SENSE THROUGH NONSENSE
READING DIFFICULT POETRY

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_____
Prof. Dr. Sencer Ayata
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

_____
Prof. Dr. Wolf Konig
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read and this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

_____
Assist. Prof. Dr. Margaret J-M Sönmez
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Prof. Dr. Nursel İçöz M.E.T.U. E.LIT. _____

Assist. Prof. Dr. Margaret J-M Sönmez M.E.T.U. E.LIT. _____

Prof. Dr. Ayşegül Yüksel A.U. E. LIT. _____

I hereby declare that all the information in this document has been presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, Surname : Bengü Taşkesen

Signature :

ABSTRACT

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READING DIFFICULT POETRY

Taşkesen, Bengü

M. A., Department of English Language Teaching

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Margaret J-M Sönmez

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This thesis analyses the difficulties in reading modern poetry that arise out of not the references but the unconventional use of language, and presents them in a theoretical framework based on Julia Kristeva's semanalytic theory and Melanie Parsons's application of it to a comparison of Nonsense literature and twentieth century poetry. Then aspects of the works of G. M. Hopkins, Dylan Thomas and Edith Sitwell are discussed and poems by these poets are analysed within this framework.

Keywords: Difficult poetry, Poetic language, semanalytic, Nonsense.

ÖZ

SAÇMA ARACILIĞIYLA ANLAM
ZOR ŞİİRLERİN OKUNMASI

Taşkesen, Bengü

Yüksek Lisans, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi

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Bu tez modern şiirin okunmasında, gönderimlerden ziyade, dilin sıradışı kullanımından kaynaklanan zorlukları çözümlemekte ve bu zorlukları, Julia Kristeva'nın semanalitik kuramı ile, Melanie Parsons'ın bu kuramı yirminci yüzyıl şiiri ile Saçma edebiyatın bir karşılaştırmasına uygulamasını temel alan kuramsal bir çerçevede sunmaktadır. Daha sonra, G. M. Hopkins, Dylan Thomas ve Edith Sitwell'in eserlerinin özellikleri ve bu şairlerin şiirleri bu kuramsal çerçeve içinde çözümlenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Zor şiir, şiir dili, semanalitik, Saçma.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still.
>
> (T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton", ll.149 -53.)

The century we left behind was one of great variety and experimentation in English poetry. Despite the variety, a characteristic common to a remarkable portion of the twentieth century poems, such as those of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, e.e. cummings, Dylan Thomas, among many others, is the way language is employed, which makes them puzzling and obscure, hence "difficult" to the reader. According to Eliot, "poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. [..] The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." (qtd. in Allot, 21)

The more significant part of this qualification is not (for example as in Eliot's own poems) simply the referential difficulty brought about by the numerous footnotes required to enlighten his erudite allusions, which ultimately refer to some meaning in a more or less rational way. Although such requirements may leave the reader with a deep feeling of inadequacy, the fact that Eliot himself often provided annotations can be said to indicate that this sort of difficulty can easily be resolved. But there is another difficulty which arises out of the way language is used, the difficulty posed by what cannot be annotated and resolved to any rational meaning, but is inherent in the act of "meaning", where referential language, the only medium

of communication between the poet and the reader, nevertheless seems not to be the common medium for that communication. An example may be found in the following lines from Dylan Thomas's first sonnet of the "Altarwise by owl-light" sequence:

> Altarwise by owl-light in the halfway-house
> The gentleman lay graveward with his furies;
> Abaddon in the hang-nail cracked from Adam,
> And, from his fork, a dog among the fairies,
> The atlas-eater with a jaw for news,
> Bit out the mandrake with tomorrow's scream. (1-6)

Here, the "dislocations" Eliot speaks of may be sampled in coined combinations such as "altarwise", "graveward", "halfway-house" and "atlas-eater"; in expressions like "the hang-nail cracked from Adam" (what is a "hang-nail" and how can it be cracked?) and in the uncertain syntax of the lines. After reading such a poem, a reader may often be left feeling that, although the poem is not meaningless, he has failed to understand or has incompletely understood a substantial part of what the poem communicated. Or, perhaps, one may be left feeling that he has grasped something that the poem communicated, but cannot pin it down, as it is something that he cannot name or express; it may be an experience too abstract to be communicated through language, although the poet has used language to communicate it. As Allot notes, "Dislocated discourse makes for economical compression in writing but hard reading" (21).

In his essay "On Difficulty", Steiner differentiates four categories of difficulty in poetry: "contingent", "modal", "tactical" and "ontological" (18-47). Although not agreeing with all his classifications and the causes he assigns to them (for example, as will be discussed later, the last two of his categories, the tactical and ontological difficulties, may sometimes overlap so much that to the reader they become

indistinguishable), still it may provide a good starting point to review these categories.

By "contingent" difficulty Steiner means the referential difficulty posed by references to the whole canon of (Western) culture (22), the usage of obsolete words or creation of new combinations out of existing words (20); such difficulty can theoretically be solved by doing one's "homework" and "looking up"; however, practically, the right source that will enlighten the specific referential difficulty at hand may not be available (26-7). So the difficulty is not just a matter of discovering the referential relation but also a matter of chance, thus contingent in both senses. Although agreeing with Steiner that "the poet is a neologist, a recombinant wordsmith" (20), it is assumed in this thesis that the difficulty resulting from "wordsmithing" should not come under contingency, as it is not simply a referential difficulty, as will be discussed in the theoretical chapter. Coinages and condensations may result from the conscious intentions of the poet (hence be a tactic) or from his unconscious.

The "modal" difficulty is the one experienced when "the lexical-grammatical components are pellucid" but when "the poem in front of us articulates a stance towards human conditions which we find essentially inaccessible or alien" and the reader finds it hard to "grasp" in the sense of entering into the spirit of the poem or to find it poetic (27-8). An example may be found in "The Flea" by John Donne, even after the conceits, allusions and every unfamiliar word have been explained; students may still find it strange as poems on love and eroticism go. The modal difficulties can be overcome by the reader striving to overcome his or her "parochialism" and adjusting his outlook to possibilities other than his habitual ones

(40); after all, literature is, among other things, about different experiences and different ways of experiencing. Although this study will not focus on poems with modal difficulties, the approach adopted can also help resolve modal difficulty, as Appendix B, in which "Makinalaşmak" by Nazım Hikmet is studied, depicts.

The "tactical" difficulty arises when the poet is intentionally "obscure in order to achieve certain specific stylistic effects" (33), mainly for purposes of freshness or defamiliarization, for "dislocating and goading into new life the supine energies of word and grammar" (40). However, the urge for such new life may not be as consciously intentional as Steiner assumes, but result from a deeper drive, which takes us to the final category, the "ontological" difficulty:

> [T]his type of difficulty implicates the functions of language and of the poem as a communicative performance, because it puts in question the existential suppositions that lie behind poetry as we have known it … Difficulties of this category cannot be looked up; they cannot be resolved by genuine readjustment or artifice of sensibility, they are not intentional techniques of retardation and creative uncertainty (though these may be their immediate effect). Ontological difficulties confront us with blank questions about the nature of human speech, about the status of significance, about the necessity and purpose of the construct which we have, with more or less rough and ready consensus, come to perceive as a poem. (41)

The present study will concentrate not on referential difficulty but on the difficulties of the kind Steiner termed tactical and ontological. Thus for its purposes, "difficult poetry" means poetry that is difficult to understand for the reader due to unconventional use of language, as well as due to too frequent or too extensive use of conventional poetic devices[1]. Such poems are characterised by condensation, coined or unconventionally used words; syntactic, grammatical or other structural

[1] As will be discussed in the theoretical background, the poetic devices, such as figurative language, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and rhythm are themselves dislocations; however, they have become conventional, are taken for granted and do not create difficulty when used moderately. Nevertheless, their too frequent employment in a single poem, as in Hopkins's work, not only creates a nonsense effect by dazzling the reader and diverting his attention from the semantic component, but also points to other than referential meaning sought to be communicated.

omissions; all sorts of dislocations and disruptions of language, besides often an emphasis on sound and cadence, as if they were written more for their music than for their sense. As such, difficult poetry is not unique to the twentieth century, although examples of it abound in that period. Almost all poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins or Emily Dickinson may come under that appellation, besides certain rare earlier examples throughout literary history, such as Shakespeare's "Will" sonnets, 135 and 136.

As Allot also notes, when F. R. Leavis published his *New Bearings in English Poetry*, Hopkins's separation in milieu, as a Jesuit priest of the 19th century, from Eliot and Pound, did not prevent Leavis from juxtaposing all three[2] (23). Nevertheless, the abundance of difficult poetry especially in the first half of the first half of the twentieth century may point to certain historical circumstances favouring it. Although they were in time canonized, it is relevant that makers of difficult poetry, such as Eliot, Sitwell, Stein, and Joyce, started as *avant-garde*, they were artistically in a marginal situation and reacting to certain aspects of their civilization. To name only a few, Eliot was reacting to "the loss of vitality, and of a sense of purpose as a result of a decay", Pound was reacting to the "drabness and levelling down in a commercial and industrial society" (Allot 24), and Sitwell to the mediocrity of Georgian poets. They were seeking new ways of expression, both in form and content, making use of language, but also trying to reach beyond language, because of its aspect as a social construct with all its burden of common-sense, ideology and social order. The dislocations Eliot saw necessary for the poetry of his

[2] As Hopkins's work achieved substantial publication only in 1918, 39 years after his death, his influence on English poetry was delayed and appeared almost at the same time with those of Pound and Eliot (Leavis 119).

time are the same signifying practices, of "a particular type of modern literature", identified by Kristeva in her *Revolution in Poetic Language* as pointing to "a crisis of social structures and their ideological, coercive and necrophilic [*sic*.] manifestations" (15). According to Kristeva, in the writings of periods of crisis in every civilization, in "the dawn and decline of every mode of production", such dislocations and obscurities occur, but the capitalist society has created a particularly "spectacular shattering of discourse" (1980;15). Steiner also emphasises that his "ontological" difficulty is more characteristic in the "European literatures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" and gives among its possible reasons "the mutual disenchantment between the artist" and the capitalist society, causing the former to become increasingly more isolated and seek an expression "unsullied" by the latter. (41-2)

In speaking of understanding, the basic assumption seems, according to the silent communal convention of language, to be that the "meaning" to be understood is a message, denotation, or a rational sense. This study will try to show that difficult poetry "means" in other ways besides a rational, denotative one, that it aims at not an "objective" meaning that is bound by the social linguistic conventions enabling practical communication, but a highly subjective one. For perhaps the difficulty of poetry is not only on the side of the reader, it may also concern the poet who finds language, his only tool, not sufficient for what he wants to communicate, as sampled in "This is not what I meant, at all" [3]. The approach employed for this purpose will be based on Julia Kristeva's theory of poetic language, as expounded by *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Desire in Language*, and Nonsense theory,

[3] T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", l. 110.

especially Marnie Parsons's *Touch Monkeys: Nonsense Strategies for Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry*, to which this study is particularly indebted. The first theory locates as the source of difficulty the workings of the preverbal unconscious. The latter is employed because, as occasional examples from that genre will hopefully depict, the study of Nonsense highlights the workings of difficult poetry, although difficult poetry is definitely not nonsense, and in Nonsense, seemingly no meaning is intended, or rather, a lack of meaning is intended.[4] Kristeva points to this affinity between poetic language and Nonsense, when she says there is "a heterogeneousness to meaning and signification" which produces " 'musical' but also nonsense effects". (1980; 133)

According to Tigges, Nonsense is a genre[5], in verse or prose, characterized by "playful creation of a suggested reality from language and its logic, […] and the maintenance of an unresolved tension between meaning and non-meaning" (254). Although examples of pure Nonsense are found in Lewis Carroll's and Edward Lear's works, it is not a genre limited to these two writers and hence only an eccentricity of the Victorian period, but can be found in literature of all periods, if only in patches and fragments, and in nursery rhymes in both Turkish and English. Again to cite examples from Shakespeare, Bottom's various speeches in *A*

[4] Following Parsons, "nonsense" with lower case "n" will be used throughout this study to indicate linguistic or logical nonsense, as in Chomsky's example "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously", and "Nonsense" to indicate the genre.

[5] As Parsons claims, by discussing the attempts at definition, showing them all to be incomplete and finally refraining from a definiton, defining Nonsense is, like defining poetry, almost impossible (11-6). However, for the purpose of this study, Tigges's definition seems adequate.

Midsummer Night's Dream, and some of Ariel's speeches in *The Tempest*, are such fragments[6].

The beginning assumption of this study is based on Jakobson's proposition that there is a "poetic function" of language, differing from the daily language used for practical communication (356). According to Themerson, poetic language uses "nonsensical means" (e.g. figurative language) to produce sense that is more effective than that produced by sensical means (as in the practical, daily use of language) (8). Although certain aspects of Fish's reader response theory are incorporated into the approach of this study, and Fish objects to an approach distinguishing between ordinary language and poetic language, and seeing the latter as a deviation of the former (106), this does not actually create a conflict. For, what Fish rather requires is ultimately paying always and to all language the same attention afforded to poetic language (32), and paying attention to *all* of language is what will be attempted in the analyses in this thesis. For, a study of Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and the dialectics of the *genotext* and *phenotext* leads to paying attention to aspects of language other than its semantic content. In brief, it seems possible that difficult modern poetry may usefully be analysed in terms of dislocation, condensation, certain renderings of synaesthetic experience, ellipsis and emphasis on sound. It is postulated that such analyses should not only shed light on how the poems can be read, but also provide some crucial, indeed fundamental, evidence towards a Modernist poetics.

[6] Burgess cites a passage of pure nonsense from "a contemporary of Shakespeare", then another from one Samuel Foote, an actor "more interested in sound than meaning" (18). Such a coincidence is suggestive for reading Shakespeare.

As it is thus assumed that difficult poetry is the one which makes unconventional use of language characterized by dislocations and a dazzlingly extensive use of conventional poetic devices, to the extent that the effect produced on the reader, at least at first, is similar to that of Nonsense, the poets whose works show such qualities will be studied. As mentioned above, there are many options to choose from, as experimentation and innovation characterizing the twentieth century has produced many difficult poems. It is important to choose, for the purposes of the theory that will be applied, works by poets who have been marked for originality. What is meant here by "original" is not only uniqueness of style, but also the allowing of dominance to nonsense effects, resulting from the workings of the unconscious in Kristeva's theory, at the cost of possible frustration of readers' expectation of sense and the risk of failing to achieve any access to, or communication with, readers. Once the way is paved for poetry that does not make easily consumed sense, and what was once *avant-garde* is accepted into the canon, difficulty may become, for later poets, the way poetry can very well be written, no longer a challenging of the conventions, but another norm. The works of such later poets need not lack originality, but when a theory focuses on the disruptions of the norms of language and communication, which result from unconscious drives, as Kristeva's does, it is more interesting to choose works by poets who did not have such a norm of difficult communication before them.

Thus the poets whose works will be studied here are Gerard Manley Hopkins, Edith Sitwell and Dylan Thomas. It is assumed that in the works of these poets there is a Kristevan dominance of the unconscious at the cost of communicative convention. Hopkins's work achieved publication more than thirty years after his

decease, largely due to its difficulty. Sitwell, following a brief attention paid to her poem-performances, was never truly canonized. Thomas had Eliot, Hopkins, Dada and surrealism before him as examples of difficulty, but the difficulty of his work, in its originality, is different from their examples.

In the following chapters of this study, the approach mentioned above will be expounded and practiced. The second chapter will present the semiotic theory of Kristeva, and will bring in comparisons with Nonsense, as well as briefly touching on the relevant comments of various thinkers such as Kant, Deleuze, Bakhtin, Foucault, also dwelling on the place of reader response in the approach by incorporating various aspects of theoreticians such as Iser and Fish. The third chapter, after briefly dealing with the parallelism between Hopkins' own comments on his poetry and Kristeva's approach, will analyse his poem "The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo" to dwell on the disruptions of language that give rise to the difficulty. The fourth chapter will be a study of how the approach applies to Thomas's "Fern Hill", and the fifth chapter will again be an application of the approach to Sitwell's "The Drum". The conclusion chapter will present a summing up of the approach and comments resulting from its applications.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 "Hesitation between sound and sense": The dialectics of the semiotic and the symbolic

In order to study the type of difficulty specified in the introduction, that is, the tactical and ontological difficulties that characterise the work of certain poets often included under the category "modern", the way language functions in poetry must first be reviewed. Jakobson of the so-called Russian formalist school saw poetic language as a "deviation" from or a deformation of "normal" language (Pomorska vii, Fish 106). According to Jakobson, there are six functions of language at work in all communication acts in any language, one of which is the poetic function (353). Each of these functions of language is determined by one of the six factors in communication: addresser, addressee, context, message, contact and code. The referential function of language, also called the "denotative" function, is the most commonly encountered of these, and oriented towards the context. It is the function that dominates the practical, daily use of language. Among others, the metalingual function is oriented towards the code (language) and thus language is used to speak about itself (e.g. "What does this mean?") (356), while the emotive or "expressive" function is used to express the addresser's attitude and feelings (354). Although one function dominates in a given act of verbal communication, it does not exclude the presence of others. Of these six functions, the poetic function is the one oriented towards the message (354). As a function can be present in any verbal act, the poetic function is not limited to poetry but can be present in any verbal communication;

however, in poetry it is the dominant function. Inversely, other functions may be present in poems too; in lyric poetry, for example, the emotive function may also be present; on the other hand, difficulties or defamiliarized usages met in a poem may, by drawing attention to the language used, to some extent add a metalingual quality. One example is e. e. cummings's "anyone lived in a pretty howtown", in which, as Parsons notes, pronouns are made almost proper nouns, allowing "the poem to be read in at least two ways- as a love story proper that is set in the context of human apathy, and as the dramatization of a grammatical rule" (51).

