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A comparative study of spoken word poetry and its literary counter-part

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Introduction

This thesis discusses a contemporary phenomenon--spoken word poetry--in comparison

to its more famous literary predecessors, the canon of poetry that is studied in schools by being

read out of textbooks. Although poetry readings by contemporary poets are not unheard of, the

vast majority of people experience poetry as something that is read on a page, either silently or

out loud. In contrasting this reading experience with the more performance-based phenomenon

that is spoken word poetry, it is worth pausing and considering some of the details of the rela-

tionship between spoken and literary poetry. Literature, as the word itself suggests, is a phe-

nomenon of writing, although in all traditions we know of, there was a period of time prior to the

invention of writing when poetry and other kinds of discourse were experienced only in perfor-

mance. The first "literature" was in fact a written-down version of the verbal portion of these

performances; and such literature was only legible to people who were familiar enough with the

tradition of live performance to be able to reimagine it based on a written record of only the

words. How this process took place in well-documented instances like ancient Greece is still a

matter of controversy; and the impact of writing on the practice of poetic performance is not

completely understood.[1] What is known more certainly is that written-down versions of oral per-

formances began to be just as important in their own right as the oral performances from which

they began. This is true of Greek epic, for example, Greek lyric poetry and Greek drama, all of

which is rooted in particular performance contexts, but over time became more and more experi-

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[1] Walter J. Ong. *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.

enced as texts to be studied as such. In time, writing itself began to effect certain changes in the ongoing tradition of composing poetry of various kinds, so that often the oral origin of literary texts becomes itself an obscure and difficult element to recover.

It can be said with some certainty that the oral traditions that preceded the use of writing performed a number of important roles in society.[2] For example, poetic discourse is typically seen as a collective memory in the sense that it could be easily memorized and repeated. Many of the characteristics that we associate with poetic diction and syntax--rhythm, for example, or rhyme in some traditions--can be traced to mnemonic techniques that made the discourse more memorable. These characteristics of poetic discourse had a role in maintaining various kinds of important information, such as genealogy or religious ideas, in a cultural context where there were no written records. But these same characteristics became linked with the aesthetic effects that we often associate with poetry, its expressiveness and its grandeur. At the same time oral poetry is primarily a form of public discourse, a special language that was kept for those matters deemed most important by a social group whose cohesiveness was affirmed and articulated by the practice of performing poetry and rituals associated with those performances.

How all this changed with the introduction of writing is beyond the scope of this discussion, but a few observations can be made. Writing is a partial transcription of a more fully embodied phenomenon and privileges the verbal dimension over the somatic part of a discursive practice. This tipping of the balance toward the verbal portion of linguistic performance has a number of consequences that will be central to my comparison of more traditional literary poetry

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[2] Jack Goody, The Domestication of the Savage Mind (Cambridge University Press, 1977).

with spoken word poetry[3]. These will be taken up in more detail in the analyses below, but we can say in a preliminary fashion that spoken word poetry can be thought of as a kind of return to an emphasis on performance, particularly in the way that it engages a live audience.

Spoken word poetry is phenomenon that started in Brooklyn, New York, in the 1990s, as a combination of rap and hip hop music, with poetry. Priya Parmar and Bryonn Bain 4 traced its roots to the civil rights movement, but found it gained most popularity just before the 21st century. It spread among urban youth quickly in the United States and then Europe, allowing many teenagers and young adults to be able to express themselves in a new and articulate way. The idea behind mixing rap and hip hop music with poetry was to bridge the gap between those who liked performance and poetry, and those who liked the rhythm and beat of music. Although spoken word poetry is not performed to a beat nor is it accompanied by any music, it deploys the performative style and diction of rap and hip-hop and so was more appealing than traditional poetry. It also included a variety of topics that have already been discussed in rap and hip-hop music by the urban youth; from abuse to ethnic struggles and personal problems, the topics touched upon by the poets were all mainstream among youth.

The use of spoken word poetry allowed young people to voice their problems, their experiences and the way these things affected them.[5] They were able to relate to other people who have been through something similar and reach far and wide across borders to people they may

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[3] Scott Dillard, "The art of performing poetry: Festivals, slams, and americans' favorite poem project events," *Text and Performance Quarterly* No. 3, July 2002, 217-227.

4 PRIYA PARMAR and BRYONN BAIN. "9. Spoken Word and Hip Hop: *The Power of Urban Art and Culture." Counterpoints*, vol. 306, 2007, pp. 131-156.

[5] Mia Fiore. "Pedagogy for Liberation: Spoken Word Poetry in Urban Schools." *Education and Urban Society,* vol. 47, no. 7, Nov. 2015, pp. 813–829, doi:10.1177/0013124513511269.

not have had any connection otherwise. The idea of spoken word poetry is to talk about one's

experiences in a way that has the audience relate. The use of imagery in this form of performance

is meant to make the audience able to imagine the situation vividly, to formulate an image in

their mind so that the experience is easier to relate to. As I shall try to show, the aesthetics of

spoken word poetry is different from the aesthetics of literary poetry, touching upon references,

word choice and other style differences that shows the similarities and contrast between the two.

Taking inspiration from the shape and form of hip-hop music, spoken word poetry is a

merging of past and present. In it the orality of literature and the musicality of hip-hop were able

to work together to come up with a work of art that was both old and new.[6] Young people were

able to relate fully and strongly to poetry, reacquainting themselves with the art of the word. Ex-

pressing emotion was the main idea behind what they were doing and they found that the page

and the stage were able to offer them that exact outlet.

Hip-hop music and rap music put emotions and strong feelings into images and a familiar

rhythm. These genres use plays on words, images and a performance style people can under-

stand. But Hip-hop and rap had taken a commercial direction, with artists going from talking

about problems faced by youth to more hackneyed topics that had greater commercial value,

leaving a gap for others to fill. This gap was about the day-to-day struggles young people faced,

in their homes, their communities, the religions, their countries, and their identities. Spoken word

poetry provided an air of authenticity that was missing from more commercialized music, and it

also allowed the poets to express themselves without being restricted by rhythm or a musical

beat, leaving them to focus on the images and feelings that they were trying to convey. This al-

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[6] Ian Levy. "Hip Hop and Spoken Word Therapy with Urban Youth." *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2012, pp. 219-224.

lowed them to focus on the problems that they had in regards to race, body image, trauma and many other things that were considered too taboo or edgy to be mentioned in mainstream music, which largely centered on love and sex.

I plan to contrast spoken word poetry with examples of literary poetry, which operates more through the traditional literary aesthetics of poetry. The concept of reaching the audience is present in literary poems, but it is not the driving motive behind it. Most literary poems, because of the way they are presented and, sometimes, the topics they tackle, feel more like something to be watched from afar rather than something to be experienced deeply and immediately. Literary poetry focuses more on engaging the reader's intellect than their emotions. Consequently, the reader does not feel the poem as an experience, but sees it as an aesthetic object to be appreciated from a distance, and is less likely to be fully engaged emotionally. This is not a fundamental difference, but a matter of emphasis that is grounded in the way that poetry is institutionalized today: namely, that is usually studied by literature students in universities. For many, poetry seems to be for all intents and purposes dead; a quaint relic of a prior age that carries no immediate importance in our modern day lives. This is in contrast to spoken word poetry, which occurs outside of the institutional study of literature. The metaphor and literary allusion that literary poets used set a distance between poetry and the public. So the branching off of spoken word poetry to focus on immediate imagery and topics created a new experience of poetry for many people.

Spoken-word poetry is intensely personal poetry. Poets take the stage and spill their secrets, shames, desires and love in front of complete strangers and the audience reacts by reacting to the poets and empathizing with them as much as they can.   There are, of course, many examples of traditional poetry that discuss personal experiences, shedding light on things that might

have happened in the writers' lives, how they perceived them and how they were dealing with them. However, relying heavily on metaphor and literary allusion, such poetry allows an author to tell a whole story as an extended allegory without mentioning their experience at all, pointing to it obliquely and figuratively. With spoken word poetry, the personal experience is discussed head-on and centralized. The metaphors are there to accentuate the telling of the experience, not to sublimate the details of the experience altogether. These differences show up both on paper and in performance, for the performer reacts to his/her own experience as s/he tells them, adding to the emotion, while the voice of the author in traditional poetry is usually not inscribed so un-ambiguously in the text.

Spoken word poetry is performed live, usually in front of small groups of people (Dillard, 2002, 217). The performances vary from small clubs to medium-sized theaters but the setting is always an intimate one where the poet is able to establish a connection with the audience and transfer his/her emotions to them through the use of voice, intonation, and body language. The audience is usually made up of either other spoken word poets or people passionate about spoken word poetry. The poems are usually performed in the first person, and are often based on intense-ly personal experiences. A very important element is the the kind of images that such poems de-ploy. It is a way for performers to expand their realm of self-expression and a way for them to reach more people in a society that is leaning more towards forms of expression and experience other than reading. These poets are able to communicate their poetry to a crowd of like-minded people who would appreciate the words, the rhythm, the images and the performance. They are able to form a community of poets who teach and learn from each other about the idea of deploy-ing imagery in the poetry and how imagery was the most vital part of poetry. These communities

form mostly through word of mouth; poets tell each other about the small gatherings where they

perform in front of each other and celebrate each other's word. These communities formed in the

same places where hip-hop and rap communities formed, and they celebrate the organic way

with which they came together.

