing symbols in nature, order and meaning do not shine through. Relations are neighborly, yet this metonymical relation gives the promise of “a nearness to tremendousness,” as Douglas Anderson puts it, with the trees “effortlessly” maintaining “a kind of modest readiness” (222) to God as the nearest neighbor. This space is informed by four haphazardly arranged trees whose layout no poetic I/eye can interpret as ordered.

In this poem written in 1863, Dickinson foreshadows Rimbaud's idea expounded in his letter written to Paul Demeny, May 15, 1871, insisting that “[t]he Poet makes himself a seer by a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses” (377). So, in order that we may think in ways other than how language has taught us to think poetry, we must throw off the shackles of perception and thinking by deranging all the senses. Perceived objects and processes must be registered in the poem before interpretation, before the eye and cultural habits give meaning to them. This way, experience will be preserved unmediated in the creative process.

Otherwise, as Goethe told his friend, Friedrich von Müller, we see only what we know and understand (Müller 31).

Charles Altieri, in his *Enlarging the Temple*, locates the roots of this poetics in Wordsworth's immanentist position—one, we might add, that seems intimately connected with his understanding of attention. "Here poetic creation is conceived," Altieri writes, "more as the discovery and the disclosure of numinous relationships within nature than as the creation of containing and structuring forms" (17). As he concludes,

Where the symbolist poet seeks to transform nature into satisfying human structures, the immanentist poet stresses the ways an imagination attentive to common and casual experience can transform the mind and provide satisfying resting places in an otherwise endless dialectical pursuit by the mind of its own essences and of Transcendental realities. (17)

And, what is particularly significant from the perspective of my argument, the creative self will be no more than an "attentive mind opening itself to the life of . . . familiar objects" (34), making the ego no more than "an intense form deepening one's participation in experience: an 'organ' responding and reacting to experience" (43).

Indeed, this is exactly what is happening in the Dickinson poem: the observer does nothing more than discover and disclose relationships within nature, mobilizing imagination attentive to casual experience that will transform the mind, whereby opening itself to familiar objects. The creative self will indeed be no more than an attentive mind opening itself unto the world. The ego becomes an organ responding to experience. That experience is common and casual and is clearly indicated by the random placing of the trees that surround the solitary acre containing the sun and the wind, together with their neighbor, God. God does not rule over this place, nor does he give it order; he is simply adjacent to it, connecting metonymically. Not only is there no visible divine order here, but human presence is also just about missing (except for the incidental passer-by or the boy). No human mind insists on deciphering God's message: the only meaning of this acre consists in its mere existence, exhibiting inner, as opposed to outer form.

The scene informed by the four trees refers, in a self-reflexive manner, to the four-line stanza, while *acre* and *plan*, words made up of four letters, mark out the place or space of the poem, its inner and outer landscape just being carved out by the composition. As such, the organicist

metaphor of the four trees folds exactly that compositional process as outer image as the metonymical structure realizes. What is emphatically missing from the poem is the self-expressive lyric I, which might take control, from the position of the center, of the landscape. The voice we hear in the poem is no more than the observer of natural processes, the viewer who establishes contact without giving human interpretation to the acre occupied by the trees.

As to poetic form, one might first note the freedom with which Dickinson dismisses formal orthodoxies. Neither the number of syllables (10-4-9-2, 9-2-7-2, 6-9-9-2, 12-2-10-2), nor the number of stresses or accents (5-2-3-1, 4-1-3-1, 3-4-3-1, 4-1-3-1) exhibit any kind of regularity. The two-syllable lines occurring in certain even numbered lines of the stanzas (lines 4, 6, 8, 12, 14, 16) seem to make up the only recurrent prosodic formula throughout the poem. Indeed, “the irregular pattern of alternate long and short lines,” as Cristanne Miller observes, “makes the poem read like free verse” (*Reading* 235).

Moreover, in one variant of the poem, Dickinson commits a particular grammatical error in failing to differentiate between transitive and intransitive verbs and using a transitive verb as intransitive.

Four Trees – opon a solitary Acre –
Without Design
Or Order, or Apparent Action –
Maintain – (*Poems* 733)

In this elliptic parataxis the verb *maintain* is lacking its object, whereby the poet violates a basic rule of syntax. The common observance of this rule is replaced by the contingent placement of words, resulting in a loose syntactic structure that remains ambiguous throughout. For it is unclear where one sentence ends and another begins. In fact, two sentence structures get superimposed upon each another, with the phrase *apparent action* capable of connecting with either the preceding or the subsequent syntactic elements. In the first case, *apparent action* can be read as the last item of the list “*Four Trees* [reign] *opon a solitary Acre – Without Design Or Order, or Apparent Action*,” resulting in a violation of the rule of transitivity in the next line, containing the transitive verb *maintain*. Therefore, our language competence suggests that *apparent action* connects to *maintain* as its object: *Four Trees . . . Without Design Or Order, Or [without] Maintain[ing] Apparent Action*. However, as we read on, the first word of the next stanza,

sun, exhibits a similar unresolvable ambiguity in the sense that *sun* can either act as the subject of the next sentence (*The Sun – upon a Morning meets them*) or the object of the previous sentence, completing it into *Four Trees . . . Maintain the Sun*. In this somewhat uncanny structure, which Miller calls “syntactic doubling” (*Emily Dickinson* 37), the sentences seem to be shoved into each other, and the reader can never be sure where syntactic breaks fall. One might claim that Dickinson frees language of its syntax here, allowing words to interact with each other of their own volition, so to speak, making for a readerly undecidability. The poet, as Mallarmé writes, “yields the initiative to words” (208), allowing textual space to act and create a once and accidental pattern much like the acre allows the trees to create their own order.

In this remarkable poem, the attentive mind opens up to take in what is in front of the senses. While the self is withdrawn, the mind is ready to be absorbed by the world. The sensory process turns into an intellectual one, as the speaker opens up to be absorbed by the scene, while celebrating an absence of (humanly perceivable) order, from which the center has disappeared, and relations are reduced to contiguity and metonymy. While grammar is ambiguous, and syntactic rules are violated, neither meter, nor line length is regular. The poem creates its own free form.

