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INNER SPEECH AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF POETRY

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Abstract: A vexed claim in the philosophy of poetry is the *form-content unity thesis*, which states that the formal features of a poem (e.g., meter and rhyme) and its meaning are inseparable. In this paper, I interpret this thesis as a descriptive claim stating that form and content in poetry are experienced as indissolubly connected while reading silently. My view is that the unity of the experience of form and content can be explained by highlighting the role of *inner speech* (i.e., the mental production of one's voice) in the phenomenology of reading poetry. The content of the inner voice is heard as having an auditory aspect and a cognitive one, which are indissolubly connected in the phenomenology: they cannot be experienced in isolation from each other (e.g., by attending to a single aspect). This interpretation explains why form-content unity is revelatory of the specific aesthetic value of poetry: it individuates poetry as the art that produces sonic and semantic effects in a unitary way, through the phenomenology of inner speech. Unity captures the specificity of poetry, since comparable sonic and semantic effects are found in other arts (e.g., music and novels).

1. Introduction

A vexed claim in the philosophy of poetry is the *form-content unity thesis* (FCU from now on). This thesis, usually attributed to Bradley (1909) or Brooks (1960), states that the formal features of a poem (e.g., meter and rhyme) and its meaning are *inseparable*, that is, are connected in such an intimate way that the appreciation of the poem always seems to be directed at both. This connection is usually thought to be not exhibited by other literary genres like novels, which arguably involve focus on

the content of the text at the expense of its formal features. A classic argument put forward in support of this thesis is the *no-paraphrase argument* (NP from now on), which states that paraphrases of a poem are never successful, because they never share the same content of the poem they target. Given that paraphrases are attempts to separate content from form, and they are always unsuccessful, the form-content unity thesis is affirmed.

The form-content unity thesis is usually taken to be revelatory of the specific aesthetic value of poetry (i.e., what makes poetry valuable for its aesthetic properties and not, say, for its importance as a historical document; see e.g., Lamarque, 2009: 403-404). The common assumption in aesthetics has been: if one explains in what sense form and content are unitary in poetry (and in what way this unity makes paraphrase impossible), one thereby explains a fundamental aspect of poetry's appreciation. Depending on how FCU is fleshed out, then, one will produce a different take on the aesthetic value of poetry. Let's refer to this resulting thesis as the *value thesis* (VT from now on).

Kivy (1997) has offered two interpretations of FCU (and, in turn, of NP). The first, which I shall call the *semantic interpretation*, takes it to be a thesis about the *propositional meaning* of the poem: the formal features of the poem would affect the semantics of the text, thereby making it impossible for paraphrases to report the same content, given that they lack the relevant formal features. The second interpretation, which I call the *experiential interpretation*, instead, views FCU as a thesis about the experience of reading the poem. Rather than positing an influence of form over meaning, this version of FCU claims that meaning and form are *experienced as indissolubly connected while reading*. Paraphrasing fails, in this case, because it cannot reproduce the same experience, since paraphrases lack the formal features that contributed to that experience.

Each interpretation has had its supporters and detractors. In this paper I focus mainly on the experiential interpretation, which is arguably the most popular in the literature. I present the debate around this interpretation and put forward a new version. My view is that the unity of the experience of form and content can be explained once the role of *inner speech* is highlighted in the phenomenology of reading poetry. By inner speech, I refer to the mental production of one's voice while reading in the absence of physical articulation. The content of the inner voice is heard as having two aspects: an *auditory* aspect and a *semantic* one. These two

aspects are indissolubly connected in the experience: one cannot separate them, even if one tries to focus one's attention on one of them. This unitary character of the content of the experience of reading explains the unity described by FCU: the sonic properties and the semantic properties of the poem are experienced as inseparable aspects of the same content while reading. NP, in turn, can be explained as the impossibility of reproducing this unity through a paraphrase, in which even if the reader uses inner speech, the content of the targeted poem is experienced as different, because it is connected with different sonic properties.

Interpreting FCU as being about the unitary character of the phenomenology of inner speech has consequences for the relationship between FCU and VT. Different interpretations of FCU attribute the specificity of the aesthetic value of poetry to aspects of the reader's experience such as a specific way of modulating one's attention (e.g., Lamarque, 2009) or a set of *sui-generis effects* produced by interactions between semantic and sonic aspects of poems (e.g., McGregor, 2014). In contrast, I contend that the specificity of poetry's aesthetic value lies in the unitary way in which semantic and sonic aspects of poems are experienced while reading through inner speech.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In section 2 I illustrate the experiential interpretation of FCU and the debate around it. I show that what is problematic about the accounts involved in the debate is that they rely exclusively on the way in which attention is distributed while reading poetry. In section 3 I sketch out my proposal by analyzing the unitary phenomenology of inner speech. In section 4 I defend the descriptive claim that inner speech is involved in the experience of reading poetry. In section 5 I flesh out my interpretation of FCU, showing that it effectively tackles problems faced by other accounts in the debate.

2. Form-content unity: the experiential interpretation

Andrew Cecil Bradley's 1901 Oxford inaugural lecture, titled "Poetry for Poetry's Sake", is generally referred to as the main source for the form-content unity thesis (see e.g., Kivy, 1997). Another common reference is Cleanth Brooks' 1947 essay "The Heresy of Paraphrase", from the literary school known as *New Criticism* (see e.g., Lepore, 2009). The intellectual history of this idea is complex (see e.g., Kivy, 1997), but in what follows I will mainly consider Bradley's version.

FCU can be expressed as in (1).

- (1) *Form-content unity thesis* (FCU): the form and the content of a poem are inseparable

In support of FCU, Bradley (1909) puts forward the no-paraphrase argument (NP), which is illustrated in (2).

- (2) *No-paraphrase argument* (NP): If the content and form of a poem are separable, then paraphrases should be possible (since a paraphrase is the attempt to report the content of a poem in a different form). But paraphrases never share the same content as the poem they are about. Therefore, the form and the content of a poem are inseparable.

Bradley puts forward different examples in support of the second premise of NP. Consider for instance Shakespeare's quote in (3). Bradley in (4) attempts to report the same content of (3), but with different words.

- (3) To be, or not to be, that is the question
(4) What is just now occupying my attention is the comparative disadvantages of continuing to live or putting an end to myself

Bradley denies that (3) and (4) have the same *content*. Something contentful is lost once the poetic form is changed.

Because NP applies strictly to every possible alteration of poetic form, this means that not even synonyms can be replaced without loss of content. Thus, Bradley claims that Lord Byron's verses in (5) (from the poem "Ode to Mazeppa", 1819) lose their content if we exchange the places of "horse" and "steed".

- (5) 'Bring forth the horse!' The horse was brought:
In truth he was a noble steed!

While intuitively it is clear that something goes missing in the paraphrases just presented, pinpointing this something is no simple task. If, trivially, the change

is just about form, then NP is not sound, and FCU cannot be affirmed. If instead the formal change somehow affects the content of the verses, then one must make clear what is meant by ‘content’. As illustrated in the introduction, Kivy (1997) provides two possible interpretations of this notion. Under the semantic interpretation, NP is taken to show that the alteration of form when paraphrasing affects the *propositional meaning* of the poem. FCU is therefore interpreted as a thesis about the inseparability of the form and the propositional meaning of the poem. Under the experiential interpretation, FCU is understood as a thesis about the inseparability of the form and the content of the poem *as these are experienced while reading/listening to it*. Paraphrases may succeed in reporting the propositional meaning of a poem, but they cannot preserve the *way in which it is experienced when reading it in the poem*, because form, which contributed essentially to that experience, is lost. It is in this sense that paraphrases do not share the same content as the poem they target.

Note that FCU and NP are connected to a third claim, the *value thesis* (VT), given in (6). Bradley can be said to be committed to VT. The first philosopher to make this claim explicit was, to my knowledge, Lamarque (2009).

(6) *Value thesis* (VT): The aesthetic value of poetry lies in the unity of form and content that poetry achieves

Differently put, VT states that the aesthetic value of poetry lies in FCU. Importantly, VT does not imply that poems cannot be aesthetically valuable for other reasons (e.g., because it conveys important, profound messages). VT just states that what specifically makes poetry aesthetically valuable is FCU. Whenever FCU is defended, it is defended in connection with VT. Moreover, depending on how FCU is fleshed out (i.e., depending on which one of Kivy’s interpretations is selected), VT will be different. If FCU is a thesis about propositional meaning (as stated by the semantic interpretation), VT states that what is aesthetically valuable about poetry is the specific meaning achieved through FCU. If instead FCU is a thesis about the experience of poetry (as stated by the experiential interpretation), then it is understood as a form of *experientialism*, that is, a view claiming that the aesthetic value of poetry depends on the experience it is supposed to generate.