Susan B. A. Somers-Willett notes that a construction-worker turned poet named Marc

Smith held open mic readings and spoken word poetry competitions in 1983 when he learned

that poetry readings are always people reading for other poets, and that if you would like to read

your own poetry it would have to be in an academic setting.[7] This is when he started organizing

open mic readings of original poetry, and experimenting with different ways and methods of per-

formance.

These poets did not only find a means of self-expression, they found a way to discover

their own identities by sharing experiences, a way to know how their brains operated and shaped

the way they would tackle personal and societal problems through their art. It was also a way for

them to defy societal norms, pressures and injustices; they were able to address the political and

social problems that arose for them through speaking about them to an audience of their peers.

They found that those like-minded people were able to provide a safe space for them to speak, as

well as a way for them to be accepted and, most importantly, heard. Susan B. A. Somers-Willett

mentions this point by discussing the way race, poetry and identity have interacted with each

other through performance: "poetry slams are venues where poets come to express

themselves" (Susan B. A. Somers-Willett, 68). She emphasizes how the idea behind spoken

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[7] Susan B. A. Somers-Willett, "Commercial Niggas Like Me': Spoken Word Poetry, Hip-Hop, and the Racial Poli-
tics of Going Mainstream." *Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse
in America* (University of Michigan Press, 2010).

word poetry was affected by the search for identity that a lot of urban youth go through, noting that "performances most frequently stem from categories of marginalized race, sexuality, and gender identities, but they also include those of region (as with the Trinidad and Tobago– born poet Lynne Procope), profession (as with the cop-poet Corbet Dean), class (as with poets Ray McNiece and Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz, who grew up in working-class families), and intellectual persuasion (as with the host of the NPS nerd slam, Shappy Seasholtz, who boasts in his signature poem "I am the one who gave Darth Vader asthma" (Sommers-Willet, 69).

Spoken word poetry typically has a common canon of topics, which include issues of identity, trauma, memory, and family problems. Poets like Neil Hilborn, who focuses on his mental illness and the many ways he tries to deal with it in poems like "Joey", "Luminality", and "OCD", adumbrate certain topics that pertain to their lives in an intimate way so that they could draw the imagery from these experiences and be able to perform them in a way that would relate immediately with the audience listening and watching them.

But in time, the poems did not just speak of personal problems or strife, but were able to scrutinize and criticize society and government, mentioning the many injustices that they faced on a daily basis, which in turn were injustices suffered by the poets themselves. Poets like William A. Evans in his poem "New Year's Eve Party at Eric's House" and "the Black Boys Have Had Enough" describe the many problems that the black community faces on a day-to-day basis with discrimination and the police. He tackles this topic time and again as he mentions his daughter and how he wishes she didn't have to face the world as a black woman, along with the things that happen to him as a black man.

After spoken word poetry started to make its way to universities and high schools around North America, the topics expanded to encompass the problems that the people of these demographics and age groups faced. Matthew Dooley explains how spoken word poetry helped those who were left out become more involved in their schools as they used it to make others "see" them: "His spoken word poem allowed both him and his classmates to see each other, develop mutual respect, and thus create a true learning community." [8] He was able to discuss not only societal pressures but also mental health, financial problems and other personal stories: "Previously, classes that focused on literary analysis or exposition may have been both too intimidating and unrelated to the issues of this student's life. He was able to focus on a subject that often goes unaddressed in school—economic class—and express his yearning for an authenticity beyond the identity of his privileged social class" (Dooley, 86). Spoken word poetry became a way for them to connect, to find people who faced the same problems as them and see that they were not alone.

Spoken word poets found that, in order to enhance their poetry, it was not enough just to include the problems that they faced on a day-to-day basis, but they also needed to include images that would assist them in getting their points across to their audiences. The way they painted pictures to accompany their topics aided them in getting the people who were listening to them to understand what they were going through. Images became a vessel that carried their emotions over to the people listening to them. The effectiveness of spoken word poetry is built on the fact that the poet speaks their poetry in real time, in front of a live audience, and gets instant reaction. That is why poets strive to find the perfect image to be able to connect with their audience.

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[8] Matthew A. Dooley, "Beautiful Words: Spoken Word Poetry and a Pedagogy of Beauty." *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2014, pp. 85.

Another frequent topic of spoken word poetry is mental health and trauma. Some poets discuss their depression, anxiety, abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder and many other afflictions, since they find a safe space through poetry and slam nights to discuss these problems without the fear of facing taboos or the need to be politically correct with their language. It is typical of spoken word poetry events that the audience are more accepting of other people and their problems. Spoken word poetry was a way for those discussing trauma and mental health to use it to achieve a cathartic experience. Poems started not to be just about conveying the experience, but about the struggle, the journey, and the healing process that the poet would go through, one poem at a time.

Depression is a good example of a somewhat taboo topic that spoken word poetry often addresses. Spoken-word poetry allowed people to not only find a way to work through their emotions, their good days and their bad days, but to be able to talk about them in a controlled, safe setting. They were also able to help others understand how they felt and see the illness for what it really was.

Discussion of trauma is another topic tackled in spoken word poetry, mentioned in a number of poems from different angles. People who suffered through accidents, wars, abuse and death wrote down not only the fact that they were struggling through these problems, but were able to convey in great detail the way they were dealing with these traumas, and to describe the traumas themselves. Spoken word poetry became a therapeutic process in the sense that talking about it helped poets deal with it. This was a two-way street because, more often than not, poets who discussed traumas found audience members that related to their problems in one way or another. Poets who discussed abuse, rape, war, or death, were able to touch upon topics that people in their audience, or even online, related to, but were never able to talk about for fear of taboo.

The use of imagery in spoken word poems differs in important ways from its use in literary poems. As we shall see in the following chapters, literary poems often use images to create an allegorical version of experience, transforming the whole topic into a parallel for the reader to contemplate. More literary poets allow the readers to take their time to figure out for themselves what the poem is about, often creating puzzles that invite the reader to speculate about the meaning. It is the task of the reader to try and figure out what the poet meant, often by a process of identifying allusions and inter-texts. This is not only because of the allegories used in the text of the poem, but also because the written poem is dried ink on paper, and that takes away some of the emotional impact of the poem. In spoken word poetry, the poet can alter the performance from time to time, introduce new words, subtract some ideas, making the poem a living thing, while with literary poetry, the text is fixed. The poet has left the markings on the pages and the reader, in another place and time, has a task of interpretation.

In both cases, the poet and the reader/audience are connecting, relating to each other on a certain level; the difference here lies with the type of connection. Each form of poetry has its own method of delivery, affecting the audience in a different way. With literary poetry, the main source of the poem is the page; literary poetry is often read out loud but is rarely performed. The reader must engage with the poem on an intellectual level by reading the poem, attempting to understand it and decipher the metaphors used in it. However, spoken word poems are performed dramatically, the use of rising and falling intonation they deem important. The tone or voice in spoken word poetry is as much a part of the poem as the words. The voice acts as a vital element, composed as a part and parcel of the poem. Again, there is no reason that literary poetry cannot be read dramatically, but in spoken word poetry this is a necessity.

In his book on orality and literacy Walter Ong emphasizes the difference between oral and written forms of literature in order to distinguish between an oral culture or mentality and a literate one. Ong's list of differences between oral and written culture can be used to highlight the differences between literary and spoken word poetry, while also shedding a light on the similarities between them and the way they adapted to the different readers and audiences. Ong's division of characteristics for orality and literacy is somewhat controversial, as it presented a clear divide between the two, a set of binary differences between orality and literacy as if they were two different things. His work has been criticized for not taking into consideration the fact that orality and literacy are interconnected, nuanced and dependent on one another in many ways.

However, if one considers Ong's list as a heuristic device to highlight the differences between modern spoken word poetry and its literary counterpart, it will be possible to highlight the subtle differences between them. Although both genres are similar in many ways, the differences that can be found allow for each of them to hold their own and to present different manners of imagery and experiences to their readers/audiences. The characteristics of orality defined by Ong include "additive rather than subordinate," "aggregative rather than analytic," "empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced," and "situational rather than abstract." In each of these cases, it can be seen that spoken word poetry is closer to the "orality" side of the opposition, although the categories are not so so binary and allow for considerable overlap.

For example, "empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distant" is an instance of the way that the live performance of spoken word poetry is different from reading literary poetry. Spoken word poetry appeals to the emotional side of the audiences, using imagery that would affect the audience's emotions because the poet will be able to get direct, instant feedback

from the audience as he/she performs. This is also achievable through body language as the audience experiences the poet's performance in its entirety, not just the words. The tone of voice affects the performance and, therefore, the effect that the poem has on listeners. Another useful category identified by Ong is "situational or concrete vs. abstract." The imagery used in spoken word poetry tends to be more concrete, building upon other concrete images and real-life situations. However, literary poetry tends to build its images by alluding to other literary images and therefore they are often more intangible and hidden beneath the cloaks of figurative language.