The poetic function operates in a specific way to promote "the palpability of signs" (Jakobson 356), making language more significant, striking, effective and memorable; however, this operation, in poetry, is also related to the source of difficulty. In making poetry, or on other occasions when the poetic function becomes dominant, instead of simply choosing one word among many with the same or similar meanings, the addresser also chooses words so that, when combined, they will have some parallelism or similarity, in other words, equivalence, among themselves, "[t]he poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (Jakobson 358). Thus, for example, when syllables are chosen and combined such that a long syllable in a line corresponds to equivalents in the form of other long syllables in that line and other lines, the same applying to the short syllables and pauses, and their overall frequency and number, meter emerges (358). The principle of the projection of equivalence gives rise to rhyme, meter, alliteration and other musical devices.

But the similarity does not stop there; that would only be verse, not necessarily poetry. On the other hand, word sequences combined with similarity of sound may not always make sense, as can be seen in Nonsense poetry. According to Jakobson, the principle of equivalence projection in the poetic function continues on to the level of meaning, and sound in poetry may be at least as important as the referential meaning, for poetry has been described as "hesitation between sound and sense" (Paul Valéry qtd. in Jakobson 367). It is interesting that Jakobson cites Hopkins, one of the poets who will be studied in this thesis, to demonstrate the principle of projection of equivalence extending from the sound to the sense:

> The artificial part of poetry, perhaps we shall be right to say all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. […] But parallelism is of two kinds necessarily- where the opposition is clearly marked, and where it is transitional or rather chromatic. Only the first kind, that of marked parallelism, is concerned with the structure of verse- in rhythm, the recurrence of a certain sequence of syllables, in metre, the recurrence of a certain sequence of rhythm, in alliteration, in assonance and in rhyme. Now the force of this recurrence is to beget a recurrence answering to it in the words or thought and, speaking roughly and rather for the tendency than the invariable result, the more marked parallelism in structure whether of elaboration or of emphasis begets more marked parallelism in the words and sense…to the marked or abrupt kind of parallelism belong metaphor, simile, parable, and so on, where the effect is sought in likeness of things, and antithesis, contrast and so on, where it is sought in unlikeness (Hopkins qtd. in Jakobson 368).

It is a dramatic argument coming from a poet known for his "difficulty", that parallelism of sound expands transitionally or chromatically onto the level of meaning through association. The similarity of sound "must be evaluated in terms of similarity and/or dissimilarity of meaning" because, while in referential language the relation of the sound component of the sign to the signified is completely arbitrary, as put forth by Saussure, in poetry, somehow, it is not so (Jakobson 372). It is not just a matter of 'Pope's precept […] "the sound must seem an Echo of the sense" '; what Jakobson implicitly claims is, through sound symbolism a meaning other than the referential, denotative one can be expressed (372). But why, whence

comes this other-than-referential meaning found almost exclusively in poetry, that perhaps gives it its unique quality? Kristeva's semanalytic theory provides a possible answer.

Roudiez explains that Kristeva uses the term semiotic not in the sense of the study of signs (semiology) but as "the actual organization, or disposition, within the body of instinctual drives […] as they affect language and its practice, in dialectical conflict with […] the symbolic" (in "Introduction" to *Desire and Language,* Kristeva 1980; 18). The semiotic is the articulation of a constant flow of energies contained at the *chora*, a subconscious "totality" of the drives with all their dynamism, flow, stops and changes (Kristeva, 1984; 25), a crucible of desire and energy. Not only is the semiotic and its dialectical conflict with the symbolic the source of poetic language according to Kristeva, but she also refuses to see poetic language as a deviation from "ordinary" language as Jakobson did. Instead, poetic language is a fuller use of language, with more possibilities and potential, and thus literary activity is an opposition to social restrictions imposed upon the individual via language (Roudiez's "Introduction" to *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva 1984; 2).

Building upon Lacan (with certain modifications adapted from Deleuze and Guattari), Kristeva claims that before the acquisition of language, a child does not know separation from, and sees itself as one with, its mother, the source of every bliss (1980, 136). However, in order to acquire language, the baby must perceive the mother as the other and distinguish her from itself. Language acquisition, which develops parallel to the Oedipal stage, also imposes rationality with its regular structure and rules, together with social restrictions as embodied in both language

and the rule of the father. Thus by the acquisition of language, the child enters the symbolic order, where it not only experiences separation from the m/other (the mother perceived as the other due to separation, hence becoming the object of desire), but also the social restrictions and repressions of the instinctual drives. A desire to re-achieve oneness with the m/other remains in the unconscious after the acquisition of language. This pre-linguistic yearning continues in the unconscious after the acquisition. The unconscious energies and drives related with 'desire', which is pre-linguistic, cannot be expressed through the medium of the language; nevertheless, the unconscious is also "structured like language" even before entering the symbolic order, as Parsons also notes (58):

> At the same time instinctual and maternal, semiotic processes prepare the future speaker for entrance into meaning and signification (the symbolic). But the symbolic (i.e. language as nomination, sign and syntax) constitutes itself only by breaking with this anteriority, which is retrieved as "signifier," primary processes, displacement and condensation, metaphor and metonymy, rhetorical figures-but which always remains subordinate- subjacent to the principal function of naming-predicating. (Kristeva 1980; 136)

The practical daily use of language, with its rationality, its rules and its denotative function, belongs to the symbolic order, whereas the semiotic *chora*, in a constant flow with the drives it contains, has none of these, but "archaisms" from the pre-linguistic stage, "detected genetically in the first echolalias of infants as rhythms, intonations" (Kristeva 1980; 136, 133). A tension is created when the semiotic, which is non-linguistic by nature, seeks expression through language, the only tool to communicate effectively. This tension gives rise to disruptions of the linguistic structures, because the semiotic can be expressed "only by deranging the speech of the symbolic mode" (Parsons 60), hence the "dislocation of langua ge into [the poet's] meaning" that Eliot speaks of (see p.1). When the semiotic seeks expression thus, poetic language emerges. As sense is a function of the language and

the symbolic order, and as the semiotic is pre-linguistic, when the semiotic erupts "a heterogeneousness to meaning and signification" occurs, giving rise to difficulty in poetry (Kristeva 1980; 133). The semiotic operates 'through, despite and in excess of" language as it is practically used, and produces in poetic language 'musical but also nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations, but in radical experiments, syntax itself." (Kristeva 1980; 133)

Thus the semiotic is not only responsible for the projection of equivalence principle, but also for difficulty of making meaning in poetry. Among other things, Kristeva also remarks that the dominance of the semiotic expression is not entirely message-oriented and 'preoccupied" with signification as formalists such as Jakobson claimed but has also something to do with the instinctual drives (1980; 137). At the same time, by tracking the etymology of 'semiotic", to 'the Greek *sémeion*, a distinctive mark, trace, index, the premonitory sign, the proof, engraved mark, imprint", Kristeva implicitly attributes to it a certain ontological truthfulness (133): As the semiotic does not have the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and is not charged with social ideology and discourse as the symbolic is, the semiotic is more authentic, less removed from the unique reality of the speaking object, closer to the 'thisness" of things, 'the hidden presentness of Being in beings" that Steiner mentions when explaining his categorization of ontological difficulty (G. M. Hopkins qtd. in Steiner 43). The ontological difficulty is a result of the poet's 'sense of the inauthentic situation of man in an environment of eroded speech" according to Steiner (44), who, following Mallermé, remarks 'it is the task of the true poet to force his way upstream to the Orphic sources of his art - and where there is compulsion there will be difficulty." (43) Not only does this underscore T. S.

Eliot's "poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*" (see p.1), but also it can be assumed that Mallarmé's "Orphic" source is the semioti c. Hence, the semiotic works with something more than the artificial and arbitrary signification of language:

> The word is experienced as word and not as a simple substitute for a named object nor as the explosion of emotion [..] beside the immediate consci ousness of the identity existing between the object and its sign (A is A), the immediate consciousness of the absence of this identity (A is not A) is necessary; this antinomy is inevitable, for without contradiction, there is no interplay of concepts, no interplay of signs, the relationship between the concept and the sign becomes automatic, the progress of events comes to a halt, and all consciousness of reality dies [..] Poetry protects us from this automatization, from the rust that threatens our formulation of love, hate, revolt and reconciliation, faith and negation. (Jakobson qtd. in Kristeva 1980; 31-2)[1]

When the semiotic attempts speaking through the symbolic, it either tries to utter an A (a signifier) that really is B (the signified), which does not exist in language; or, too aware that A is not B anyway, it makes A be a very subjective, randomly associated B; or, as in Nonsense, it utters an A that is not meant to be B, but only A. At this point language stops being a common code whereas verbal meaning "evolve[s] over an extended period of use, meaning becomes allied with context." (Parsons 15) The subjectivity creates the difficulty. According to Steiner, such subjectivity may add up to "semantic privacy", where, beyond tactical difficulty, the reader is "not meant to understand at all" (45). However, it is not possible to agree with this, because, although it may be difficult and obscure, a poem nevertheless has communicative intentions; what is needed in the face of such difficulty is perhaps expectations of "understanding" different from semantic understanding.

[1] This creates an interesting parallel with Foucault's comment on signs and their interpretation: "The death of interpretation is to believe that there are signs, signs that exist primally, originally, really, as coherent, pertinent, and systematic marks.... The life of interpretation, on the contrary, is to believe, that there are only interpretations." (qtd. in Harkness "Translator's In troduction" to *This is Not a Pipe*, 12).

In the dialectics of the semiotic and symbolic, "there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic" such as music (which can be understood, though not semantically), but in verbal communication, there is always an undercurrent of the dialectic of the two orders which determine "the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.)" (Kristeva 1984; 24). As the semiotic becomes dominant over the symbolic, the poetic quality increases; however, so does difficulty. In a given text the elements that result from the operations of the semiotic correspond to the *genotext* and those of the symbolic to the *phenotext*:

> The nature of the threads thus [by the interaction of the semiotic and the symbolic] interwoven will determine the presence or absence of poetic language. Those that are spun by the drives and are woven within the semiotic disposition make up what Kristeva has defined as the genotext, they are actualized in poetic language. Those that issue from societal, cultural, syntactical, and other grammatical constraints constitute the phenotext; they insure communication. Seldom however, does one encounter the one without the other. A mathematical demonstration is perhaps pure phenotext, there are writings by Antonin Artaud that come close to being unblended genotext, those, in Susan Sontag's words, "**in which language becomes partly unintelligible**; that is, an unmediated physical presence." (Roudiez's "Introduction" to Kristeva 1984; 5) (emphasis mine)

The unintelligibility resulting from the dominance of the semiotic also characterises the discourse of psychotics, in which "symbolic legality is wiped out in favour of arbitrariness of an instinctual drive without meaning and communication" (Kristeva 1980; 139). This may be the reason why the writing of Artaud, who was schizophrenic, is almost pure genotext (Parsons 18; see also Deleuze and Guattari 135). Foucault remarks, "Language is the first and last structure of madness, its constituent form; on language are based all the cycles in which madness articulates its nature." (*Madness and Civilization* 100; also qtd. in Parsons 16). On the other hand, as the genotext results from the realization of the prelinguistic "rhythms, intonations", it occurs (among other realizations of the projection of equivalence

principle discussed above) as repetition of sound figures such as meter, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, also found in the magic language of mantras, incantations and other verbal religious rituals[2], which have an effect on the hearer although their esoteric meanings are often not known to him. Eliot speaks of "a delightful poem", "the *Blue Closet* of William Morris", that "has the effect somewhat like that of a rune or charm", though he cannot explain what it means (64). Kristeva argues, "Magic, shamanism, esoterism, the carnival and "incomprehensible" poetry all underscore the limits of socially useful discourse and attest to what it represses." (1984; 16) Thus Plato's mad man, prophet and poet all seem to speak the semiotic.

Although Deleuze and Guattari definitely reject Lacanian notions of Oedipality and lack as impositions of capitalist discourse aiming at repression (115), nevertheless their ideas on the operation of the "desiring machine", process and production display great similarity with Kristeva's *chora* containing energies, drives and desire, and the operations of the semiotic. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "literature is like schizophrenia" because it "shatters" the limits imposed by the capitalistic discourse (133). As it has been mentioned above, Kristeva's symbolic is the embodiment in language of social rules and restraints: "The symbolic - and therefore syntax and all linguistic categories- is a social effect of the relation to the other, established through [...] differences and concrete, historical family

[2] For example, in the verses of Koran, rhyme, meter, assonance and alliteration occur to such a great extent that apparently a defence drawing attention to the serious content was needed early; there are many verses asserting it is not poetry, to avoid comparisons with the contemporary tradition of oral poetry: "We did not teach him (the prophet) poetry. That would not have been proper for him. This is an advice and clearly Koran." ("Yasin" 36:69). "When they were told 'There is no other God but Allah,' they were contemptuous./ They said, 'Shall we leave aside our plans because of a **mad poet**?" ("Saffat" 37:36 -7) "It [the Koran] is not the word of a poet. How little you believe./ It is not the word of a **seer**. How little you think." ("Hakka" 69:41 -2) (Translation from Turkish and emphasis mine)

structures." (1984; 29). Deleuze and Guattari's comments on style highlight the dislocation of the symbolic by the semiotic which articulates Kristeva's fluent *chora*:

> [...]an author is great because he cannot prevent himself from tracing flows and causing them to circulate, flows that split asunder the catholic and despotic signifier of his work, and that necessarily nourish a revolutionary machine on the horizon. That is what style, or rather the absence of style is -asyntactic, agrammatical: the moment when language is no longer defined by what it says, even less by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow, and to explode- desire. For literature is like schizophrenia: a process and not a goal, a production and not expression. (Deleuze and Guattari 133)

Defined that way, literature seems to be about the semiotic. On the other hand, according to Deleuze and Guattari, this schizophrenic effort is a resistance to Oedipalization, and ultimately, to the turning of literature into an object of consumption by capitalist ideology (133). This creates an interesting parallel with Steiner's claim that the increasing appearence of ontological difficulty since the 19th century has its source in poets' disillusionment with and exile from a commercial world, where literature, like everything else, is ready-made and easily consumed (41-2).

Habitual expectations from communication, which have their source in the daily use of language governed by the symbolic, and traditional methods of literary interpretation look for referential meaning, a signified behind the network of signifiers comprising the text, thus it is the phenotext that they focus on. But if the semiotic is dominant, then the phenotext will tell little to the reader, and making sense will be difficult. An approach that pays attention to the genotext in difficult poetry may render more in the way of enjoyment, but it is not likely to make the reader discover meaning in the conventional sense. An approach focusing on the genotext concentrates on the material aspects of language and looks for disruption,

since disruption occurs when the semiotic tries to accommodate language to its own end (Parsons 63-7). The process of adapting language to express the non-verbal causes "[recreation]… in speech [of] this pre-sentence-making disposition to rhythm, intonation, nonsense; makes nonsense abound within sense." (Kristeva qtd. in Parsons 63). Syntactic disruptions, semantic displacements and condensations, pun, repetitions (refrains and all musical devices such as rhyme, meter, alliteration, assonance), omissions and gaps (as found in Eliot's poetry, where language fails the semiotic, instead of or along with saying "This is not what I meant at all"), are products of this process. Sound is important not only as a repetition reflecting the semiotic rhythm, but for its own sake too (Parsons 120). The "parallelism" that Hopkins speaks of does not stop at the level of music, but continues on to the "parallelism of word and thought", the poet moves from thought to thought by mere sound association. Moreover, not only may sound become music (and music is semiotic), but also the semiotic draws in sign systems other than linguistic, such as the visual, for synaesthetic[3] expression (Parsons 87) and where referential language fails, only the sound and the appearance of the words on the page remain for communication. The following gives an idea of the difficulty of rendering synaesthetic experience:

> 'Usually my dreams are so different from waking that I can only describe them if I say: "It is as though I were living and thinking as a tree, or a bell, or middle C, or a five-pound note, as though I had never been human." Life there is sometimes rich for me and sometimes poor, but I repeat, in every case so different, that if I were to say: "I had a conversation," or I was in love," or "I hear music," or "I was angry," it would be as far from the fact as if I tried to explain a problem of philosophy, as Rabelais's Panurge did to Thaumast, merely by grimacing with my eyes and lips.'
>
> 'It is much the same with me,' she said. 'I think that when I am sleep I become, perhaps, a stone with all the natural appetites and convictions of a

[3] Synaesthesia is "production, from a sense-impression of one kind, of an associated mental image of another kind." (OED)

> stone. 'Senseless as a stone" is a proverb, but there may be more sense in a stone, more sensibility, more sensitivity, more sentiment, more sensibleness, than in many men and women. And no less sensuality," she added thoughtfully.
> (Graves 12-3)

In Peter Bogdanovich's 1985 movie, "Mask", a boy tries to tell a blind girl about colours; he drops in her palm a hot potato for "red", ice cubes for "blue", slimy boiled vegetables for "green"; a touching scen e, an inadequate synaesthetic expression. The odd dialogue above is from Robert Graves's story, "The Shout", which turns on the magic power of the human voice and has for its intra-intradiegetic narrator a schizophrenic- a blend of things semiotic. Graves the poet knows how difficult it is to render different experiences in language and how inadequate language may be. In terms of the variety of human experience, the experience of the constant flow of drives and energies, the symbolic is no more sympathetic than a stone, or rather, than it is towards a stone. The female character's preoccupation with the derivations of "sense" - "sensibility", "sensitivity", "sentiment", "sensibleness", "sensuality" - reflects the preoccupation of the poet with expression of different experiences, sense, and meaning. It is significant that Graves wrote poems, like "Welsh Incident" (or "Lollocks" with its Nonsensical note), where the effect is due more to what is not told than what is:

> 'Describe just one of them'
> 'I am unable.'
> 'What were their colours?'
> 'Mostly nameless colours.' ("Welsh Incident", ll. 14 -7)

Before going further, it may be useful to summarise here once again certain terms, such as the ones adopted from Kristeva's semanalytic theory, that will be frequently referred to throughout the rest of this study. **Referential** or denotative language is the most commonly used form of language in daily communication, for

practical purposes such as conveying information (see p. 11). The success of referential communication depends on the context; that is, both the addresser and the addressee should understand the context or have previous clues about what is being meant. By **equivalence**, Jakobson means the similarity of units that can be selected for parts of an utterance (see p.12). For example, in the command, "Start!", a selection is made between alternatives with similar meanings such as 'start', 'commence', and 'begin'. Jakobson claims that in poetic language, the equivalenc e is projected from the selection to the combination of the units selected for the utterance (358). Thus, in "Be beginning" (in l. 9 of Hopkins's "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo"), words are not only selected according to their meaning, but they are selected so that in combination they will have an equivalence in sound; in the example here, namely, alliteration and assonance.