Modernist poetics of attention

With Emily Dickinson as its nineteenth-century pioneer, the poetics of attention did indeed open to the world. Early modernism followed suit, with Imagism and radical modernism placing attention on the world in the center of their poetics. The practice of poetry was radically transformed by the Imagists’ impetus to turn poetic attention from the self to the world. The time is the 1910s, the years when modernism was being born. This is the decade, when, as Virginia Woolf succinctly put it, “human character changed” (4).

What happened at that time? First, in 1910, the Post-Impressionist exhibition opened in Grafton Gallery, displaying works of Manet, Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Matisse. In 1911, Diaghilev’s Russian Ballet performed in London, introducing the audience to the radical ideas of modern dance. New York’s exhibition-going audience was shocked, in 1913, by the Armory Show, sensitizing them with Braque, Picasso, Max Ernst, Picabia, and others. The Show’s most scandalous piece was, perhaps, Marcel Duchamp’s *Nu descendant un escalier* [Nude Descending a Staircase], which transformed movement into abstract form, thereby making modern art’s

break with realism final and irreversible. In a couple of years, another, still more scandalous work came to be the talk of town, Duchamp's *Fountain*, whose photograph was exhibited by Alfred Steiglitz in his Gallery 291 in New York.

The Imagist movement took root in this cultural climate, positing—in the manner of contemporary visual arts—the (visual) treatment of everyday objects and situations as the proper subject of poetry. Insisting on the “direct treatment of the thing, whether subjective or objective,” as Ezra Pound's “A Retrospect” puts it (36), the Imagists insisted on sticking to what was in front of the senses, especially the eyes, allowing perception to turn into the poet's primary creative faculty. For this reason, Imagist poems are short, clear-cut, registering the objects of attention and perception without interpretation and without the involvement of the lyric I. Only this way will poetry, as T. E. Hulme put it in his “Romanticism and Classicism,” “arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process” (79).

This cultural climate seems to have permeated all of Europe, from London to Paris to Moscow. In London, T. S. Eliot insisted that the task of poetry is to wake up its readers and help “to break the conventional modes of perception and valuation . . . and make people see the world afresh” (155). In Paris, Jean Cocteau wrote,

Suddenly, as if in a flash, we *see* the dog, the coach, the house for the first time. Shortly afterwards habit erases again this potent image. We pet the dog, we call the coach, we live in a house; we do not see them anymore. . . . Such is the role of poetry. It takes off the veil, in the full sense of the word. It reveals . . . the amazing things which surround us and which our senses usually register mechanically. Get hold of a commonplace, clean it, rub it, illuminate it in such a fashion that it will astound us all with its youth and freshness, with its primordial vigour, and you shall have done the job of the poet. (qtd in Erlich 179–80)

At around the same time, the Russian Formalists in Moscow formulated similar principles about the necessity of poetry to make people truly see again. As Viktor Shklovsky explains, “People living at the seashore grow so accustomed to the murmur of the waves that they never hear it. By the same token, we scarcely ever hear the words which we utter . . . We look at each other, but we do not see each other any more. Our perception of the world has withered away, what has remained is mere recognition” (qtd in Erlich 176–77).

The task of poetry, then, is to make us see or hear objects and phenomena as if for the first time. To bring an image or sound into the sphere of fresh perception, with the added task of the poet to register the moments of heightened perception so that the mind might take possession of it. Because great art, according to this philosophy, is primarily a matter of perception, of noticing what lies around us. This is what Williams Carlos Williams does in his best-known poem, “The Red Wheelbarrow,” which so blatantly redirects attention from the poetic self to an object in the world, while relying on pure perception as the primary creative faculty.

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens (*Collected Earlier* 277)

What depends on the red wheelbarrow is exactly its perception, its recognition. As Burt Hatlen points out, what the poem foregrounds is the return of “our attention to the concrete particulars of the world, to see these particulars anew and to allow these particulars to form new configurations,” identified as modern poetry’s predominant distinguishing feature (Hatlen 159, qtd in MacGowan 90). As Christopher MacGowan cites Hatlen, “‘The Red Wheelbarrow,’ most famously, reminds us that ‘so much depends / upon’ summoning us ‘back to the concrete particulars of the world’” (MacGowan 90; Hatlen 160). The modern poet must teach us to see the familiar as unfamiliar, and to bring it into the sphere of perception, thereby to see this everyday object as if for the first time, allowing for the Jamesian transition from a sensory experience to an intellectual one.

Ezra Pound’s “Pagani’s, November 8” is another piece informed by this philosophy:

Suddenly discovering in the eyes of the very beautiful
Normande cocotte
The eyes of the very learned British Museum assistant. (*Selected Poems* 151)

What we do not have in this poem is the self-expression of the lyric I, explanation, or interpretation. What we do have, however, is observation, perception, the surprise of recognition, together with the economy of words and the intensity of visual experience. At the time when Victorian lyric rhetoric still reigned, these poems offered density of diction and precision of observation, features whose prerequisite is the withdrawal of the self, allowing for the objective perception of the outer, empirical world.

A respect for the quotidian informs Williams's general poetic attitude. The famous Williamsian dictum, "no ideas but in things" (*Paterson* 6), emphasizes exactly this groundedness in the objective world. For example, "This Is Just to Say" (*Collected Earlier* 354), his famously "light" poem, aims at no more than what it is, the registering of a most everyday situation. It is the speaker's message left on the kitchen table, an apology and a conveying of the simple delight gained from eating the plums. And although it is an apostrophe written in the first-person singular, it is by no means self-reflexive; the intersubjective act of apology turns attention emphatically outside, to the delicious, sweet, and cold plums. To take another example, "Pastoral" (*Collected Earlier* 121), which might be read as the explicit unpacking of the philosophy implicitly contained in "The Red Wheelbarrow," claims that the pleasure gained by perceiving the everyday secures not only personal happiness but also the happiness of the community, the nation. In a typical Williamsian tone, the poet searches for the answer to the age-old question of what our mission (or simply job) in the world is. While speaking in the first-person singular, he proposes to look outside: to notice simple images, to appreciate simple pleasures that will build the particulars of place, community, and nation.

His "Young Sycamore," written after Stieglitz's photograph *Spring Showers*, demonstrates this way of seeing, the recreation of a tree by visual perception registering, as Bram Dijkstra explains in his seminal book, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech*, what "the camera eye of his own imagination" (191) saw.

