

Movement and Balance

A comment on Derek Attridge's *Moving Words*

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Abstract: This paper discusses some central problems that occur within cognitive versification studies. Derek Attridge's *Moving Words* (2013) comments on Richard Cureton's concept of temporalities. Attridge understands poetic rhythm as movement. He draws the conclusion that movement and repetition are, in principle, contradictory because, in a way, repetition looks backwards and stops the movement. This turns out to be a complicated statement, as repetition seems to be the only poetic device that is common in poetry all over the world. However, it may be possible to understand the relationship between movement and repetition with the help of Reuven Tsur's concept of back-structuring. This shows how verse rhythm is spatialised as well as has the ability to move in time. This is possible because of gestalt borders that close the sequences. Additionally, Cureton's fourth thematic temporality is useful to solve the conflict. Temporality is a complex reality, and poetic rhythm also has the ability to stand still.

Keywords: Attridge, closure, Cureton, movement, repetition, temporality, Tsur

Introduction

With the entrance of cognitive poetics, versification studies have become a central issue in literary studies, a discipline where basic questions of aesthetics and artistic language can be studied. There are a couple of scholars who should be especially honoured for this breakthrough. Reuven Tsur was first with his *Poetic Rhythm* and *Toward a Theory of Cognitive Poetics*.¹ Richard Cureton took another perspective in his *Rhythmic Phrasing in English Verse*. From a more traditional starting point, after his classic *The Rhythms of English Poetry*, Derek Attridge incorporated cognitive findings, little by little, into his system, thus stabilizing it. Another starting point is Mikhail Gasparov's *A History of European Versification*, which adds a broad historical perspective to contemporary versification studies.

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¹ Tsur's very first outline of cognitive versification studies takes place in Tsur 1977.

In this article, I will comment on a passage in Attridge's *Moving Words* (2013). In his second chapter (2013: 31–49), he refers to Cureton's idea of different levels of rhythm in a poem, which is what Cureton calls temporalities. Attridge is especially interested in the second and the third temporality, which are grouping and prolongation, respectively (the first temporality concerns metre). He discusses how they relate to repetition, which is another general device in poems. A basic idea in Attridge's work – as well as in Cureton's – is that a poem could be understood as movement in time (Attridge 2013: 5, 31). Attridge starts by saying that, in principle, movement and repetition are contradictory (2013: 39). With the help of Reuven Tsur's poetics, I will harmonise this conflict. My main perspective will be gestalt and closure.

Most of Attridge's examples are in metred verse. However, I will look at his ideas from the perspective of modernist free verse. Free verse may be defined as pronounced phrases combined with elaborate pauses. The division of the text into short lines creates the most salient pause with the line break. Free verse uses the same devices as traditional verse (e.g. rhymes) but without any general pattern. Modernist versification developed rhythms from different ancient cultures including Old Greek poetry and Eddaic forms. Biblical poetry could be added to the list. A fourth starting point for free versification was the avant-garde movement of the twentieth century, which offered a productive field of rhythmic experiments.

Free verse presents complications in method for the metrist who cannot go on counting iambs. This might be a reason why they have overlooked the free forms for about a century. However, a new version of gestalt psychology can come to our help.

Background

Before going into the conflict between movement and its borders, I will specify the concept of rhythm in poetry. I have combined Cureton's temporalities with Gasparov's verse systems into some principles of rhythm, which are three historical ways for words to move.² A verse system must rely on a certain rhythmical principle with the addition of a set of rules. However, principles of rhythm cover also all other art forms that use the concept of rhythm, like music and architecture. I distinguish three principles of aesthetic rhythm,

² Hereby I worked together with my late colleague Lena Hopsch at Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden.

serial rhythm, sequential rhythm and dynamic rhythm – that is three basic sets of gestalt qualities:

- Serial rhythm – The tactus or beat in measured music and poetry, which is to be found in the accentsyllabic poetry from the Renaissance until the modernist breakthrough.
- Sequential rhythm – The sequence of the phrase, which is to be found in the accentual versification in Old Norse poetry and the Germanic Middle Ages as well as in free versification, in music and in the surfaces of a painting, or the parts of a sculpture.
- Dynamic rhythm – The forces and directions in two- and three-dimensional artefacts and the temporal intensification towards a focus in music and poetry.