Chora is like a container of the drives and the energies resulting from them, which are in a constant change and flow (see p. 14). The **semiotic** is the order that precedes the acquisition of language; and the semiotic processes are the primary ones that attempt at articulating the pre-verbal desire and the drives in the *chora*, as opposed to the symbolic processes (see p. 15). The **symbolic** is the order that every child enters after the acquisition of language, it is the order of the rationally structured language, social rules and restrictions. Referential language belongs to the symbolic order (see p. 14). In any given text, the elements that result from the semiotic processes make up the *genotext*, and those that result form the symbolic processes the *phenotext* (see p. 17-8).

2.2 How Nonsense Helps

A little demonstration without sense or reason:

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

' Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimbole in the wabe
All mimsy were the borogroves
And the mome raths outgrabe. [4]

D A
Datta: what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment' s surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms
…
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih[5]

Rationally, there is nothing common between the two poem extracts above, the one on the left is from "Jabberwocky" in *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll and the one on the right is from the last part of "the Waste Land", "What t he Thunder Said" by T. S. Eliot. One is a piece of Nonsense poetry, written to amuse children, narrating, in burlesque Old English[6], a battle with an imaginary and vague monster, perhaps imported from a nightmare. The other is completely serious and deals with the state of Western civilization after World War I, perceived by the poet to be barren. The mock Anglo-Saxon coinages in "Jabberwocky" seems intended to make not sense but fun. The unfamiliar words in the extract from "The Waste Land" are erudite references to Sanskrit prayers in the *Upanishad*[7]. So far the only common point between them is that both are at varying levels difficult to understand, but even that seems to stem from completely different sources.

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[4] Lewis Carroll, "Jabberwocky" ll. 17 -28.
[5] T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land" ll. 400 -9 and 432-3.
[6] Parsons notes that the first (and last) stanza of "Jabberwocky" was earlier entitled 'Stanza o Anglo -Saxon Poetry" by Carroll (31).
[7] Norton Anthology v. II, 2159, note 6 and 2160, note 2.

But perhaps poetry does not stem from or appeal to the rational part of our minds, but concerns that part, with its own twisted logic "as dreams are made on". If it is assumed for one moment that some aspect of poetry has more to do with the mechanisms of dreamwork than with rational thinking, can any more similarities be seen between the two extracts above? Can one see, for example, that both begin with sounds of violence? That "One, two! One, two!" are the words accompanying the movement of the "vorpal" sword that slays Jabberwocky (l.18) and "DA/ Datta" is more likely to be associated by the reader with the sound of the thunder, expected in the course of four hundred lines, rather than with a Sanskrit prayer, and this richness of meaning is probably intended by the poet too? As such, perhaps it can be assumed that both extracts concern a temporary end to a crisis, the slaying of the scary Jabberwock, and, in "The Waste Land", as thunder is likely to bring rain, a hope for regeneration and relief from barrenness. Somehow, in both extracts the words signifying the ecstasy of relief and the peaceful feeling ("Callooh! Callay!" "Shantih shantih shantih") do not have any denotative meaning (at least in English), but happen to be iambic. While speaking of sound, it can perhaps be assumed that part of the attraction of "Jabberwocky" is its gurgling music, and the last line of "The Waste Land" can be an onomatopoeic rendering of the hissing sound of the first drops of rain hitting dry dusty ground, and as such, it is only sound, which does not have the absoluteness of referential meaning, and thus does not resolve the fate of the wasteland[8] but remains ambiguous. (Then perhaps it is a pun- because it has a

[8] Of course Eliot did not need to supply an ending and could suffice with depicting the situation, but by mentioning the sound of thunder, he brings it in; nevertheless, not rain but only the sound of thunder is unequivocally mentioned in the poem.

referential meaning, "the peace that passeth understanding" [9] different from the sound one; as in Shakespeare's "Spring" where the owl's ominous "To -whit, tu-who?"[10] is both onomatopoeic and expresses mutability, just as the "coo, coo, coo" of the dove in the 23rd quatrain of Omer Khayyam constantly repeats the question, "where now?" [11]) Can it be assumed that poetic words which are denotatively meaningless can still be meaningful at some other level, due to sound and association? Can it even be assumed that, just as the inhabitants of that dreamland, the slithy toves gyring and gimboling in the wabe, and the totally mimsy borogoves[12], are left exactly as they were before the resolution of the crisis, nothing having really changed in their lives, the first and last stanzas of the poem being exactly the same, it is also implied in "The Waste Land" no chance relief wi ll make a significant contribution to the plight of a civilization that brings about decadence and world wars? Not rationally of course.

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[9] Norton Anthology v. II, 2160, note 2.

[10] Arp, Thomas R. *Perrine's Sound and Sense*. p. 6, ll. 7-16.

[11] Daniş, Hüseyin, ed. *Rubaiyyat-ı Ömer Hayyam*. 2nd Ed. İstanbul: İkbal Kitabhanesi, 1927. p. 123. This is a good example pointing to the universal presence of the semiotic in the poetry of all cultures and periods. Daniş explains the pun is created by writing *ku* ("coo"), the sound of the dove's song as the Persian word *gu* ("where now"). According to Daniş, "this figure was unprecedented in the poetry of that period" (123). This insertion of different lettering ("gef" instead "kaf" in Persian script) also points to a synaesthetic expression, not only as it combines musical experience with the linguistic one, but also as it creates a visual element in the appearence of the poem on the page. The quatrain itself, about the monuments of a perished king, is amazingly similar to Shelley's "Ozymandias" (there are other echoes of Khayyam (11 th century) in Shakespeare too).

[12] The title suggests an epic with the addition of –y to the proper name, as in Odysseus, *Odyssey*, but Jabberwock is the monster that gets slain, whereas the hero himself goes unnamed- befitting the topsy-turvy logic of Nonsense. "Jabberwocky" appears in the first chapter of *Through the Looking Glass* (28). For the coinages in the poem, which turn out to be condensations of multiple words, hence multiple meanings packed into one, Carrol supplies explanations, almost as an after-thought, in the sixth chapter, through Humpty Dumpty (125-8); then, in the preface to *The Hunting of the Snark*. As Parsons notes, however, these explanations do not fully account for their effect and anyway, Humpty Dumpty is a poor authority on the meaning and usage of words; moreover, apparently Carroll supplied differing meanings even earlier. (31) Nevertheless, " 'jabberwocky' composed (claims Carroll) of 'jabber' and 'wocer' o r'wocor' meaning 'offspring or fruit' denotes not only an imaginary animal but also a voluble, animated, or chattering discussion". (Parsons 32) See also p. 35.

Nevertheless there is a possibility that much of the difficulty in poems like the extracts above may result from a too rational approach conflicting with those poems' own irrational logic. After all, it is not at all a rational occupation to sit down and write anything rhyming, meter is even more absurd from a strictly sensible point of view; figurative language and all poetic devices are nonsensical (Viguers 145): the question "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" is so too - why compare and contrast a human being to a seasonal phenomenon? But the human mind operates that way. The theoretical chapter of this thesis attempts at tracing that operation.

* * *

> It is not necessary, in order to enjoy the poem, to know what the dream means;
> but human beings have an unshakeable belief that dreams mean something...
> (Eliot 64)

Kristeva's semanalytic theory locates in the semiotic the source of the difficulty (termed ontological by Steiner) experienced while reading poems, especially after the romantic era, which allowed free play to the poet's subjectivity. Parsons applies this theory to a comparison of Nonsense and modern poetry with a view to developing reading strategies for the latter. "Poetic language is essentially, a nonsensical utterance that entertains Nonsense's self-referentiality, and undermines both denotation and meaning" (Parsons 60). In fact, the comparisons between more "serious" literature, especially poetry and Nonsense date from much earlier, and a wide variety of critics and thinkers, from Kant to Deleuze, have commented on the connection of Nonsense to art and poetry in particular.

According to Kant, nonsense is the creative faculty let loose; "All the richness of imagination in its lawless freedom produces nothing but nonsense." (qtd. in

Meninghaus 1). As such, it creates an interesting parallel to Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, for "imagination in its pure form [...] produces 'tumultuous derangements' that shatter 'the coherence which is necessary for the very possibility of experience.' " (Kant qtd. in Meninghaus 2). Moreover, Kant also links Nonsense to Madness, with only this difference between them; that while nonsense results from "inability even to bring one's ideas into [...] coherence which is necessary for the very possibility of experience", hence is "tumultuous", madness is " *methodical*" (Meninghaus 21).

Esslin argues that "verbal nonsense is in the truest sense a metaphysical endeavour, a striving to enlarge and to transcend the limits of the material universe and logic." (qtd. in Ede, 23)[13]. Literary Nonsense, to be more specific, is defined by Tigges as "a genre of narrative[14] literature which balances a multiplicity of meaning with a simultaneous absence of meaning" which must both invite and fail interpretation for successful effect (27), it is "not an absence of sense, but rather a frustration of expectations about sense, and that is also why it allows for the expression of 'total poetry.'" (R. Benayoun qtd. in Tigges 25)

According to Meninghaus, "Nonsense as a positive category in poetics" dates earlier than Carroll and Lear, the two most famous Nonsense writers, to the Romantic period (6). This may be more significant than it seems, because Abrams claims, in the first chapter of *The Mirror and the Lamp,* that the poet's subjectivity began to play an increasingly greater role with the Romantics, revolutionising the

[13] While mentioning Esslin, Tigges differentiates between literary absurd and Nonsense, noting that the absurd works outside language, denying the version of reality language creates, while Nonsense works inside language to create an alternative reality (38).

[14] "Narrative" cannot be the rule, Tigges himself analyses "Cold are the Crabs", which is not narrative at all, in the same article that this definition occurs in.

perception of and expectations from literature (3, 21-6), ultimately paving the way for the other "revolution in poetry", with subjectivity coming into full play, that Kristeva investigates in her study of the same title, "namely that the nineteenth-century post-Symbolist avant-garde effected a real mutation in literary 'representation'". (Roudiez's "Introduction" to Kristeva 1984; 1). Steiner also links the increasing occurrence of ontological difficulty to the Romantics and the social conditions surrounding poets after them (41). Apparently there is a historical connection between nonsense and difficult poetry giving rise to a different attitude towards meaning and signification in both; this attitude may have culminated in the twentieth century to characterize the work of poets such as Eliot, Pound, Sitwell and Thomas with the difficulty of making meaning.

"There are poems in which we are moved by the music and take the sense for granted, just as there are poems in which we attend to the sense and are moved by the music without noticing it," says Eliot in "Meaning and Music" (64). The example he gives is "the nonsense verse of Edward Lear", the sense of which is "the parody of sense"; however, he also notes Lear is at the same time capable of filling Nonsense with "blues" (64 -5). In both Nonsense and difficult poetry, sound, music and even "dissonance" and "cacophony" contribute to the meaning (Eliot 65).

While reading Nonsense literature, such as the works of Carroll and Lear, or simply nursery rhymes that in both English and Turkish are major examples of Nonsense, one cannot help feeling there is more to the text than the apparent meaninglessness or absurdity. Viguers claims that the distinctive feature of Nonsense is its carefully being structured to have "the cadence of meaning without the content" (139), whereas in both poetry and ordinary speech "content and form

are inseparable" (140). Nonsense aims at "a sing -song quality" with intentional lack of meaning (Viguers 141).

Perhaps, the reader is misled to suppose there is some vague sense in Nonsense verse because of the inbuilt expectation of relevance in linguistic communication expounded by Grice; as the ordinary use of language is practical communication, our expectations concerning language assume the existence of a silent agreement that the communication will be understandable and in a common code (Levinson 101). If that expectation is appealed to but not fulfilled in Nonsense, if one takes "nonsense" to mean "That which is not sense; absurd or meaningless words or ideas" (OED), then how can the fact that Nonsense is funny be explained? How can something that has no meaning convey mirth? Perhaps it may simply be the absence of rationality; the abundance of the grotesque, the upside down, and the irrational in Nonsense may be what makes it enjoyable. But Nonsense works are not only funny, they can simultaneously be melancholy too, like Lear's "Cold are the Crabs", because of the words in it that do not mean anything together, but connote melancholy ("And colder still the braz en chops that wreathe / The tedious gloom of philosophic pills!") (Tigges 29), because of the sounds of the words and the rhythm, because of even the poem undermining its own meaning, disabling the tantalised reader from making sense of it, with its last line leaving a crucial revelation incomplete: "Such such is life -".

Is it not possible for poetry to connote or mean without denoting? Not only does Nonsense seem to do this, but Jakobson and Kristeva imply that possibility. Assuming there may be a sort of meaning that is not necessarily rational, and even that the rational structure of language may not be sufficient to express all kinds of

meaning, perhaps there is a common point in how Nonsense and modern poems of the kind mentioned above function. It may even be the case, as Parsons argues, that reading strategies derived from the former can be used to read the latter[15] (xix).

Nonsense, like difficult poetry, is self-referential and metalingual as it draws attention, by the difficulty of making meaning, to the language used, with this point of difference that Nonsense intends lack of meaning. According to Deleuze, Nonsense means only itself, nothing beyond (in Parsons 20), that may amount to having only "A is A" instead of the equation "A is B", a "palpabil ity of signs" that Jakobson attributes to poetic language (see p. 17). However, because it is so ostentatiously meaningless it also contains ("not only implies") the possibility of its opposite, meaning (in Meninghaus 4). On the other hand, as Parsons remarks "While poetry always makes an undefeatable gesture towards meaning, [...] that gesture is not, especially in the twentieth century poetry, limited to thematic or sententious meaningfulness." (67)

As an example of the metalingual quality of Nonsense, literalism is a frequent device highlighting the fallacies of language; in Carroll's works, idioms like "the mad hatter" or "the march hare" are personalized in *Alice in Wonderland*; and insects shaped like rocking horses ("rocking-horse fly") or burning snap-dragons (snap-dragon-fly), a slice of buttered bread with wings (bread-and-butter fly) fly about in *Through the Looking Glass* (Parsons 13). In the fifth chapter of *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice is promised jam and bread "every other day", but as each

[15] If, after Kristeva's above quoted remarks on the nonsense effects of the semiotic, a blend of Nonsense and Kristeva still seems odd, Parsons is also aware of such a possibility: "There are dramatic differences between nonsense and Kristeva's theory of poetic language, but the similarities and the potential usefulness of Kristeva's system in analysing Nonsense and poetry certainly justify adopting some of Kristeva's terminology and adapting some of her ideas." (82)

day that comes becomes "today", she is never to reach "the other day" nor access the jam. In Chesterton's *Tales of the Long Bow*, idioms like "when Thames burns", "when pigs fly", "when trees walk", "white elephant sale" are realized in the course of a series of amazing stories (about a bunch of men resolving on a mild social rebellion). These literalisms draw attention to the stale logic of language which has become arbitrary but is nevertheless imposed as rational. However, this metalingual questioning never rises to a serious tone, it is content with turning things topsy turvy and with being humorous, as opposed to the more radical stance of the "schizophrenic" literature Deleuze and Guattari draw attention to.