I must tell you
this young tree
whose round and firm trunk
between the wet

pavement and the gutter
(where water
is trickling) rises
bodily

into the air with
one undulant
thrust half its height-
and then

dividing and waning
sending out
young branches on
all sides –

hung with cocoons
it thins
till nothing is left of it
but two

eccentric knotted
twigs
bending forward
hornlike at the top (*Collected Earlier* 332)

Given the fact that the poem, as an imprint of what psychologists call “object-driven attention” (see LaBerge 158), offers a poetic version to the Stieglitz photograph, the processual nature of the text—that the poem can be read, as Perloff insists, as foregrounding “emphasis on process rather than product, on the act rather than its consequence” (“Poetry Chronicle” 129)—begs explanation. For, indeed, the successive lines bring about, in a performative manner, the actual tree, branch by branch, twig by twig. This dynamic poetic process—as opposed to the static visuality of the photograph—can only be partly explained by the nature of language, its linear and processual arrangement transmitted to poetic lineation; concrete poetry, as I will show later, manages to discard this inherent processual

nature of language. But this is a poem that follows the steps of attention, realizing the unity of the eye and the image. Adhering to the movement of the perceiving eye, attention as act and process informs lineation, until the mind, absorbed by the world, takes possession of the tree. So that the image gains its significance from becoming lived experience, one now living in the mind.

A glance at the form of the Williams poems discussed will reveal a very particular correspondence between grammar and prosody. In “This Is Just to Say” only at one line-ending (“that were in / the icebox”) does the noun phrase break, where it is not syntax that determines prosody. But this break after the preposition is perfectly normal in everyday speech. In “Pastoral,” with all line-breaks coinciding with grammatical breaks, Williams goes even further, putting prosody under the total control of grammar. “The Young Sycamore” is a little more complicated grammatically-wise, with several non-coincidences between prosody and syntax (“between the wet / pavement and the gutter”; “(where water / is trickling) rises / bodily”; “into the air with / one undulant / thrust half its height”; “young branches on / all sides”; “but two / eccentric knotted / twigs”). While line-breaks overwhelmingly coincide with grammatical breaks, where they do not—where lines break within syntactic units—there too, the pauses suggested by stanza breaks or line breaks are totally acceptable in everyday speech. Such non-coincidences are places where lineation overrides grammar without, however, disrupting the natural intonation of ordinary speech. Everyday speech here is hesitant, unsure, even groping, showing a mind who thinks while speaking, and which, for this reason, can stop within noun or verb phrases.

Based on this cursory overview of the formal features attending radical modernist poetics, one can conclude that two processes are happening simultaneously here: as the so-called lyrical self is withdrawn and poetic attention is directed on the world, language takes control over prosody.

Concrete poetry

As opposed to traditional lyric poetry, concrete poetry relies on the interplay of the semantic content and the visual qualities of words, while the representational potential of language is significantly challenged as language provides constituents for a concrete poetic object. The poem becomes a visual product in which language is broken down into its components, while it falls under the control of the dimensions of space.

Language ceases to be a transparent medium but becomes an object in which words and letters become visible in their objecthood. As such, concrete poetry radically undermines the subjectivity of the lyrical self, if for no other reason than because complete sentences are most often avoided, making it impossible for the grammatical subject to show itself.

Concrete poetry exploits the performative potential of language as it makes objects with concrete physical dimensions, word-objects, out of the language material. This linguistic material becomes an object that is both linguistic and physical, for on the one hand, it is made of elements of language, while on the other, as a physical object, it will be one of the objects of physical reality. Moreover, concrete poetry brings together the semantic content of language and its written or printed visual objectivity, thereby realizing Paul Valéry's dictum about literature being an "extension and application of certain qualities of language" (85). As such, concrete poetry makes language spatial, while also making objects out of letters and words, and turning linear reading into spatial experience, which demands a perception very similar to the perception of visual art objects.

I differentiate between two kinds of concrete poems, depending on whether they exploit the nominal or verbal elements of language. Adopting the linguistic terms, I call them topic poems and comment poems, the first making objects out of the nominal elements of the statement, the second out of its verbal elements. Both produce reductionist-minimalist texts, but while in the first case the end-product is an autonomous object (a nominalized topic lacking a predicate, the comment), in the second it is a comment-like process (complete even without the nominal element, the topic).

Topic poems rely on the "nominalism" of Pound's ideograms, to use Marjorie Perloff's term ("Search"), as, for example, Mary Ellen Solt's "Forsythia," made of letters and Morse-code signals, and "Geranium," constructed out of letters, with both giving out the shape of the flower.

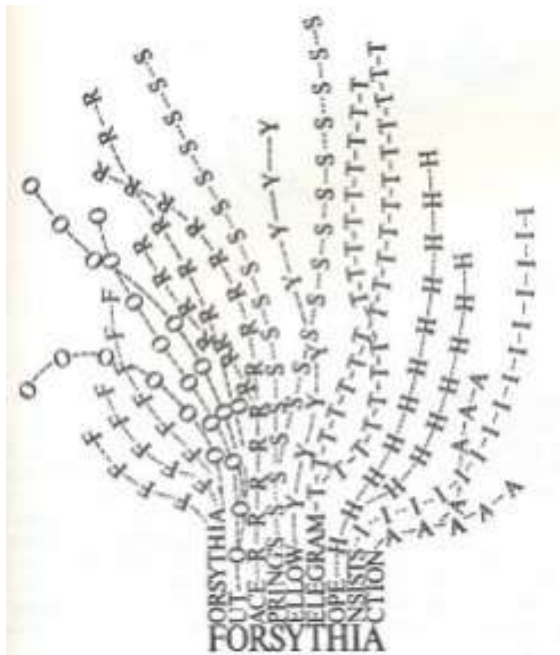


Figure 1.
Mary Ellen Solt, "Forsythia" (1965) (Klonsky 256)