With these three kinds of rhythm in mind I will introduce a couple of main points made by Attridge, Cureton and Tsur, who are the fathers of cognitive versification studies. An important purpose of this article is to make their respective versification theories speak with one another.

Attridge's most important contribution to versification studies is his handling of the four-beat line that uses sequential rhythm, which is the patterned sequence of a phrase (Hopsch, Lilja, E. 2007). The sequential accentual rhythm dominated in England up to ca 1100 (Attridge 2012: 3, Gasparov 1996). As to versification rule, the line should have four prominences and be divided by a caesura in 2 + 2 stresses. The line is kept together with the help of alliteration. By calling attention to this old and new form, Attridge has freed versification studies from the permanent constraint of metre. My own field of study is the versification of modernist free verse, and this is often a variety of the old four-beat line.

I have already mentioned Cureton's temporalities – first alternation or pulse, then grouping in the phrase, and, finally, the prolongation that directs the line. They are equivalent with what I have named serial rhythm, sequential rhythm and dynamic rhythm. However, Cureton has a fourth one – the thematic rhythm. The first three levels that are covered in Cureton's book, go together with a hierachical system, where pulse is the smallest entity, phrase comes next, and the prolongation covers at least one line. All levels have their directions and their main stresses, and the definitive rhythm of a line will be a combination of rhythms from different levels.³

³ Cureton's notations of each level apart make the result difficult to grasp. In my rhythm

However, Cureton also constructs a fourth rhythmic possibility, the thematic temporality. After publishing his book, he obviously observed that his three temporalities were insufficient to describe the rhythm of a poem. The fourth temporality is about spatialised rhythm. Repetitions connect certain points in the rhythmic flow, and relate them to each other. This shapes a kind of eternal now (Cureton 1994a, 1994b; Larsson 1999: 99f.).

For modernist poetry, this fourth temporality – the thematic rhythm – is especially important. The first three levels move – the first one, metre, makes a short cyclical movement, the phrase of the second one centres, and the third one goes up to and out from a distinct focus (Cureton 1992). But the fourth one rests. With the help of repetitions time is spatialised (Hopsch, Lilja, E. 2017: 424).

Over centuries, the very word “rhythm” has been used for spatial as well as temporal art forms (Lilja, E. 2016). The pulse or metre of the first temporality can be found also in the antique peristyle. The poetic phrase has an equivalent in the arms and legs of the statue, and the directions of a prolongation can also be recognised also in a piece of architecture. What about the forth temporality? The tight rope walker moves forward at the same time as she/he stands in the middle of a dynamic play of forces, that keep directions in balance. Cureton’s fourth temporality means that a temporal form may also stand still, or balance.⁴

The very patriarch of cognitive versification studies, Reuven Tsur, has had a vast amount of research production during decades. Patiently, he uncovers layer after layer in a poem’s production of meaning. Every extra signification has its own technical explanation. Structures of emotion go with the structures of sounds, right down to tiny phonological differences. What have been called intuitions are explained here in frequencies and other acoustic details, which present different kinds of precategoryal information (Tsur 2012a, 2012b). Poetic conventions are shaped and constrained by the natural capacities and limitations of the human brain (Tsur 2017: 158).

Tsur emphasises the importance of the gestalt in poems, and he modernises the old gestalt psychology for this purpose. The gestalt observations of old times were in need of new and reliable theory. Tsur confirmed the observations through findings in neurology combined with phonology. The gestalt turned

notations I have taken all levels into account at the same time for practical reasons, considering various possibilities of interpretation. A notation of the levels one by one is confusing, something that also has been remarked according to Cureton’s thorough analyses.

⁴ From this intermedia perspective follows that also analyses of free and metrical verse can use the same tools (Hopsch, Lilja E. 2017).

out to be a useful methodological tool that works just as well in both free and metred verse. Gestalts may of course be of different sizes, but one of them is the phrase – Cureton’s second temporality – which Tsur prefers to name a “breath group”. He uses Miller’s finding of the so-called “magic seven”, which is based on the fact that short-term memory can hold about seven items, or syllables, at a time. This is also the extent of an ordinary phrase, a short line or a half line (Miller 1970). When transferred into time, the short-term memory holds about ten syllables for approximately three seconds (Pöppel 2004). What goes within this limit of seconds or items will be apprehended as one instant.