Although Deleuze and Guattari call Nonsense "neurotic or perverse recoding" (they favour the schizophrenic nonsense of Artaud) and Carroll "the coward of belleslettres" because of this contentment (135), at one level, this relates Nonsense to the carnival tradition as expounded by Bakhtin (Parsons 25). In *Rabelais and His World*, where he investigates semiotic operation (for once in the sense of semiology), Bakhtin introduces carnival as a celebration of "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from established order", with a humour that "denies, but revives and renews at the same time"; carnival is content with mocking the way of the world at publicly scheduled and allowed periods (10-1). According to Parsons, Nonsense shares with carnival not only the topsy-turvy version of the established order and the humour arising from it, but also the delicate balance that make both unthreatening to that order, with this difference only; Nonsense is self-referential, whereas the carnival is not (25-6). However, the nonsense in "serious" poetry can be the manifestation of a more threatening trait in the poet: He is not Oedipalized enough; the symbolic, and the social restrictions embodied in it have

not totally assimilated his perception of experience, nor limited his expression of it; as such, he is dangerous for the established order. (In this respect, the connection Deleuze established between the true poet and the schizophrenic reminds one of Foucault, who argues in *Madness and Civilization* that throughout the history of Western civilization, the mad were institutionalised, driven to wander on seas, chained, tortured, exiled and subjected to forced labour, because, among other reasons, of the overthrow of social conventions manifest in their verbal and body language.) Kristeva, commenting on Jakobson's article "The Generation That Wasted Its Poets", remarks "Consequently we have this Platonistic acknowledgement [...]: a (any) society may be stabilized only if it excludes poetic language." (Kristeva 1980; 31) Here may lie the source of the modal difficulty that Steiner defines; we refuse to understand what differs from our conventional experience because it seems to threaten those internalised conventions.

Metalingual and self-referential, Nonsense mocks the automatic acceptance of arbitrary signification that poetic language liberates us from, according to Jakobson (see p. 17), emphasising how the make believe of "A is B" replaces reality, and the simultaneous awareness "A is A". Parsons draws attention to the following conversation of Alice with the White Knight in the 8th chapter of *Through the Looking Glass*:

> 'The name of the song is called "Haddock's Eyes".'
> 'Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?' said Alice, trying to feel interested.
> 'No, you don't understand,' the Knight said, looking a little vexed. 'That's what the name is *called*. The name really is "The Aged Aged Man".'
> 'Then I ought to have said "That's what the song is called"?' Alice corrected herself.
> 'No, you oughtn't: that's quite another thing! The song is called "Ways and Means": but that's only what it's called, you know!'

> 'Well, what is the song then?' said Alice, who was by this time completely bewildered.'I was coming to that,' the Knight said. 'The song[16] really is "A Sitting On A Gate": and the tune's my own invention.' (qtd. in Parsons 47-8)

This is one of the qualities that link Nonsense and difficult poetry to Dada[17] and surrealism[18]. Under Magritte's realistically painted picture of a pipe is written *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* ("This is not a pipe"), because it is only the picture of a pipe, a "graphism that resembles only itself, and that could never replace what it describes" (Foucault 48). A point simple and yet complicated enough to be the subject of Foucault's monograph of the same title, exploring the arbitrariness of the sign as depicted by this painting and its variations by the same artist. Many of the Dada and surrealist artists were also poets (or influenced by poets such as Breton, Eluard and Aragon) and they joined poetry with painting with the result that they "expanded meaning-and often obliterated it entirely- via the manipulation of artistic conventions (Freeman, 14-5, 36). Thus came into being "word-images"; rejecting the conventions of previous art, Dada and surreal artists included "verbal references" in their pictures, "establishing alternate interpretations of the meaning of the work" (Freeman 21). This synaesthetic blending of pictorial depiction with the lingual was accompanied with its reverse, an experimentation with how the words comprising a poem should appear on the page. Visual elements in poetry, as in "shaped poems" of George Herbert, were not new, but the blend of the pictorial and the poetic was carried to extreme dimensions in this period, as Freeman notes concerning Duchamp's "The", Zayas's *Femme!*, or Picabia's *Pensées sans langage*

[16] The song itself is a parody of Wordsworth's "Leech Gatherer", incidentally.
[17] "Dada" itself is a nonsensical name, randomly chosen by the poet Hugo Ball (Freeman 20). As the artists associated with it scorned "-isms", they also scorned the derivative adjective "dadaist".
[18] Incidentally, the self-referentiality also links Nonsense to metafictional works like *Tristram Shandy*, accounting for a frolicsome humour it shares with Nonsense.

(22, 27, 32). And characterising both painting and poetry was not only the questioning of the referential function of language, as Foucault notes, the "banal" make-believe in both plastic and verbal art that the sign stands for an independent reality (34), but also the difficulty of making meaning. Dada and surrealism completely upgraded the notion of what could pass as poetry, bequeathing great freedom of expression to the poets that came after them and to their contemporaries who were not necessarily Dada or surrealist. On the other hand, as the illustrations that complete Lear's verses or those that accompany Carroll's work indicate, the visual is an important element in Nonsense. As to the place of the visual in other difficult poetry, an example is e.e. cummings, who was a full-time painter and a part-time poet, and paid so much attention to the appearance of his poems on the page, an inherent part of their potential meaning according to him, that he preferred to have them printed by a favourite typographer who "understood" him (Kostelanetz xx).

Another link between Dada, surrealism, Nonsense and other difficult poetry is the free play they allow the subconscious and, as Parsons also notes, to dreams (33). The dreamwork mechanisms as expounded by Freud operate in all literature, but possibly more in these modes. While Dada and surrealist art favoured "spontaneous" writing and association, it also explored "the possibilities of poetry that consisted almost exclusively of thoughts devoid of conventional syntax" (Freeman 32). Disruptions of syntax not only comprise one of the dislocations that result from the semiotic but also occur in difficult poetry not included in Dada or

surrealist movement, such as the poems of Dylan Thomas[19]. "Words never were to mean, necessarily, what they conventionally mean. Surrealist poetry was to transcend poetry. The unconscious, the automatic text, and dreams were to dominate" (Freeman 37). And incidentally poems were to become so difficult that occasionally they became completely opaque. Thus conscious intention, as aiming at defamiliarisation and overthrow of artistic convention, and the unconscious, verbalising the semiotic urge are both at work in the production of a difficult poem. It is because the moment when the unconscious urge surges to become a conscious intention cannot be exactly pinpointed with certainty that Steiner's categories of tactical and ontological difficulty were adopted with reservations in the introduction (see p.2).

While difficult poetry is seldom, and Nonsense probably never, totally "spontaneous"; still they reflect the unconscious "dreamwork" mechanisms of displacement, condensation and association. An example of condensation from Nonsense is the "portmanteau" words C arroll uses in "Jabberwocky". Carroll explains, via Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass*, that these are "two words packed into one" (125), e.g. "mimsy" is "flimsy" and "miserable" at the same time (127). In his preface to *The Hunting of the Snark* he adds that these words are uttered almost without intention when the mind is suspended in balance between them (42), reminiscent of Freudian slips. According to Deleuze, portmanteau words "of the first order" also combine different sign systems to create "a series of verbal

[19] Dylan Thomas, coming after the prime Dada and surrealism, was influenced by them and benefited the freedom they made possible, but did not really belong to these movements. His claim to be "totally unfamiliar" with surrealism (see Davies and Maud's note in Thomas 211 -2), whereas he certainly was familiar with it, suggests this.

proliferation of expressible senses." (qtd. in Parsons 32). It is such portmanteau words of the first order that cram Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, where their multiplicity of meaning exceeds the sum packed into them, as also Burgess and Barbara Hardy note (Burgess 20, also see Hardy 41) .

As an example of association in Nonsense, Carroll's Snark is very suitable because it enables one to move from nonsense towards meaning. Not surprisingly (for Nonsense), the nearest the reader may come to learn about what a snark is lies in the following tantalising lines from "Fit the Third: The Baker's Tale" (64):

> "If your Snark is a Snark, that is right;
> Fetch it home by all means-you may serve it with greens,
> And it's handy for striking a light."
> [...]
> "But oh, beamish nephew, beware of the day,
> If your Snark be a Boojum! For then
> You will softly and suddenly vanish away,
> And never be met with again!" (ll. 26-40)

The gaps that this information leaves incite the reader to fill them in by himself. Without resorting to the dictionary[20], only by sound association, snark reminds "snarl", "snare", "snore", "snort" and even "gnarl(ed)" - a series of more or less unpleasant associations. However vague what a snark looks like may be, it is not likely that any reader will have a tendency to imagine a snark is a cute pet, like a lop-eared rabbit. But that is not all, we learn that there is also a fatal kind of snark; a snark may be a "boojum". Although it is no more certain what a boojum is than what a snark is, that much is clear. And what is a boojum? Associations in English

[20] As OED and also Parsons gives, snark is a "dialect term: [...] an intransitive verb meaning 'to snore, snort", a transitive verb meaning 'to find a fault with, nag.'" (Parsons 44). Of course OED also gives "an imaginary animal" as the noun, the meaning first attributed by Carroll. Boojum is "an imaginary animal, a particularly dangerous kind of snark" according to OED.

are "boo" and "bogey" [21]-scary associations. In Turkish there is an even closer sound association, *(b)öcü* [bødzy], a bogey with which affectionate elders used to scare nursery children into bed or behaving themselves, not the less frightening because it is vague and unspecified, just like the bogey, and the boojum. (In the poem, the baker who supplies this enlightening information also learns about the boojum from an elder, as a caution.) With the prolonging of the final vowel [bødzy:], *böcü* also becomes the sound that the monster makes when it comes. One wonders why the "boojum", "boo", "bogey", "böcü", all sounding alike, are all related with mysterious, frightening things. The similarity of sound and meaning in such nursery words as bogey and *böcü* in such distant cultures as English and Turkish may only be a coincidence or perhaps the result of some long-past (and forgotten) contact, or it may have a deeper source in the collective unconscious. However, coincidence or not, this creates and interesting parallel to the meanings attributed to sounds by Edith Sitwell, such as 'shade' for 'ck' at the end of words such as 'quack', and "deathlike rottenness" to 'a' in 'stage' (xxii, see also the 5 th chapter). Anyway, sound association in difficult poetry operates in a similar way towards multiplicity of meaning.

Another connection between Nonsense and difficult poetry is the dominance of sound in both (Parsons 120), which will be discussed in detail after a brief discussion of how the reader response theories of Fish and Iser determine the stance towards 'making meaning' in difficult poetry.

[21] A vague "evil and mischievous spirit; something that causes fear and trouble.", as used in 'bogeyman': "an imaginary person feared by children." (OED)

2. 3 The Place of Reader Response Theories in the Approach

> "But that is the bitterness of arts; you see a good effect,
> and some nonsense about sense continually intervenes."[22]

Iser begins *The Act of Reading* with a critique of referential analysis that parallels and complements Kristeva's theory of the semiotic. According to Iser, the traditional approaches to interpretation are concerned "first and foremost with the meaning of a literary work." (3), as if meaning was something that could be "subtracted from the work" (4), thus traditional analysis attempts to "reduce literary texts to referential meaning" (5), like some sort of vitamin to be extracted from the round juicy orange of literature, treating all other components as pulp. As such, however, the effort of referential analysis appears to be just another working of the symbolic order with its repressive operations:

> Everything the critics touch goes flat. They want nothing less than to integrate into the general, authorized, established usage a language whose very impetus consists in the fact that it neither could nor would coincide with that usage but must find a style of its own.
>
> (Pontalis qtd. in Iser 5)

That impetus is the semiotic urge; however, the traditional interpretative approach attempts at evaluating the text in terms of the symbolic. As if the text was one of those hologrammic designs that yield a picture when looked at with squinting eyes, the traditional attempt at interpretation always focuses on a presupposed meaning behind the text. "And so he sees nothing but blanks" (Iser 7). According to Iser, the reductive attempt to fill these blanks with referential meaning "leads to nonsense" (7). A meaning for a work of modern literary text, constructed by the critic according to the premises of an approach aiming at referential analysis and imposed upon the reader, is a subjective and even habitual one; any interpretation

[22] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Epilogue of the Cigar Diva*n, qtd. in Themerson 7.

that the reader himself makes is preferable, because it is the reader's own experience of the text (17).

Then what is the reader, and even more important for the purpose of this study, the interpreter[23] to do? Iser talks of another meaning, of "imagistic" character, that cannot be reduced to referential meaning (9). This creates another parallel with the semiotic's play of synaesthetic expression, of sound image, and other meanings that cannot be expressed referentially in language by the writer, or rephrased by the reader; which is part of the difficulty. When Corvick, a character in Henry James's "The Figure In the Carpet" finally discovers the "secret meaning" incorporated inseparably into the design of the novels by a favourite writer, "the effect is so powerful that he cannot express the experience; instead he finds that this experience begins to change his life" (Iser 7). "The meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity, but, if anything, a dynamic happening" (Iser 22). That meaning not only articulates the semiotic, itself a dynamic process, but requires as much dynamic effort for its retrieval or rather reconstruction on the part of the reader, who should actively recreate meaning. That is why poetry in general, and difficult poetry in particular, is not ready-made or easily consumed (Steiner 42). What Corvick experiences is the semiotic, and his life changes because, having devoted about six months[24] of his time and almost all his energy to bring about the experience (James),

[23] Of course the reader is an interpreter, but I substitute this word for "critic" as used by Iser, because, after Beckett's resonant "Crritic!" directed at poor Vladimir as the worst of insults, I cannot bring myself to accept the appellation (*Waiting for Godot,* Act II, p. 75).

[24] To be accurate, Corvick, an ardent interpreter as any writer could hope for, devotes six months to an intensive study of Vereker's novels, then goes to India for a year, on purpose to let what he sensed but did not perceive sleep and thus catch him unawares as an epiphany when it ripens in his unconscious (James); among other things, apparently James was aware of the moment on the threshold of sleep and unconsciousness when revelations sometimes surge before dreamwork disguises them unrecognizably.

although without expecting or intending to do so, he liberates himself from the symbolic to a certain extent[25]. Thus we have a meaning that is not to be explained referentially, "but is an affect to be experienced" (Iser 10). The task of the interpreter thus becomes paying "more attention to the process", which is the semiotic according to Kristeva, and "not to explain a work, but reveal the conditions that bring about its various possible effects (18).

Difficulty in art is essential for Iser, who argues that resistance to "translation into referential meaning" is "a quality integral to art" (11). Difficult poetry is categorized as "art for art's sake", a judgement often accompanying an accusation of decadence. Iser explains that this accusation is because, when traditional approaches to analysis finally manage to attach a referential meaning to a work of modern art, that meaning turns out to be so complex that, again according to a value-based judgement, it "demands a *clear* representation" (13). This is not only the symbolic passing sentence on the semiotic for its trespass, but also it reduces the artist to such a level of simplicity that it almost assumes him incapable of knowing how to express *his* meaning or accuses him of negligence. Even Kristeva, who avoids the word "author" because of its connotation of authority, does not deny the writer that much; on the contrary, the writer, or as Kristeva terms, the speaking subject (also implying subjectivity), should not be disregarded, because into whatever artistic form he may mould his material, it is initially his subjective perception and experience.

[25] I agree with Iser that James "exaggerates" the experience of Corvick (10); on the other hand, "The Figure In the Carpet" is such a good example that I could not refrain from retaining it, as James, whose novels are by no means easily consumed either, intuitively writes about the semiotic and places it in the novel genre, which can very well be and does, since poetic language is not unique to poetry (see p. 18)

Iser, with his discussion of how gaps in the knowledge of the addresser and addressee concerning each other hinder the effectiveness of communication, implicitly supports taking the subjectivity of the writer into account (165). The gaps in a text not only necessitate the reader to supply the missing information, but they can even be indications of what is not said (169). At another level, it is also possible to think that any available information, such as biographical, social, historical data concerning the writer, the context of the work etc., are welcome if they help filling the gaps. What Iser opposes is treating texts as "documents" (13). For example, Conrad's novels are not to be used as documents proving that he suffered from depression, but with the knowledge that he was depressive, his novels can also be read, apart from their own interest, to experience what depression feels like[26]. Ultimately this is to say that referential difficulties have to be got rid of before tactical or ontological ones can be tackled, as Steiner also notes (27). Similar to Iser's concern, Fish also emphasises the experience of reading:

> [...] the information an utterance gives, its message, is a constituent of, but certainly not to be identified with, its meaning. It is the experience of an utterance- all of it and not anything that could be said about it, including anything I could say- that is its meaning. (32)

Thus, in terms of the dialectics of the semiotic and the symbolic, not only the referential meaning making the phenotext, but also the visual and auditory aspects and the disruptions comprising the genotext should also be paid attention to. Every word, every disruption counts, the reader should always be on the alert for the effect, asking for every element of the text the question "what does this do?" instead of "what does this mean?" (23).

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[26] See Taşkesen, Bengü. "The Gloomy Sunshine: Depression in Conrad". *10th Metu British Novelists Seminar Proceedings.* Ed. Nesrin Eruysal and Bengü Taşkesen. Ankara: Metu Faculty of Education, 2004. 135-141.

Fish is aware that a method based on the reader's experience of the text may lead to subjectivity, but he claims that his method, given in a nutshell above, avoids the affective fallacy, because of its temporal aspect (the reader should be aware of his response at the moment of encountering difficulty), because it "recognizes the fluidity, "the movingness" of the meaning experience and because it directs us to where the action is- the active and activating consciousness of the reader" (44). The subjectivity, even if it does exist, does not seem to matter much for some Dada and surrealist poets, who encouraged creative interpretation and the active making of meaning, nor does Eliot seem to prefer referential analysis over an experiential one if the latter is going to be subjective:

> If, as we are aware, only a part of the meaning can be conveyed by paraphrase, that is because the poet[27] is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist. A poem may appear to mean very different things to different readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the author thought he meant. (65)

Steiner claimed that understanding difficult poetry may be a "concentric" effort (24); for example, beginning from a clue in the middle of a poem and working outwards to other lines, but at the same time moving inwards to perhaps deeper levels of meaning. Fish similarly claims understanding is not a "linear" process, and that the reader should be ready to move back and forth between the elements on the page (46). Parsons's analysis of a poem by Bruce Andrews, which is comprised of words scattered in a disorderly fashion on the page, thus allowing for readings other than from left to right, is a literal example of this principle; the reader has to participate actively and find his own sequence of reading the words if he wants to create a meaning (176-7). Fish goes so far as to claim any mistaken meaning

resulting from tactical difficulties may be part of the meaning intended by the author and point to a multiplicity of meaning (47).