As anticipated, in this paper I won't focus on the semantic interpretation. I will just briefly mention one reason for rejecting it¹. Consider the example in (5). Claiming that the propositional meaning of Byron's verse is affected once the synonymous "steed" and "horse" are exchanged just seems implausible. As Lepore (2009) has noted, accepting this interpretation would introduce a radical asymmetry between poetic and ordinary language. In the latter, synonymous expressions can be substituted by preserving the truth-conditional value of the sentence. And indeed, the very fact that Bradley uses synonymous words in his examples suggests that the contrast is located elsewhere.

Let us then focus on the experiential interpretation, which equates content with the propositional meaning *as experienced* when reading poetry. Kivy (1997) extracts this view from Bradley's 1901 lecture, where he states that the unity of form and content is attested by the impossibility of conveying 'the effect of a poem or passage in any form but its own' (Bradley, 1909: 22). If paraphrases cannot convey the 'effect' of a poem, then it must be that form-content unity lies in the experience elicited by poetry, rather than in a supposed alteration of the propositional meaning.

I take it that the view targeted by this interpretation, once properly qualified, is the correct one. But what does it mean to claim that the unity of form and content is achieved by the experience of poetry?

Before illustrating the different answers, I should note that most accounts focus on the experience of *reading poetry silently*, as opposed to the experience of listening to oneself or someone else *declaiming poetry*. Why should one focus on silent reading, given that, as Ribeiro (2015) notes, declaiming poetry in many traditions has an historical precedence over the former? A reasonable answer is that silent reading is today the most common way in which we consume poetry. Nevertheless, I take it that accounts of FCU that stick to the experiential interpretation must address all possible experiences of poetry to be considered complete and workable accounts. I will do this in section 5. Until then, let's focus on silent reading.

Kivy (1997, 2011) accepts that there is one way of reading poetry in which the form and the meaning are experienced *together*. The type of experience he has in mind is one in which the reader's attention is evenly distributed over the formal

¹ See Kivy (1997: 104) for another argument against the semantic interpretation.

features and the meaning of the poem. As an example, consider the verses from E. A. Poe's 1845 poem "The Raven" in (7).

(7) Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before

Among the notable formal aspects contained in these verses there is for example the alliteration of the 'd' consonant, as well as the internal rhyme "peering-fearing". For Kivy, a reader can attend to these aspects *as well as* to the propositional meaning of the lines (i.e., the situation described by the poet). Importantly, Kivy is not describing *two simultaneous attentional tasks*. This view would be in tension with research in cognitive science that shows that due to the brain's limited resources, attention is selective and switches competitively from an object to another (e.g., if in a room there are multiple sound sources, I can only focus on a single source at a time; Bizley & Cohen, 2013; for visual perception, see e.g., Desimone & Duncan, 1995). Rather, as Kivy puts it, the reader's attention is directed at a *unicum* (i.e., at a single object) in which the formal aspects and the content-related aspects are connected. No further detail is provided by Kivy about how this *unicum* should be characterized. This is a problem, as we shall later see in this section.

Kivy argues that the experience of poetry just described is but one of the several possible ways of experiencing poetry. In these other cases, the content and the form of the poem are experienced *as separate*. All depends on how the reader's attention is directed:

Sometimes we experience the medium and the message as one rather than two objects of attention; sometimes we are not aware of the medium and the message but only the medium-and-message, undifferentiated. But sometimes, too, our attention flits rapidly back and forth from one to the other or concentrates for a while on one rather than the other. (Kivy, 1997: 110)

He thus defends a form of *pluralism* about the experience of poetry. There are ways of reading poetry that achieve FCU, and ways that don't.

The ways of reading poetry that don't achieve FCU are divided in two groups. First there are *non-poetic ways of reading*. As an example, Kivy (2011) conceives a scenario in which a reader decides to read Milton's Paradise Lost by focusing on how many times the letter 'e' is used. In this case, the aspect at which the attention is

directed is not aesthetically relevant. But even if it was for whatever reason (e.g., one could count the letters for pleasure), the underlying reading practice would not count as one that preserves the specific aesthetic value of poetry. The second group features *poetic ways of reading*. For instance, one can read *Paradise Lost* and “concentrate on the specifics of Milton’s religious views, in the context of his times” (Kivy, 2011: 373). In this case, the reader’s attention is directed at an aesthetically relevant aspect of the poem’s content, whilst formal aspects are neglected. This way of reading, for Kivy, *preserves the specific aesthetic value of poetry*. Moreover, Kivy notes that poems such as Milton’s, whose meaning and formal aspects are particularly *dense* and *difficult*, force the reader’s attention to be distributed sometimes over content-related aspects, sometimes over formal ones. Form-content unity in the case of dense poetry seems hopelessly out of reach, and yet we can poetically read these poems.

So, Kivy’s pluralism allows him to reject FCU: it is simply not true that the form and content of poems are inseparable when reading poetry. Moreover, Kivy argues that once FCU is interpreted in this way, NP does not look like a cogent argument anymore. Even if we admit that FCU is true, the purpose of paraphrasing is not that of reproducing the particular experience of form-content unity that the reader has when reading poetry. The objective of paraphrasing is to report the meaning of the targeted text, not the meaning *as experienced when reading it*. If this is correct, then NP is not cogent, given that its topic (i.e., paraphrase) has nothing to do with FCU.

Let me comment on this second point first. Is it true that NP cannot be interpreted as cogent under this interpretation of FCU? I produce a new version of NP (let’s call it NP1) in (8), in which the interpretation at stake is made explicit.

(8) *No-paraphrase argument (NP1)*: If the content and form of a poem are separable *when reading the poem*, then paraphrases should be possible (since a paraphrase is the attempt to report the content of a poem *as it is experienced* in a different form). But when *reading* a paraphrase, the *experienced* content is never the same as the content *experienced when reading* the poem the paraphrase is about. Therefore, the form and the content of a poem are inseparable *when reading the poem* (FCU).

The argument in (8) strikes me as cogent. One can legitimately attempt to reproduce the experience of a certain content using a different wording. If one accepts, like Kivy does, that when reading poetry one can focus one's attention exclusively on the content, and that the experience of poetry is accounted for exclusively by referring to this distribution of attention, then a paraphrase (e.g., Shakespeare's paraphrase in example (3)) should be able to elicit the same experience of that content. Of course, one may question whether that is the true aim of paraphrasing. Alternative aims can be conceived (e.g., being simple *aids* to the interpretation). Regardless of how one labels the practice of using another form to report the content of the poem as experienced when reading it, that practice is the topic of NP1.

What about Kivy's rejection of FCU through the pluralism he proposes? A defender of FCU could accept a form of pluralism, but deny that there are poetic ways of reading poetry that do not achieve FCU. Lamarque (2009, 2015), seems to go down this road. Under his view, content and form may be separated when reading poetry, but if we are to experience poetry as in itself aesthetically valuable, we should read it by attending to form-content unity. He puts it in this way:

Reading a poem *as poetry* demands the assumption of form-content unity. The indivisibility of form and content is not something that is *discovered* in works – more in this, less in that, not in this one at all – it is something that the practice of reading poetry *imposes* on a work. (Lamarque, 2009: 411)

Lamarque's view has a *normative* flavor, since he, like Kivy, commits to a pluralism about the experience of poetry, but then claims that if one is to experience the specific aesthetic properties of poetry, one must read in a way that achieves FCU. Kivy's proposal, in contrast, is *descriptivist*: he takes his pluralism about poetic ways of reading to stem from a description of the different ways in which readers consume poems.

Lamarque defines this way of reading poetry through the notion of *semantic finegrainedness*. When reading *poetically*, for Lamarque, we are interested in the specific way in which the content of the poem is presented. Let's use one of Lamarque's examples:

Both Coleridge and Shelley wrote odes on Dejection, similar in content as well as in structure and tone. We might, I suppose, imagine a context where we would say to someone: if you are interested in romantic treatments of dejection read Coleridge or Shelley, it doesn't matter which, they are

sufficiently similar. But to anyone interested in poetry itself it would be extraordinary to say simply take your pick between these poems. (Lamarque, 2009: 410)

Here Lamarque echoes Bradley's (1909) distinction between the *subject* and the *content* of the poem. When one is not reading poetically (but say, as in Lamarque's example, because one is interested in the history of romanticism), the content of a poem can be felicitously picked in a loose way. But in these contexts, we only get the *subject* of the poem (i.e., what the poem is about). When we read poetically, instead, we access the *content* of the poem, which is, for Lamarque, the specific way in which the subject is presented in the poem. This specificity demands attention to formal features (e.g., the choice of words, rhyming, meter, etc.), which is why paraphrasing does not succeed in reproducing the content of poems (whereas it succeeds in reporting the subject).