Another basic device in Tsur’s versification studies is rapid and slow categorisation. The reader will be invited by the text to read it quickly or slowly. In rapid categorisation the forms are transparent and easy to get hold of, while other poems may need more effort to be enjoyable. Tsur calls these more difficult texts divergent – information points in different directions – but rapid categorisation emanates from convergent texts, where form devices and contents harmonise. Slow categorisation creates time for a deeper understanding of the text for the reader (Tsur 2008: 59, 83, 100).

Tsur also points at the so-called back-structuring (Tsur 2012a: 302–303). Think of listening to a piece of music. The full melody will not show up until we have heard the very last tone, but after that one knows very well how it goes. Music – and poetry – works in time and we have to wait for the closure before we fully apprehend the temporal gestalt. On a lower level, this is also true for phrases and figures. In temporal gestalts, the form is grasped backwards. During listening, one waits for a boundary and the internal order of the form emerges afterwards when the gestalt becomes closed. Suddenly one has perceived its form and, in the same moment, patterned it (Smith 1968: 2). The temporal course includes a spatial understanding that is caused by gestalt pressure.

Back-structuring in perceptual processes, like reading, influences the interpretation. The whole phrase will be reinterpreted in arrears. The gestalt is only acknowledged when it is closed. The same goes for the larger gestalt of the whole poem. The forward factual time is unsettled and replaced with the periodic time pattern.

In his verse history 1996 Gasparov established the European systems of versification. In Northern Europe and Northern America, we must take into account four or five of them. Old Norse and medieval forms use the accentual system of versification. After that comes a period of accentsyllabic verse, and during the last century free verse has dominated the development of poetry. In addition, the syllabic system of French poetry has been seminal here, and

of course we must consider the quantitative system of versification of classical antiquity even if our own languages resist that kind of accent.

The Problem

Tsur's version of gestalt psychology is a necessary tool for cognitive versification studies. It is in line with Cureton's temporalities and Attridge's analyses. Any gestalt has a closure, and one aim here is to discuss how to achieve that closure in poems.

When writing his *Moving Words*, Attridge obviously has not noticed Cureton's articles about the fourth temporality. Attridge's chapter two, "Meaning in Movement. Phrasing and Repetition", takes Cureton's second and third temporality as a starting point for a discussion of different kinds of repetition.⁵ According to Attridge, the words in a poem should be moving, but repetitions make them stand still, he says. A repetition halts the movement, and the phrase will not be closed (2013: 40, 43). And of course, this will also affect meaning.

What kind of movement is Attridge thinking of? A prolongation works with meaning – its focus must be the semantically most important word of that passage. And of course, the semantic level emphasises some syllables and represses others in the sound structure of a poem. But when talking about verse rhythm, we usually refer to something else – the play between stressed and unstressed elements in a rhythm. These are related to meaning, but exist at the language level. In his second chapter, Attridge concentrates on semantic meaning. However, poetry has usually been described as an art form where the sound structure plays the most important role. Moving words are directed towards (and from) focuses of meaning but also to-and-fro stress focuses. Cureton's temporalities fluctuate between form aspects and semantics. His first temporality is only concerned about sound, the second one needs sound and meaning, while the third one concentrates on meaning.

Attridge says that repetitions may have an anti-closural effect (2013: 39). For closure, Attridge refers to Barbara Herrnstein Smith's discussion in *Poetic Closure* (1968: 155–66). According to her, serial repetitions – of that kind one

⁵ The serial pulse level of the first temporality seems to be less interesting for Attridge. However, even ordinary speech has kind of alternation at the bottom of the sound structure. This due to a strive for an evenness in the gestalt. This alternation is thing other than the tactus of premodernist verse, and in free versification the second level, the sequential rhythm of the phrase, is dominant.

will find in accentsyllabic versification – work in an anti-closural manner, and Attridge defines repeated words and expressions as equivalent to these types of repetition in verse. However, according to Smith, free unsystematic versification uses repetition as a means of closure. Mainly, free and metred poetry use the same formal devices with the difference that free verse does not accept any rules. However, there is a difference between the two verse systems in that pauses mostly are more crucial in free verse.⁶ This may be a way to explain why repetitions should behave differently in free and metred verse.