Ong also considered the oral tradition to be "aggregative rather than analytic," in the sense that the oral performance tended to create redundancy by using clusters of descriptive terms, to help the audience see with their eyes the scene he's trying to describe. On the other hand, the literary tradition often uses imagery more sparsely to allow the reader the time, and the imagination to build the scene in their head slowly. Both achieve a sense of experience in the reader/audience, but with different strategies.

The coming chapters will discuss three poems each, a literary poem and two spoken word poems. Each set of three poems will have the same topic as a common factor, but will tackle it differently. Chapter two will show the effects that the trauma of "wreckages" have on a person, be it emotional, physical or sexual. The poems "Diving into The Wreck" by Adrienne Rich, "Luminality" by Neil Hilborn and "People You May Know" by Kevin Kantor all have the same underlying theme of a trauma that has not entirely healed, and how they have used different ways to try and deal with it. The next chapter will shed a light on the effects that war, death and post-traumatic stress disorder have on the survivors. "Strange Meeting" by Wilfred Owen, "Pass On"

by Michael Lee, and "Resurrection" by Dylan Garity show the many effects of post-traumatic stress disorder by using different methods, with Owen's poem being our literary example.

Although spoken word poetry and traditional literary poetry have many commonalities, this thesis will try to highlight the differences between them as a way of getting a clearer idea of what spoken word poetry is. In order to make the distinctions as clear as possible, I will use Walter Ong's opposition of orality and literacy as a framework for my discussion. Using Ong as a lens will not only allow us to highlight differences between literary and spoken word poetry, but will also serve to illuminate one of the key weaknesses of Ong's theory, his tendency to see orality and literacy as incompatible "mentalities," overstating a distinction between two phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected. With this objection in mind, we can use some of the oppositions Ong delineates to discuss the different positioning of these two types of discourse on a continuum.

Chapter 2: On Surviving the Wreckage

The differences between written and spoken word poetry appear in a number of different elements. The first is how literary poets tackle past experience differently from spoken word poets. [9] Literary poets often try to distance themselves from the incident that they are trying to tell us about. The experience is seen through a sort of lens that the poet applies: a distancing method to show that the poet is no longer a part of the event. We can see that the poet has healed somewhat from the experience itself; they move on or tell it in a way that seems more reflective than a reliving of a trauma. The poet sees what has happened but is no longer affected by it. This distance allows the poet to tell the story in a more organized, rational way, adding emotions at will and not as they would come to them. It seems as if they are also readers of their stories rather than the people who experienced them. We get recollections wrapped in metaphors and narratives that seem as if they happened to someone else other than the writer.

However, with the spoken word poets, the narratives within the poems are always very close to home; they are always told as if they were happening to the poets as they spoke, as if they were experiencing them again as they were narrating them to us. The audience gets somewhat of a first-hand experience of the event, as not only the tone of voice and body language factor into the poem, but also the narration to the audience acts as a gateway for them to share the experience as they become part of it. We see the way the story affected the poet, the way the experience still strikes a nerve with them and we know that they have been affected by it. It does

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[9] Steven C. Abell, "The Use of Poetry in Play Therapy: A Logical Integration." *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1998, pp. 45–49.

not matter whether these stories are happy or sad, triumphant or traumatic, we get a glimpse of the reactions the poets had at the time, in real life.

While literary poems employ imagery by creating layers that refer to other literary images, spoken word poetry uses imagery to intensify and emphasize the story that is being told Most spoken word poems aim to relate to their audiences as quickly into the poem as they can; therefore the stories that are told through the poems do not rely on metaphor or obscurity. The imagery in this case is meant to highlight the emotions felt by the poet, show the meaning behind the story and have the audience understand the story more. This can be attributed to the fact that spoken word poetry is heard and not read, and so the audience need to be able to understand the poems as they hear them because they won't be able to go back and reread them. It is also to get immediate reactions out of the audience and so there is no time to have them be confused about the meaning behind the poet's words.

The poems "Diving Into the Wreck" by Adrienne Rich, "Liminality" by Neil Hilborn and "People You May Know" by Kevin Kantor tackle trauma and the effect it had on the poets in the moment and in retrospect. [10] The poems all have the same themes and the same ideas but they go about it in different ways.

"Diving into The Wreck" approaches the concept of trauma through the lens of the third person[11]. Rich narrates the experience of the dive from a first person, but the experience of the trauma is something outside of her. The "wreck" of the trauma she has suffered is something that

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[10] June F.Dickie, "Lament as a Contributor to the Healing of Trauma: An Application of Poetry in the Form of Biblical Lament." *Pastoral Psychology*, 2018, pp. 1-12.

[11] James Lindroth, "TROPES OF DISCOVERY: ADRIENNE RICH AND 'DIVING INTO THE WRECK.'" *CEA Critic*, vol. 47, no. 3, 1985, pp. 69–78.

has nothing to do with her now; she is merely a spectator of it.[12] On the surface, the poem mainly talks about a diving trip that the writer takes in order to explore the wreckage of a ship she hasn't seen in a long time. She starts by telling us about the preparations she's taking, the things she's wearing and the absurdity behind some of the things she has to do in order to go down into the ocean's depth to explore the wreck. The imagery here is related to the extended metaphor of the ship and the wreck itself, suggesting us that the writer is getting ready to revisit memories of old.

The poem is a journey of self-discovery, a reflection on her past experience. She uses the metaphor of the shipwreck to try and make sense of a trauma that she suffered. She tries to distance herself from the incident as much as she can. She is not part of the wreck, she is an explorer of it. She is still whole and complete, only looking in on something that she used to be part of and is no longer connected to her. She is protected by a rubber suit of armor and the water that distances her from the wreckage. Her oxygen mask provides her with the air she needs to survive under water and the knife she has is just in case she needed extra protection. As for the wreck itself, she is no longer in it, so she finds herself comfortable enough to go near it.

She tries to frame the trauma as a myth from her "book of myths" so that it does not seem real. Even though she mentions discussing the wreck and not its story, she never really names the thing itself, but keeps going around it in a way that gives the reader an idea of what might have happened to her without a concrete declaration of the trauma. She also uses the water as a wall between her and the wreck, as well as using the camera to hide behind as she takes pictures that don't show the thing itself but rather a rendition of the thing. All of these are ways by which she tries to distance herself from what had happened to her before.

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[12] Martin Jay, "Diving into the Wreck: Aesthetic Spectatorship at the Fin-de-Siècle." *Critical Horizons*, vol. 1, no. 1, Feb. 2000, pp. 93–111.

One theory surrounding the metaphor of Rich's wreck is that the trauma itself is that of child abuse; however, this conjecture is never confirmed outright throughout the poem. There is no way to know exactly what had happened to her because she never mentions it, but hides it behind the different imagery and metaphors in the poem. The time that had passed over the wreckage, and the fact that she needed to protect herself from it, show that it was something that could affect her still, should she not be cautious enough as she went in to see it. Her extended metaphor is there to also put some distance between her and the memories she is fearful of. Her camera, although taking a picture to commemorate the dive, will also put distance between her and the wreck. She objectifies the act itself into something more distant, allowing herself to be able to explore it without being affected by it personally again. The image of the water that acts as a wall between her and the wreck is also an example of objectification, which allows the reader to also put a distance between them and the event.[13]

"Liminality" is a spoken word poem about a car crash that happened to the poet and his girlfriend. Neil Hilborn tells the story vividly as if to immerse us in it as it happened. Using the first-person narrative voice, he recounts the accident as if it were happening to him as he spoke. The story begins with them taking a road trip on the west Texas highway. With the driver not paying attention, the car clips the guardrail and they fly over the steep cliff.   The poet starts by setting the scene in such a way that it seems that both passengers in the car had absolutely no control over what was going to happen. They had all the warnings, but none of the power to change what was going to happen.

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[13] Trudi Witonsky, ""A Language of Water": Back and Forth with Adrienne Rich and Muriel Rukeyser." *Women's Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2008, pp. 337.

Similarly, Kantor's "People You May Know" is a poem about the trauma of rape and the repercussions that follow. [14] Kantor starts off his poem by talking about how the trauma came to haunt him while he was trying as hard as he could to leave it behind. His rapist's name came up on the "people you may know" tab on Facebook telling him that his rapist was actually closer than he ever could have thought.

Kantor doesn't shy away from focusing on the gory details. He explains everything from his encounter to how he felt about each stage, every feeling that passed through him while he saw his attacker's face on his Facebook page. He talks about the shock of finding him, the journey he took through his profile, and the feelings that came along with it. He mentioned everything from him being someone he did know, to someone who took advantage of the fact that he is a man who will not be listened to when he yelled "rape". The poem goes through different phases of retrospect , and we can feel the five stages of grief in his words and his voice.