So, on the one hand we have Kivy's pluralism, which rejects FCU and NP by claiming that when reading poetry the reader's attention can be distributed exclusively on content or on form while still counting as a form of poetic reading. On the other hand, we have Lamarque's pluralism, which restricts the set of poetic ways of reading to ways of reading that achieve FCU.

Finding a way out of this debate, I argue, is impossible if the experience of reading poetry remains underspecified. Both Kivy and Lamarque seem to think that the debate around FCU and NP can be settled by making reference only to how attention is distributed while reading. This is a mistake: whether content and form can be experienced separately while reading poetry is a question about the *structure of the experience of reading*. One cannot decide whether Kivy's "Paradise Lost" example, where the reader focuses on Milton's religious views, actually counts as a case in which form is not experienced, if one doesn't have an explicit theory that establishes what counts as an experience of form when reading poetry in the first place. For the same reason, both Kivy's and Lamarque's references to the *unicum* which we are supposed to attend to when reading poetry in a way that realizes FCU cannot be evaluated: one needs a theory that explains how it is that in the phenomenology of poetic reading there is an object in which formal and semantic aspects are fused, and at which one's attention can be directed. Such a theory must produce explicit claims about the *phenomenology of poetry*, that is, about the structure of the experience the reader undergoes when reading poetry. Only once this

theory is provided, Kivy's and Lamarque's claims about how attention is distributed can be properly assessed.

The views put forward by Kivy and Lamarque contain *assumptions* about the phenomenology of reading poetry. Kivy seems to think that however the phenomenology is characterized, the focus of attention can be the form of the text, the content or a fusion of the two. Given that, as we said above, attention operates selectively (e.g., I cannot attend to a sound source unless the auditory system represents it as such, see: Bizley & Cohen, 2013), the object of the phenomenology of reading should alternatively be the semantic component, the formal component (e.g., rhymes and meter) or a fusion of the two. Note that Kivy (2006) has an explicit theory about the experience of reading literature, which views inner speech (i.e., the inner production of language through auditory imagery) as having a fundamental role, and which he employs for its ontology of literature. This theory is not employed in his treatment of poetry, but one can plausibly assume that he would view the assumptions just outlined as compatible with such a theory. But such assumptions are incompatible because, as I show in the next sections, form and content are inseparable in the phenomenology of inner speech.

As we have seen, Lamarque (2015) has a similar view, since he also thinks that the contents of the experience of reading poetry can be directed to a fusion of content and form, or to form or content alone (the main difference lies in the aesthetic importance Lamarque attributes to reading poetry by achieving FCU). In addition, he explicitly denies that reading poetry exhibits a characteristic phenomenology at all:

Certainly experience is at the core of what gives poetry value but it is not merely passively received so much as sought after under relevant modes of attention when the poetry game is engaged. The definitive experiences are not sensations or even emotions—there is no determinate phenomenology of poetic experience across all genres (the very idea is absurd)—but are processes of thought precisely shaped by the form-content unities that are their focus of attention. Of course there might be accompanying emotions or sensations in particular cases but these are contingent and context-dependent. (Lamarque, 2015: 36).

For Lamarque, the relevant experience in reading poetry poetically can be captured by “processes of thoughts” which are elicited by the focusing of the reader's attention on the poetic presentation of content. Even though a *sensory* phenomenology or an *affective* phenomenology can at times be detected, these fail to generalize to all

experiences of poetry. So, reading is described as a fundamentally intellectual process, in which the reader understands the meaning of the poem, its form, or a fusion of the two. But is this actually the correct picture? In the next sections I argue that it is not the case.

Others in the literature have tried to shed light on the phenomenology of poetry. Prinz and Mandelbaum (2015), for example, put forward the notion of *poetic opacity*, which they take to be the defining property of poetry and which they describe in the following way:

a text is poetically opaque if the author intentionally constructs it in such a way that readers' attention is drawn to the words used and not just to what those words represent (Prinz & Mandelbaum, 2015: 72)

Put in this way, poetic opacity looks similar to Lamarque's (2009, 2015) notion of semantic finegrainedness, which is also described as a way to direct attention to the way in which content is presented. Prinz and Mandelbaum contrast poetic language with ordinary language (e.g., a newspaper article) which is concerned with the *transparent communication of meaning*. Bringing attention to the language is considered as a flaw in ordinary language, whereas attention to form (i.e., opacity) is the objective of poetry.

Prinz and Mandelbaum's specific contribution to the phenomenology of poetry lies in the analogy between the notion of *twofoldness* in depiction, originally developed by Wollheim (1987), and the notion of poetic opacity. The characteristic perceptual experience one has when looking at a painting is defined as *twofold* because it has two components: on the one hand, one sees a bidimensional surface, on the other one sees a three-dimensional scene *in* the surface (Wollheim, 1987: 46). Wollheim (1980) famously denies that these two components correspond to two perceptual experiences that alternate (i.e., one sees now the surface, now the scene), a view commonly attributed to Gombrich (1960), but casts them rather as two *simultaneous visual experiences*. His view later evolves, thereby conceiving twofoldness as a property of the content of a *single perceptual experience* (Wollheim 1987). The content of pictorial experience is twofold, according to this later view, in that it has *two inseparable aspects*: it is the experience of seeing a three-dimensional scene (first aspect) in a bidimensional surface (second aspect).

Prinz and Mandelbaum (2015: 76) note that the way in which attention is distributed when reading poetry is analogous to how it is distributed when looking at a painting. When one views a painting, attention is directed at two aspects, that is, on properties of the surface (e.g., the brushstrokes) and properties of the content (e.g., the depicted figures). Similarly, when reading poetry, the object of attention is directed at both the form and the content of the text. Attention when reading a newspaper is not directed in this way. It is not *twofold*, since it is distributed exclusively on the content. We do not, at least in normal situations, notice the form.

Reading poetry and pictorial experience present differences as well, for Prinz and Mandelbaum. As we have seen above, pictorial experience can be characterized either as two experiences which alternate or are simultaneous, or as a single experience with a twofold content. In contrast, Prinz and Mandelbaum argue that reading poetry does not fit into a single account:

When poems are difficult to interpret, form may present itself prior to content, and independent of it. This counts against simultaneity. Once meaning is ascertained, we do not alternate back and forth, because it is hard to experience the meaning without keeping the words in view. At that point, there may indeed be a simultaneous experience of form and content, but, as already noted, that need not occur right away. In the case of noise poems or poems that are incomprehensible, it may never occur. (Prinz & Mandelbaum, 2015: 77)

When comprehension is impaired, as with difficult or dense poetry, it seems that only form is experienced. In cases where content is understandable, Prinz and Mandelbaum seem to lean towards the *simultaneity option* for depiction (i.e., the one attributed to Wollheim, 1980), given that “it is hard to experience the meaning without keeping the words in view”: poetic reading is described as composed of two simultaneous experiences.

The resulting account is close to a form of *monism*, against the pluralistic accounts proposed by Kivy and Lamarque, because the only contexts in which form is taken to be experienced separately from content are those where content is not understandable. Given that cases in which comprehension is lacking can hardly count as cases of reading at all, we are dealing with a form of monism: reading poetry just is attending to content and form at the same time. I said *close* to a form of monism, because they mention relevant exceptions: if one includes noise poems in one’s definition of poetry, then we are back in a form of pluralism. It is a type of

pluralism constrained by the object's structure: depending on whether the poem has content, the experience will be of form alone or of form and content at the same time.

Another important feature of Prinz and Mandelbaum is that their account appears to be *descriptive*. Like Kivy, and unlike Lamarque, who's normativist, they take themselves to be describing how people read poetry (like Kivy, their claim is grounded in introspective judgment). It's not the case that poetry is read in several different ways, among which there is one that should be considered as *poetic reading*. Readers read poetry by attending to both form and content, whereas readers read newspapers and other non-poetic texts by attending only to the content.

I find Prinz and Mandelbaum's descriptive monism appealing: the theory I present in the next section has the same general features. Their view has also the merit of providing an hypothesis about the phenomenology of reading poetry through the analogy with twofoldness, which can be used to interpret FCU: the experience of poetry is *twofold*, in the sense that we have two simultaneous experiences that cannot be separated. There are however problems with this view.

The first problem is that there is clearly a tension between defining the notion of poetic opacity in terms of attention alone and endorsing a simultaneity view about the phenomenology of poetry (akin to Wollheim's, 1980 view of pictorial experience). As we have seen above when discussing Kivy's pluralism, empirical research (e.g., Bizley & Cohen, 2013) tells us that attention operates on objects and switches selectively from one object to another. How can attention be directed at two objects at the same time? Does poetic reading really involve simultaneity, or rather just a quick back and forth between form and content? As for Kivy's and Lamarque's views, such questions cannot be answered without characterizing the phenomenology of reading poetry.