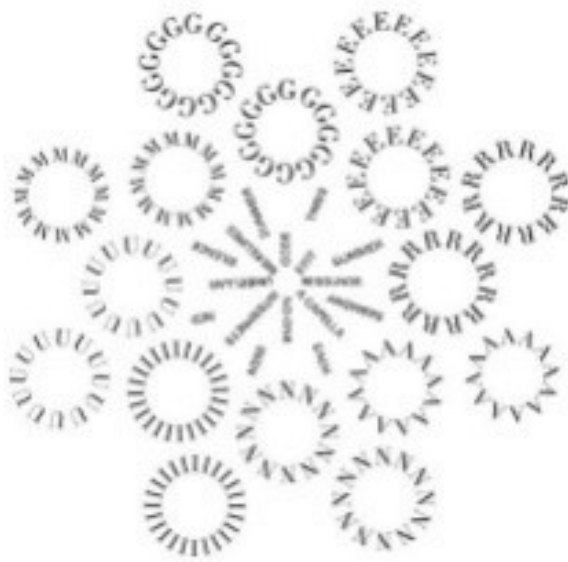


Figure 2.
Mary Ellen Solt, "Geranium" (1963) (Klonsky 257)

The Belgian visual artist Paul de Vree's "My Word Is My Sword" also falls into this category, constructing a word-object out of letters.

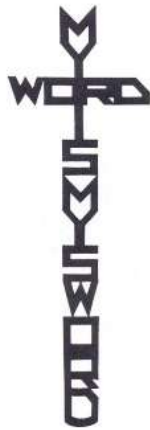


Figure 3.
Paul de Vree, "My Word Is My Sword" (1969) (Klonsky 255)

These static topic poems can be grasped instantaneously, providing a visual experience that is impossible to attain in linear reading. Comment poems, on the other hand, perform the verbal elements of the statements, fashioning them as act and process. In the Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay's "Acrobats," letters do acrobatics as they jump up, down, and sideways, giving a comment-like performance of the topic of acrobatics.



Figure 4.
Ian Hamilton Finlay, “Acrobats” (1966) (Klonsky 251)

We are witnesses to a similar process in Emmett Williams's "Like Attracts Like," displaying a coincidence of the descriptive and performative function of language.



Figure 5.
Emmett Williams, “Like Attracts Like” (1958) (Klonsky 295)

What is most intriguing in this poem is that it performs the same act which it describes. Read as a description, *like* acts as a signifier, that of an abstract

concept capable of referring to an unlimited number of signifieds. Read as a performative, however, *like* is the signified itself: the word has become the “thing” that participates in its concrete materiality in the act of attraction traced here step by step in the consecutive lines.

Concrete poetry refuses to fulfill the mimetic-expressive function of lyric poetry; instead, it eliminates the self-expressive first-person subject while allowing the language material to take the place of the subject. Here too, the elimination of the lyrical self seems to go hand in hand with the disruption of regular poetic form: concrete poetry simply shatters the linear text. Which means, among others, that the text cannot be read out loud, cannot be performed as other poems can during readings, for example. As such, since it cannot be learned by heart, it does not comply with one of Jacques Derrida’s requirement of “the poematic,” (233), or the “poematic experience,” which is the “dream of *learning by heart*” (231).

Concrete poetry breaks language into its constitutive elements, words, and letters, which can be meaningful, mostly on the morphological or lexical level, but rarely on the syntactic level. The two Mary Allen Solt poems, the Ian Hamilton Finlay poem, as well as the Paul de Vree and Emmett Williams pieces all resist the self-reflexive mode of the first-person singular; they each in their own way objectivize language and can best be approached by the “super close reading” of what Perloff calls “micropoetics,” which is equally attentive to the visual and sound effects and the verbal elements. This reading focuses on the micro-elements of the text, where “every phoneme, every morpheme, word, phrase, rhythm, and syntactic contour” is examined with an eye to how “they create a brilliant verbal, visual, and sound structure” (*Infrathin* 2).

Language poetry, the case of Charles Bernstein

The language poets² represent perhaps the most radical form of both eliminating the lyrical self and adhering to a poetics of attention, which in their case means attention to language, as well as submission to language, the transferring of agency from the poet to language.

In direct lineage with the aesthetics of the radical avant-garde movements of the twentieth century—of Gertrude Stein, Jack Spicer, the Black Mountain poets, and the Objectivists—the poetic theory proposed by the language poets, and most prominently by Charles Bernstein, holds that language is not a transparent (and unperceivable) medium of self-expression and communication because there is no prior self or poetic theme or topic to be “expressed.” Nor is there anyone at the other end of

the line: the receiver is “off the hook” (“The Lives of the Toll Takers”; *All the Whiskey* 150). Disclaiming the role of the lyric subject, this experimental poetics places the creative process under the control of language, thereby eliminating the self or persona, which formerly gave cohesion to the text, and allowing language to take over the central structuring function of the lyrical self. Language poets welcome the incidental order of linguistic elements or *non sequiturs*, which rhetoric handbooks consider fallacies, to be avoided at all costs. They see the blatant manifestation of language in such cases, which must be heard, since, they believe, language knows more than its speakers, and if the speaker wants to know that “more,” they will have to interrogate language itself. Language never shows the world without itself being shown in the process. That is why when the poet speaks about the world, he always speaks about language as well.

Language is the frame and source of experience, Bernstein insists, while “experience is a dimension built into language” (*Content’s Dream* 35). In order to engage with language, the poet must find ways to foreground the materiality of language, and thereby demonstrate its non-transparency. The chief innovation of the language poets lies here, in ways of making use of the non-transparent nature of language, whereby attention may fall on language itself. “[T]he movement,” writes Bernstein, “is toward opacity/denseness—visibility of language through the making translucent of the medium” (*Content’s Dream* 70).

Bernstein developed his aesthetics of language writing by using Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language as a foundation by appropriating, among others, the philosopher’s idea of the speaker locked inside language. Accepting Wittgenstein’s well-known axiom, “[t]he limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (*Tractatus* 5.6), Bernstein insists that the relation of language to the world does not consist in language “accompanying” thought, but in language being thought and thinking itself. It is language that contains the world, not vice versa. “Truthfulness, love of language: attending to its telling” (“Palukaville”; *All the Whiskey* 31). “When I think in language, there aren’t ‘meanings’ going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought,” he quotes Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations* §329; *Content’s Dream* 62). Language, therefore, is really the space or territory within which the world exists, and meanings enter the world exclusively through language.