The shock effect that both Hilborn and Kantor use allow for the audience to be immersed in the poem from the beginning to the end. That method plays on the emotions of the audience, allowing them to be spectators and participants in the poem. The emotional entanglement they experience gives the poet leeway to use concrete imagery that does not rely on literary references, but rather on the emotional connection that the images will induce. The images, therefore, are not abstract, but concrete, and serve the emotional aspect of the poems.

One category on Ong's list was the fact that oral culture was situational rather than abstract. He mentioned that all conceptual thinking can be thought of as abstract, but oral culture uses situational frames of reference to shy away from the abstract as much as possible. We can

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[14]R. Ingalls, (2012), "Stealing the Air": The Poet-Citizens of Youth Spoken-Word. J Pop Cult, 45: 99-117.

see some of the points that Ong makes in the difference between Rich and Kantor, as Rich uses abstract concepts, showing the trauma in an objectified way, while Kantor explains the situation he was in using vivid detail and emotion. Despite this, one must note that Kantor also uses some abstract concepts in his poems, citing the literary imagery of the boy who cried wolf, assigning a character to the rapist and showing himself as the boy. This shows that even the oral culture sometimes relies on imagery from literary works that came before them; however, they do not constitute the main thrust of the poem.

"I had to give it a name, or it didn't happen," that simple line explains a lot about the way rape and rape culture is tackled, not just in the USA, but all over the world. The first thing people do when someone says that they had been raped is to deny it or blame the victim. The second thing is to ask them to describe what had happened in vivid detail so that they could take his statement. His trauma was not taken into consideration. "That obviously I could have fought back" suggests that men are never considered victims when it comes to crimes like abuse, molestation or rape because they could fight back against assailants. However, in this situation, fighting back was not an option and nobody considered Kantor to be a victim.

"The wreck, and not the story of the wreck" (Rich, Line 62), is about the idea that we associate with the incidents that happen to us, how we add to the stories to give them more meaning, more nostalgia, and sometimes, more horror. Rich wanted to make sure that the experience she was going through is not based on the additives that her brain connected to it; she wanted to look at the experience as it was. The poem is a way of distancing and disengaging from the event. Walter Ong uses the phrase "objectively distanced" to show how the written culture of poetry separates the knower from the known and sets up conditions for objectivity in the sense of

personal disengagement or distancing.[15] This line, in particular, shows how the poet is trying to distance herself from the incident. She objectifies, and at the same time, distances it from the story that comes with it. She speaks of the wreck itself, and not its story, to show that she is trying to put a barrier between her and the incident.

Her exhibition under water does not provide clarity to her as much as it confuses her more. "I am she: I am he" (Rich, Line 77). She loses track of who and what she is, the water makes her feel like a mermaid, a creature of the ocean itself and the journey makes her more confused about who she is as she approaches the wreckage of the ship. She also loses, somewhat, her footing on whether she is a subject or a spectator. She feels like she is part of the picture she paints, while at the same time, not part of the wreckage.

Hilborn does not only use the concept of retrospect in his poem, he also uses the idea of continuation, and cause and effect, "Her collarbone is broken, the same one she fractured at six years old" (Neil Hilborn, Line 21) This reference to the prior wound shows their fragility. It is also to show how the state of shock they were in had them focus on things that were not as important as the situation they were in. The poet takes the audience with him as he tries to salvage memories from the wreckage, trying to peer through the emotions that blinded him then of shock and fear, and the emotions that blind his retrospection as he tries to bring forth the memories that his mind tried to block out. This approach to the narration of the poem is more empathetic, allowing the audience to identify with the poet and using their emotions that rise with his words to connect with them. Therefore, the poet begins the poem with a situation, relying on images that

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[15] Walter J.Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.

are fast, shocking and concrete, and lets the audience take the journey of the poem along with him.

This can also be seen with Kantor's poem; the use of shocking imagery is what allows the audience to feel empathy. He dives into the poem by mentioning his rapist, how he saw him on the "people you may know" tab on Facebook, and how it affected him. He does not ease the audience into the poem, but rather surprises them by the vividness of the words. The audience does not expect to hear about a rapist, especially from a man. This empathetic approach allows Kantor to keep the attention of the audience for the duration of the poem, to have them take the journey along with him, empathize with him and remember the poem after he is done performing it.

Another thing that is evident in all three poems is the use of pictures in the explanation of the traumas. Pictures are always seen as a way to freeze time; a method of preservation where nothing can change or grow. That is why Rich and Kantor use them specifically to look back at the traumas that they encountered. They are different people from the time those pictures were taken. However, they use those pictures as reference and evidence of what had happened to them. Pictures are also a way for them to distance themselves from the incident; in Rich's case, she is no longer in that picture; she cannot identify with anything in it. However, with Kantor, he mentions how he can find bits and pieces of himself in every picture that he goes through, even if he is not in the pictures physically: "I am under his fingernails"(Kantor, Line 10). Hilborn's use of a picture is not physical like Rich and Kantor, because his encounter with trauma is that of someone who is still going through it. He performs the poem in a way that freeze-frames the incident once they go over the cliff :"Our headlights kick into space" (Hilborn, line 14). After this line, the poet pauses and explains every detail in the image, relying on concrete images to show the

extent of the accident. His language and narration make the audience feel as if he is still going through the trauma not distancing himself from the trauma like Rich and Kantor. His picturesque way of narration is seen in his use of imagery, "her blouse blossomed like a supernova" (Hilborn, Line 16), The explosion of color and visual narration here paints more of a picture than if he had used an actual picture to tell his story, making him live inside of the picture rather than talk about it like Rich and Kantor.

"Click; I see myself caught in his teeth. He is dancing in a city I have never been to" (Kanor, Line 6). Here the retrospect is also introduced through photographs, albeit digital ones, but the memories are still engraved in the pictures as evidence of the time that passed. Kantor uses the extended imagery of a monster; he describes himself as the victim that he is by mentioning all the horrific things that the rapist has done to him: "I am under his fingernails," "I see myself caught in his teeth". We get a monstrous effect that befits the action that the rapist did. He goes through each picture, pointing out the monstrosity of it by just pointing out how the rapist is living a day-to-day life, not minding what he's done. Kantor sees himself in every picture because he feels like the rapist has taken something away from him, and he cannot get over that fact.

One photograph, however, stands out from the rest, the old baby picture of the rapist with his father. Suddenly, Kantor loses control over the profile investigation he's been carrying out. The baby picture puts a little bit of humanity into the character of the monster Kantor has been painting from the beginning of the poem and it throws both him and the audience off.

"I call him the wolf...when I talk about him". The reference to *the boy who cried wolf* acts as an umbrella over the whole poem, positioning Kantor and his rapist perfectly in the

predator/prey scenario he tries to convey throughout his recount. The inhumane aspect of the rapist fits him perfectly; however, we start to see the human side of the wolf as the poem progresses and we get to the point where we can no longer see him as a fantastical monster, but rather as the horrible human being that he is. Kantor tells us he can no longer call him a wolf, because the man has a life, friends and a family and the fantasy he's been hiding him behind has been protecting Kantor more than it has been helping him process his trauma. Now, after seeing the profile and the humanity of the rapist, Kevin Kantor has to deal with his traumatic event in another way.

The transition from story book to real life takes the audience through the process of distancing themselves from anything as traumatic as rape. They hear about it in storybooks and movies, yet they never consider that it might have happened to a real person and Kantor uses that to shock the crowd into seeing a live example of the trauma of rape.

"He can no longer be a wolf, or a nameless grave I dig for myself on bad days." Kantor highlights both trauma and denial in his poem. The first thing any victim of trauma tries to do is to run away from the idea of even thinking about his traumatic event. Throughout the poem, Kantor does not only shock the crowd into reality but he shocks himself as well. He tries to talk about the event in a cool, level-headed manner. However, he falters and his voice shakes as he recounts the way his rapist seemed to have gone on with his life without even the slight feelings of remorse. He still feels like his rapist has power over him because he is yet to gain justice for what had happened to him.

Hilborn starts by using all the sensory details he could to forge a well-rounded image: sound, "Out here, they've only got two kinds of music on the radio, country and

western." (Hilborn, Line 3); sight "Our headlights kick into space" (Hilborn, Line 14) and touch, "Her hair touches my shoulder in the wind" (Hilborn, Line 4). All these elements help the reader start off the poem immersed into the story as they they are part of it. The sensory details here set the scene for what is about to happen and provide us with emotional detail. They allow us to see, hear and feel what the poet is seeing, hearing and feeling. The performance of the poet and the rising and falling with his voice, allow the audience to participate in the story with the poet.

The image he describes is now distorted, muddied by the shock he was in. The shifting of the imagery from one thing to the other is quick and seems to shatter along with the car they were in. Hilborn jumps from one image to another very quickly and without focusing intently on one or trying to elaborate it. This highlights the speed with which the accident happened in real life. When he was in the car with the girl, they did not go through it slowly, but rather everything happened all at once so that they were barely able to react, only be flung around the car "like marionettes" and he made sure to pace his poem with the pace of the accident.