Another problem is that their view *overgenerates*. At first, the fact that poetic opacity is characterized only through attention may look like an advantage, given that it allows them to include into their notion of form effects that range from the sonic realm (i.e., rhyme) to the visual one, as with *concrete poetry*, where the way in which words are graphically arranged in the page matters for appreciation. But consider for example graffiti art. Here visual properties of the text matter as much as content does. This is enough, following Prinz and Mandelbaum's characterization, to classify graffiti as poetically opaque: the words bring attention to both content and form. But graffiti art is clearly not considered as poetry.

Because of these problems, their view cannot be used to account for the core question of this paper: how can a phenomenology of reading poetry explain FCU? In the next section, I introduce my account, which addresses this issue.

3. The unitary phenomenology of inner speech

In this section I introduce my interpretation of FCU, which revolves around a characterization of the phenomenology of poetry. Let's start by noting that my account is *monistic*, unlike Kivy's and Lamarque's, and like Prinz and Mandelbaum's: I claim that there is just one basic way of reading poetry. Like Prinz and Mandelbaum, I claim that pluralism can be found at the crossroads between poetry and ordinary language: reading poems and reading newspapers are different experiences, from a phenomenological perspective. My account is also *descriptivist*: that there is only one way of reading poetry is something we discover by looking at how people read poetry. It is not, as Lamarque would have it, the right way of reading we select against different options. My account is therefore tied to empirical research on how people read poetry. As I will show, research suggests that this view is sound. However, it is important to note that a *normative version* of my account can also be defended. I will illustrate this alternative version in section 4.

Poetic reading can be characterized in the following way: when we read a poem we hear the words we read in our mind's ear as spoken through our mind's voice. *Pace* Lamarque (2015), the experience of reading poetry therefore has a defining *sensory phenomenology*, since it necessarily features a form of *auditory imagery*: we *hear* ourselves reading in the absence of physical articulation (for a definition of mental imagery along these lines, see e.g., Nanay, 2023: 24). This experience is complex: it has an *auditory phenomenology*, which represents the sound of the utterance, but it also has a *cognitive phenomenology*, which represents its meaning. These components are indissolubly connected in the phenomenology: they have the same intentional object (i.e., they represent aspects of the same utterance) and cannot be separated. This is what FCU is about: in poetry, the sound and the meaning of the read words cannot be separated *as we read them*, because they are aspects of the same experiential content. Moreover, this is why NP1, as outlined in (8), is sound: paraphrases can't reproduce the experience of the meaning of a poem, because when reading poetry this meaning is *experienced* as a property of

an utterance with sonic properties, whereas in a paraphrase that meaning is accessed on its own through understanding.

But let's take one step back. The view that auditory phenomenology has an important role in the experience of reading poetry is not original by any means. Several scholars in philosophy (e.g., Kivy, 2006; McGregor, 2014; Ribeiro, 2015) and literature (e.g., Richards, 1929), as well as poets (e.g., Eliot, 1975) have pointed this out. Among these, there is Bradley (1909) himself:

When you are reading a poem, [...] do you then apprehend and enjoy as one thing a certain meaning or substance, and as another thing certain articulate sounds, and do you somehow compound these two? Surely you do not, any more than you apprehend apart, when you see some one smile, those lines in the face which express a feeling, and the feeling that the lines express. Just as there the lines and their meaning are to you one thing, not two, so in poetry the meaning and the sounds are one: there is, if I may put it so, a resonant meaning, or a meaning resonance. If you read the line, 'The sun is warm, the sky is clear,' you do not experience separately the image of a warm sun and clear sky, on the one side, and certain unintelligible rhythmical sounds on the other; nor yet do you experience them together, side by side; but you experience the one in the other. And in like manner when you are really reading Hamlet, the action and the characters are not something which you conceive apart from the words; you apprehend them from point to point in the words. Afterwards, no doubt, when you are out of the poetic experience, but remember it, you may by analysis decompose this unity, and attend to a substance more or less isolated, and a form more or less isolated. But these are things in your analytic head, not in the poem, which is poetic experience. (Bradley, 1909: 14-15)

In this rich quote, Bradley describes the experience of reading poetry as having a content, which he calls “resonant meaning”, with two components: sound and meaning. Importantly, he also provides a theoretical alternative to his view. While Bradley views reading poetry as a single experience whose content has two aspects which are indissolubly tied together, one could conceive of the same phenomenon as featuring two distinct experiences with two contents: one would be the experience of hearing “articulate sounds”, while the other would be the experience of understanding the meaning. By appealing to introspection, Bradley denies that the experience of reading poetry is separate in this way. At best, separation can be performed *analytically*, after the experience, as one *thinks about the poem*.

Given Bradley's clarity about the importance of sound in the experience of poetry, and therefore in FCU, it is puzzling that Lamarque (2015), who sets out to defend Bradley's claims, denies that poetry has a sensory phenomenology.

A view that makes explicit use of Bradley's notion of resonant meaning is the one put forward by McGregor (2014). He interprets the inseparability in FCU as a *reciprocal relationship* between sound and meaning, where the former affects the latter and *vice versa*. To do so, he follows Richards (1929: 231), who compares the line in (9) from John Gilbert Cooper 1755 poem "The Tomb of Shakespeare" to the line in (10), which features words semi-homophonous to the words in (9).

- (9) Deep into a gloomy grot
(10) Peep into a roomy cot

Although the words in (9) are placed in the same order as the words in (10), Richards claims that the two lines *don't share the same rhythm*, because the meanings of the words are different. This difference in meaning, that is, produces for Richards (and for McGregor) a difference in the experience of reading the line such that the experienced *rhythm is different*.

Similarly, sound influences the experience of meaning. Here McGregor refers to Ribeiro (2009: 73), who notes that sound patterns interact with meaning to give rise to interesting effects in poetry. As an example, she cites Ezra Pound's 1920 poem "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" in (11). The sonic similarity of the words "plaster" and "alabaster" contrasts with the fact that they denote materials with opposite physical qualities, thereby generating irony.

- (11) The 'age demanded' chiefly a mould in plaster,
Made with no loss of time.
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
Or the 'sculpture' of rhyme.

When reading (11), the experience of the meaning of the words "plaster" and "alabaster" is affected (i.e., they are experienced as having a supplementary ironic meaning) because of the sonic patterns in which the words are placed.

I argue that McGregor's theory cannot make sense of FCU and NP. Consider Richards' examples in (9) and (10). Here the experienced rhythm is said to change because of a change in meaning. This description of the phenomenon can be interpreted in two ways. If what is supposed to change is the rhythmic aspect of the

experience, then it is far from clear that this is the case. Quite the contrary: the rhythmic component appears to be the same in both experiences. If what is supposed to change is instead the overall experience, then this is surely correct, but it is not clear why this change should be cashed out as an influence of the meaning over the sonic aspect of the experience, rather than just as change in the meaning-related aspect of the experience. The claim that meaning and sound cannot be separated when reading poetry is not equivalent to the claim that there is a mutual influence between meaning and sound.

What about Ribeiro's example in (11)? Surely one may agree that there is a content-related aspect (i.e., the ironic content) in the poetry that stems directly from the sonic aspect, and surely one may describe this phenomenon as an influence of sound over content. But it is far from clear that effects such as this are ubiquitous in poetry. If one goes back to Bradley's (3) and (5) examples illustrated in section 2, it is hard to pinpoint ways in which sonic aspects of the words produce a content-related component by interacting with the meaning of the words. The sonic aspects (e.g., rhythm and rhymes) are certainly important in those examples, but it is doubtful that they are responsible for modifying the meaning of the lines. Thus, even if in certain poems one may find that sounds interact with meaning by affecting meaning, it seems too strong to claim that this effect should be generalized to all poetry. Claiming that sonic aspects necessarily make a contribution to the experience of poetry is not the same as claiming that sonic aspects necessarily change the meaning experienced when reading poetry.

FCU should not be understood as a claim about the reciprocal interactions between sound and meaning. If one accepts that the inseparability of sound and content is met only by this type of interactions, then many poems where there is no such interaction, but just a co-occurrence of sonic and meaningful aspects, would fall outside of FCU. This is an unwelcome consequence that should be avoided.

The right way of accounting for the importance of sound in the experience of poetry is by explaining its place in the phenomenology of reading poetry. I describe the experience of reading poetry as one that involves *inner speech*. Both philosophers and cognitive scientists usually start their analyses of inner speech by offering an introspective characterization of the phenomenon (see e.g., Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015). Inner speech is thus described as a voice which we are able to produce and hear *without speaking* (i.e., without producing sounds or moving the

muscles involved in speaking). This inner voice is used in many different contexts, for example when thinking, mentally rehearsing speech, or reading. Note that, as highlighted by Langland-Hassan (2021: 2), studies in cognitive psychology concur that inner speech can occur *unconsciously*, and should therefore be understood as the more general cognitive capacity of *internally producing language*. My interest lies in the characterization of the first-person experience one has when reading poetry, rather than addressing a theory of the cognitive function and scope of inner speech, so I will limit myself to consider inner speech as a conscious phenomenon by focusing on its phenomenology.