“My aim in poetry is to show the fly it’s in a bottle,” Bernstein writes in his preface to the Hungarian collection of his poetry (“To the Reader” 9), echoing Wittgenstein’s famous remark, “What is your aim in philosophy? To

show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (*Philosophical Investigations* §309). As opposed to philosophers, however, poets know, he insists, that there is no way out of the bottle. For this reason, the language text is never about something, it has no content to be paraphrased, no symbols and other tropes to be interpreted, and certainly no lyric I. Therefore, the job of the language poet is to bring about a consciousness of language in readers, to help them notice language, whose transparency was so naturally assumed. The poet will do this by "the sounding of language from the inside," as Perloff puts it (*Dance* 221), feeling out the lumps as in wood, places where the material thickens. It is these lumps that make it nontransparent, visible. Bernstein calls these visibility spots "typographicities" and "syntaxophonies" (*Content's Dream* 73), of which there are many, one just needs to notice them, sound them or feel them out. The poet who once made a living by writing and editing medical texts applies the medical term *dysraphysm*, meaning the "dysfunctional fusion of embryonic parts," to such spots of visibility in general, spots of "mis-seaming" of components in the texture of language, insisting that dysraphysm is "a prosodic device" (*The Sophist* 44).

Everything that is unusual or irregular counts as dysraphism, which makes language visible and deprives it of its medial transparency. He not only enjoys these irregularities but considers them utterly meaningful too. "Interruption and inscrutability enthrall me," he writes in his preface to his Hungarian collection ("To the Reader" 9). In line with the thinking of the Russian Formalists, Bernstein understands such irregularities as defamiliarizations and estrangements: they defamiliarize what is familiar and denaturalize what is natural, making even the mother tongue strange. As if Proust's famous aphorism, which claims that the language of all beautiful books sounds necessarily "strange," had been put into practice (305). In consequence, whatever was invisible and unperceivable now comes to the foreground. This is why Bernstein is so eager to create puns and construct other presumed "anomalies" of language; that is why he does not correct his typos (or probably even makes them consciously)—so that all the nodes, lumps, and gnarls that are normally smoothed out from the texture of language would show and help reveal meanings that otherwise would not surface. For no matter how little sense *non sequiturs* or puns or homonyms make, they still make *some* sense. As he writes in "The Lives of the Toll Takers,"

There is no plain sense of the word,
nothing is straightforward
description a lie behind a lie:
but truths can still be told. (*All the Whiskey* 172)

Elliptic condensation will often create syntactic doubling, where one syntactic unit can go either way, rounding off the preceding structure or beginning the subsequent one. Moreover, by typographically marking deletions, as he does in “Standing Target,” for example, he makes clear that empty spaces are not totally empty but contain traces of words fallen through the cracks of language.

fatigue
of of
open for
to , sees
doubles
glass must
are for
in : they
are , her
that it
watches, leaves,
days that
made
and the (*All the Whiskey* 64)

At first reading, this poem seems to register a deterioration of language (much like those humorous demonstrations of the step-by-step corruption of internet English): how sentences fall apart so that only (or mostly) function words and punctuation marks remain. As such, the lack of semantic content makes it impossible to decipher any “meaning” in the usual sense. However, with typography giving instructions as to how to read the poem, the words that have not fallen through the gaps receive extra weight. For typography tells us to pause at gaps but stress words that come after such pauses; while the pauses slow down the reading, the stress given to each remaining word gets even more acute. What is especially important is that with such indirect reading instructions, we must give weight to function words too, which are otherwise not stressed (when they are simply fillers between full words). So, it turns out that language does not fall apart

here but quite the opposite, it rebuilds itself like a lizard after having its tail cut off. The remaining words get additional weight, both full and function words. The distinction between the two gets eliminated, and with the doing away of sentences, the single word or morpheme emerges—with its tactile, sound, and visual materiality as well as its taste—as the basic unit not only with a life of its own but also to serve as the blocks of a language rebuilding itself. For it is not the poet who is the building agent here but language itself: the poet simply allows the lizard of language to regrow its sentences. But he has no voice in the process; the lyrical self is completely eliminated from this poetic exercise.

Bernstein has come up with another way of muting the poetic voice, or the voice of the lyrical self, which one might call polyphonic intertextuality. Discourses in the individual poems are overwhelmingly plural, ranging from the serious to the playful, from the tragic to the sarcastic. The distinctiveness of the applied registers usually comes from the foreign texts that get incorporated by quotation, citation, allusion, or evocation. In these recyclings, readers may identify not just quotations but textual residues, resonances, and ekphrases, in which the boundaries between the poet's own text (the one being written right there) and the texts appropriated from others (those that have already been written) become blurred. By admitting foreign materials into the language of the poem and containing simultaneously the language objects he “found” in the world outside, as a screen through which to read, he postmodernizes the modernist *objet trouvé*.

We can find examples for all kinds of allusions in Bernstein's poetry. The volume *All the Whiskey in Heaven*, for example, abounds in references to the Black Mountain poets (Olson, Duncan, Creeley), Thomas Cole, Simone de Beauvoir, Janis Joplin, Ezra Pound, the Apostle Paul, Villon, Shakespeare, Socrates, Marx, Machiavelli, Bing Crosby, and Robert Frost. Among such ekphrastic writing, when other texts are evoked through which the poems proceed, we have, in the volume *Recalculating*, texts written in the style of Thomas Campion, Leevi Lehto, Sylvia Plath, Douglas Messerli, Wallace Stevens, Whitman, and Wordsworth, mixed with translations, or transplantations, of Fernando Pessoa, Osip Mandelstam, Régis Bonvicino, Velimir Khlebnikov, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and Apollinaire.

Discursive polyphony will serve as the source of Bernstein's distinctive humor. Perhaps his humor is most strident when clichés and other bits from popular culture merge with the poetic and the serious. Any reader would complete the phrase *blue suede* with *shoes*, but in “The Klupzy

Girl,” Elvis is forgotten, and *blue suede* will refer to *pestilence* (*All the Whiskey* 88). In “Dysraphism,” the sentence “Reality is always greener” evokes the neighbor’s yard (*All the Whiskey* 118); while we hear the nursery rhyme “There was an old woman who lived in a shoe” beneath the lines “There was an old lady who lived in a / zoo” and its further distortion, “There was an old lady / who lives in a stew” (*All the Whiskey* 153–54).