He speaks with a pronoun "we" and "our," including his girlfriend, who was with him and who saw everything he saw. Throughout the poems we see the events of the wreck through his eyes, as if they are windows to the incident. The lens used here is the poet himself. With "Diving into The Wreck" we were able to see the events of the poem through several lenses. We saw the event through the lens of the camera that the poet took with her on the dive, through the photo that she used as a reference to how the wreck used to look and through the water itself, the barrier between the poet and the wreck. Hilborn had no barriers, nothing separating him from the wreck; his narration style allows him to intensify the experience, making the audience feel it along with him. The only separation between him and her is "Change in the cupholders form

constellations glinting in front of your eyes" (Hilborn, Line 17) and he loses that once the car falls to the ground.

"Her blouse blossoms like a supernova" (Hilborn, Line 16). The explosive image here shows us the magnitude of the wreck itself. It is not about the blouse as much as it is about the event. The present tense, slowing down time to an almost halt so that the slow motion effect shows us how time had no power at that moment. Hilborn's retrospection here shows as he focuses on the images that stuck in his mind. He remembers the shape of her blouse as it opened up in the explosion of the incident. He remembers everything within them and around them flying, suspended in mid-air as if they were never to go up again and never to hit the ground. This moment is the picture his mind keeps, the moment of serenity within the chaos. Here is another difference with Adrienne Rich's poem, the calm in Rich's poem versus the chaos in Hilborn's. With Adrienne Rich, the wreck is long gone and we do not see it as it happens; rather, we're invited to visit what remains of it, knowing full well that it is over. The wreck is quiet, still, with nothing stirring in it or around it, while Hilborn's recounts the story as if it were happening at the same time he was telling it. We experience everything with the poet; he takes us back to the second the incident happens while Rich takes us back to a calm and settled aftermath.

Rich also shows the reader that this is a journey she has to do on her own,

> I am having to do this
>
> not like Cousteau with his
>
> assiduous team
>
> aboard the sun-flooded schooner
>
> but here alone. (Rich, Lines 8-12)

She emphasizes that she has to do this without any support from any team, family or friends. This is an internal experience that nobody can help her with. Her trauma happened to her alone, her healing happened to her alone, and her retrospective journey had to happen to her alone. She writes the poem in an objectifying manner to distance herself, while telling the story. She mentions that she is speaking of the wreck itself, and not its story so that she could tell the reader that she has no intention in going back and telling the story of how the wreck came to pass.

Hilborn, on the other hand, takes the audience through the story in a play-by-play manner, without any distancing; he attempts to show more the smallest of details of what happened, so that the audience can experience it with him. The aim is for the story to be engrossing on an emotional level so that the audience would be able to visualize what he experienced throughout the traumatic incident.

Both those poems talk about a wreckage of some kind, the first cloaks it in layers of literary imagery and metaphor, while the second uses concrete imagery to emphasize the point. Both poems represent trauma to the poet as the recounting of a painful experiences that they have spent a long time trying to surpass, and both those poems represent a healing of sorts to the poet so that they could move on.

So too, Kantor does not only address the rape, he also addresses the proximity of it. The fact that his rapist came up on "people you may know" tab means that there are a lot of mutual friends, places they both frequent, and things they are both interested in so that the algorithm on the website could match them up together. This, again, points to a detail not addressed, that most of the time, the rapist is someone the victim knows.

Kantor also discusses proximity in terms of people in between. The three mutual friends between Kantor and his rapist provide for a deeper meaning of the trauma; the fact that there are three people that know both people shows how people can turn a blind eye to something as gruesome as rape.

"It felt like the closest to a crime scene I have ever been" (Kantor,Line 3). Kantor paints a picture of the incident that happened to him through the things he finds on the rapist's Facebook page. This incident didn't have an actual crime scene; the police didn't put yellow tape along the place where he was raped, but the profile page of his rapist gave him the sense that he was back where he was raped.

As Kantor goes through the rapist's profile, the concept of retrospect is introduced. He was given a chance to understand the man who raped him more, to paint a more complete picture of him: "I sit in my living room and I sift for clues,"(Kantor Line 5). His detective-like attitude allows him to focus on every detail of the rapist's profile, looking for meaning between the pictures.

One might argue that the fact that Rich positions herself as a diver, going into the water and looking for the wreck, shows that she is still connected to the incident and not completely distanced, or objective, about it. It shows that there is still a part of her that chooses to dive into the water and see what had happened. The difference here is that the effect it has on her is no longer vital, immediate, or scarring, as it is with Kantor and Hilborn.

When discussing spoken word poetry, it is vital to consider performance and narration to be part of the poem itself, and not an addition to it. The method of narration Hilborn uses allowed the audience to live through the accident with the poem, highlighting the severity of it and

showing us the thought process. With "Diving Into The Wreck", the thought process is somewhat cooler and calmer than that of "Liminality". We can notice the length of the sentences. Rich allowed for long, complex sentences to slow down the pace, allowing the reader to take in the words at a slower pace and paint the images mentioned with ease and calmness, reflecting the calmness of the ocean she mentions and the calmness of the wreck she views. Hilborn, however, bombards the audience with short, quick sentences that force the audience to see the wreck as it happens at a speed that is uncomfortable. Both methods of narration serve their respective goals. Hilborn's poem, if said calmly, would lose its immediacy, and Rich's poem cannot be at a faster pace because it is, after all, an unveiling of an old memory that has had a long stretch of time pass over it.

If we consider the three poems, "Diving into the Wreck", "Liminality", and "People You May Know" we can see that there are many similarities in the description and retrospect of trauma. Rich made hers into an extended metaphor by comparing it to a shipwreck, while Hilborn and Kantor explained the trauma directly. However, Hilborn's trauma was an actual wreck and Kantor's trauma was the same that Rich suffered from but spoken out loud without any imagery to hide it. The imagery in Kantor's poem was to highlight it and to provide visual aspects so that the audience could experience it in a more vivid manner while Rich had the reader go through the whole journey of the dive to be able to see the wreck and allow their own interpretation.

All three poems discuss a form of a traumatic event that happened to the poet. The poet is the narrator and the poet is the protagonist. Rich's style of written poetry was a very progressive one for her era. However, she stuck to the idea of hiding the actual trauma in an extended metaphor. This compels the reader to dig deeper into the meaning behind the poem, as she takes

the reader through the very journey she had to go through. Hilborn's and Kantor's poems had to be more straightforward and to the point. Both poets talked about the trauma itself, while using imagery not to have the audience dig deeper to find the meaning, but to highlight different things they deemed important for the audience to know and feel. "When the nickel stars settle in the dust" (Hilborn, Line 19), and " the clockwork murder that I make of my own memory" (Hilborn, Line 6), are both perfect examples of how the poets used imagery for clarification and emphasis. Hilborn shows how the car wreck was a shock and how it seemed more like an explosion than a wreck, and Kantor shows how he sees his rape, as a crime scene that was never investigated before he saw the profile. The imagery here is used to circle the emotions and feelings that the poets went through, unlike Rich who used her imagery as a blanket to cover the story that is her trauma and to guide the reader into her journey to try and get them to look for themselves.

Adrienne Rich, Neil Hilborn and Kevin Kantor used imagery to convey the traumas they have been through. Each of them has been through a trauma that has changed their lives significantly. With these changes, they used their present and past selves to narrate their poems either through telling the story as if it were happening at the time or looking at their pasts through a lens that separated them from the actual event. They all delved into their poems as a way of seeking healing or of telling us that they are already healed.

Chapter 3: On Death and Remembrance

This chapter will discuss three poems that tackle the subjects of war, death, and remembrance. "Strange Meeting" by Wilfred Owen[16], will be our example of a more traditional literary poem, while Dylan Garity's "Resurrection", and Michael Lee's "Pass On" will be our examples of spoken word poetry. Aside from the similarities in themes, the three poems have very distinct differences from each other in regards to the use of figurative language and the effect of performance on their structure. In highlighting these differences against the background of their treatment of similar themes, I aim to sharpen the distinction between literary poetry and spoken word poetry, but that is not to say that these poems are qualitatively different; rather they lie on a continuum of relative emphasis when it comes to the use of imagery and figurative language, as well as an intention for performance.

William Kevin Penny notes that Owen borrowed liberally from classical literature as well as ecclesiastical literature and the propaganda provided constantly by the military.[17] He makes the point that Owen attempted to reconcile hero worship and the condemnation of war. Penny argues that Owen uses dissimulation by using antiquated themes, metaphors and imagery from different literary traditions to hide the fact that his poem is combining contradictory ideas of hero worship and the condemnation of war. Penny also posits that Owen's poem moves toward irony by starting with a classic descent into the underworld-also found in Dante's *Inferno*,

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[16] Alan Tomlinson, "Strange Meeting in Strange Land: Wilfred Owen and Shelley." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1993, pp. 75-95.

[17] William K. Penny, "A Tragic Harp: Ritual, Irony and Myth in the War Poetry of Wilfred Owen."*Language and Literature*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2011, pp. 151-167.

Virgil's *Aeneid* and The *Odyssey*--for revelation about truth, followed by a return to the upper world.