Inner speech features a form of auditory mental imagery (see e.g., Langland-Hassan, 2021: 6): it is the subjective experience of *producing* and *hearing sounds* that correspond to meaningful utterances in the absence of external articulation or stimuli. Although these sounds may be perceived as having different properties from external speech (e.g., unlike external speech, they are not perceived as originating from a physical source), analyses of introspective reports show that one can produce and hear auditory properties of one's own voice "in the same rhythm, pacing, expressivity, tone, hesitations, and style as external speaking" (Hurlburt et al., 2013: 1482).

One doesn't just hear sounds when innerly speaking, one hears *meaningful sounds*. The phenomenology of inner speech seems to involve a *semantic component*, which cannot be reduced to the auditory one. Consider the case of ambiguous sentences. For example, imagine mentally uttering "where is the mouse?" while looking for the computer device. Imagine another scenario where I internally utter the same sentence because I can't find the rodent that hides in my kitchen. The two inner utterances are experienced as different, despite the words being homophonic. Examples such as this one are operationalized by defenders of *cognitive phenomenology* (e.g., Strawson, 1994; Pitt, 2004), who claim that cognitive processes such as reasoning or understanding someone's utterance when speaking have phenomenal properties, that is, there is a 'what is like' that corresponds to the experience of undergoing such processes. Jorba and Vicente (2014) explain how cognitive phenomenology may be involved in inner speech. By drawing a parallel between inner speech and external speech, they hypothesize that "just as when we hear someone speaking we are conscious both of the sounds and of their content, when we talk to ourselves we are conscious both of pronunciations and

of contents.” (Jorba & Vincente, 2014: 92). I concur with this hypothesis (for another account that supports this hypothesis, see: Montague, 2017).

Importantly for my purposes, the meaning-related aspect and the sonic-related aspect are *fused* in the experience: we cannot experience these aspects separately, no matter how much effort we put in by attending to a single aspect. Munroe (2023) describes this feature of the phenomenology in the following way:

Inner speech doesn't appear to involve a representation of some set of speech sounds conjoined with a separable (although not currently separated) representation of some proposition. Instead, inner speech is experienced as representing both phonological and semantic properties of a particular (planned yet aborted) utterance. Similarly, hearing another's overt utterance doesn't seem to involve the representation of some bare phonological (/phonetic) structure and some proposition. Instead, the utterance is experienced as having both phonological and semantic properties. (Munroe, 2023: 298)

Following Munroe, the experience of inner speech is *unitary*: it doesn't involve separate experiences of meaning, on the one hand, and of sound, on the other. A single object (i.e., the utterance) is experienced as having two properties (i.e., sound and meaning). Auditory and cognitive phenomenology cannot be separated when innerly speaking.

This characterization allows me to go back to the difference between the experience of inner speech and pictorial experience. As Voltolini (2020) for example notes, because the phenomenology of pictorial experience is entirely perceptual, the overall experience can be defined as *fused* in a stronger sense: it constitutes a single *sui generis* perceptual experience, in which one sees the 3D scene in the 2D surface (i.e., the view attributed to Wollheim, 1987). In contrast, hearing an utterance (be it in inner speech or external communication) is not fused in the same sense, because this experience doesn't amount to a *sui generis* perceptual experience. Rather, the overall experience is a combination of perceptual and cognitive phenomenology. As proof of this, Voltolini uses cases involving ambiguous sentences like the mouse example provided above. The experiential change in these examples is best described as a change in cognitive phenomenology. The perceptual aspect, as it is assumed, remains constant. In contrast, pictorial ambiguities are resolved perceptually: whether I see a duck or a rabbit in a picture is resolved depending on which content I *visually recognize* in the picture's surface.

Crucially, from the fact that inner speech experiences are not fused in the strong sense used by Voltolini, but are rather combinations of different primitive phenomenologies, it doesn't follow that these phenomenologies are separable while undergoing them². Experiencing an utterance through inner speech is a unitary or (weakly) fused experience, in which two phenomenologies are connected in the representation of the same object. No matter how much one tries to attend to one phenomenology, its phenomenal content is *indistinguishable* from the phenomenal content of the other phenomenology. Now, the only way in which these two aspects can be told apart (besides cases in which one reads without understanding what is read, and therefore in the absence of any cognitive phenomenology) is by producing *phenomenological switches*, such as with meaning-related ambiguities. Another example mentioned by Voltolini (2020: 210) is the phenomenon of *semantic satiation*, in which the constant repetition of the same word produces the experience of hearing a meaningless sound. But crucially, these switches must be *forced*: the normal experience of inner speech (and of external speech) is one in which auditory phenomenology and cognitive phenomenology are indissolubly fused together and cannot be separated. This is the key notion of unity I have in mind: the two phenomenologies of inner speech are unitary or weakly fused because they cannot be distinguished in the experience (but they can be separated in other specific contexts). The resulting, overall phenomenology is not a *sui generis* perceptual experience, but it is a unitary experience nevertheless.

A more formal criterion can be developed for judging whether an experience is unitary or fused (in the weak sense of 'fused' I'm using here). Pick an experience x with two simultaneous phenomenologies y and z . Try to specify the phenomenal contents of y and z , that is, the 'what is like' of those phenomenologies. If these contents cannot be specified in isolation from each other, the experiences are unitary or (weakly) fused. Inner speech fits this criterion: I cannot offer a full description of what it is like to hear an inner speech utterance by excluding the cognitive phenomenology: it is the experience of hearing not just an utterance with sounds, but

² Note that an alternative analysis of this phenomenon might describe it as an instance of *cognitive penetration* (see e.g., Stokes, 2021), where the cognitive states of the reader influence the sonic aspect of inner speech. Under this view, the binding between semantic and sonic aspects is done at the perceptual level, as in the painting case. I do not engage with this alternative view, since it would require addressing another very much open and lively debate, but it should be noted that it is compatible with the claims I present about the inseparability of form and content in inner speech. The main difference is that since form and content are fused *perceptually*, they cannot be separated even *in principle*, since they constitute *sui generis* perceptual effects.

an utterance with *meaningful sounds*. Both the auditory and the cognitive phenomenology evenly contribute to the ‘what is like’ of experiencing the inner speech utterance. The phenomenal content of a single primitive phenomenology cannot be introspectively retrieved.

Other simultaneous experiences, despite being of the same object, do not fit the criterion I just outlined. Imagine looking at a statue and touching its surface at the same time. These two experiences are simultaneous and are directed at the same object. However, the contents of their phenomenologies can be fully described in isolation from each other: I can describe what it feels like to touch the statue without at any point needing to appeal to the visual phenomenology, and *vice versa*. For this reason, seeing and touching are not unitary or weakly fused. The same goes for other combinations of perceptual and cognitive phenomenologies. Say I realize that I left my keys on the kitchen table while at the same time mentally picturing the keys on the table. I can easily describe the ‘what it is like’ of that realization without appealing to the perceptual phenomenology of my mental imagery. My cognitive phenomenology and my mental imagery therefore do not constitute a unitary or weakly fused experience.

How should one then compare inner speech experience and pictorial experience? Although inner speech experiences are not strongly fused in the sense described by Voltolini, they are *unitary*. From this perspective, then, the phenomenology is close to Wollheim’s (1987) characterization of pictorial experience: as in pictorial experience, the two aspects (i.e., sound and meaning) constitute an inseparable phenomenal unicum. The difference is precisely that in the case of inner speech, this unicum is obtained from two primitive, distinct phenomenologies that can occur in isolation in determinate contexts.

Given this characterization of the phenomenology of inner speech, a new interpretation of FCU and NP can be provided. The core idea of this theory is that we read poetry through inner speech, and that this way of reading explains the union between form and content when reading poetry. But let’s take one step at a time. To say that we read poetry through inner speech means that we experience the production and hearing of one’s own inner voice declaiming the poem. On what ground can this be claimed? In the next section, I provide two arguments.

4. Why inner speech is involved in reading poetry

In aesthetics, Kivy (2006) famously claimed that inner speech is involved in the silent reading of literature. This claim serves as support for another claim stating that the act of reading literature should be thought of as a performance (i.e., the inner, silent analogue of a theatrical performance). His claim is based on introspection and focuses primarily on novels (for a study that probes the empirical support for this thesis, see: Barbero & Calzavarini, 2024). Defending the claim for such a genre appears more counterintuitive than for genres such as poetry because, notes Kivy, “poetry [...] remains a literary form in which the sound of language is an integral part, as it is not, in the case of the novel, to anywhere near the degree to which it is in poetic texts” (Kivy, 2006: 55). However, neither Kivy nor others in aesthetics have probed the empirical support for this claim about poetry.