Given the fact that the nodes and lumps in language come about from the meeting of texts, polyphonic intertextuality is a well-functioning form of dysraphism, which is why Bernstein is so fond of ironically-humorously overwriting aphorisms, axioms, sayings, proverbs, and slogans. For example, Bernstein alters the words of Jesus, “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24):

Harder for a rich man to read a poem than
for a hippopotamus to sing bel canto.

(“Reveal Codes”; *All the Whiskey* 193)

He also changes the familiar teaching of the Apostle Paul on all being one body in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12) into “We may be all one body but we’re sure as hell not one mind” (*All the Whiskey* 177) or he gives the peculiar contextualization of the postmodernist doctrine as “The Jew is a textual construction” (“Recalculating”; *Recalculating* 177).

The linguistic-cultural humor so pervasively present in Bernstein’s poetry is most obvious in his aphorism poems. “War Stories,” for example, is written almost completely in such distorted, overwritten aphorisms—even if the intertextuality is not the source of humor but of tragedy (*All the Whiskey* 283–90). We seem to laugh when reading “Foreign Body Sensation” because every sentence is a cliché, foreign linguistic body incorporated into the poem, borrowed from talk shows, blogs, where media heroes publicly admit some very private secret and give a latter-day conversion narrative of how their lives have changed (*All the Whiskey* 139–49). The multiple aphorisms of the prose poem “How Empty Is My Bread Pudding” evoke a whole culture, confronting the reader with the lies behind the clichés generally taken for granted (*All the Whiskey* 81–91). Here “[p]oetry is too important to be left to its own devices” (82) applies Clémenceau’s famous sentence (“War is too important to be left to the generals”) to poetry. Behind “Sometimes a cigar is just a symbol” (84) there resonates not only Freud’s well-known maxim (“Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar”) but also see Magritte’s pipe or non-pipe

("Ceci n'est pas une pipe"). The line "Two prosodies diverged in a striated field" (86) evokes Frost's "The Road Not Taken"; with "Make love not unilateralism" (90) we associate the sixties slogan, "Make love not war". Hearing "No man is a peninsula entire unto itself" (91) we immediately hear John Donne's familiar line, "No man is an island, entire of itself"; while "The pen is tinier than the sword" (91) clearly cites the proverb, "The pen is mightier than the sword." Such citations, near-citations, allusions, and textual residues seem to amplify the undecidability of the text, adding new quotation marks to the already questioned—because overwritten and appropriated—lines, sentences, clichés, and axioms.

These radical departures from the norms of language contribute to what Bernstein calls imploded sentences, sentences that are fragmentary, broken, associative, acrobatic, cumulative, incomplete, and without closure, as well as rough, knotty, lumpy, and gnarled, resisting the "syntactic ideality" of the complete sentence. They are very much alive too, the word *sentence* being a near homonym of the word *sentience*, he claims ("Recalculating"; *Recalculating* 177). As he writes,

Clark Coolidge's improvisatory extensions of the line refuse the closure of the subject/verb/object sentence; refuse, that is, the syntactic ideality of the complete sentence. . . . In imploded-sentence poetry, meaning flows durationally—*horizontally*—by means of the linear continuousness of the sweeping, syncopated rhythms. While in the complete/closed sentence, attention is deflected to an abstracted, or accompanying, "meaning" that is being "conveyed," in the imploded sentence, the reader stays plugged in to the wave-like pulse of the writing. In other words, you keep moving through the writing without having to come up for ideational air: the ideas are all inside the process. (*Artifice of Absorption* 37)

Indeed, imploded sentences might resist "syntactic ideality," the rules of (semantic) selection and (syntactic) combination, in varying degrees, as well as rules of text grammar demanding that consecutive sentences are semantically related.

"The Klupzy Girl" is a classroom example of Bernstein's language writing in imploded sentences. Its interpretive reading must take a mode very different from what we are used to, given the fact that the poem resists reading for sense, and therefore no paraphrase can be given that might do justice to it. Our reading of such a "difficult poem" (see the essay "The Difficult Poem"), as he admits his imploded sentence poems are, must rely on the assumption that poetry is neither self-expression nor expression; no

transcendental ego preexists the poem (one that could give cohesion to the lines), and, given the avoidance of referentiality, no topic can be deduced from the sentences. Here are the first twenty-eight lines of the long poem:

Poetry is like a swoon, with this difference:
it brings you to your senses. Yet his
parables are not singular. The smoke from
the boat causes the men to joke. Not
gymnastic: pyrotechnic. The continuousness
of a smile—wry, perfume scented. No this
would go fruity with all these changes
around. Sense of variety: panic. Like
my eye takes over from the front
yard, three pace. Idle gaze—years
right down the window. Not clairvoyance,
predictions, deciphering—enacting. Analytically,
i.e., thoughtlessly. Begin to push and cue
together. Or I originate out of this
occurrence, stoop down, bend on. The
Protest-ant's voice within, calling for
this to be shepherded. For moment's
expression's enthroning. Able to be
alibied (contiguity of vacuity). Or
telepathetically? Verena read the epistle
with much deliberateness. If we are
not to be phrasemongers, we must
sit down and take the steps that will
give these policies life. I fumbled clumsily
with the others—the evocations, explanations,
glossings of “reality” seemed like stretching
it to cover ground rather than make
or name or push something through. (*All the Whiskey* 84)

The first sentence is just about the only normative or, as Bernstein puts it, “complete/closed sentence”; here the academic poet gives his thesis sentence to the lines that follow, explaining, in his own manner, how poetry brings us to our senses. The coincidence of prosody and grammar in the first line gives weight to his assertion while demanding slow comprehending reading, with a pause at the end. However, only the first and last lines are end-stopped; all the others are run-on, with line endings cutting into the middle of noun and verb phrases, even prepositional phrases. The units separated by full stops are

sentences or noun and verb phrases; each syntactic unit is a one-line long total, but each begins towards the end of one line and continues until two-thirds or three-quarters of the next. This grammatical structure of non-coincidence between prosody and grammar contributes to the “durational” or “horizontal” flow of meanings that Bernstein found important to emphasize in his description previously quoted. The wave-like structure evolves from the speed of the sentences and phrases: right after one ends, the next begins without stopping, performing indeed the movement of waves.