These poems, although longer, have tackled the same journey-like aspect of war to which Owen alludes in his work. In both Dante's *Inferno* and Homer's *Odyssey*, one can find the similarities with "Strange Meeting" to be very prominent. *Inferno* is an account of a trip through the underworld that is an allegorical spiritual autobiography. Guided by his literary ancestor, Virgil, the poet of the *Aeneid*, he goes through the underworld and the narrator talks to people suffering and listens to their stories. They tell him about why they are there and what had happened to them. They all know that the narrator does not belong in hell and that he is just passing through and yet they tell him their stories so that he may learn something from them.

Dante's journey through the underworld itself makes allusion to the famous underworld trip of Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where the hero encounters characters from his past and also meets characters from his future. Aeneas' journey to the underworld is itself based on Odysseus' journey in the *Odyssey*. It is plausible that Owen is familiar with Dante, and thus he links his experience to a long chain of literary tradition. Owen's poem gains its resonance and weight from this long chain of literary tradition. His imagery relies heavily on the fact that there are other poets who have paved the way for his poem.

Dante's influence can be seem in the setting of the scene, and the ways both poets discuss hell are similar. Meanwhile, Virgil's underworld is a place to find the true meaning of the hero's struggles. The hero of the *Odyssey* goes to the underworld to find his way home, but encounters figures from his past who comment on their choices.

Owen's conversation with the fallen soldier is similar to Odysseus's conversation with Achilles,[18] both telling the traveler how the glory of war is not at all glorious and that living would have been a better prize than glory and death. Just as Achilles casts doubt on his choice of a short but glorious life in war, Owen casts doubt on the idea of fighting for his country.

As the narrator of Owen's poem goes through the figurative hell, some of the soldiers look at him and do not speak to him. [19] This is similar to the *Aeneid* where Dido, Aeneas' former lover, walks past him and refuses to speak to him. And this in turn is based on Odysseus's encounter with Ajax in the *Odyssey*. The refusal to speak has itself become typical of an underworld scenario.

But Owen, who had fought in a war himself, was concerned with writing about it as a way to explain the horrors that came along with it. [20] The allegorical and literary character of the poem served as a reification of the war that he had gone through. At the time, the idea of post Traumatic Stress Disorder was not yet diagnosed; called "Shell Shock" at the time, the disorder was passed over as being a consequence for which nobody had a solution. Therefore, those who suffered from it were not treated well and that affected their lives. Owen was such a patient of Shell shock and this led him to look to poetry to express his feelings; and all his poems include a depiction of the war, its consequences and the effects it had on him.

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[18] Anthony T. Edwards,"Achilles in the Underworld: Iliad, Odyssey, and Aethiopis." *Greek*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2004, pp. 215-227.

[19] Elliott B.,Gose Jr., "Digging in: An Interpretation of Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting'."*College English*, 1961, pp. 417.

[20] Marc D.Cyr, "The Conscientious Killer: Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting'." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2016, pp. 108.

Hell is thus an extended metaphor that describes the way people feel after they return from the war. "It seemed that out of the battle I escaped" (Wilfred Owen, Line 1), shows how there was a moment of denial where the poet considered himself fortunate to be out of the war. The denial he feels is very evident and so we prepare ourselves for what is to come for him afterwards.

The dead around the poet who are on the ground groaning never notice him because they are engrossed in their own problems. The whole image of the tunnel, the people, the groaning, and the poet going through them can be connected to post-traumatic stress disorder and the different emotions that they have to suffer through.

When Dylan Garity attempts to tell "The story of war" (Line 7), he alludes only to personal experience and not to a literary ancestry of any sort. His use of imagery is made not to point to past poetry or an image used before by a different poet, but to better frame an image that would allow the listener to share the experience along with the poet. What gives potency to Garity's poem is the individuality of it in comparison with literary poems that rely on a chain of allusions to past poems.

Garity's account can be thought of as an unofficial oral discourse. His grandfather's story of the war is not a literary tradition; it is a story passed down only through Garity's family. Their stories of war, of the machines pressing down on his grandfather's hand, of his PTSD, were all stories he used to spin his own oral tradition. He also references writing by mentioning the newspaper clipping where his grandfather wrote "I designed and built everything in that picture" (Dylan Garity line 27) speaking of the machine for which someone else got a Nobel Prize for. The oral account of an unofficial written comment on an official printed document (the

newspaper), stands in contrast to the intertextual chain of allusions that stem from Dante in Owen's poem.

Garity also use word choices that help his individuality, showing the fact that PTSD was not a word that was known in his grandfather's time although the feelings behind it existed. He sheds a light on the fact that some emotions have had no words to be associated with them and were only felt as an experience. He also tries to convey that experience to better have the audience feel it instead of just thinking about it..

Garity writes, "Back then, you didn't talk about depression; there was no such thing as PTSD" (Line 15); It shows how these soldiers felt as they were thrust into the line of fire; and how they were not able to explain those feelings because the condition was not recognized at the time.

The similarity between this poem and that of Wilfred Owen is very evident as both poets point to the gravity of PTSD as well as the fact that it is usually overlooked. [21] But Owen uses the character of the soldier who has "dead eyes" as well as his manner of speaking which is void of hope and happiness, while Garity points at it directly, saying that his father had post-traumatic stress disorder at a time when nobody thought of it. Owen uses the underworld itself as a pointer to the idea of post traumatic stress disorder. Another reference in Owen's poem is how he described it as a wound that does not bleed, showing how the invisible effects of the war remain without physical "bleeding". Garity, on the other hand, knew the term PTSD as it existed in his time. So, he described by showing how his grandfather reacted to it in real life. This contrast shows the difference between spoken word poetry and literary poetry as both tackled the same

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[21] Desmond Graham, *The Truth of War: Owen, Blunden, Rosenberg.* Carcanet Press, Manchester, [Greater Manchester], 1984.

theme from different angles; literary poetry uses allusions and metaphors that illuminate a thought, while spoken word poetry uses individual experience to make an immediate and lasting impact.

Literary poetry is the fact can be said to be more intellectual than spoken word poetry. Literary poetry attempts to stimulate the intellect while spoken word poetry is more concerned with the raw emotion that is reproduced during the performance. The audience does not have time to remember literary allusions, but they do have the capacity to feel what the poet has to say. This allows the audience to experience the emotions that the poet puts forward with the poet as he performs it. These emotions help the audience connect with the poet on a deeper level in a short amount of time.

Spoken word poetry is performed and recorded in front of an audience, making it accessible for everyone who may not have attended the live show to still be able to experience the performance. Literary poetry is experienced as words on a page with no clues to how these words would be performed, and so the meaning of the words and the images are more open to different interpretations.

Spoken word poems have shorter sentences, are additive rather than the subordinative, to use Ong's terms; the simpler sentences and shorter bursts are designed to make more of an emotional impact, while literary poems tend to use more elaborate constructions to give a greater sense of depth. As the images are being painted in both genres, we notice that the differences are often subtle; however they affect the way the poems are interpreted. Literary poetry builds on the intellectual drawing of the image rather than the emotional connection that its spoken word counterpart employs. This allows literary poetry to create intertextual links, with the intention of chal-

lenging the reader intellectually. The literary poem does not paint a new picture, but alludes to other pictures that have a similar meaning. However, with spoken word poems, the images stated are as concrete and immediate as possible with the intent to make an emotional appeal. The images have a shocking effect that brings in the audience instantaneously and if they do allude to other images, they are not primarily literary or intertextual.

The performance itself affects the meaning of the poem, so spoken word poets take performance into consideration as they compose their poem, keeping in mind the immediate reaction of the audience.

Hell is the epitome of hopelessness, and that is how Owen's soldier explains it to the poet. Even though the poet still considers it an improvement to be away from the warzone, the soldier tells him about the years that he missed out on and the experiences he may have enjoyed had he survived the war. The war in this poem is the literal one; however, represents all the people who have been in war and the lost years out of their lives.

Garity is trying to emphasize the problems of the war by saying how it affected someone who is close to him. That simple "nobody" shows how those who survived the war, even if their country won, cannot see themselves as winners. The soldiers fought for something and both sides came out losing. In comparison to Owen's piece, Garity's poem discusses how war is hell on its soldiers; however, he doesn't talk about hell in literary terms; he talks about PTSD as such and not as an extended metaphor.

Although Lee's poem is not entirely about his grandfather, he points to his death as another traumatic event that happened to him. "The day my grandfather passed away, there was the strongest wind" (Michael Lee, line 18). He uses the image of the wind again to show that his

memories of his grandfather were strong and that his grandfather had a lot of energy within him for his soul to produce a strong wind. Garity's take on his grandfather's death was different than that of Lee's because he was dedicating the entire poem to his grandfather's memory, a man he didn't even meet to remember. However, Lee speaks of his grandfather's death as something that he experienced, a trauma he went through, another loss he searches for throughout the poem.