Especially interesting for the purposes of this study is Fish's claim that "an analysis of [the reader's] experience rather than logical content is able to make sense of one kind- experiential sense- out of nonsense" (37). According to Fish, his method is able "to deal with sentences (and works) that don't mean anything, in the sense of not making sense", and he gives the works of Dylan Thomas as an example (36).

Parsons's comments on poets writing in the journal "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" (172) can be adapted to all difficult poetry: This type of poems do not have a readily consumable meaning but require the reader's participation (Parsons 172). Similarly, according to Iser and Fish, the interpreter of modern literary texts should focus on the reading experience, paying attention to the effect of the elements that constitute the poem, and highlighting possibilities instead of forcing his subjective interpretation as the absolute referential meaning on the reader, who, in turn, should actively contribute to making meaning of the text. That interpreter's task is what will be attempted in the analytic chapters of this study.

2. 4 What to Look For

In the first section of this chapter, the nature of poetic language according to Jakobson was discussed. Kristeva's semanalytic theory, as discussed above, locates the source of poetic language in the semiotic *chora* and introduces primary processes (displacement, condensation, metaphor, metanomy, etc., 15) as the ones underlying the genotext, which occur as disruptions of language. When these

[27] Previously in the quoted essay Eliot speaks of Mallarmé, but here it may be also be possible that he is speaking about poets in general.

become too frequent or extensive, making meaning becomes difficult. The implication of the semanalytic theory is that the semiotic 'means' in a way different from the referential meaning of the symbolic or the rational, practical use of language. The second section briefly examined the parallelisms between the genre of Nonsense and difficult poetry as put forth by mainly Parsons, and other critics and thinkers. The third section brought in the relevant aspects of reader response theories of Fish and Iser with a view to the reading of difficult poetry. This section will dwell on the features that make up the genotext, which should be explored for the non-referential meaning that accompanies the referential one in difficult poetry.

Rephrasing in Kristevan terms a comment of Sonstroem on Hopkins, Parsons states that,

> [C]onventional poetry aims at sense and communication (phenotext) but lets in moderate amounts of sound play (desire/genotext); Nonsense overwhelmingly lets in desirous and other languages until it inundates and embarrasses the symbolic, without ever eradicating the phenotext; Hopkins starts with desire (genotext) as a motivating principle, but uses it to bolster the phenotext. (71-2)

As the discussions (in the first section) of the poetic language, with its principle of projection of equivalence, and its source in the semiotic disposition put forth, musical devices based on repetition, such as alliteration, assonance, rhyme and meter, have their source in the pre-verbal urge, which is, in terms of referential meaning and the symbolic, nonsensical. But these devices have, in the course of the history of the speaking man, become conventional and familiar, and in conventional poetry they do not occur to the extent of impeding referential meaning.

In Nonsense, such as Lear's, referential meaning does not exist, only its empty shell the signifier, and musical devices exist. However, this creates the impression of the existence of a meaning that cannot be paraphrased. Even certainty is denied

on such occasions, because certainty and absoluteness are possible only with the rational symbolic (that is one of the reasons why we need the symbolic and also another reason why only possibilities of interpretation will be mentioned in the analyses here), whereas the *chora* behind the semiotic is in a constant flow; there are no absolutes as far as it is concerned.

In difficult poetry, not only by Hopkins but also by many other poets of the twentieth century, there is a referential meaning, but it seems to be dominated by the non-referential meaning of the semiotic, and repetitions imitating the primal processes mentioned by Kristeva occur to such an extent that the reader is dazzled. Thus the first thing to be looked for and experienced by the reader is abundant repetition: assonance, alliteration, rhyme, meter, repeated words and phrases, or words with similar sounds or meanings, operating associatively. The possibility of sound as sense has to be explored, with the resulting synaesthetic experience.

The parallelism between thought and sound as put forth by Hopkins, and the dreamwork mechanisms of displacement, condensation and association indicate that portmanteau words or combinations, words employed in unfamiliar ways and associations should be looked for. Conceit, not only as cleverness but as a possible chain of association, metaphor, and metonymy have to be noted. Imagery, of course, is synaesthetic. Where possible, the movement from one thought to another, with the possibility of anything in the chain of association left unmentioned in the poem, can be explored. Blanks, ellipses or elisions in a line of difficult poetry may be there for not only reasons of economy, but also have a significance of their own.

All of the above come under semiotic disruptions, but also other dislocations, such as in grammar or syntax, are to be noted. The appearance of the poem on the

page, as a form of synaesthetic expression has to be probed instead of passed over, for the semiotic expression is synaesthetic, and even the abrupt breaking of a line may contribute to the sense, creating an ambiguity that works towards richness of meaning. "All poetry weaves sound patterns with or against (in Nonsense more usually against) its sense," says Parsons (69), the sound patterns and the appearance of the poem should be scanned to discover if there is a negation of the referential sense.

Of course, these are all methods for exploring the tactical or ontological difficulties, which can be resolved, if at all, only after referential ones. So the necessary references will be supplied, often in the footnotes, in the following chapters, especially with a view to using the subjectivity of the poet as a key, but the emphasis will be on not the reference, but the experience. For, as Eliot suggests, in the latter may lie the meaning: "When I learn that a difficult sonnet was inspired by seeing a painting on the ceiling reflected on the polished top of a table, […] I can only say that this may be the correct embryology, but it is not the meaning." (64)

CHAPTER 3

G. M. HOPKINS AND "THE LEADEN ECHO AND THE GOLDEN ECHO"

3.1 A general overview of the relevant points from G. M. Hopkins's own conception of poetry

"Hopkins is really difficult, and the difficulty is essential," says Leavis, according to whom Hopkins's difficulty is intentional, or to use Steiner's term, tactical; because every word, at least in his "important" poems, does so much that if the poems were read easily, "the extremely complex response called for would not have a chance to develop." (123) True, but not complete, because while Hopkins certainly intended difficulty as a means of eliciting a complex response, that response was only a way of communicating his complex perceptions and worldview, and some of the difficulty encountered by readers who have a different view was unintended. In other words, the difficulty of Hopkins's poems is a mixture of the tactical and the ontological.

Separated in time, outlook and almost every possible way from the Dada poet-painters, Hopkins was yet another poet who had taken up painting in his youth and preserved a strong sensitivity to the visual (and the musical) throughout his not very long life; his diaries display extraordinary keenness not only of visual and other sensory perceptions, but also an amazingly detailed memory concerning them (for example, see Hopkins 106-7); he noticed and remembered a lot in nature.

That sensitivity led him to the discovery of "a new aesthetic or metaphysical principle" according to Gardner (xx), of which at least a brief discussion is necessary both for displaying the similarity it bears to the etymology of Kristeva's

semiotic, the "distinctive mark, trace, imprint" (see p.16), and for shedding a light on his ontological views. Hopkins believed that every object in nature had an " 'individually-distinctive' form (made up of various sense-data) which constitutes [its] rich and revealing 'oneness' ", this he called "inscape" (Gardner xx). Inscape was the individual realization of a universal stress or mark called "instress" (xx), the "hidden presentness of Being in beings" (Hopkins qtd. in Steiner 43, see also p.14). So far the relation inscape bore to instress resembles the relation of worldly objects to Platonic forms. However, Hopkins's inscape is not merely a copy at second-remove from a transcendent ideal; it is uniquely beautiful, and individually valuable. On the other hand, Gardner notes that instress may also be the force that "actualizes the inscape in the mind of the [...] 'perceiver"' through the senses, thus instress also becomes an epiphany of "that deeper pattern, order, and unity which gives meaning to external forms" (xxi).

Hopkins observed that most people were insensitive to inscape, so they never experienced instress either (Gardner xxi), and as a Jesuit "who devotes his intellect and will to the service of Christ" (xxiv), he probably justified his poems to himself by thinking they were attempts at communicating inscape, or God's Grandeur[1], in all its complex beauty, to those who were unaware of it. On the other hand, as a very sensitive artist who *must* produce and communicate his keen perceptions, especially of beauty, he was, despite himself, oppressed by the requirements of the ascetic calling he had sworn to. The conflict between his sensitivity to beauty and pleasure, and his asceticism created a tension (Gardner xxiii). This tension, between

[1] See "God's Grandeur", Hopkins 27.

drives and the internalised restrictions, seems to be another instance of the play between the semiotic and the symbolic.

Parsons notes, "inscape does motivate for Hopkins the linguistic distortions Kristeva attributes to the semiotic" (72). The complexity Leavis notes was probably because the location of instress, the mental and synaesthetic image of inscape, was in the domain of the semiotic. According to Parsons, in parallel to the Kristevan desire's "frustrated need" to be in language; "within a very different framework, Hopkins seems to have isolated [...] the split between being and language" (72). In other words, to adapt Eliot's phrase, Hopkins dislocated language to his semiotic meaning.

Those dislocations making his poetry nearer to the semiotic expression than to the symbolic language of reference, have a unique function, perhaps because Hopkins was sincerely devoted to the service of Christ, that is, in his way he had internalized the symbolic. According to Parsons, "by granting language an inscape, and so removing it from the realm of mere representation, mere symbol, Hopkins's theory of inscape in effect resolves Kristeva's dichotomy theologically." (73) In terms of Jakobson's analogy of the sign (see p. 17), this means that in Hopkins's poems, A does not simply *mean* B, but strives to become it.

According to Hopkins, "oddity" and difficulty was inevitable because of his attempt to endow language with inscape: "as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern, or what I am in the habit of calling inscape, is what I above all aim at in poetry." (qtd. in Leavis 121) As "inscape may be perceived through all the senses at once" (Gardner xxi), Hopkins's poems had to be synaesthetic expressions. Leavis notes this synaesthetic quality as "

[h]is words and phrases are actions as well as sounds, ideas, images, and must [...] be read with the body as well as with the eye" (128, emphasis mine). Thus his poems are not only musical to the degree that Hopkins's used complex notations resembling those of music to indicate stresses, but the complex sensory quality he wanted to communicate required the coining of condensations and combinations, similar to Carroll's portmanteau words. He, like Lear, "had a fondness for lists, [...] of adjectives especially" (Sonstroem 194), because he had a multifaceted perception to communicate.

Hopkins, in his effort to endow language with an inscape, attached great importance to sound. According to him, "poetry is ... speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning."[2] (qtd. in Sonstroem 200). Alliteration, assonance, end and internal rhyme abound in his poems; sometimes, through association of sound, manipulating the chain of thought, leaving "us wondering how we got from there to here" (Sonstroem 195). Meter is so important that Hopkins devotes his only "Author's Preface" to its explanation, and introduces "sprung rhythm":

> Sprung rhythm is the most natural of things. [...] it is the rhythm of common speech and of written prose, when rhythm is perceived in them, [...] of all but the most monotonously regular music, [...] It is found in nursery rhymes, weather saws and so on... (Hopkins 11)

Sprung rhythm is "measured by feet of from one to four syllables", with one stress in each feet, which is on the first syllable (9). As "it is natural in Sprung rhythm", the scanning of each line begins from the last syllables of the previous one (Hopkins 10), that is, as Parsons notes, "the rhythm [...] works against the more formal line breaks. Paradoxically, the movement of common speech, or Hopkins's

[2] Hence Sonstroem's claim given in Kristevan's terms in Parsons (72) (also see p. 45).

version thereof, undermines its more structured and conventional poetic equivalent." (72, also see Leavis 125).

However, poems written with that much emphasis on sound turned out to be dazzlingly obscure for the reader[3]. Hopkins also provided reading strategies for his poems. Returning to a poem of his after a few months, even Hopkins was apparently bewildered; however, he said, "take breath and read it with the ears, as I always wish to be read, and my verse becomes all right."[4](qtd. in Leavis 121). Again in defence of his own difficulty Hopkins says, "Obscurity I do and will try to avoid so far as is consistent with excellences higher than clearness at a first reading" (qtd. in Gardner xv).

As a priest who had scruples about his yearning for artistic outlet and the pleasure he received from beauty in itself, Hopkins was not easy in his soul until he discovered that Duns Scotus also prized an individuality similar to his inscape; Scotus named this individual and unique quality "Thisness (*haeccitas*)" (Gardner xxiii). After the above mentioned similarity of inscape to not only the etymology of *sémeion* and the discussion of how it gave rise to "oddity and obscurity"[5] in Hopkins's poetry, perhaps the similarity of instress to an argument of Kant is only to be expected. Menigghaus notes that Kant's ideas on nonsense leads to the notion that Nonsense (which has previously been discussed as arising out of the semiotic)

[3] Even the two poets whose opinion Hopkins valued and to whom he constantly sent manuscripts of his poems, Robert Bridges, the poet laureate, and Canon Dixon, were often puzzled; the above extracts defending his obscurity and oddity are both from letters to Bridges.

[4] Gardner's note 36, for 'Spelt from Sybil's Leaves", is even more striking, because in it Hopkins requires performance, not only hearing: "Of this long sonnet above all remember what applies to all my verse, that it is, as living art should be, made for performance and that its performance is not reading with the eye but loud, leisurely, poetical (not rhetorical) recitation, ..." (238). One is inevitably reminded of the Dada performance-poems.

[5] Two faults of Hopkins's poetry according to Bridges, who felt the necessity to draw the reader's attention to these faults on introducing Hopkins's poems to the reader for the first time (qtd. in Leavis 120).

as what evades our "interpretive schemes" "can become for us "authentic" and absolutely real in its transcendental givenness and unavailability [...] can even become from a religious perspective a proof of God's existence" (4). Thus the distinctive quality, incidentally causing difficulty, that can be rendered only queerly in poetry- for "it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer" (Hopkins qtd. in Leavis 121), the mark of instress and implicitly of God for Hopkins the poet, is also to be the mark of God for the reader according to Kant; just like instress is both the force that imprints inscape and the impulse that through the senses recreates inscape as a mental image in the beholder.

Anyway, beauty, the distinctly individual beauty of natural objects, and the immortal beauty of the force that imparts it to them, was a life-long preoccupation to Hopkins, even coming up in his sermons[6]. That is why the following poem was chosen for analysis, although Leavis says if it had been the best representative of Hopkins's poetry, he would not have been worthy of notice [7](130).

3.2 An analysis of disruptions of language in "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" by G. M. Hopkins

"The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" is initially part of an unfinished play by Hopkins, entitled *St. Winefred's Well*[8], and like all the rest of Hopkins' work,

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[6] For example, as in the hackneyed but sincere didacticism of "far higher than the beauty of the body, higher than genius and wisdom the beauty of the mind, comes the beauty of his [Jesus Christ's] character, his character as man."(Hopkins 140-1)

[7] The poems Leavis would rather prefer, "The Windhover" and "Spelt From Sybil's Leaves", are much analysed, as he also notes (133-5). The latter poem is analysed, among other critics, not only by Leavis (135-8), but also by Parsons, and with the approach adopted in this thesis too (73-6).

[8] The story of St. Winefred was attractive to the Catholic sensibilities of Hopkins. According to the legend, St. Winefred was a Welsh saint of the 6th century, who was the daughter of a noble family, and whose head, which was severed when she resisted violation by a prince, was miraculously restored by another saint. The miracle seemingly enabled her to pass the remainder of her life as a nun (*Catholic Encyclopedia Online*). The legend has it that a fountain sprang where her head was dropped, in the place today known as Hollywell, and sick and lame people apparently still seek

meant to be recited aloud (in Hopkins 237, Gardner's note 36). According to Gardner, the Leaden Echo is a metaphor for the living body and the Golden Echo for the body after resurrection (in Hopkins 238).

The poem presents several kinds of disruption forming its genotext; besides the disrupted flow of the first line, there are intrusive alliterations, assonances, repetitions and listing, which are repeated throughout the poem, which, as Parsons comments on another poem by Hopkins, "[overwhelm] sense", and "[favour] materiality over semantic value" (73, 75): "HOW to kéep —is there ány any, is there none such, nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, láce, latch or catch or key to keep". "HOW" is capitalized to stress the yearning query. There is a disruption of the sentence in the abrupt breaking off from "HOW to keep —" to "is there ány", only to break off and start twice again, which creates an impression of distraction. In the second line, a disruption in the form of ellipsis appears "Back[9] beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, …from vanishing away? " The echo almost seems to forget its query for a moment, in contemplating upon beauty. Furthermore, in order to achieve forced rhyme, most sentences are split into at least two lines, which further disrupts the flow of sentences: "key to keep/ Back beauty" (l1.1 -2). All these disruptions create a sense of a mad yearning instead of logical communication; desire seems to be speaking.

The repetition of sounds creates a music of its own. There is both assonance and alliteration in " bow or brooch or braid or brace, láce, latch or catch or key to

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healing there. There may also be and allusion, as the initial idea, to the echoes resulting from dropping coins into the well while making a wish, and in that sense, perhaps the quality of the wish, which arises out of desire, determines the quality of the echo.