Let’s then turn to psychology, where it is a widely acknowledged fact that inner speech is involved in reading (for an overview, see e.g., Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014). One of the main problems is to establish the scope of inner speech in reading tasks: is inner speech always present (e.g., when reading a newspaper article), or does it arise only in specific situations? Empirical findings do not yield a consensus on the matter, but most accounts seem to converge towards the idea that experiences of inner speech present considerable variations across different subjects and contexts, and that inner speech is not always present while reading (see e.g., Hurlburt, 2011; Moore & Schwitzgebel, 2018; Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014): we often read without the need of making the words sound in our heads.

Reading in adults occurs via two routes: the *phonological route*, in which strings of perceived letters are converted into auditory representations (i.e., phonemes), and the *lexical route*, in which strings of perceived letters are converted directly into meanings (Dehaene, 2009). As Dehaene (2009: 44-53) explains, the phonological pathway computes information about the pronunciation of words, as shown by experiments that attest that reading speed of a word increases when another word that sounds the same is shown immediately before it. At the same time, readers can access meanings *directly* by retrieving them from their mental lexicon, as shown by the fact that we can readily distinguish between the meaning of homophonous words (e.g., between ‘board’ and ‘bored’). These two routes complement each other: we use the lexical route to rapidly read frequent, regular and

irregular words, while we rely on phonological information to read rare or new words. Reading through inner speech should thus be differentiated not only from reading through the lexical route (as noted by Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014: 228), but also from reading through the *unconscious use of the phonological route* (as noted by Moore & Schwitzgebel, 2018: 58). In the latter two cases, the experience of reading is *truly silent*, as it involves only the experience of understanding the meaning of the visually perceived words.

There seem to be specific contexts in which inner speech is involved in reading, for example when the text is difficult (Alexander & Nygaard, 2008) or when reading direct speech reports (Yao et al., 2011). A relevant hypothesis (explicitly formulated by Moore and Schwitzgebel, 2018) is that *types of text whose sonic properties matter (e.g., for cognitive purposes) tend to evoke auditory imagery*, that is, inner speech. Studies that support this hypothesis rely on behavioral experiments that test whether subjects can *detect rhymes* or homophones (e.g., Filik & Barber, 2011; Langland-Hassan et al., 2015). For example, Filik and Barber (2011) presented subjects with poems that rhymed only in specific English accents, and found through eye tracking that only subjects that spoke in the targeted accents detected the rhymes while reading silently, which suggests that subjects innerly speak in their own accents. Now, rhyme judgements are a testing device which is widely acknowledged as *reliable evidence for inner speech* (Langland-Hassan, 2021: 21; Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014: 223). As Perrone-Bertolotti et al. (2014) explain:

Rhyme and homophone judgement tasks [...] involve active use of inner speech. In these tasks, participants have to monitor their own inner speech, keep the first presented item in working memory, while they process the second item. Phonological awareness is crucial in these tasks, as well as a high level of attention to one's inner speech. (Perrone-Bertolotti et al., 2014: 223)

Unconscious use of the phonological route is not sufficient: one has to *consciously attend to one's inner speech* to carry out such tasks. Crucially, insofar as reading poems *typically involves detecting rhymes*, we have empirical evidence for the presence of inner speech in the experience of reading poetry.

Note that rhyme detection in poetry may differ from that involved in the experiments just discussed, given that sometimes the two rhyming items are placed too far from each other in the text to be processed through working memory alone (e.g., at the end of the first verse and at the end of the fourth verse, as with enclosed

rhymes). But as Fabb (2015: 19) notes, different cognitive strategies are available to overcome this problem, such as using a mix of working and long-term memory. Moreover, for the purpose of defending my account, I need not provide a complete list of the types of rhymes that can actually be detected by consciously attending to one's inner speech when reading poetry. What matters is positing that when reading poetry, readers expect to find rhymes, the detection of which requires conscious inner speech to be performed.

Furthermore, note that this evidence targets not just paradigmatic terminal rhymes, but also comparable sonic properties that involve repetitions of different words with similar sounds, such as assonance, consonance, and alliteration, the detection of which also arguably requires attending to one's inner speech by keeping the previous items in working memory. Moreover, this evidence may extend beyond similarity to the detection of euphonic or cacophonous combinations of sounds across different words. For example, detecting the soothing sonic texture created by the repetition of liquid consonants, soft fricatives and long vowels in the line "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" from John Keats' 1820 poem "To Autumn" requires retaining the material of the verse in working memory through conscious inner speech. If this reasoning is correct, then the evidence bears also on poems that lack rhymes (e.g., Latin poetry) or clear-cut rhyme schemes (e.g., modernist poetry).

Interestingly, similar evidence is available for other sonic properties of texts. Consider the case of *meter*. Beck and Konieczny (2021) put forward the hypothesis that metrical grids of poems induce rhythmic patterns which are perceived through inner speech. In particular, they assume:

Although an inferred beat may inwardly 'go on' autonomously while reading, the respective prominent metrical figure has to be checked and updated in order to maintain it. Therefore, it must be aligned constantly with the upcoming input [...]. (Beck & Konieczny, 2021: 3)

The metrical regularities of poetic texts thus induce readers of poems to form rhythmic expectations which are constantly tested:

[...] rhythm and meter can change from one stanza to another or even from one verse to another. In this case, readers must attune their temporal predictions, either by inferring, respectively projecting a new 'metrical grid' to the following lines, or by adjusting to an accelerated/slowed-down beat, i.e., applying slightly increased or decreased intervals [...]. (Beck & Konieczny, 2021: 3)

Following this reasoning, they hypothesize that metrical violations (e.g., altering the metrical grid by adding a syllable) are experienced as such, resulting in a slowing down of the reading process. Using eye tracking as an indirect, behavioral measure, they confirm this hypothesis: they show that readers' gaze fixes on the word that introduces the anomaly, thereby prolonging the reading time.

The type of attentional monitoring performed by readers when tracking their rhythmic expectations points to a conscious use of inner speech, since it is comparable to the monitoring described by Perrone-Bertolotti et al. (2014) for rhyme detection. These data are significant, because rhythm-inducing effects are another pervasive phenomenon in poetry (for a cross-cultural overview, see e.g., Fabb, 2015). An empirical, open question raised by Beck and Konieczny (2021: 33) is whether comparable effects indicative of inner speech can be found with poems that have highly irregular metrical patterns. It can be plausibly presumed that in such cases expectations of readers will be differently geared towards noticing possible rhythmic repetitions, as well as novel effects. In such a different setting, high attention is still plausibly demanded on the reader's own inner speech.

Overall, this evidence supports the descriptive claim that conscious inner speech is used when reading poetry, since it targets a pervasive set of formal properties (e.g., rhymes, alliterations, rhythm, etc.) that are detected by attending to one's conscious inner speech. Insofar as readers expect to find such properties when reading most poems, they use inner speech. Clearly, it is possible to read poetry without using inner speech (e.g., read a poem as if it was a shopping list). But this is not what people do.

A theoretical argument can also be provided in support of this claim, which is illustrated in (12).

- (12) *Argument for inner speech in poetry*: (P1) If it is possible to experience poetry while reading silently, then silent readers are able to experience sonic aspects of poems. (P2) If silent readers are able to experience sonic aspects of poems, then silent readers read poetry through inner speech. (C) If it is possible to experience poetry while reading silently, then silent readers read poetry through inner speech

The conditional contained in the first premise (P1) affirms that if one is prepared to hold that silent reading of poetry counts as a full-blooded experience of poetry, then one should also hold that readers can experience sonic aspects of poems (e.g., rhyme, meter, alliteration, etc.). By “experience”, I mean having a conscious mental state the phenomenology of which features the poem as its intentional object. Given that most poems contain sonic aspects, whatever mental state one undergoes when reading poetry, the phenomenology should include such aspects as well. The conditional in the second premise (P2) is clear enough: if we are to have a mental state in which sonic aspects of poems are featured in the phenomenology, this mental state is inner speech, because inner speech is the only candidate with the necessary auditory imagery for reading. If these two premises are sound, then this argument affirms the conditional stating that from the plausible idea that reading silently counts as an experience of poetry, it follows that this experience features inner speech.