In Owen's poem, the narrator goes through the tunnel, watching the people groaning; nobody notices him; he is not something out of the ordinary for the rest of the people lying on the ground. They are all in pain, groaning and worrying about their own troubles. The images so far are building tension for what is to come. The readers still do not know what is going on with the poet, what drove him to hell or what he did to deserve being there. The poet slowly builds the tension using couplets, which the reader can find themselves noticing, leading to the main point of the poem, the meeting with one of the soldiers who died at the war.

"Then, as I probed them, one sprang up" (Owen, Line 5). This begins the conversation the poet has with the soldier that explains why they are all in hell. The man does not speak, rather he smiles at him and waits for him to realize where he is and to let the idea sink in, just as we readers begin to realize it. The narrator notices that the man knows him; this throws him into a stream-of-consciousness where he starts to think about what happened to him and the people around him.

"By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell" (Wilfred Owen, Line 10). The poet does not see hell in the people around him or the way they are laid out, he sees it in the smile of the man who sprang up to receive him. "His dead smile" shows the psychological effects that war has on those who are plunged into it. The smile is not sad or morose, it is dead and non-existing.

Owen's word choice shows the fact that PTSD has murderous effects on those who go through trauma, as if a part of them dies in the process.

He talks about the years he never got to live; this does not only have to do with his death but also with his life and how a lot of people never really know how to live when they return from the war. Death here is not only the physical demise of a person, but also the death of the soul that has been to war.

Another thing the poem touches upon is the way soldiers are considered disposable in the war. They are not accounted for when the plans are being made nor are they remembered when they die. "None will break ranks though nations trek from progress" (Owen, Line 29), the bigger picture does not involve the lives of the soldiers and the explanation of how their lives do not mean anything. He predicts a never-ending war and speaks of how none of them matter in the scheme of things.

The characters of the poem can be seen as the different sides of the poet himself. The conversation he has throughout the poem shows his struggle with acceptance of the trauma he has been through. It is also a window to the life of a lot of soldiers who have been through the same thing. He uses this conversation as an explanation of the life of a soldier to those who have never known war.

Using hell as a metaphor for war helped Owen employ imagery in a way that would make the reader discern his ideas. The thought process that a reader would have to go through allows them to somewhat understand the extent of Owen's topic. The small images in the poem "profound dull tunnel" (Owen, Line 2) "dead smile" (Owen, Line 10) weave into the fabric of the poem, allowing him to intimate a picture of hell .

One can see Owen's piece as a story-like literary work. The journey aspect, the story that the poem tackles and how it addresses a certain topic all point to its literary dimensions. An example would be Owen's allusion to the "Titanic wars", touching upon the wars of the titans and how they almost were the end of life. He also plays on the double meaning of "Titanic" as he alludes to the way the Titanic ship sank in his lifetime and how traumatizing that was for the people of his age.

Although both genres of poetry include narration, the way they introduce and use the narrative aspect of their poems is what differs between them. Both poets are trying to engage the reader/audience in the poem with them; they try and get them involved, as they are, in the topic, images and narration. Owen's poem introduced the story slowly, setting the scene, and starting with the obscure before showing what the poem is really about. This obscurity makes the reader want to continue reading the poem. The reader's intellect is addressed here, and so they start to think about what the poem is about. With spoken word poetry, on the other hand, the poet employs the shock effect, engaging the audience's emotions rather than their intellect. The instant jump into the poem's topic and the way that the poet introduces the poem affect how the audience perceive it, and allow the poet to keep the audience's attention for the duration of his poem.

Another difference between spoken word and literary poetry relates to how each engages the audience. Literary poetry provides space between the poet and the reader, in more ways than one--indeed this is one of the differences Ong identifies between literacy and orality-- and this allows the poet to take time before diving into the topic of the poem itself. There is also the issue of tone of voice and performance; this issue allows the spoken word poet to show the audience exactly what they meant by using more than just words, but also gestures and tone. This method

plays on the emotional side of the listener, allowing them to connect on a personal level with the spoken word poet.

Unlike Owen, Dylan Garity's poem "Resurrection" started with the topic from the first sentence "This is a story of my grandfather" (Dylan Garity, Line 1). He said the sentences and paused to let the emotions sink in with the audience. After he mentioned the basic topic of his poem, he delved into the details of the poem. Similarly, Michael Lee started with his topic "When searching for the lost, remember eight things" (Lee, Line 1). He sets the scene as soon as he speaks the first words, then takes a breath to allow the audience to comprehend what he is about to say, then dives into the imagery associated with the poem.

Lee's depiction of death is different than those of Garity and Owen, in the sense that he does not speak of it as an enemy, or a consequence; he discusses death as a part of the journey that everyone has to take; something that just has to eventually happen, not something that is traumatic. Yes, his friend's death was traumatic in and of itself, but he discusses the idea of death as a part of the sequence of events. He shows the inevitability of it when he says "when we die, we go everywhere," (Lee, Line 8). He discusses dissipating as a consequence of death: "We go everywhere" suggests that there is no one place where souls go, but a dispersion of energy where we give back what we haven taken. As he performs, Lee uses his body language to show the dispersion of the soul. He stretches his arm out as far as they would go, allowing the image to morph with his body language and show through his movement.

The poem discusses the same themes found in both Owen and Garity's poems, death, remembrance and trauma. Searching for the lost here means those who were lost to death. We look for them in everything that would help us remember them.

"Swallowing the electricity of life upon birth." (Lee, Line 2-3) The images here are also clear and to the point. "We are vessels," (Lee, line 2) is a simple metaphor and not necessarily an objectification. If we look at Owen's form of metaphor we would find that the entirety of death is objectified in the tunnel he falls through at the beginning of the poem. Ong discusses objectification by pointing out that the abstraction inherent in literacy is designed to distance the reader from the poem. However, with oral literature, the images are situational, immediate and quick to understand. This can be found throughout Lee's poems with a of different images that point to the immediacy of the image rather than its abstraction. "I found your voice, found it in a young boy in Michigan who was always singing. His lungs flapped like sails" (Lee, Line 51-53). This is another part of the poem that is filled with short, quick images that allow the audience to imagine the scene with the poet. The short bursts also affect the pace of the poem. The shorter the sentences, the faster the pace. This also affects the performance of the poem; Lee uses those quick sentences to quicken his pace as he speaks, his breath shallows and his movement quickens showing the intensity of the image he is trying to portray.

The layers introduced by Owen's poem are meant to help the reader peel them away one at a time. The connection is established on an intellectual level, allowing for reader and poet to communicate throughout space and time. On the other hand, with spoken word poetry, the connection is formed immediately through the performative aspect of the poem; the poet takes the stage and shocks the crowd with an image, a tone, or a body movement that allows the listener to immediately be engrossed in the poem as much as the poet is. This instant connection allows the audience to experience a similar feeling as the poet. It also allows the poet to jump from one image to another without risking losing the crowd.

Michael Lee's poem "Pass On" is another example of how spoken word poetry tackles themes and performance differently than literary poetry. In Lee's poem, he discusses the death of his friend and how he was working through the trauma of accepting that death. He uses a copious amount of imagery to try and show how this death affected him, how he was dealing with it, and in an effort to get those who watch the poem to relate to him in a personal way. Lee attempts to relate the loss of a loved one with a lot of clear images that would allow the audience to feel what he is going through as well as connect it to a loss of their own.

Both Lee's poem and Owen's are centralized around death and the aftermath. However, the contrast between Owen and Lee is that Lee speaks of an energy that moves from one body and disperses to different bodies around the world. It is not one intact being that goes to another plane of existence after it leaves the body, i.e heaven or hell; it is an energy that spreads in our world and goes to different people as it can never be created or destroyed.

That is why he mentions how he could find pieces of his dead friend in different people he encountered along his life.

By recalling Ong's distinctions between orality and literacy, we can find that Lee's orality focuses on what Ong calls the "situational form" of experience. He does not find an abstract thought to write his poetry about, but rather, he discusses a life trauma in a way that communicates his emotions by particularizing them.

Lee's poetry is also participatory; he speaks of something that is close to him on an emotional level, trying to get the listeners to empathize with him on what he felt. Owen's poem, however, relies on the intellectualism that comes with the literary forms of poetry as a reader

would be sent to read other texts, so they can relate to it on an intellectual level. Lee's approach relies on forming a close, empathetic, immediate, connection with the listeners.

Lee employs more than just language in his poem; his poetry is comprised not only of the words, but also of voice, repetition and body language as they help him get his point across to his audience faster. Lee uses repetition "pulsing, pulsing" (Lee, Line 45) to illustrate the word itself by mimicking its emotion. Another use of repetition is when he says "Music, wind, music, wind" (Lee, Line 17) to liken them to each other as he spoke about the energy that flowed through his high school hallways when he thought he could listen to his dead friend singing his favorite song. He uses this repetition to try and illustrate the way wind carries music or the energy of music along the hallways and to pave the way for his poem to speak more about the energies that travel from one point to another.

The repetition helps the poet portray the experience in a way that would establish emotional connection with the audience immediately, and therefore connect it to the emotion of the poem. When Lee mentions music and wind, he follows it up by the memory of his dead grandfather and how the day he died there was a strong wind that took his spirit away to different people around the world (line 18). The repetition established the emotion and the example established the connection.