[9] On the use of "back", Hopkins sa id "Bach is not pretty, but it gives the feeling of physical constraint which I want" (Hopkins 238,Leavis 129). It is interesting, as shall later be discussed, that Sitwell, for reasons of her own, calls one syllable words ending in –ck "dead".

keep", as well as internal rhymes. Alliteration and assonance are repeated, such as in "wrinkles, rankéd wrinkles" (l. 3), "Ruck and wrinkle, drooping, dying, death's worst, winding sheets, tombs and worms" (l. 12), as well as "[…]looks, locks, maiden gear, gallantry and gaiety and grace, /Winning ways, airs innocent, maiden manners, sweet looks, loose locks, long locks, lovelocks, gaygear, going gallant, girlgrace—" in "The Golde n Echo" part (ll. 30-1). Sound and thought association go hand in hand in these alliterative lists.

The alliterative listing, according to Sonstroem, creates a parallel between Hopkins's style and that of Lear, as they either add "unpredictability" to the ir work, as each word strikes as a surprise, or enables movement from one word to the other through association, often based on similarity of sound (195). The internal rhyme is also repeated: "[…] not within the seeing […]/ Not within the singeing […]/ Tal l sun's tingeing […]" (ll. 19 -21). Although the poem does not have a fixed meter, there is a rhythm, as indicated by the stresses marked by Hopkins[10]. However, "The Leaden Echo" part moves more stumblingly, with more difficulty in comparison to "The Golden Echo" part, due to both difference in rhythm and the fact that the sounds and words in the first part are more difficult and harsh to pronounce. These combine to give the first part the tone of an urgent, straining quest, while the second part sounds quietly persuading, or like the tone of a soothing consolation.

In this poem condensations are not in the form of portmanteau words, but as compounds, such as "gaygear", "girlgrace" (l. 31). Lines 35 -6 echo Mathew 10:30: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" and Luke 21:18: "A hair of your head shall not perish." There are also hyphenated combinations of two, three and

even four words: "care-coiled", "care-killed" (l. 43), "wimpled-water-dimpled, not-by-morning-matched" (l. 26), "beauty-in-the-ghost" (l. 34), the renderings of complex perceptions. And, whereas sentences are almost always enjambed, as is "natural in Sprung Rhythm"(Hopkins 10), there is an occasion when they are combined by dashes:

> Fonder a care kept than we could have kept it, kept
> Far with fonder a care (and we, we should have lost it) finer, fonder
> A care kept.—Where kept? Do but tell us where kept, where.—
> Yonder.—What high as that! We follow, now we follow.—Yonder, yes yonder, yonder (ll. 45-8)

Lines 45-6 give enjambed sentences, but then in the following lines, the voices of both echoes are given in the same line, and dashes, which usually serve to split, are used to combine. The dash at the end of line 47 starts the answer of the Golden Echo, and so could well be placed at the beginning of line 48, but it is placed there to indicate that the answer begins at line 47. Thus a sense of union and an answer to the query starts in this line, and is achieved in the penultimate line of the poem. (The final line, of one word, gives the last say to the Golden Echo.)

The unusual length of several lines (ll. 1, 4, 12, 24, 29-32, 35), with their many repetitions, is an overthrow of the poetic convention of conciseness, and creates a contrast with the condensation of words discussed above. In addition to sounds, whole words, phrases and sentences are repeated:

> So be beginning, be beginning to despair.
> O there 's none; no no no there's none:
> Be beginning to despair, to despair,
> Despair, despair, despair, despair. (ll. 13-5)

These repetitions function in other ways besides giving a sense of urgency. They constitute resounding echoes, which materialize the two echoes voicing the

[10] Hopkins attempted marking all the stresses, but seeing they were many and complicated, he decided to leave them to the reader (Hopkins 237,Gardner's note 36).

poem, thus literalising the metaphor of "echo". Also, these two voices echo each other, the Golden Echo starts by echoing the "despair" in line 15 with "Spare!" (l. 16). There is a movement from the sound of one word to another, similar in sound, but contrasted in meaning, as if by thinking in sound; the command to despair is countered by "Spare!" bringing hope. In line 27, " the flower of beauty" turns into "the fleece of beauty", and "fleece" moves onto "fleet", the transience of beauty, which is then warranted not to "fleet". The answer to the quest emerges in this echoing and re-echoing, as "fonder" becomes "yonder".

These elements of disruption express a sense based on sound and other material aspects, which, in the case of this poem, at one level support and reflect the denotative and figurative senses, sound becomes sense, echoes merge and unite, thus the yearning for preserving of beauty is satisfied. The disruptions express the straining desire to preserve beauty, which can be called a form of the semiotic drive, another form of the preverbal desire to achieve the bliss lost on entering the symbolic order. Preserving beauty, in the constant flow of the energies and drives in the chora, is not differentiated from that other desire to preserve the oneness with the m/other.

But at another level, there is an unresolved conflict; the Golden Echo does not really supply the solution to the initial query, because the immortal beauty, as the imprint of instress, cannot have the unique and distinctive beauty of the sensory beauty of individual inscape. As Parsons's analyses of "Spelt from Sybil's Leaves" claims, death which brings immortality also brings nihilization of "dappled"[11] distinction, there is only black and white, making that poem "a capsule of dread and

[11] See "Pied Beauty", Hopkins 30.

desire" (74), which can very well be said for "The Leaden Echo" too. Whereas that other poem, where the dominant feeling is despair turns out to be at the same time "a self-negating welcome" to death ultimately (7), that duality of dread and welcoming in "the Leaden Echo" works the opposite way, because the immortal beauty comes only after death, and that is the end of the distinct individual beauty.

Moreover, even the postponement of preservation of beauty to immortality, which would ultimately come after the resurrection of Christ according to the faith of Hopkins, is suspect. Concerning the interest shown by Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov "and other futurists" in "the theme of Messianic resurrection", Kristeva notes "the semiotic rhythm within the signifying system of language will never be […] truly experienced in the present" (32). In other words, the present is a symbolic construct of reality, crashing with its nature the semiotic desire's hope of fulfilment, so the semiotic postpones that fulfilment to " a later time, that is, a forever" (32). Thus immortality and eternity turn out be constructs after all, only this time of the semiotic instead of the symbolic. As such, beauty is to be preserved in a never-land. Thus, Hopkins's poem undermines its own hopeful assurance, voiced by the Golden Echo.

CHAPTER 4

DYLAN THOMAS AND "FERN HILL"

4.1 The semiotic disruptions in Dylan Thomas's poetry

Dylan Thomas is often noted for the difficulty of making meaning from his poems, which have been compared to Nonsense because of that difficulty (Fish 36, Vigeurs 143). It is interesting that Barbara Hardy, in her study of Thomas as a modernist poet, often notes the Nonsensical aspects which are, according to Parsons, manifestations of the semiotic (Hardy 36-43, Parsons 56-82). Hardy's following remark seems to corroborate the discussion of disruptions resulting from the semiotic as characteristic of twentieth century poetry (see the introduction and Ch. 2):

> There are two related "disruptive" structural features which Thomas's poetry has in common with Eliot's and Joyce's, and which are recognizable rhetorical features of modernism. In Thomas they go together and support each other. One is a conspicuous musicalization of language, [...] as the poem's music asserts its own sound primacy. The other is a local assertiveness and fragmentation of imagery, the dominance of part over the whole, or part independent of whole. (36)

The first feature, which is the sound aspect of difficult poetry has been much emphasised in the theoretical chapter. Hardy claims that, Thomas's poetry shares with Joyce's prose a "prominent fluidity" which blurs the boundar ies between words, phrases and sentences (36), similar to the poems of Hopkins, whose "The Golden Echo and The Leaden Echo", Thomas "liked to read aloud" (40). Parsons, like Hardy, draws attention to the place of sound in Thomas's poetry with the following quotation from Thomas:

> The first poems I knew were the nursery rhymes, and before I could read them for myself I had come to love just the words of them, the words alone. What the words stood for, symbolised, or meant, was of very secondary importance. [...] And these words were, to me, as the notes of bells, the sounds of musical instruments, the noises of wind, sea, and rain, the rattle of milk carts [...] Out of

> them came the gusts and grunts and hiccups and heehaws of the common fun of earth; and though what the words meant was, in its own way, often deliciously funny enough, so much funnier seemed to me, at that almost forgotten time, the shape and shade and size and noise of the words as they hummed, strummed, jugged and galloped along. (qtd. in Parsons 76)

This statement clearly indicates a synaestheic experience of sound as an influence on his poetry. It also tells of his earliest reactions to language (the questions of accuracy or authenticity left aside as unverifiable), his first introduction to the symbolic, when not the meaning of words but their sound signified to him. In terms of Kristeva's description of rhythm as a primary process, it is significant that Thomas mentioned the rhythmic noises of the sea, the rain and of milk carts. It is also interesting that Thomas, like Sitwell, can attribute even a "shade" to sounds. On the other hand, critics also link the importance of sound in Thomas's poetry to his Welsh background and the tradition of Celtic poetry in which "sound [is] equal to or dominant over sense" (Hardy 36, also Ackerman 8 and James Davies 198).

The "assertiveness", the second disruptive feature Hardy speaks of above, turns out to be an effect on the reader of parts of the poem; the reader first grasps "fragments that are prominent" before understanding the whole of Thomas's poems (Hardy 42). This in turn parallels Steiner's "concentric" understanding, or Fish's non-linear process of understanding (see p. 43). Viguers also notes a structural disruption, which she compares to Nonsense, in Thomas's syntax (143, also Parsons 77), which may be accepted as a sort of fragmentation in terms of its effect on the reader. Parsons, while agreeing that Thomas's poetry shares certain qualities of Nonsense, claims syntactic disruption in Thomas is rather mild when compared to his lexical disruptions (77), occurring in his displaced usages, condensations and combinations. As another parallel with Nonsense, Hardy claims that "Thomas also

emulated Carroll and Joyce in the fluency of Portmanteau words" (41).

The difficulty arising from the semiotic disruptions in Thomas's poems again seem to be a mixture of the tactical and ontological, besides the referential. Thomas seems to have summarised his tactics by claiming to use "old tricks, new tricks, puns, portmanteau-words, paradox, allusion, paronomasia[1], paragram, catachresis, slang, assonantal rhymes, vowel rhymes, [and] sprung rhythm." (qtd. in Parsons 76). Among the old tricks can perhaps be counted his experimentation with shaped-poetry in his "Vision and Prayer", which is, as Hardy also notes, "his most traditional Christian poem, in a traditional form, most famously used by George Herbert" (38), which is, nevertheless a way of synaesthetic expression.

As to the source of the ontological difficulty of his poems, the following much quoted statement perhaps gives the best summary: "I hold a beast, an angel, and a madman in me, and my enquiry is as to their working, and my problem is their subjugation and victory, downthrow and upheaval, and my effort is their self-expression." (qtd. in Ackerman 3). Thomas was familiar with Freud, so once again, the authenticity of this insight might be suspect; however, the suggestion of the semiotic, speaking through "the beast, the angel and the madman", and the dialectics of the semiotic and the symbolic, with the resulting disruptions and overthrow of conventions of language, are strong in this statement.

[1] Paronomasia is "a playing on words which sound alike; a word-play; a pun"; paragram is "a kind of play upon words, consisting in the alteration of one letter or group of letters of a word", catachresis is "improper use of words; application of a term to a thing which it does not properly denote; abuse or perversion of a trope or metaphor" (OED). For sprung rhythm, see the chapter on Hopkins.

Before an analysis of the disruptions in "Fern Hill", perhaps it is time for a brief discussion of the first sonnet of the "Altarwise by owl-light" sequence, quoted in the introduction (see p.2). The sonnet actually contains a good deal of referential difficulty, and Sitwell's free interpretation of it famously drew an objection (that she did not "take the literal meaning") from Thomas, who nevertheless insisted that the poem was "meant to be understood" by the reader "thinking and feeling about it", not by "whatever he is meant to do with surrealist writing" (Davies and Maud 211-2). In that case, the reader is left with a "nativity poem" (Davies and Maud, 210) that should be taken literally according to Thomas. However, that strategy alone does not seem to lead very far into making sense. Going back to the "what does this word do?" strategy, some suggestions can be made.

Instead of a birth, as the context of nativity supplied by Davies and Maud suggests, the poem seems to begin with a scene of death, whereas the "gentleman" lying "altarwise" - a portmanteau-like combination- can be taken for Christ. The "altar" part of the combination alone connotes sacrifice, Catholic communion[2], hence Christ's flesh and blood, and thus Crucifixion-the sacrifice of Christ. The owl-light seems to be a substitution for the "candle-light" the altar connotes, or "moonlight"; but, unlike these, "owl-light" connotes both an eerie, uncanny atmosphere, and also wisdom; and, as owls are not luminescent like candles or the Moon, while they are characterised as being able to see in the dark, perhaps utter darkness too. "Altarwise by owl-light" is assonant, creating a rhythm which later turns out to be what Hopkins calls a "counterpoint rhythm"[3], and a music that

[2] Thomas was not Catholic, but the connotation is nevertheless there.
[3] In his Author's Preface, Hopkins describes counterpoint rhythm as "the superinducing or mounting of a new rhythm upon the old", by reversing the order of the stressed syllables in the first two feet (8), for example, on a counterpoint rhythm set on iambic pentameter, the first two feet would be

somehow matches the tone and the eerie wisdom of the horror-story teller. "Halfway-house" is ambiguous, it may be halfway because it is the penultimate residence of the dead who lies "graveward"; it may also be the cave in which Christ was interred, materially halfway between a civilised house and a caveman's dwelling, and between his life and resurrection. "With his furies", again ass onant and internally rhyming, completes the setting of the horror-like scene.

"Abaddon", as Davies and Maud also note, is "the angel of the bottomless pit in Revelation 9:11"; as a pun, it can be taken to mean "the devil in flesh" – "A bad'n in the hang-nail"; thus with Christ's crucifixion, the devil that attached to Adam since the Fall was separated from him (212). Sensible; however, this gives the chain of associations too abruptly, it is not a referential meaning but one got by association. "Hang" and "nail" connote the Crucifixion, the onomatopoeic "crack" is no ordinary separation but a sudden and violent one. There may also be other connotations here; "cracked from Adam" also connotes the rib which Eve was made of; then the threat of the bottomless pit may lie in her flesh and original sin. Though not continued in the referential sense, as background noise this possibility may account for the increasing phallic imagery in the rest of both this sonnet and the rest of the sequence, such as the procreative fork and the mandrake. It may also account for the theme of castration which, according to Davies and Maud, Thomas connected with the Crucifixion (212). Parsons, who analyses the sixth sonnet of the sequence, also remarks on the abundance of phallic imagery throughout the

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trochaic. In "Altarwise by owl-light" the first two feet of the first line are anapaestic and the rest seems to be more or less iambic. However, according to Hopkins, with further irregularities introduced for effect, the counterpoint rhythm can also become hard to discern as in certain works of Milton (9).

sequence, and in a context of Christian mythology too (78-9). Thomas insisted that the next three lines be taken literally, and supplied the following information:

> A 'jaw for news" is an obvious variation of a 'nose for news', & means that the mouth of the creature can taste already the horror that has not yet come or can sense it coming [...] It's the dog among the fairies, [...] the snapper at demons, the scarer of ghosts. This poem is a particular incident in a particular adventure... (Davies and Maud 212)

As Davies and Maud note, the adventure in question is the Crucifixion, which Thomas, in "bit out the mandrake with tomorrow's scream", turns into a castration with an impact on the future (212). The rest of the sonnet is clear despite the oddness of its imagery and tone; the wounded and castrated Christ with coins on his eyes (also connoting materiality) brings about a salvation for all the Christendom ("Capricorn and Cancer" seem to be preferred for the effect of their sound rathe r than their capacity to display the geographic limits of Christianity, which is not exactly located in the tropics), including the yet unborn persona. Interestingly, the birth in question is not Christ's, but the persona's, or Thomas's. At another level, the death of Christ gives birth to Christianity (a theme also present in Hopkins's "The Windhover", which Thomas was probably familiar with).

"Altarwise by owl-light" marked the end of Thomas's early period (see Davies and Maud 58), characterized by a difficulty sometimes amounting to almost total opacity. "Fern Hill", on the other hand, is one of the most popular poems in his later style.

4.2 An analysis of the disruptions in "Fern Hill"

Unlike "Altarwise by owl-light", there is almost no referential difficulty in "Fern Hill"; one does not even need to know that Fern Hill was the farm that

belonged to the poet's aunt to get the gist of the poem; without identifying the locale, it can still be understood that the poem is a reminiscence of happy childhood perceptions and memories. The difficulty lies in the disruptions that continuously distract the reader from referential meaning. And those disruptions are no less important than the referential meaning, or what could be paraphrased of this poem, because they are the semiotic's often synaesthetic attempt at rendering memories and perceptions. Even these disruptions are not often very great; they mainly consist of phrases and synaesthetic imagery presented in a dazzling fragmentariness, following each other too fast, and with odd lexical juxtapositions such as "windfall light", "heydays of his eyes", and a great amount of assonance, alliteration and internal rhyme (few of which will be mentioned[4]; this is also a poem to be "read with the ears" in Hopkins's phra se); but they are enough to baffle the reader.