Note that it is possible to consider a *normative* version of this descriptive claim. Suppose that empirical evidence shows that people read poems both with and without inner speech. There is still the option of claiming that what they are doing when reading poetry without inner speech is *incorrect*, because poetry should be read through inner speech. Accordingly, one could motivate this claim by arguing that sonic properties of poems are not *experienced* in the incorrect mode, and FCU is not achieved because of this. Moreover, even if empirical evidence confirms the descriptive claim, a parallel normative claim can be defended: given that it is possible to experience poetry without inner speech (even though that is not what subjects do), the descriptively confirmed option is the correct one.

5. A new interpretation of the form-content unity thesis

Given the claim that readers of poetry use inner speech, a consequence follows: the experience of reading poetry has the characteristic unitary phenomenology of inner speech (*pace* Lamarque, 2015, who argues that poetry is not accompanied by a characteristic sensory phenomenology). The meaning and the form of poetry are experienced as indissolubly connected aspects of the same content, that is, as properties of the same object (i.e., uttered lines of the poem). That these aspects cannot be separated is established by the phenomenology of inner speech, which I have illustrated in section 3. FCU should therefore be interpreted as a thesis about

the role of inner speech in poetry: the meaning of a poem is inseparable from its sonic properties when read silently in inner speech.

In turn, NP1 affirms the impossibility to reproduce the experience of the meaning of poetry, not because this meaning is ineffable (as a proponent of the semantic interpretation of FCU would have it), but rather because it is accessed through inner speech while reading poetry. In this experience, the auditory imagery is experienced as indissolubly connected to the poem's meaning. Hence, paraphrases cannot reproduce not only the sounds of the words (which in itself would not be very surprising), but also *the experience of the poem's meaning*. This is the sense in which NP1 can be evaluated as sound. Inner speech can thus account for the initial examples (3)-(5) discussed in section 2. The changes that occur in these cases can be cast as modifications of the sonic qualities of the words (e.g., when the synonyms "horse" and "steed" are switched in (5)). These modifications affect the overall phenomenology of the experience: meaning too is experienced differently, not because it is a different meaning, but because *it is attributed to an utterance that has different sonic properties*.

Importantly, my account has interesting consequences when considering the relationship between FCU and VT. To reiterate, VT states that the aesthetic value of poetry lies in the unity of form and content achieved by poetry. Combined with a theory like Lamarque's (2009), VT stipulates that the specific aesthetic value of poetry is accessed through a specific way of reading, that is, by directing one's attention to form and content at the same time. Other modulations of the attention are labeled as *non-poetic*. Similarly, a theory like McGregor's (2014) is committed to defending a version of VT stating that the aesthetic value of poetry resides in the reciprocal influence between sound and meaning achieved uniquely by poems. My theory, in contrast, cannot adopt a similar strategy, since the unitary experience of inner speech is not unique to poetry: we read many non-poetic texts through inner speech (e.g., difficult prose, direct-speech reports, etc.). Should we therefore reject VT? Has the aesthetic value of poetry nothing to do with form-content unity?

Not quite: VT is compatible with my theory. Through my interpretation, poetry is captured as the art whose aesthetic properties are grasped by experiencing the interplay between sonic and semantic aspects. When reading a poem such as E. A. Poe's in (14), the reader experiences an utterance to which a meaning is attributed (e.g., the description of the dreadful situation), *as well as* certain sonic properties

(e.g., a given metrical pattern). Although this unitary experience is not unique to poetry, poetry can be individuated as the art which achieves interesting aesthetic effects by *manipulating this experience*³: it features rhyming, rhythm, metaphors, and other aspects that are appreciated through inner speech. Unity thus explains the *specificity* of the aesthetic value of poetry. Poetry is not special because it achieves *sui generis* content-related effects (e.g., metaphors, hyperboles, irony, etc.): novels, for example, feature similar effects. Poetry is not special because it achieves *sui generis* sonic effects (e.g., rhythm, alliteration, rhyming): music features comparable effects. What's special about poetry is the fact that its semantic and sonic effects are experienced in a unitary way. The fact that when reading, readers experience interesting sonic effects, as well as interesting semantic effects, *as attributed to the same utterance through inner speech*. It is in this sense that appreciation is always directed at form and content simultaneously. And it is this feature of the appreciation of poetry that explains the specificity of poetry's aesthetic value. FCU is thus compatible with VT.

A clarification is in order. A possible interpretation of my view takes it as stating that poetry is special because it achieves *sui generis* effects resulting from the interaction between semantic and sonic effects. According to this interpretation, the phenomenology of inner speech when reading poetic texts features effects that are not found when reading non-poetic texts through inner speech. I reject this interpretation. As I have argued in section 3 when discussing McGregor's (2014) view, which posits a reciprocal influence between sonic and semantic effects that is unique to poetry, it is doubtful that such effects exist. My view, in contrast, needs not posit *sui generis effects*. Rather, I claim that reading poetry features the standard phenomenology of inner speech, which is found even when reading non-poetic texts⁴. The specificity of poetry's aesthetic value lies in the unitary character of inner speech, because this phenomenology individuates poetry as the art that uses *garden-variety* semantic and sonic effects in a unitary way.

³ In this respect, poems are like paintings: while the notion of *twofoldness* describes the phenomenology of non-artistic pictures *as well as* artistic ones, twofoldness is taken to capture the specific aesthetic value of pictures, because their aesthetic properties are grasped within this peculiar phenomenology.

⁴ Note that this conclusion is preserved even if one adopts a version of my view that relies on cognitive penetration, as illustrated in note 2. This alternative view would be different insofar as it would posit that inner speech has a *sui generis perceptual* phenomenology, but it would still hold that this phenomenology is preserved across readings of poetic and non-poetic texts.

Of course, since semantic and sonic effects are experienced simultaneously, they are appreciated for how they relate to each other. For example, one may evaluate that the form of the poem ‘matches’ the content, as in Poe’s case, where the insistent rhythm produced by the poem’s metrical structure fits the dreadful situation described. Similarly, to borrow an example used by Prinz and Mandelbaum (2015), Christina Rossetti’s 1862 poem “Goblin Market” talks about sexual themes but sounds like a nursery rhyme. Here the form can be evaluated as inappropriate for the content. But crucially, one can accept that these effects enter the phenomenology without considering them as *sui generis*. In Rossetti’s case, the reader experiences sounds with their own properties (e.g., having a playful rhythm), *as well as* a content with its own properties (e.g., a description of scenes with sexual connotations). The attribution of these properties to the same utterance is experienced as a mismatch, but no reciprocal alteration of sound and meaning needs to be posited to account for this. There is nothing *sui generis* about this experience. Comparable effects are commonly found in normal conversation, say, when a speaker uses a playful intonation when talking about a serious topic. If this is the case, then my view can be plausibly combined with VT without positing *sui generis* effects in the phenomenology of poetry.

My theory has an important advantage over pluralistic theories of poetic experience such as Kivy’s or Lamarque’s: it can easily discriminate between experiences of reading that realize FCU and experiences that don’t *without appealing to attention*. Reading poetry counts as an experience of form-content unity *as long as inner speech is involved*. One can focus on the meaning-related aspect (e.g., on a metaphor), but by doing so, one also necessarily focuses on the sonic properties (e.g., the rhymes) as well. This binding of the attention is explained by the fact that meaning and sound are properties indissolubly attributed to the same object in the experience of reading. This is a common phenomenon in perception: if I listen to someone humming a song and focus on the pitch of the voice, I will also increase my focus on other properties of the object such as the melody (Bizley & Cohen, 2013). Focusing on aspects of inner speech only results in diverting one’s attention from competing, co-occurring events (e.g., from the sound of a conversation occurring at the same time as my reading).

The only way in which meaning can be experienced separately from sound is by reading *without inner speech*. For example, say I mistake a poem for a shopping

list. In this case, I am likely to read it without inner speech, thereby accessing only the meaning of the text. Doesn't this count as an instance of reading poetry that doesn't achieve FCU? Even if it does, from my monistic account it doesn't follow that reading poems without inner speech is *impossible*. Rather, it only follows that *people don't read poems in this way*. So, insofar as the examples illustrated by Kivy and Lamarque are *realistic*, they should be interpreted as featuring inner speech. One can read "Paradise Lost" by focusing on Milton's religious views, but because this is realistically done by using inner speech, FCU is preserved. One can also read Coleridge and Shelley for their exemplifications of the theme of Dejection. Here too, one attends to the thematic aspect *while using inner speech*, and this can be done precisely because the experience of inner speech is *unitary*. What about the ways of reading that Kivy calls 'non-poetic'? Reading Milton's poem by focusing on how many times the letter 'e' is a weird situation in which neither the semantic nor the sonic properties of the poem are attended to. But this example would be problematic only if realistic, and it is safe to claim that people do not read poetry in this way.