The sentences and phrases themselves give the illusion of grammaticalness: they look like normative units, at least upon first glance in that they follow the rules of the English sentence in, for example, terms of agreement (plural subjects get verbs in the plural): “his / parables are not singular”; “The smoke from / the boat causes men to joke”; “I originate out of this / occurrence.” However, with an obedience to rules of combination, only the structures are normative, while—since the rules of selection are disobeyed—the semantics of these complete/closed units does not give out meaning or sense. There is no way to catch the meaning of “his / parables are not singular”; to imagine how “The continuousness / of a smile” is “scented”; how “my eye” might “take over from the front / yard”; or how a “moment’s / expression” might be “enthroning.” Yet we do take away something from the poem, for the observations, as *unheimlich* as they are, do contribute to a woman’s portrait. We sense, for example, that she prefers sameness (“Sense of variety: panic”), that she lived her years in “idle gaze,” and that the scent of her smile is fruity. Given these features, we begin to see her, as Jerome McGann points out, “for what she is, for what she’s *doing*” (722). This world “can only be explained in its own terms,” McGann continues, “from what Rosetti called ‘an *inner* standing-point’” (723).

What is at least as important as semantics in the poem is the sheer pleasure we get from the waterfall of short observations. The source of this pleasure lies in the words, as the reader experiences their materiality, their mouthfulness, so to speak. This then is intensified by unexpected correspondences such as internal rhymes (*smoke—boat—joke*; *contiguity—vacuity*), alliterations and assonances (*able—alibied*, *evocation—explanations*), word plays and creative innovations (*Protest-ant*, *phrasemonger*), play with long words (*parables—singular*; *gymnastic—pyrotechnic*; *contiguity—vacuity*) and short words (*push—cue*; *idle—gaze—years*; *stoop down—bend on*) as well as with metaphorical and literal meanings (*stretching it—to cover ground*). As we read on, we are more and more absorbed by language, while the words more and more enact the girl so that we experience her in language. It is the overall pleasure taken in

language that becomes the most important character of the Klupzy girl: contained in language, she becomes pleasure materialized as words.

It is important to note that not only do individual syntactic units disobey the rules of semantic selection but also the sequence of sentences. In other words, the whole sequence does not “make sense” from a text grammar perspective either. The order of sentences is incidental and contingent; parataxis is the overwhelming structural principle, simply allowing sentences and phrases to follow one another, in a *non sequitur* manner. Having given up trying to find meaningful connections between units separated by full stops, the reader surrenders to language, yields to being absorbed by language, thereby appropriating the pleasure of the Klupzy girl—probably even becoming her via this absorption.

As we read one line after the other, we begin to understand the claim made in what I called the poem’s thesis sentence, the first line and a half (three-quarters, to be precise), setting the whole section in motion: why poetry is “like a swoon,” with the difference that “it brings you to your senses.” Swoon as a state caused by poetry belongs to the traditional understanding of the power of language and music both the poet and the reader experience in poetry; it is the perlocutionary effect the lyric has been held to have on its listeners. For the language poet, however, and certainly in this language poem, another meaning is foregrounded: the state of being deprived of control, of agency, and for this reason undergoing some “rapturous emotion” (as I found in a 1953 *Webster’s New World Dictionary* under the entry “swoon”), as well as “admiration” and “adoration” (which a recent Google search brought up for “swoon”). The second part of the definition is even more important to the language poet: that poetry brings us to our senses. Here, at least two meanings of the phrase “brings you to your senses” are involved: one is the surprise arousal that unfamiliar and even bizarre lexical combinations might provoke, while the other is the awakening of all the senses in the experience of language. The former is a common reaction, when we wake up, startled, from the stupor of the quotidian by an atypical and uncanny comment; the latter is a response carefully administered by the language poem to involve all our senses when experiencing language.

Bernstein’s imploded sentence is a most radical poetic device for several reasons. For one, while disregarding the “syntactic ideality” of English, it gives space for the pleasure of language to accelerate. The poem becomes an experience, a material assemblage that we apprehend with our senses. But this is not all; it realigns the balance between poetic self and poetic language, on the one hand, and grammar and text, on the other. As to the former, in lyric

poetry the lyrical self acts as the agent who controlled language, structured the text, and “expressed” some subjective vision in figurative language. In language writing the poetic self disappears while language takes over the control of the text. As to the latter, the violation of the rules of grammar does not happen for itself but in order that we may avoid thinking and speaking in patterns and structures that preexist our sentences in which the actuality of the meanings suffers. In short, in imploded sentences the two processes I surveyed in my essay meet: the elimination of a pre-existing poetic self and the elimination of a pre-existing form, grammatic and poetic alike.

Conclusion

The poetries I have surveyed represent various modes of breaking with the subject as well as breaking with form. Dickinson, we saw, launched a particular attention to scenes devoid of human presence, while not only did she break with regular meter and form, but also liberated her poetry from the rules of syntax. The Imagists, following this poetics of attention of the receding self, chose grammar as the governing formal principle (instead of regular meter and stanzaic form), subordinating prosody to grammar. Concrete poetry did away with the first-person singular by replacing the linear sentence with the concrete image, time with space, which also eliminated the possibility of regular form. Finally, language poetry eliminated both self and form by placing the process of writing under the control of language, replacing the self with language both as the organizing principle of the text and as the object of poetic attention. In short, the radical tradition I have discussed is informed by the double gesture of eliminating the lyrical self, on the one hand, and first the loosening, then the doing away with regular form, on the other. That is, the destabilization of the lyrical self has led to various modes and degrees of free verse, as well as to violations of rules of grammar, indicating that self and form are integrally related.

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Enikő Bollobás, Professor Emeritus at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, corresponding member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and editor-in-chief of the Academy’s monthly journal *Magyar Tudomány* [Hungarian Science]. She has written monographs on American free verse and non-lyric poetries (Akadémiai, 1986 and 2020), as well as on the poets Charles Olson (Twayne, 1992) and Emily Dickinson (Balassi, 2015); two histories of American literature (Osiris, 2005 and 2015); and theoretical

inquiries into poetics, subjectivity, and performativity (Eötvös 2021; Balassi, 2020; Balassi, 2015; Peter Lang, 2010). Her numerous essays have appeared in international and Hungarian scholarly journals, among them, *American Quarterly*, *Arcade*, *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Paideuma*, *Language and Style*, *Word and Image*, *HJEAS*, and *Americana*.