"Now", which begins the poem, seems to be both the classic beginning of a narrator and an indicator of the fact this is an act of remembrance, the present is different from the past, the narrator is not the child he was anymore; nor does he perceive the world as he used to, a point emphasised in line 12. The persona carries both the awareness of present time of the symbolic, which crushes the hope of fulfilment for desire (see p. 58), and the past of irretrievable bliss. This is why Time and "the mercy of his means" is an ever returning refrain in the poem (ll.13 -4, 52), the present is perceived as capable of being cruel.

[4] Ackerman, besides giving a long list of the alliterations, assonances, the number of syllables in each line and the pattern thus repeated in every stanza (125-7), claims that in this poem "Thomas uses a looser form of *cynghanedd*", an alliterative and assonant type of medieval Welsh verse form characterised by a symmetry of the number of alliterative syllables on both sides of the caesurae, besides other devices of Welsh poetry, such as making the lines of a stanza begin with the same letter as that of the first line (127).

Students are often stunned as early as the "easy" in the first line; somehow, in their expectations as to what may come after "young" and before "under the apple boughs", "easy" does not seem to be in the first rank. A reason for this may be that the sense of "easy" is not clear here; it may mean relaxed, or as Ackerman notes, carefree (126), which latter sense is made explicit in line 10. How a house can be "lilting" puzzles Viguers, who thinks the way "words have been jolted out of their normal relationship to each other," is akin to Nonsense (143). At the synaesthetic level, however, lilting may be a projection of the infantile rhythm to the surrounding objects, or may convey the rhythmic music of all the regular noises of a peaceful house experienced reassuringly by the child, as line 11 also suggests. Line 2 is alliterative ("house and happy", "grass was green" in l.2) and assonant ("young... boughs/About ... house" "happy as the grass"), and these musical devices are repeated throughout the poem.

Hardy notes of the music of Thomas's poetry that phrase runs into phrase (see above). Images also follow each other with stunning speed; the expression seems to try to catch up with the semiotic's fast flow, which gives the sense of visionary flux that Ackerman notes (126). "Happy as the grass was green" is another synaesthetic imagery, rendering the happiness of the child a quality as natural as the colour of grass, and a fresh and bright sensation too; the feeling is repeated in line 10. Whether it is Time (echoing the personification in carpe diem poetry), as the period of fresh experience, that is golden, or whether it is the boy at play that is as fresh and at his prime, cannot be ascertained from the unusual phrasing of lines 3 and 4; the result of this disruption is a richness of meaning with both possibilities. What "golden" means in this con text is another matter; connotations are purity, brightness,

immortality, lasting freshness and beauty, a sense of being valuable. Lines 6 and 7 may convey both the tolerant fondling of the child by the grownups around, resulting in a privileged feeling lucky children often have, also echoed in line 10, and, as Ackerman also notes, his happy freedom (126). The child is the centre of his world, a semiotic perception of oneness, perhaps accounting for the superimposed imagery too; there is no need for distinction in the semiotic. "Once below a time" is a reversal of "once upon a time", at first seeming Nonsensical, then connoting a sense of timelessness, and as Ackerman notes, an innocence of "change and mutability" (126). However, literally it may mean "once before time", that is, before time as a symbolic concept entered his life. Like the images (all superimposed on each other, as if in one act of fragmented remembrance), the simultaneous perceptions in the lines 7, 8 and 9 which follow "once below a time", indicate the time experienced by the child is not linear. It is rather cyclical, always bringing renewal, a fresh start, genesis out of nothingness, as the fourth stanza clearly depicts.

Again, there is ambiguity in lines 13 and 14, as to whether it is the child (more probable here) or Time that is golden; but "mercy" in line14 also seems to convey the feeling of short-lived privilege, in looking back at childhood, also repeated in line 52. Line 15 starts with the imagery of a Pan-child, now underlining the "lordly" of line 7 with the sense "god". The great child Pan (the alliterative, internally rhyming "huntsman and herdsman") is at peace with nature and all in it; except perhaps foxes, whose bark is cold[5], again a synaesthetic image lending different sensory perceptions. The coldness maybe because of their distance and their being

[5] Sitwell, who was a friend of Thomas, says "The intense cold has always seemed to me to have an affinity with an unheard sound- the sound to high for our hearing" ("Some notes on My Own Poetry" xlv).

not as easily approachable as calves, or because their bark is associated with a cold time of the daily cycle, such as the early morning. The "sabbath" in line 17 conveys the eternal holiday quality of childhood.

In line 19, "All the sun long" is a typically Thomas -ian substitution for all day long; Parsons notes that this metonymy creates a nonsense effect, an indication in the poem of the necessity of attention to other than referential meaning (77). The breaking of this line at "hay" distracts the reader from referential meaning. Indeed, this line, with its juxtaposition of "running", "lovely" and "hay", creates a dazzling effect at first, which continues onto the next line. Without "the hay", the next line (l. 20) begins reading "Fields as high as the house", something the brain cannot grasp.

In the next phrase, for a moment there is a sense that "the tunes from the chimneys" "was air"; a play on "air" as both a tune, and the atmosphere. The reader has to move back and forth to keep an eye on the referential meaning, but as the meanings proliferate, it gets more difficult to do so. Continued from the previous line, line 21 begins reading "it was air and playing", which may mea n both "it was playing in the open air", and "it was a tune playing". (In line 43, it is time that seems to be "tuneful", probably indicating a time of airiness and play, but maybe the time of inherent rhythm too, as in the lilting house.) Lines 21-2 in their sudden passage from "lovely and watery" and "fire green as grass" (ll. 21 -2), for a moment produce the expectation of "fiery", a moment's anticipation of the desire that will come after entering the order of adults, but at this time yet unkown. (Earth, water, air and fire, all the four elements seem to be saluted in this stanza). The same playful nonsense effect occurs in "the whinnying green stable" (line 35). "All the moon long" is again

a metonymy for the night, "blessed among the stables" echoes aga in a god-child, this time baby Christ.

James Davies claims the poem echoes Thomas Traherne's [6] "The Rapture", "an ecstatic outpouring stressing the child's God -given and glorious sense of self" (199), and also it is a solipsist child who does not mention any other people, but only the objects of his pleasure(202). As such, the child in question creates a parallel to the preverbal baby that knows only itself, and perceives everything as an extension of itself, he is alone in his world where everything is there to serve his pleasure. In contrast, the last stanza, with its tone of regret at the lost bliss of childhood and a passage into a world of separation and distance, ("the moon always rising", and the alliterative "And wake to the farm forever fled from th e childless land", ll. 48, 51), is not only about the feelings of a life-and-responsibility-harassed adult, but also about the desire that never achieves fulfilment after entering the symbolic order, a lament for the paradise of the preverbal condition lost.

The poem offers repeated synaesthetic imagery to render the carefree, happy freshness of childhood perceptions, imagery flowing but belonging to things cyclically eternal and at their prime, like the godly child, as opposed in the last stanza, to the imagery of mutability and an irretrievable bliss. Lexical disruptions, as in the metonymies noted above, or the slight syntactic disruptions, distract the reader away from the referential meaning, towards the recreation of the experience of the child.

[6] For other echoes of Traherne in this poem, see Ackerman 128-9.

CHAPTER 5

EDITH SITWELL AND AN ANALYSIS OF "THE DRUM"

5.1 The semiotic elements in Edith Sitwell's Poetry

According to Susan Sontag, "abstract painting is the attempt to have, in the ordinary sense, no content; since there is no content, there can be no interpretation." (qtd. in Iser 11). In this context, it is significant that Sitwell says, "the poems in *Façade* are abstract poems- that is, they are patterns in sound."(xvi). Sitwell's "Some Notes on My Own Poetry" prefacing the collected edition of her poems seems to be a testimony to the semiotic process, a corroboration of the approach adopted in this study, and in that respect, what Sitwell says leaves one very little else to point out in terms of the aspects of her works that fit in with this approach. Her poetry is to be experienced for the effect of its sound and imagery, as well as its sense; and anyway, there is not much that can be paraphrased in her poems. The best strategy for Sitwell's poetry would be to read it aloud with eyes closed, laboriously observing the mental effect, the "imagistic" meaning of Iser.

According to Sitwell, "rhythm is one of the principal translators between dream and reality. [...] It shapes and gives new meaning." (xv). That new meaning is not referential but based on the effect of sound, it is a semiotic meaning, a synaesthetic communication. Reacting to the "deadness" of Georgian poetry, Sitwell felt the necessity to "find rhythmical expressions" answering the requirements of the modern age (xv, see also Appendix B). Her poems in *Façade* are "inquiries into the effect on rhythm and on speed of the use of rhymes, assonances, and dissonances, placed at the beginning and in the middle of lines, as

well as at the end, and in most elaborate patterns." (xvi) According to her, sounds can be fluttering, dead, decadent, or shady (xviii,xx-xxiii); woven into patterns, they may carry their own sense, accompanying the referential sense or singing their counter tune, the chiming of the semiotic, primary rhythm, the echolalias that Kristeva speaks of. However, that counter tune may be baffling and confusing too. Parsons says in reading Sitwell's poems, "the reader is caught in the struggle between the meaning and the movement, the struggle of meaning as movement" (147).

On her imagery, Sitwell notes:

> It was said that the images in these poems were strange. This was partly because, where the language of one sense was insufficient to cover the meaning, the sensation, I used the language of another, and by this means attempted to pierce down to the essence of the thing seen, by discovering in it attributes which at first sight appear alien but which are acutely related.- by producing its quintessential colour (sharper, brighter than that seen by an eye grown stale) and by stripping it of all unessential details. (xix)

Here explicitly is synaesthesia, the insufficiency of (the symbolic) language to convey all the experience and perceptions (of the semiotic), condensation, displacement, and even the distinct essence of things that Hopkins too discovered. This is parallel also to Sitwell's remark that poems with such an emphasised sound component are not devoid of sense, on the contrary, they are packed with meaning, nevertheless, a "plot" should not be necessary for the enjoyment of a poem (xvii). It is also interesting that Sitwell also mentions "the idea of equivalence" (xvi), recalling Jakobsons's projection of equivalence principle in poetic language, which leads to a parallelism between sound and thought. The effect aimed at in her poetry also aims at thought, as reflection on a remarkable experience.

The only thing that remains after Sitwell's explanations concerning her poetry is to see how they work in an actual poem. The following poem was thus chosen

randomly as the first poem of the *Façade* (as listed in the collected edition of her poetry), assuming that any poem in that group should be representative of those experiments in sound that Sitwell speaks of.

5.2 An analysis of "The Drum" by Edith Sitwell

"The Drum" has a plot [1], and a Gothic one in that, but emphasis is on the recreation of the experience. The narrative begins with the setting, which is quite understandable, with the exception of "decoy-duck" (l.3), however, there actually seems to be a problem of "understanding" as early as the first two lines in terms of what the poet wishes to convey. In these lines containing the adjectives describing the house of Mompesson, all the reader can hear may be the rhyme of "senatorial" and "manorial", and perhaps the necessity of a stop after "blac k". However, Sitwell points out that there is a "subtle" dissonance between "tall" and "senatorial" in the first line, and she claims that this dissonance is meant to "convey the sense of menace, of deepening darkness" (xxii). This seems quite discouraging as an example of sound as meaning, because the only sense of darkness in these lines seems to come referentially from "black". But let us substitute another word that has a similar sound but a meaning incompatible with the sense of menace of darkness, for example 'clack' or 'slack', then read it aloud:

> In his tall senatorial,
> Slack and manorial,

[1] According to the mixture of legend and history, the "Drummer of Tedworth" is supposed to have disturbed the residents of the town (now spelt Tidworth) in 1661. He was supposed to have been in Cromwell's army, and claimed to have a license to play his drum whenever he wanted. A magistrate named Mompesson confiscated his drum, which was taken to his house, and the drummer was driven away. The magistrate's household began to be disturbed at nights by sounds of unseen drums, and objects reported to move of their own accord (as in poltergeist incidents), which the story says stopped when the drummer found a way to return and repossess his drum. Apparently all the uncanny incidents started in the rooms of the children of the house, and with the Puritan tint of the story, it might perhaps be thought another case of collective hysteria, similar to the Witch trials and burnings in Salem. There is no record of this incident causing any death, however; only a drummer's heart seems to have been broken.

Now the lines have a totally different referential meaning, which is a little incoherent and nonsensical, but the sound has changed very little. The slow cadence and almost all the phonemes are still there, and so seems to be still present a vague disturbing sense too. Sitwell claims that "certain arrangements of words ending in 'ck' ('black', 'quack', duck', 'clack', etc.) cast little, almost imperceptible shado ws" (xx). This could be rejected as a very subjective feeling, only we should also note "the restraint" that Hopkins attributes to another word ending in "ck", "4" (see p. 52, note 9). This reminds us of the importance Hopkins and Thomas also attached to sound. Poets are extremely sensitive to the effect of sound; readers, on the other hand, may be too used to looking only for referential sense, and in this way they are blinded to what is trying to be conveyed by the semiotic. In any case, casting "vague shadows" through patterns of "ck" ending words and other sounds that have certain associations is what Sitwell is trying to achieve in this poem; and that "black", referentially too, has a sense of darkness that would be a parallelism between sound and sense for her. This parallelism operates interestingly, Sitwell claims the "m" in manorial is "impenetrable" (xxiii). At least this feeling of hers is not impenetrably subjective, not only because referentially a manor can be impenetrable to strangers, but also "m" is pronounced with lips pressed - and impenetrable. The nonsensical combination "decoy -duck" turns to be a more subjective, surreal word operating on the attributed shadiness of "duck", and another subjective association of Sitwell, who claims "a duc k's quacking is [...] one of the driest sounds, and it has a particular deadness"; thus "decoy -duck dust" means "very thick dry dust" (xxii). Lines 4 and 5 contain onomatopoeic words, whose sounds mean shade, darkness, dryness and death according to Sitwell (xxii-xxiii). The reader may not share

Sitwell's subjective associations, but those sounds and other onomatopoeic words, "howl", "whine", "whinnying", are repeated throughout the poem (and always their referential meaning turns out to be associated with fear), and their effects accumulate.

There is also synaesthetic imagery in this poem, for example, "Dust doth clack- /Clatter and quack" (ll. 4-5), the drum is "rolling like the sea" (l. 9), a star "howls" (l. 17), the sound of the drum has "a pang like da rkness" (l. 41), for "burning milk" (l.56). Like the emphasis on sound, or even insistence on sound as meaning, these synaesthetic images also make up the genotext of the poem.

The meanings attributed by Sitwell aside, the poem's emphasis on sound cannot be missed. In the first stanza, as Sitwell also notes, there is internal rhyme ("dark stark" l. 8) and assonance "musty Justice" (l.9) (xxiii). In the rest of the poem, these devices are repeated (for example, "pomp [...] Mompesson" in l. 20, "lolloping gal loping" in l.34, "With a pang [...] with a clang [...] orang -outang" in ll.41-2) and alliteration also occurs: "Hecate howls" (l.17), "Wolfishly and whined/The wind" (l.18-9) ("from very far" here creates a subtle contrast), "coral comb of a cock", which, besides being assonant, also half-rhymes with "it rocks" (l. 22), "candle confesses" (l.34), etc. The "orang -outang" (l.42) and "Heliogabalus" (l. 43) seem to be chosen rather for their extraordinary, foreign sound than for their sense; although "orang-outang" may connote wildness, there is nothing, except "musty", to prepare the reader for the allusion "Heliogabalus" [2], which conveys strong profligacy and seems to be substituted for the magistrate. All musical devices, as Parsons also notes (see above), draw the reader's attention to the sound,

to the point of distraction from the referential sense. However, all this emphasis on sound completes the referential sense too:

The poem is about a disturbing sound, the rhythmic, primeval sound of a drum which is "rolling like the sea" (l. 9); this connotes not only the rhythmic movement of the waves, but their power to engulf; and the sea can also be associated with a womb that generates life. This drum is confiscated by "the musty Justice Mompesson". And thus its rhythm, that was "Once heard rolling like the sea", a quality repeated twice, is forbidden until "Eternity" (ll. 13, 15). In Kristevan terms, the drum could be interpreted as the semiotic rhythm of the primary processes of the preverbal child, and even reminiscent of the rhythmic sounds heard in the womb. The Justice could be a powerful authority representative of the restrictive symbolic order, which is nevertheless "musty", reminiscent of the staleness of language that the metalingual quality of Nonsense draws attention to, or of Sitwell's and other twentieth century poets' dissatisfaction with the staleness of not only certain poetry, but their civilization too. Thus, the semiotic is confiscated by the symbolic until "Eternity", which is, as discussed before, the semiotic's favourite time until which the fulfilment of desire is delayed.

But the dark act of confiscation is followed by increasing darkness, when the drum is confiscated, the inhabitants of the manor are engulfed by fear; every sound, and even silence, becomes fearful. The "black" star in l. 17, which is silent, "howls" wolfishly, or the persona in her fear chooses to attribute the wolf's howl to the star supernaturally; wind is perceived as whining (of course these are metaphors, but they are chosen to render the disturbing sensation). The candle, which has been lit in

[2] Heliogabalus is "the adopted name of Varius Avitus Bassianus, Roman Emperor A.D. 218-222,

the middle of the night to drive away fear of the dark, is "lolling"; its light is weak and incapable of penetrating the darkness of the night (l.21). Even the sound of air stirred by a hare becomes as loud as "whinnying" and whining [3] like a horse (l. 27). And up pops a beautiful dark lady, as if she has mistaken this poem for a Shakespearean sonnet (in the source legend there is no mention of a witch, only the drummer is the implied origin of the evil happenings). What is the function of this frightening lady who is dangerously charming? The metonymic candle that locates her in a kitchen gallipot has quite childish fears: "Outside in the passage are wildernesses/Of darkness rustling like witches' dresses"(ll.35 -6). The narrative begins to be more and more reminiscent of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown".