Furthermore, by describing the experience of reading poetry as one which involves the attribution of sonic and semantic properties to the same object (i.e., the mentally uttered lines of the poem), my analysis readily explains how attention can be directed at sound and meaning *at the same time*. This feature is lacking in theories that rely exclusively on attention, insofar as they don't explain what is the object that fuses sound and meaning and which attention operates on (i.e., in Kivy's, in Lamarque's, and in Prinz & Mandelbaum's).

My account also avoids the risk of overgenerating which I attributed to Prinz and Mandelbaum's account. By casting the experience of poetry as the experience of sound and meaning through inner speech, my view does not apply indiscriminately to graffiti art or calligraphy. It may be objected that my account overstates the role of sound in the experience of poetry. If accounts as the ones analyzed in section 2 risk overgenerating because they rely only on attention, my theory risks failing to account for poems that do not rely on sonic effects (e.g., concrete poetry). To this objection I can reply by claiming that my theory accounts for *paradigmatic instances of poetry*. To use Walton's (1970) terminology, having sonic formal features is a *standard* property of poetry, not having such features or having visual formal features are *contra-standard* properties. Same goes for nonsense poetry: because nonsense poems do not have meaning, they are labeled as *contra-standard* instances of poetry.

I believe that labeling sonic effects as standard properties of poems is a relatively uncontroversial claim. For example, if one focuses on the history of poetry in Europe, one finds that virtually all poetic styles (from ancient Greek elegies to British Romantic ballads) rely on a prominent use of sonic effects. By comparison, poems that rely on visual effects at the expense of sonic ones are very rare.

From this simple statistical observation, a cluster definition of poetry could be developed, that assigns a necessary definitional status to sonic and semantic effects, while listing contra-standard properties as non-necessary in the cluster. I resist the temptation to do so in this paper, as this would require tackling competing definitions of poetry (e.g., Ribeiro, 2007; Fabb, 2015). For the purpose of this paper, it is sufficient to accept that sonic and semantic properties are standard properties of poems, and that visual properties are contra-standard. If that is the case, then it is acceptable that my theory cannot properly account for such cases.

One could object that my account also overgenerates: word plays that rely on sound are normally not considered as poetry, and yet they might be profitably read through inner speech. But crucially, this overgeneration is different from the one at stake in Prinz and Mandelbaum's account. The latter is so dramatic that it puts paradigmatic poems and graffiti art into the same category, without further discrimination. My theory, instead, struggles with distinguishing paradigmatic poems from other uses of language in which sonic properties matter for appreciation. This is progress: it's a reasonable hypothesis that the appreciation of paradigmatic poems shares more similarities with word plays that rely on sound than with graffiti art.

Another objection against my view is that sound and meaning do not neatly coincide with form and content. Thematic relationships between parts of the text, dramatic structure of the poetic narrative, metaphors, are not sonic properties, and yet literary scholars involved in the debate on FCU (e.g., Brooks, 1960) refer to them as *formal properties*.

Admittedly, there is no consensus view on what counts as form in poetry. Authors like Bradley tend to reduce form to sonic properties, while authors like Brooks take a different road. To avoid proceeding from stipulation, one must therefore provide a theory that distinguishes formal properties from content-related ones. In aesthetics, one finds two main types of theories (see e.g., Levinson, 1996: 10; or Carroll, 1999: 108-153). First, one can claim that formal properties are properties

of the artwork's medium that realize the content, but that can be isolated *in abstraction* from the latter, that is, without making reference to *what* the artwork represents. For example, one can describe the pattern of colors on the surface of a painting without referring to the scene the painting represents. Let's call this conception of form *narrow*. A second type of theory defines formal properties, more generally, as the properties that explain the *manner* in which the artwork's content is presented. This theory posits no abstraction criterion, thus allowing that formal properties may sometimes coincide with representational ones. For example, the composition of a painting's scene may be referred to as a formal property, under this theory, even though it cannot be isolated without making reference to what the painting represents. Let's call this definition of form *wide*.

Given this distinction, it's clear that my account captures formal properties of poems in a *narrow sense*. Properties that are grasped through the medium of auditory imagery of inner speech are responsible for realizing the content of poems: they are found at the level of the vehicle, and not at the level of the meaning of words. For this reason, they can be isolated without making reference to content (even though this can be done analytically, not when experiencing poems by reading them through inner speech). In contrast, properties like dramatic structure are not labeled as formal by my account. They can be considered as such only in a wide sense: they cannot be abstracted from content, since they describe how the contents of poems (not their vehicles) are structured.

Adopting a narrow or wide notion of form matters depending on the type of theory of aesthetic value one is committed to. For instance, if *formalism* is interpreted as locating aesthetic value exclusively in narrow form, it is highly implausible, given that the appreciation of representational arts like literature depends on evaluating how content-related elements, and not just vehicle-related ones, are structured (Carroll, 1999: 125). But my account is not committed to this position. Rather, I interpreted VT as stating that the aesthetic value of poetry lies in the experience that poetry generates, where content and form are experienced in a unitary way. VT thus assumes that both content and (narrow) form are necessary for the aesthetic appreciation of poetry. This type of view on aesthetic value is workable, and has been defended before (see e.g., Eldridge, 1985, who arguably employs a narrow definition of form). For whatever reason, one may prefer to adopt a wide notion of form, but my theory remains *comprehensive*, since it accounts for the

contribution to the aesthetic value of poems of properties like dramatic structure by labeling them as content-related properties. Moreover, my theory has an important advantage: by adopting a narrow definition of form, it offers the best available interpretation of form-content unity for poetry, which meets challenges that accounts like Lamarque's (2009), who seems to adopt a wide notion of form, cannot.

A different worry is that my account places excessive importance on the phenomenology of reading. After all, there are other practices through which we appreciate poems, which may not display the same unitary phenomenology. A notable case to be addressed is listening to someone declaim a poem. As noted above when considering Jorba and Vicente's (2014) investigation of the cognitive phenomenology of inner speech, this phenomenology is commonly compared to the cognitive phenomenology of external speech. If one accepts this, no fundamental difference needs to be postulated between the phenomenology of poetry across these different experiences, besides of course the fact that while in inner speech one hears the poem as declaimed in one's own voice, with external speech one often hears it declaimed in someone else's. Simecek (2023: 50) argues that this difference may be problematic for *lyric poems*, which are often written in the first person and function to express the poet's inner life. When a lyric poem is performed live by the author, the audience *experiences* the poet's voicing of the poem as a vehicle of self-expression. In contrast, when reading the poem through inner speech, the self-expression is mediated and reconstructed by the reader. But note that this phenomenological difference *enriches*, doesn't modify the unitary phenomenology of poetry I have described⁵. Similarly, T. S. Eliot (1975: 112) notes that listening to William Butler Yeats declaiming his own poem in his Irish accent provides particular insights into the sonic qualities of the poem. But whether certain sonic qualities are unavailable through inner speech doesn't make declaiming less unitary than reading. My account doesn't depict reading poetry silently as superior to declaiming. Rather, it places importance on the experience of poetry, which is described as an inseparable composition of meaning and sound, and which is preserved in both reading and declamation.

⁵ This contrast may be accounted for through agentive phenomenology. When readers use inner speech, they experience it as originating from one's intention, and as being under one's control (Langland-Hassan, 2008). This sense of ownership produces a peculiar, mediated experience whereby the reader speaks in his own inner voice, but to express someone else's thoughts (for a discussion of this phenomenon in terms of ownership, see: John, 2013).

Still, other practices may lack a unitary phenomenology. For example, after reading a poem, one may select bits of text, in search of thematic correspondences, without using inner speech. Isn't this reader separately appreciating a content-related aspect of the poem? Even if that is the case, note that what matters for the type of descriptive monism I defend is that there aren't different ways of *reading* (i.e., sequentially, from start to finish) that falsify FCU. Insofar as this scanning is not reading, it can well be appreciative of separate aspects of poems. Still, the existence of non-unitary practices may clash with VT. But one would have to show that the aesthetic specificity of poetry lies in these practices, and this take is implausible at best.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I interpreted FCU as a thesis about the way in which poetry is experienced while reading it: in such experiences the meaning and the sound of the poem are experienced as inseparable thanks to inner speech. This interpretation offers an advantage over positions that try to deny or accept FCU by referring to the distribution of attention alone. In contrast, FCU can be endorsed by accepting that the characteristic experience of poetry has two components: a sensory and a cognitive aspect. Once paired with VT, my interpretation explains that the aesthetic specificity of poetry lies in the unitary way in which its sonic and content-related effects are experienced⁶.

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⁶ I am grateful to Marcello Frixione, Enrico Terrone and two anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

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<https://doi.org/10.1162/jocn.a.00022>

FUNDING INFORMATION

This research was funded by the ERC-StG Project 101040535 (“PEA – The Philosophy of Experiential Artifacts”). Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them