Attridge's problem is the question of how movement with repetition can be combined – a repetition that could make the line static according to his findings (2013: 39). The poem moves forward but the repetition causes the motion to cease. According to Attridge, repetition has an odd status in poetic movement and refers to repeated words and expressions, but not to different kinds of rhyming (2013: 41). Repeated words should be “contentless” (2013: 48), but so-called “expressive repetitions” may intensify the text, and new signification may rise from the change in position that will be the result of a repetition (2013: 49). With the help of some examples, he discusses how different kinds of repetition can create meaning in a poem.

Roman Jakobson was also interested in repetitions. His famous theory of equivalence states that the repeated element is defining for poetry (Attridge 2013: 38; Jakobson 1960). I personally have found that repetition is the only device that seems to be common in poetry all over the world within different verse systems. Jakobson says that in a rhyming pair, the repeated occasion points back at the first one. However, Jakobson never explains why rhyme words, or equivalent elements, are connected. He refers to some vague associations. Here, we have now got an explanation thanks to Tsur's work with gestalt theory in poetry. The equivalence, or the repeated approximate element, exemplifies the gestalt law of similarity. A gestalt is closed when the repeated element returns. Attridge's example of rhymed poetry is borrowed from Blake, “A Poison Tree”, here line 9–10:

...
 And it grew both day and night
 Till it bore an apple bright –
 ...

⁶ For various observations about rhythm in free verse I refer to my forthcoming publication *Rhythm in Modernist Poetry*.

Time of different kinds

The conflict between movement and balance might look more distinct with the help of a reflection over time. Moving words are moving in time, and temporality is a main idea in Cureton's poetics. Rhythm consists of motion, and poetic motion takes place in time. However, a moving body moves both in time and space (Hopsch, Lilja, E. 2017, Attridge 2013: 40).

There are different kinds of time. First of all, we have time according to the watch that measures time invariably and scientifically. In this timescape entropy guarantees a beginning and an end of the world. The direction must always point forwards. However, when looking around in nature, time seems to be more periodic – spring returns every year and new children are born when old people die. The society manipulates time, hastens it and intensifies it by creating weeks of seven days, vacation periods, Christmas, et cetera – here time is more of a social construct. Psychological time appears to be rather different from clock time. In the mind, time might stand still or just disappear in a rather bumpy course. The reading process needs both factual and psychological time.

Cureton talks about psychological time, how time functions in the reading process (Cureton 1992: 427). However, reading a poem is a psychological occurrence that is in need of factual reading time. What we should remember here is that these two time aspects behave quite differently even if they may cooperate with each other. Reading a poem will take a couple of factual minutes. In the psychological reading process, however, one will shape that time according to the rhythmical construction and the semantic information. Focus points are decided just as directions and tempo are and, in this inner world, time has the possibility to stand still if needed, which is something that Cureton also refers to with his fourth temporality as well as at other levels of his system. The verse line moves in factual time but might keep still in the reader's inner time.

Modernist poetry, however, will need more factual time than poems did a century ago. Modernism has developed a new type of poetry reading, which is known as spatial reading. It is rather impossible to take in a whole poem in only one reading – a modernist text is too complex for that. The reader has to walk around in the poem, so to speak, and look at the previous line again before going back to the very beginning in order to repeat the point of departure and thereby discover an expressive paronomasia that connects two segments, as well as other repetitions. After this process, one can understand the text in its entirety (Cureton 1992: 427). This process questions the

directionality of time when it establishes the poem as a room of its own where the reader walks around (Attridge 2013: 40).