All this hysterical fear seems to result from taking the symbolic, the men-made order of things, too seriously at the cost of natural and healthy inclinations, like music; as happened to the Salem girls who raised witches where there were none. The darkly attractive lady may be the m/other who is forbidden as an object of desire on entering the symbolic order through acquisition of language, who nevertheless continues to be the object of repressed desire, and thus is projected into a dangerous, tempting witch. It may be significant in this context that the danger first concentrates on the children who are "moaned" as "long dead" (49-51), an expression of unconscious self-pity as the entrance into the symbolic brings loss of self-perception as one, which may be, in a way, a death in the semiotic and rebirth into the symbolic.

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famed for folly and profligacy, used allusively." (OED)

[3] Sitwell, who was familiar with country life, may also be evoking another association. Hares, or rather rabbits, are normally soundless animals, only when extremely frightened or in danger of their lives, they produce a terrible, very high frequency and sustained squeak which is very disturbing to hear.

The poem ends with the "whinnying, neighing, the maned blue wind" (l. 55) ascending to avenge the drummer on the magistrate. The connotations of both the wind and the horse are freedom and power, but horse also connotes bodily strength and productivity, thus the last stanza may point to the energies, drives and desire of the chora clashing with the symbolic to the disadvantage of the latter; as this poem, with its emphasis on sound meaning, to a certain extent does.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at analysing the difficulties in reading poetry that arises from unconventional use of language, presenting them within a theoretical framework and resolving them. The method was a blend of Kristeva's semanalytic theory, and Parsons's study of Nonsense with a view to deriving strategies for reading twentieth century poetry. The technique employed was close reading, and paying attention to the disruptions arising out of the dialectics of the semiotic and the symbolic.

First, in the light of Jakobson's arguments, poetic language was defined as characterised by the principle of projection of equivalence. This principle causes a parallelism in sound, emphasising the sound component of language, and a parallelism between sound and meaning as opposed to the situation in the other functions of language, where the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Thus the poetic function of language, by emphasising the sound and parallelism, not only draws attention to the act of meaning, the relation between the signified and the signifer, but also implies the possibility of sound as meaning.

In the light of Kristeva's semanalytic theory, poetic language was said to arise from the dialectic interaction of the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic order tries to utter preverbal desires and drives, as well as sensory perceptions which cannot be communicated in language as they are experienced, where as the symbolic order which dominates the referential function of language and loads it with rationality, and social restrictions and regulations.

Thus poetic language has been claimed to arise from the preverbal rhythm and the primary processes of displacement, condensation, and association; also giving rise to figurative language. The semiotic processes lead to disruptions of language so as to convey perceptions and experiences that language, which is symbolic, is not structured to communicate effectively. These disruptions have been identified as the source of the difficulty of making meaning in the conventional way. According to Kristeva, every text contains the influence of both the semiotic processes and the symbolic ones. In a text, the disruptions that arise from the semiotic is the genotext and the referentially, rationally structured elements that arise from the symbolic make up the phenotext.

With Kristeva's semanalytic theory as her starting point, Parsons compares the work of certain 20th century poets with Nonsense, and other related phenomena, in order to find ways of increasing the awareness and deciphering of the genotext in the latter. In the light of her approach, the similarities between difficult poetry, Nonsense and other forms of expression which disrupt language have been briefly examined. An unconventionally emphasised usage of musical devices such as alliteration, assonance, rhyme, meter; experiments with synaesthetic expression; sound as meaning operating through association, indirect and subjectively attributed meaning operating through connotation, lexical and syntactic disruptions (such as combinations or portmanteau words), and a self-referential quality were identified as disruptions.

In the analyses, first certain general aspects of the works of G. M. Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, and Edith Sitwell were discussed. These aspects are thought to be characteristics arising from the semiotic processes and causing difficulty in making

referential meaning, besides attempting to convey a non-referential meaning. It was observed that all three poets employ language in an unconventional way and dwell on the importance of sound in itself and the possibility of sound as meaning, and they use synaesthetic expression, besides depending a lot on association and connotation. While Hopkins and Thomas use certain forms of lexical disruption, such as coined condensations or combinations with multiple meanings, and syntactic disruptions, no coinage was discovered in Sitwell's poem, but her poem depicted lexical disruption in terms of displacement- she attributed subjective meanings and qualities to existing words on the basis of their sounds (e.g. Sitwell associates "decoy -duck" with thick dry dust due to its sounds, see p. 73). Other poems of hers however, contain coinages.

Each poet had his or her own way of synaesthetic expression. In Hopkins's poem even the line breaks operated towards the creation of meaning, making use of the appearance of the poem on the page. He tried to create a sense of the craving desire, of a preoccupation with individual, unique but transitory beauty through repeated words and sounds. He used combinations of multiple words to carry complex sensory perceptions. Sitwell used unconventional imagery and her poem was the one that most depended on sound as meaning. Thomas used metonymies that disrupted referential sense, imagery imposed on each other, and repetitions of words and sound figures for emphasis.

In Hopkins and Thomas, also a perception of time arising from semiotic processes was discovered. While Hopkins defers the fulfilment of desire to a future eternity, Thomas's poem longs for an irretrievable past when time was not perceived as linear but cyclical. In Sitwell's poem also a reference to the semiotic construct of

deferral to eternity of the retrieval of a loss has been discovered. This concern with time, although it occurs in a different way in each poem, reflects the semiotic experience.

As to the difficulties of the adopted approach, in trying to discover the disruptions caused by the semiotic processes, the researcher may feel like Alice in Wonderland, who is too conventional to feel in her element there, and perhaps rushing where angels fear to tread. In poetry with such disruptions, everything seems familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Trying to pinpoint the semiotic is like being in the sheep shop in the fifth chapter of *Through the Looking Glass*[1], where shelves are seen with the corner of the eye to be crammed full of desirable objects, but when Alice reaches for a shelf, it turns out to be empty; the objects have all escaped to other shelves. So until one really reaches for the semiotic, it is loudly there; but when one tries to pinpoint it, it suddenly seems to be the most conventional of poetic devices, the semiotic has run away to the other parts of the poem, and the poem chosen for its difficulty either seems to be the most obvious of things, or appears to contain only referential difficulties. In fact, like Derrida's reference to meaning, the semiotic closure seems endlessly deferred.

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[1] Parsons notes this passage for its dreamlike quality, establishing a parallel between Nonsense and dreams (33-4).

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APPENDIX A

POEMS STUDIED

THE LEADEN ECHO AND THE GOLDEN ECHO[1]

(*Maidens' song from St. Winefred's Well*)

THE LEADEN ECHO

HOW to kéep—is there ány any, is there none such, nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, láce, latch or catch or key to keep
Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, …from vanishing away?
Ó is there no frowning of these wrinkles, rankéd wrinkles deep,
Dówn? no waving off of these most mournful messengers, still messengers, sad and stealing messengers of grey?
No there's none, there's none, O no there's none,
Nor can you long be, what you now are, called fair,
Do what you may do, what, do what you may,
And wisdom is early to despair:
Be beginning; since, no, nothing can be done
To keep at bay
Age and age's evils, hoar hair,
Ruck and wrinkle, drooping, dying, death's worst, winding sheets, tombs and worms and tumbling to decay;
So be beginning, be beginning to despair.
O there 's none; no no no there's none:
Be beginning to despair, to despair,
Despair, despair, despair, despair.

THE GOLDEN ECHO

Spare!
There ís one, yes I have one (Hush there!);
Only not within seeing of the sun,
Not within the singeing of the strong sun,
Tall sun's tingeing, or treacherous the tainting of the earth's air,
Somewhere elsewhere there is ah well where! one,
Oné. Yes I can tell such a key, I do know such a place,
Where whatever's prized and passes of us, everything that's fres h and fast flying of us, seems to us sweet of us and swiftly away with, done away with, undone,
Undone, done with, soon done with, and yet dearly and dangerously sweet
Of us, the wimpled-water-dimpled, not-by-morning-matchèd face,
The flower of beauty, fleece of beauty, too too apt to, ah! to fleet,
Never fleets móre, fastened with the tenderest truth
To its own best being and its loveliness of youth: it is an everlastingness of, O it is an all youth!
Come then, your ways and airs and looks, locks, maiden gear, gallantry and gaiety and grace,
Winning ways, airs innocent, maiden manners, sweet looks, loose locks, long locks, lovelocks, gaygear, going gallant, girlgrace—
Resign them, sign them, seal them, send them, motion them with breath,
And with sighs soaring, soaring síghs deliver
Them; beauty-in-the-ghost, deliver it, early now, long before death

[1] Hopkins, 52-4.

Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver.
See; not a hair is, not an eyelash, not the least lash lost; every hair
Is, hair of the head, numbered.
Nay, what we had lighthanded left in surly the mere mould
Will have waked and have waxed and have walked with the wind what while we slept,
This side, that side hurling a heavyheaded hundredfold
What while we, while we slumbered.
O then, weary then why should we tread? O why are so haggard at the heart, so care-coiled-, care-killed, so fagged, so fashed, so cogged, so cumbered,
When the thing we freely fórfeit is kept with fonder a care,
Fonder a care kept than we could have kept it, kept
Far with fonder a care (and we, we should have lost it) finer, fonder
A care kept.—Where kept? Do but tell us where kept, where.—
Yonder.—What high as that! We follow, now we follow.—Yonder, yes yonder, yonder,
Yonder.

Fern Hill [2]

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
    The night above the dingle starry,
        Time let me hail and climb
    Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
        Trail with daisies and barley
    Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
    In the sun that is young once only,
        Time let me play and be
    Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
        And the sabbath rang slowly
    In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay
Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air
    And playing, lovely and watery
        And fire green as grass.
    And nightly under the simple stars
As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,
All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars
    Flying with the ricks, and the horses
        Flashing into the dark.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
    Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
        The sky gathered again
    And the sun grew round that very day.
So it must have been after the birth of the simple light

[2] Thomas, 134-5.

In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm
Out of the whinnying green stable
On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house
Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,
In the sun born over and over,
I ran my heedless ways,
My wishes raced through the house high hay
And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace,

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
In the moon that is always rising,
Nor that riding to sleep
I should hear him fly with the high fields
And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

The Drum[3]

(*The Narrative of the Demon of Tedworth*)

IN his tall senatorial,
Black and manorial,
House where decoy-duck
Dust doth clack —
Clatter and quack
To a shadow black, —
Said the musty Justice Mompesson,
'What is that dark stark beating drum
That we hear rolling like the sea?'
'It is a beggar with a pass
Signed by you.' 'I signed not one.'
They took the ragged drum that we
Once heard rolling like the sea ;
In the house of the Justice it must lie
And usher in Eternity.

* * * * *

Is it black night?
Black as Hecate howls a star
Wolfishly, and whined
The wind from very far.

In the pomps of the Mompesson house is one
Candle that lolls like the midnight sun,
Or the coral comb of a cock; . . . it rocks. . . .
Only the goatish snow's locks
Watch the candles lit by fright

[3] Sitwell, 110-2.

One by one through the black night.

Through the kitchen there runs a hare —
Whinnying, whines like grass, the air;
It passes; now is standing there
A lovely lady . . . see her eyes —
Black angels in a heavenly place,
Her shady locks and her dangerous grace.

'I thought I saw the wicked old witch in
The richest gallipot in the kitchen!'
A lolloping galloping candle confesses.
'Outside in the passage are wildernesses
Of darkness rustling like witches' dresses'

Out go the candles one by one
Hearing the rolling of a drum!

What is the march we hear groan
As the hoofed sound of a drum marched on
With a pang like darkness, with a clang
Blacker than an orang-outang?
'Heliogabalus is alone, —'
Only his bones to play upon!'

The mocking money in the pockets
Then turned black . . . now caws
The fire . . . outside, one scratched the door
As with iron claws, —
Scratching under the children's bed
And up the trembling stairs . . . 'Long dead'
Moaned the water black as crape.
Over the snow the wintry moon
Limp as henbane, or herb paris,
Spotted the bare trees; and soon
Whinnying, neighed the maned blue wind
Turning the burning milk to snow,
Whining it shied down the corridor —
Over the floor I heard it go
Where the drum rolls up the stair, not tarries.

APPENDIX B

THE APPROACH APPLIED TO MODAL DIFFICULTY:

"MAKİNALAŞMAK"[1] BY NAZIM HİKMET

The focus of this study is on tactical and ontological difficulties, but associatively hearing and seeing the poem, and a little allowance for the subjectivity of the poet, can help with even modal difficulties. By no means representative of his other poems, "*Makinalaşmak*" ("Mechanization") by Nazım Hikmet strikes one at first as ironical, giving the impression that the poet is in fact speaking through a persona whose opinions are in conflict with his own: An urgent desire to get "mech anized" is hardly a thing expected from a poet known for his sensitiveness and humanity; rather, the stock expectation is a condemnation of the already mechanized and alienated in the post-industrial world and a wish to return to a more natural state. Instead Nazım, of all poets, gives us what amounts to modal nonsense; because, from the habitual perspective of a reader used to his other poems, it is not possible to understand his craving- one is reminded of an almost literal clock-work orange:

Trrrrum, trrrrum, trrrrum! trak tiki tak Makinalaşmak istiyorum!	Trrrrum, trrrrum, trrrrum! trock ticky tock I want to get[2] Mechanized!
Beynimden, etimden, iskeletimden geliyor bu! Her dinamoyu altıma almak için çıldırıyorum!	My brain, flesh, skeleton desire this! Every dynamo I am craving madly to have under me!

[1] Hikmet, 39-40.
[2] The translation is mine, although in all poetry, the difficult poems are probably the ones that fare worst in translation.

Tükrüklü dilim bakır telleri yalıyor
damarlarımda kovalıyor
oto-direzinler
lokomotifleri!

Trrrrum,
trrrrum,
trrrrum!
trak tiki tak
Makinalaşmak
istiyorum!

Mutlak buna bir çare bulacağım
ve ben ancak bahtiyar olacağım
karnıma bir türbin oturtup
kuyruğuma çift uskuru taktığım gün!

Trrrrum,
trrrrum,
trrrrum!
trak tiki tak
Makinalaşmak
istiyorum!

My saliva-wet tongue licks copper wires
in my veins chase
electric-motors locomotives!

Trrrrum,
trrrrum,
trrrrum!
trock ticky tock
I want to get
Mechanized!

Willy-nilly I will find a remedy
and I will only be happy
the day I set a turbine on my belly
and at my tail a double propeller!

Trrrrum,
trrrrum,
trrrrum!
trock ticky tock
I want to get
Mechanized!

Nevertheless, whoever the persona may be, the yearning is perfectly sincere. The poem dates to the early years of the Soviet revolution; the political tendency that prevailed among its supporters, of which Nazım was one, was all for industrialisation and progress. Moreover, human tendencies and connections, such as love and family, were thought of by most as hindering and reactionary bourgeois failings- on the principle that nothing should impede production, and devices of production had priority. Thus machines with their clock-work operations were idealized as efficient, solid, strong and rhythmic- there seemed to be no nonsense about them. It later turned out that this ideology "3its poets" (see p. 32, also *DL* 31), but at the time, even Mayakovsky, the Dada poet-painter, also among the poets soon to be wasted, supported the revolution.

The refrain of the poem consists of onomatopoeic renderings of the rhythmic noise of machinery, probably first the starting motor, then the sound of an adjusted gear and a clock. The appearance of the first stanza is as if the lines were chasing

each other in an attempt to take over the others and be the first, connotative of a competitive progress; while the second stanza is one long breathless voicing of desire. While the refrain is given in vertical type, the stanzas are given in italics, a typographic convention sometimes used for rendering the thoughts as opposed to speech, also connoting a slantness, a frailty in being human as opposed to the upright solidness of machinery. The machines attached to the lower parts of the body, especially "the tail" may each have libidinous associations.

The rhythm is no less attractive to the poet and indeed, that is not so surprising; mechanical rhythm and sound are even today musically attractive to some; how else can the existence of "Techno", the pop music movement with mechanic rhythm and percussion imitating mechanic noise, be explained? Moreover, the rhythmic noise that a fetus in the womb hears is likely to resemble that of a machine operating regularly. Even Sitwell, who lived through the period this poem was written in, but probably with feelings contrasting with those of Nazım at the time, makes the following note on her own poetry:

> The great architect, Monsieur Le Corbusier, said that, as theresult of the Machine Age, 'new organs awake in us, another diapason, a new vision.' He said of persons listening to the sound of certain machinery that 'the noise was so round that one believed a change in the acoustic functions was taking place.' It was therefore necessary to find rhytmical expressions for the heightened speed of our time. (xv)

At another level, this poem reminds one of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the desiring-machine (see p.19); "everything is a machine [...] the continuous whirr of machines." (2) The humans are desiring-machines that need to be in continuous operation and production and to be connected in a circuit, for the sake of the

process only, not for an ultimate product.[3] But the human machine is also one with nature (4). It is also possible that an unconscious creative yearning for being connected in a process of production underlies Nazım's poem.

[3] Deleuze and Guattari's view of production is totally different from that of Marx.