We can find the concept of grieving is present in both Owen's and Lee's poetry. They both tackle grief and how it has affected them in their lives. Owen mentions in both the first and third person as the narrator and the soldier discuss how their lives have been lost to the war and how they have gained nothing out of it, while Lee grieves his lost friend and his grandfather by likening them to energies that disperse into pieces that still live on in different people. In tackling

this concept, both Owen and Lee use metaphors; however, Owen's metaphors are more abstract and obscure while Lee does not bother with obscurity and presents simple metaphors that are easy to relate to as they are performed. Owen compels the reader to think about his imagery and find the inner text from it, thereby allowing the readers to use their intellect to deduce the meaning of the metaphors " Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were." (Owen, line 39), here the metaphor is vivid, but it leaves the interpretation to the reader and forces them to think of its ramifications. On the other hand, Lee uses metaphors that address emotions "The day my grandfather passed away, there was the strongest wind." (Lee, Line 18), this metaphor allows the audience to understand the grief that Lee went through from the image of the wind that is associated with the death of his grandfather. There is no need for an intellectual dive into the meaning behind it, as the emotions overpower the intellectual aspect of the image.

He also uses body language to show the "pulsing" by moving his hands from one side to another. His use of body language adds to the show of emotions and a dynamic feel to it, allowing the audience to experience the emotions immediately, and emotionally. The clear images, accompanied by the body language, voice and use of pauses, allowed both Lee and Garity to show the impact of each emotion they were trying to portray so that they reached the audience immediately. Owen, on the other hand, relied mainly on his use of allusions and extended allegories in order to allow the reader to look back on past works to be able to understand the ideas that Owen put forth. Owen's poem was meant for reading and reflection rather than performance and feeling, which highlights the difference between literary poetry and spoken word poetry.

All three poems mention death. With Owen and Garity, death is a consequence of and has a consequence on the people surrounding it. With Lee, death is a part of life; life does not end

with death but encompasses it. "Death does not come when a body is too exhausted to live, death comes because the brilliance inside us can only be contained for so long." (Owen, Line 60, 61) There is an acceptance of death in Lee's poem, not a revolt against it, and it shows in his use of imagery. He uses the images to show how grief takes different shapes and forms. "The earth is a xylophone" Describing his lost friend's basketball skills he says that his dribbling made the earth a musical instrument. In the poem, Lee uses his hands to mimic dribbling, to show how his friend used to use his hands to make music. This performance aspect shows only as the poem is seen. The mannerism of the poet represents a part of the poem, written as the poem itself was written; without it, the performance would be lacking.

The cultural references in the poems are also similar in a way. Owen points to the Titanic's sinking as one of the most traumatizing events of the century. Because it happened in his time, he is able to describe it in words in a way that would allow the reader to understand what he meant. While Lee uses the reference to the same ship, but in a retrospective way, where he has heard of what he heard happen in the Titanic but did not experience its trauma. So, he romanticizes the sinking of the Titanic as something somewhat beautiful "With an ear to the Atlantic, I can hear the Titanic's band playing her to sleep. Music. Wind. Music. Wind" (Lee, Line 15-17). Lee here discusses death like Owen, but with a different context. In Lee's version, the immediacy of the image shows as he discusses death. The band is playing her to sleep, and the death of thousands is romanticized into a beautiful slumber. However, Owen's version depicts the image of the Titanic as the traumatic thing it was "Through granites which Titanic wars had groined." (Owen, Line 3) The image here is more obscure and abstract than that of Lee's take on it. Owen's image plays more on the sinking as if it were a war that was won by the sea. The im-

age here has many levels and layers. Both uses of the Titanic are vital to the continuation of the poems; however, each of them tackled it in a way that fit with their chosen sub -genre. The simple nod to death that is in Lee's poem points to the romanticization of death that he tackles throughout the entire piece. In his opinion, the Titanic was sung to sleep; but in Owen's version, the sinking was a great war that nobody survived.

The use of the immediacy of images is also helpful when discussing a traumatizing fact. When Lee mentions his friend's murder for the first time, not just his death, he uses a number of images that both stun the audience and clarify to them how it was to lose them. "The day Stephen was murdered, everything that made us love him rushed from his knife would, as though his chest was an auditorium, his life an audience leaving single file." (Lee, Lines 24-27) Through these images, we can actually see the scene of his friend's death. The images are clear enough to help the audience understand the way Stephen lost his life and how it affected the people around him.

How spoken word poetry is performed greatly affects the meaning behind it. It is a way the poet tackles the image, emotion and point they're trying to get across without adding to the wording of the poem. With literary poetry, the model is not performance, but readership; the poet wrote this poem to be ingested through reading. As for spoken word, the poet writes the poem with the intention of performance, meaning that the tone of voice, the rises and falls, the crescendos are written with the words, in the sense that each word has a tonal aspect and a body movement to accompany it.

According to Ong, oral culture is empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced. For an oral culture, learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic identifica-

tion. However, writing separates the knower from the known and sets up conditions for objectivity in the sense of personal disengagement of distancing. The disembodied discourse allows for the spacing between poet and reader, for the interpretation of the poem according to the intellectual references, familiar to the reader, and the references familiar to the poet. The barrier of time and space allows for the poetry to be more fleshed out and for the allegories to be extended. This can be applied when comparing the three poems to each other. Both Garity's and Lee's poems employ the empathetic and participatory rather than then the distanced using both their immediate images and their manner of performance. They invite the audience to become part of their journeys as they establish a quick and meaningful connection with them. As for Owen, he uses objectification to paint his pictures, mentioning indirectly and only hinting to the hidden meaning. The reader here is invited to try and understand the hidden meaning. The lack of performance accompanied with literacy takes away an important aspect of hearing how the poet intended for the poem to be read, and that requires the reader to dig deeper to find the meaning of the images.

"In an oral culture, restriction of words to sound determines not only modes of expression but also thought processes." (Ong, 33) The modern oral culture of spoken word poetry has many similarities to the old oral culture, where the poet employs sound and mode of expression as they compose the poem itself. The mannerism and tone is part and parcel of the poem, not an additive or extra that can be taken out of it. On the other hand, literary poetry is not associated directly with tone, mannerism or body language; it exists as words on paper, the performance part is added to it and can be excluded from it without it having any effect on the meaning.

However, this distinction makes the message behind each poem different, even though both poems can have the same topic. The tone of voice and mannerisms in the spoken word poetry shows anger, grief, happiness and every other emotion on the spectrum, because it is being performed. The written word does show some aspects of emotions through word choice and metaphor, but lacks the immediacy and intensity of the image that the audience experience from the performance of the poem.

All three poems have some performative aspects to them; however, the fact that the spoken word poems were recorded and can be seen and heard even after the live performances themselves gives them a difference over the written poem which was never performed nor was recorded. Another thing about the spoken word poems is that the performance, the tone of voice and body language was written with the words, as part of the poems and not an additive to be put in or taken out without affecting the poem's meaning. The mannerisms and tones are part and parcel of the poems and so they shape them to be performative more than the written poems.

When considering the comparison between literary poetry and spoken word poetry, one must note the fact that both of them are the same genre; however they follow different approaches. The focus of the poems affects the way they are perceived; do they focus on the shock effect, or the extended metaphors? Does the poem rely on performance as well as word choice, or does it only allow the words to paint the picture? Is the narration linear and literary, or does it jump from one concrete image to the next? The painting of the image and the way they are portrayed, the way a poem is supposed to be performed and how they tackle the intellect or the emotions are the distinctive factors between poems of the same genre. It is important to think of those sub-

genres as complementary and not conflicting; for historically, they are both traditional and an-
cient, and as history shows, one of them always involves the other.

It would be wrong to assume that spoken word poetry and literary poetry are two differ-
ent genres. In fact, they are the same genre, just morphed and adapted to different audiences. The
difference between spoken word poetry and literary poetry aren't sharp; there is a range of grey
that both of them fall within. However, the subtle differences allowed them to become different
in the matter of the audiences they address and the way they present imagery, word choice and
performance. The choice of comparing one literary poem with two spoken word poems came as
a way of showing the difference between the two styles of poetry, as well as highlighting the fact
that there will also be difference between a spoken word poem and another, even if they tackle
similar topics. With Adrienne Rich, Neil Hilborn and Kevin Kantor, the idea of "wrecks" the
emotional and the physical, paved the way to highlighting the subtle difference in their ap-
proaches.

Of course, this topic could have been handled in a number of different ways; choosing
different poems from different eras could show more detail in the topic at hand. Also, the literary
poems could be more similar in style to spoken word poetry if they came from the same age. By
looking at different poems, different points will arise that may not be mentioned in this thesis,
however, the focus here is on the poems that are chosen as they depict the point I was trying to
prove as well as help sharpen the distinction between the two styles of poetry.

The two styles of poetry have been and will always be connected; oral poetry and literal
poetry interchange as the canonic mode of poetry throughout the years. This means that they're

similar and the differences do not make them different genres, but show how they both tackle

different topics, audiences and modes of communication differently.

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