Attridge focuses Cureton's second and third temporalities – grouping and prolongation. In a prolongation, the parts are directed to the focus point, and these directions are a main device in the structure of a poetic text, regarding the verse rhythm as well as semantics. According to Attridge, in the extension of a prolongation the direction will even go backwards (2013: 41).⁷ In addition, the grouping level works in the same way, and this implies that every phrase and line has a universe of directions of its own. Cureton names the grouping time modus 'centroidal time'. Yes, words are moving in a poem but not always in the forward direction of factual time – obviously, psychological time might point backwards or stay still. However, psychological time always must relate to factual time.

Simplification and equivalence

Repetition is an odd phenomenon, not easy to catch. Here, I will comment on two of its aspects, simplification and equivalence. It should be noted that there is no exact repetition. Even if the repeated expression is exactly the same as the first one, its position will change when it appears a second time. When saying the same thing once more, (factual) time has continued forwards and altered the conditions (Attridge 2013: 48, Barthes 2009).

Can it really be true that a repeated word or clause lacks meaning? I prefer to say that repetition might simplify the expression. Repetitions create simplifications – for every time one hears a message, more and more nuances will get lost (Lilja, E., Lilja, M. 2018). It will be strengthened and reduced at the same time and will become more intense and more simplistic.⁸ The ordinary way to avoid this simplification is to repeat with a slight difference (Danielsen 2006). With some new details added, the listener thinks that he hears the very original again.

Attridge remarks that meaning itself is grounded in repetition (2013: 46). One must hear something several times to perceive its meaning. Also,

⁷ It is possible to go backwards in space, but not in time. However, human perception of time is somehow modelled on the perception of space. Motion takes place in space, and time will be conceptualised in terms of motion (Lakoff, Johnson 1999: 140).

⁸ Compare with Tsur's idea (2012a: 63) of so-called cognitive economics. Brain capacity always chooses the simplest way possible to solve a problem.

communities need repetition to accept new ideas. Repetition is the highway for societies to build a common culture of norms and discourses (Lilja, E., Lilja, M. 2018).

Roman Jakobson prefers the slight difference when he makes “equivalence” a main theme in his poetics (Jakobson 1960; Attridge 2013: 38). A good repetition shall not be exact but similar, like is the case with the rhyme effect in his example “Horrible Harry”. This is not the kind of repetition that Attridge discusses, but here I would like to point out Jakobson’s idea once more, which states that a repetition makes the reader recall the first time he heard these sounds, thus creating new signification when the two occasions come together in the reader’s mind. Every repetition reminds you of the previous occurrence in a web of significations. A repeated word will close the expression (Jakobson 1960).

Tsur also notes that repetitions add extra meaning to the text, but this comes from a theory other than Jakobson’s. Tsur refers to cognitive poetics, when he emphasises that repetitions create signification simply due to the similarity, which mixes and disturbs the rational forward lapses of language, and forces the reader to abandon the rational principle of succession for the emotional principle of similarity (Tsur 2012b: 121, 138). Thereby, he does not agree with Attridge in that the repeated word would be contentless. Emotion needs time to develop and get charged, and repetition creates that time with the help of a slow categorisation. As noted above, slow categorisation serves the need for more factual time in the reading process, which is one of Tsur’s main ideas. Every repetition slows down the reading, thereby deepening thought as well as emotion. This description matches Attridge’s handling of so-called expressive repetitions (Attridge 2013: 45, 48).

Similarity connects elements in a poem, and similarity will, in practise, be the same as repetition of different kinds, such as approximate rhyming, repeated words as well as sentences. A repetition turns the reading mind backwards to the first occasion of that word, a repetition which closes the gestalt (Tsur 2012a: 303–304; Jakobson 1960).

Gestalt closure

The problem with Attridge’s second chapter is its insufficient approach to closure. Here, the concept of gestalt could be used as a methodological tool. The closed gestalt decides what movement can do in the interplay of directions in a poem. Cureton’s hierarchy of rhythm levels refers to the hierarchy of gestalts

in a poem, where a small one – like a line – will be embraced by a bigger one – like a stanza.⁹ The gestalts of a poem might be closed with the help of several means, and here I will point at two of them – two kinds of borders:

- The phrase signals a limit – a pause, a falling intonation – and this border creates a distinct entity where the movement takes place.
- A sound repetition closes the gestalt according to the gestalt law of similarity – a similar repeated element makes a closure.