Notes

1 I will not touch upon other ways of “getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego” or of the “alternatives to the ego-position,” as Charles Olson famously puts it in two foundational essays, “Projective Verse” and “Mayan Letters” (*Selected Writings* 24; *Mayan Letters* 83), such as the long poem, the serial poem, and the prose poem. On the “larger forms” of the serial poem as modes of shifting to non-lyric forms, see Barbour, esp. 7–32.

2 Or $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ poets, if the name refers not to the attachment to language of the so-called language poets but to the journal they gathered around.

Works Cited

- Altieri, Charles. *Enlarging the Temple—New Directions in American Poetry in the 1960s*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1979. Print.
- Anderson, Douglas. “Presence and Place in Emily Dickinson’s Poetry.” *The New England Quarterly* 57.2 (1984): 205–24. Print.
- Barbour, Douglas. *Lyric/Anti-Lyric: Essay on Contemporary Poetry*. Edmonton, AB: NeWest, 2001. Print.
- Bernstein, Charles. *All the Whiskey in Heaven: Selected Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010. Print.
- . *Artifice of Absorption*. Michigan: Singing Horse, 1987. Print.
- . *Attack of the Difficult Poems*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2011. Print.
- . *Content’s Dream: Essays 1975–1984*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Books, 1986. Print.
- . “The Difficult Poem.” *Attack of the Difficult Poems*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2011. 3–6. Print.
- . *The Sophist*. Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Books, 1987. Print.
- . “To the Reader.” *Beomlott mondatok* [Imploded sentences]. Ed. Enikő Bollobás. Budapest: Hungarian PEN Club–Pluralica, 2015. 9–10. Print.
- Bloom, Harold. *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1980. Print.
- Culler, Jonathan. “L’Hyperbole et l’apostrophe: Baudelaire and the Theory of the Lyric.” *Yale French Studies* 125/126 (2014): 85–101. Print.
- . *Theory of the Lyric*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015. Print.

- De Quincey, Thomas. *Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets*. London: J. M. Dent, 1961. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Che cos'è la poesia?" *A Derrida Reader*. Ed. Peggy Kamuf. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 221–37. Print.
- Dijkstra, Bram. *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969. Print.
- Dickinson, Emily. "Four Trees." MS. *Emily Dickinson Archive*. Web. 1 June 2024. www.edickinson.org/editions/1/image_sets/8645.
- . *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. R. W. Franklin. Vol. II. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1998. Print.
- Eliot, T. S. *The Use of Poetry & the Use of Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber, 1970. Print.
- Erlich, Victor. *Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1981. Print.
- Hatlen, Burt. "The Quest for the Concrete Particular, or Do Poets Have Something to Say to Sociolinguists?" *Rhetoric* 78 (1979): 143–77. Print.
- Hulme, T. E. "Romanticism and Classicism." *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 68–83. Print.
- James, William. *Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1. New York: Holt, 1890. Print.
- Knights, Lionel Charles. "Defining the Self Poems of Emily Dickinson." *The Sewanee Review* 91.1 (1983): 357–75. Print.
- Klonsky, Milton, ed. *Speaking Pictures: A Gallery of Pictorial Poetry from the Sixteenth Century to the Present*. New York: Harmony Books, 1975. Print.
- LaBerge, David L. "Attention." *Psychological Science* 1.3 (1990): 156–62. Print.
- MacGowan, Christopher. "Burt Hatlen on William Carlos Williams." *Paideuma* 40 (2013): 85–93. Print.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. "Crisis of Verse." *Divagations*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007. 21–211. Print.
- McGann, Jerome. "Beauty, the Irreal, and the Willing Assumption of Disbelief." *Critical Inquiry* 30.4 (2004): 717–38. Print.
- Miller, Cristanne. *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987. Print.
- . *Reading in Time. Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century*. Amherst: The U of Massachusetts P, 2012. Print.

- Müller, Friedrich von. *Goethes Unterhaltungen mit dem Kanzler Friedrich von Müller* [Goethe's conversations with the Chancellor Friedrich von Müller]. Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1870. Print.
- Olson, Charles. *Mayan Letters*. Ed. Robert Creeley. Palma de Mallorca: Divers, 1953. Print.
- . *Selected Writings of Charles Olson*. Ed. Robert Creeley. New York: New Directions, 1966. Print.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1985. Print.
- . *Infrathin: An Experiment in Micropoetics*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2021. Print.
- . "Poetry Chronicle: 1970–71." *Contemporary Literature* 14.1 (1973): 97–131. Print.
- . "The Search for 'Prime Words': Pound, Duchamp, and the Nominalist Ethos." *Differentials: Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy*. Tuscaloosa: The U of Alabama P, 2004. Print.
- Pound, Ezra. "A Retrospect." *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*. Ed. Donald M. Allen and Warren Tallman. New York: Grove, 1973. 36–48. Print.
- . *Selected Poems*. Ed. T. S. Eliot. London: Faber, 1973. Print.
- Proust, Marcel. "Notes sur la Littérature et la Critique" [Notes on Literature and Criticism]. *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971. 209–312. Print.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Complete Works*. Trans. Wallace Fowlie. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2005. Print.
- Valéry, Paul. "On the Teaching of *Poetics* at the Collège de France." *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*. Vol. 13. *Aesthetics*. Ed. Jackson Mathews. Trans. Ralph Manheim. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1964. 83–88. Print.
- Williams, William Carlos. *The Collected Earlier Poems*. New York: New Directions, 1966.
- . *Paterson*. New York: New Directions, 1963. Print.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M Anscombe. New York: Macmillan, 1968. Print.
- . *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. C. K. Ogden. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*. London: Hogarth Press, 1924. Print.

Wright-Bushman, Katy. "A Poetics of Consenting Attention: Simone Weil's Prayer and the Poetry of Denise Levertov." *Christianity and Literature* 62.3 (2013). 369–92. Print.