As stated above, Tsur uses Miller’s finding of the so-called “magic seven”, which is based on the fact that short-term memory can hold about seven items, or syllables, at the same time. There is also a corresponding time limit of about three seconds, which is the capacity of the same short-term memory (Pöppel 2004). According to Pöppel, so much text – approximately ten syllables – can be kept in mind in one moment, and different versification devices will make the reading of a poem consist of a row of moments. Pauses are most active in this process. Poetry supports this portioning of text with the help of lineation and other pause markers, which create a reading process that is basically separated from the one in prose (Tsur 2012a: 297).

These active pauses make us read a poem in a succession of closed sequences – not streaming, which is the way one reads a novel. Every line makes the “now” of the short-term memory, and a strong feeling of “now” will be the result for the poetry reader (Ruin 1961). This is a kind of digital reading when prose reading might be called analogous. Every gestalt is spatialised and one can also talk about spatial reading.

This succession of closed gestalts will become evident if we consider Tsur’s idea of “back-structuring” (Tsur 2012a: 302–303). Digital reading is based on temporality. Poetry works in time and we have to wait a little for the closure when the form is grasped backwards. The factual, forward directed time is replaced with a periodic time pattern.

Poetry is distinguished by repetitions concerning sound effects, themes, motives and grammatical constructs (Jakobson 1960). Back-structuring and repetition spatialize the text, transforming it to a room where the reader walks around looking for beauty and meaning.

⁹ Attridge thinks of the whole poem as one gestalt – so-called “staged temporality” (2013: 39).

Standing still

Like me, Cureton is looking for a solid definition of the swaying concept of rhythm, and his four temporalities point at a result. Rhythm deals with movements and directions in a piece of art. Rhythm is a form of perception that governs the experience of artefacts. Rhythm in an art work signifies a play between temporal or spatial proportions within the perception of a gestalt – a play of directions that includes reaching a focus. A limited movement seems to be the basis of any aesthetic rhythm. The title of Attridge's book is *Moving words*, and this is very telling. However, I will add that the movement must be limited and closed.

Repetitions are very common in poems, and a repetition halts the movement. How do we understand all these repetitions? Cureton establishes a category where rhythm does not move, which is his fourth temporality. The problem here is that it is a little aside his system, and Attridge obviously did not know about it when he wrote his book.¹⁰ Cureton's so-called equative prolongation concerns feeble movements, and Attridge draws the conclusion that the equative prolongation is about repetitions that stops the movement (2013: 40).

The concept of movement includes a stand still. The immovable moment must be one aspect of moving (Attridge 2013: 42). A tight rope walker stands in the middle of a dynamic play of forces (Hopsch, Lilja, E. 2017). We have the same amount of directions in the delicate play of big and small gestalts in a poem. Movements go somewhere or they halt for a moment – I would say that this play of directions establishes rhythm. Direction can go forwards and backwards, to-and-fro, which is something that both Attridge and Cureton mention. The balancing sequence moves forwards in factual time, but it halts in the psychological time when the gestalt closes with the help of versification devices. The balance brings about a dynamic play of forces, which also involves symmetry and repetition – mostly not a perfect symmetry but more of equivalent repetitions.¹¹

I will suggest that this kind of halting or slowing down is a typical characteristic of modernist arts. Complicated texts invite the reader to slow

¹⁰ In his book, Cureton differs between three kinds of prolongation – equative, additive, and progressional ones. Cureton defines his equative prolongation as “a movement which does not significantly move” (1992: 147f., Larsson 1999: 91). Cureton's thematic rhythm is about standing still, time as space, and returning and repetition (Larsson 1999: 99–102).

¹¹ Tsur reminds us that perceptual forces always work inside a gestalt (2012a: 83).

categorisation.¹² The complexity of modernist poetry needs much factual time. The form elements relate to balance as well as to direction, and often they aim at symmetry and asymmetry at the same time. Rhythm could be seen as a happy contrast between balance and direction.

Repetition in a poem by Leonard Cohen

I will round off this paper with a discussion of an expressive repetition in a poem by Leonard Cohen, No 55 in *The Energy of Slaves* (1972). But first, a word about how to read a poem in free verse. To a certain degree, rhythm in free verse depends on the reading. A lodestar for me has been to pronounce the texts as normally as possible, thereby following ordinary speech rhythm. Some reading rules must be kept, but in other cases there is a choice to be made. One category of syllables must be stressed, and others must stay unstressed. But one also meets a category where the reader is allowed to choose whether to stress or not stress a syllable. Factors to consider are things like tempo, meaning, line length, and exclusiveness. In addition to this, individual readers may have their own ideas about how much they want to conventionalise the sound flow. According to the fashions over time, aesthetic styles vary over epochs, with readings aiming at the stable tactus or the precious segment (Lilja, E. 2006: 173–175).

Cohen is known for his elegant irony and his portraits of masculinity. The notation signs are explained below the poem:

	You need her	o O o
2	so you can get	ooo O >
	your boots off the bedspread	o O oo OO
4	We who have always ruled the world	O oo O o / O o O
	don't like the way you dance	o o O o O
6	And she said, I for one	o OO / O o O >
	am happy with the world	o O ooo O

¹² Compare with Tsur's basic idea about rapid and slow categorisation in the reception (2008: 577f.).

8	She seized the lapel of a cut-throat and said it again	o O o O o / oo O0 o O oo O	
10	with all her small voice trembling, I for one am happy with the world	o O o OOO o O o O / o O ooo O	
12	I don't know if I want to kill her or not	oo O oo O / o O oo O o OO o OO / o OO o O	anapaests bacchii

Notation signs:

Stress	O
Semistress	0
Unstressed	o
Phrase shift	/
Enjambment	>

The poem consists of five stanzas, five closed parts:

l. 1–3: A forward direction. Prolongation goal: “need her”.

l. 4–5: A forward direction in iambic serial rhythm. The commencing choriamb OooO is common in iambic verse and does not disturb its forwardness. Prolongation goal: “don't like”.

l. 6–7: A forward direction. The latter line has a vague iambic seriality. Prolongation goal: “happy”.

l. 8–11: Here comes the emphatic core of the poem and the rhythm is nuanced. The molossus of l. 10 “her small voice trembling” oOOOo parts the poem into a before and an after – as a kind of prolongation goal for the poem as a whole and for the stanza.

l. 12: A forward direction. There are two possible readings regarding the interpretation. The line is ambiguous and could be understood in two ways, but both possible readings are directed forward, with anapaests ooO or rising bacchii oOO. This line closes the poem effectively. Prolongation goal: “kill her”.

The story of this poem concerns a man, who calls himself “a cut-throat” and lives with a woman who represents societal order. She states that she is loyal to “the world” – perhaps the middle-class order. The man gets very irritated and considers killing her. This last saying could be ironic or not. There is a conflict of class as well as a conflict of gender. The poem centres about the psychology of the male character.

The narrative cooperates with the rhythm of the poem – there are narrative structures at both of these levels. According to Aristotle's poetics, every story has (at least) a beginning, a climax, and a closure and any Hollywood picture follows that rule. The same kind of movement is to be found in courses

of rhythm that build up to a culmination and thereafter ebb away. In this way, a piece of music, for example, tells a story about going somewhere, finding something and thereafter relaxing (Kühl 2003: 59). The same emotional pattern – with variations of course – exists in poetry and any other kind of rhythmic contexture. Here, I would suggest that the molossus of l. 10 makes the culmination of this poem and plays an important part in the structure of the poem as a whole. The molossus stands still – a balance point:

10 with all her small voice trembling, o O o OOO o

The line pictures the girl as a weak person – however, also brave enough to challenge the man. From this line, the reader gets a hint of what keeps this odd couple together. From the perspective of the protagonist hooligan, the phrase also expresses contempt and scorn for the girl – or perhaps for the whole middle-class establishment.

According to direction, rhythm and narrative cooperate. Most of the rhythm goes forward, it is rising on the level of the phrase and the line. An iambic seriality is the dominating rhythmic device of this poem within the frame of the free verse system. Also, the story about the irritated hooligan quickly runs forth to the bad solution(s) of the last line. The course of events skips insignificant details to concentrate on the important moments. There is a rush both in form and story. However, the forward movement holds back with the repetition of l. 6–7 in l. 11:

11 I for one am happy with the world O o O / o O ooo O

This sentence appears twice with varied line breaks. This repetition embraces two stanzas, l. 6–7 and l. 8–11. In the first one “happy” makes the prolongation goal, but in the second stanza, the phrase “her small voice trembling” makes the goal of that stanza in spite of the following repetition of “happy”. The many stresses in l. 10 mark it out as an important saying. Thereby, the interpretation of exactly the same expression changes a little when repeated because of a new context. These prolongation goals work semantically out of the interpretation of the poem. However, they also influence how they are stressed.

A repetition breaks a straight forward movement by turning back to the first occurrence. A forward seriality of line rhythm will not change this. The repetition facilitates reading, when it creates and closes a gestalt, which here consists of the l. 6–11 in two stanzas. What is in between the two occasions will stay in the reader’s mind. Here there is a pause, a stand still, in the forward rush of this poem.

The repeated phrase is not exactly the same when iterated. In l. 6–7 it is cut in two pieces by a light enjambment, which creates more time.¹³ In l. 11 it makes more of a statement with heavy line break pauses before and after it.

The repeated expression of l. 11 is the only falling passage of this poem. A falling direction goes slower and takes more time than the rising iambs – falling direction makes emphasis (Tsur, 2017). In various rhythmic ways, the girl's replica is marked as crucial – the repetition, the enjambment, the falling pattern, and twice the closing of a stanza. The emphasis on l. 10–11 makes this passage heavy in interpretation. The reader understands that she, in spite of her littleness, will win the fight between them.

So, what about l. 12 where the hooligan threatens to kill the girl? Cohen is well-known for his elegant irony, and I would recommend a double levelled ironic reading here. The rhythm turns into an anapaestic gallop ooO – if we choose that reading. However, there is also a possibility of a serious reading of the line with heavy bacchii oOO – and, of course, something in between these two patterns. My choice of anapaestic irony has its ground in the rather sloppy everyday language of this poem that hardly cooperates with a row of bacchii.

I would like to compare Cohen's repeated line with the one Attridge discusses in a poem by Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", where the last stanza is as follows:

13 The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
 But I have promises to keep,
 15 And miles to go before I sleep,
 And miles to go before I sleep

Attridge parts Frost's poem into two prolongation groups (2013: 47). The first one, l. 1–13, describes a longing for darkness and death, and the second one, l. 14–16, points at societal duties. This second group closes with a full-line repetition.

One repetition opens for more iterations, says Attridge (2013: 48). Principally, they could go on for ever without adding anything to the interpretation. Here, he does not recognise the closing power of the repeated line. However, in a poem every detail is important – if the saying is repeated once, it is not repeated twice. The girl in Cohen's poem won the fight with her partner with the help of the repeated saying that takes into account what has happened

¹³ The special enjambment pronunciation means to somewhat lengthen the last possible syllable before the break, and the usual pause of a half second in the very break disappears or shortens (Kjørup 2003: 239–254).

after her first replica. The context has changed and, thereby, so has the meaning of the expression.

In Frost's poem nothing happens between the first and the second occurrence. However, the context here has also changed. Line 16 is a repetition – time has continued after l. 15, and the stanza form asks for closure. The extra time created by the repetition lets the reader connect to the charged motive of death that without that iteration might have fallen aside.

Conclusion

Gestalts are closed with distinct borders. A poem may be looked upon as a row of sequences in different sizes, where the three-second limit (or Miller's approximately seven items) dominates the patterning. Cognitive versification studies offers tools and theory for such new ways of looking at verse.

Repetition is a sliding concept. It behaves differently in its various practices. Sometimes it strengthens the context, and other times it makes it weaker. When taking time into account, there is a cooperation between the forward motion of the universe and a permanent returning pattern modelled on nature. Or do they fight each other? These two patterns point at how to understand the world, and how to interpret a poem.

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