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# THE RHYME THAT REMAINS: TOWARDS A POPULIST POETICS

(WITH CONTINUAL REFERENCE TO PAUL OF  
TARSUS)

O how I knew how all thy lights *combine*,  
And the configurations of their glory!  
Seeing *not only how each verse doth shine*,  
*But all the constellations* of the story.  
*This verse marks that*, and both do *make a motion*  
*Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie*:  
Then as dispersed herbs do watch a potion,  
These three make up some Christian's destiny:  
Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,  
And comments on thee: for in ev'rything  
Thy *words do* find me out, and *parallels bring*,  
And in another make me understood.  
Stars are poor books, and oftentimes do miss:  
This book of stars lights to eternal bliss.

~ George Herbert, "The Temple (II)"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Herbert, *The Complete English Poems* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1991), 52; italics added.

## §1

*Element & Herb: Lacan's Backhanded Pauls*

In “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” one finds a critical remark on the shortcoming of the horizontal linearity that Ferdinand de Saussure associates with the chain of discourse. It is on this note that Jacques Lacan moves into a discussion of poetry. The Saussurian horizontality assumes the mode of *writing* rather than speaking—Westerners do not write vertically, but horizontally—and this is a remnant of discourse’s one direction in time. On his way to verticality, Lacan wonders if, perhaps, Saussure did not listen to enough poetry.<sup>2</sup> For one has to listen to poetry,

for a polyphony to be heard and for it to become clear that all discourse is aligned along the several staves of a musical score.

Indeed, there is no signifying chain that does not sustain—as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units—all attested contexts that are, so to speak, “vertically” linked to that point.<sup>3</sup>

Breaking with the unilateral and the monophonic has something to do with the verticality of a poem. This is a mode by which we are to understand the “incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier.”<sup>4</sup>

Most significant is the example Lacan gives for this shortcoming of horizontal diachronics. The horizontal fixation “applies only in the direction in which it is oriented in time” by which “the time of ‘Peter hits Paul’ is reversed when the terms are inverted.”<sup>5</sup> A horizontality deprived of poetry allows always already that ‘Peter hits Paul.’ Paul’s response—which need not, necessarily, be considered as a kind of revenge or *ressentiment*—could never come about in such a system unless that time be rewritten and restated; a crime of revisionist history. *Yet!* Lacan insinuates that parting ways with such a horizontal understanding to a vertical one of poetry opens the possibility for ‘Peter hits Paul’ to somehow speak as to a complex way by which *Paul hits back*, yet, Peter never ‘gets hit,’ since a vertical synchronicity demands no simplistic inversion to a ‘Paul hits Peter.’

Lacan’s discussion continues into a paragraph of associations regarding Saussure’s

2 Lacan amends this comment in 1966 after learning of Saussure’s study of Saturnine verse and Cicero.

3 Jacques Lacan, “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” Part I, in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 146.

4 *Ibid.*, 145.

5 *Ibid.*, 146.

famous tree; ranging from the Hebrew Bible's tree of knowledge, to the cross of the New Testament, to the letter 'Y', and the image of a tree struck by lightning. This is followed by four lines of poetry by Paul Valéry:

No! says the Tree, it says No! in the scintillating  
 Of its superb head  
 Which the storm treats universally  
 As it does a blade of grass.<sup>6</sup>

But translation does not do justice to the stream of Lacan's discussion. The key to the enigmatic Section I (The Meaning of the Letter) in this essay is that, here, Valéry's lines rhyme, which one only hears in the French:

*Non! Dit l'Arbre, il dit: Non! Dans l'étincellement*  
*De sa tête superbe*  
*Que la tempête traite universellement*  
*Comme elle fait une herbe.<sup>7</sup>*

Throughout the essay, Lacan does not speak, directly, of rhyme. Yet the culmination of his critique of the horizontal and his alternative suggestion of poetry as a way to the vertical is not simply a poem, but a poem with rhyming end sounds. It is the 'ellement' and 'erbe' of Valéry that coalesce Lacan's enthymeme. Regardless that the word 'rhyme' lays unsaid, when Lacan says 'poem' throughout "The Instance of the Letter," we can discern that its referent, *Valéry*, is at the same time the signified, *rhyme*.

## §2

### *Rhyme or Reason*

To suggest that a certain entity is nothing but senseless or absurd, one hears often the idiomatic phrase that it has no rhyme or reason. For example, at one point, Lacan tells his seminar attendants that he feels he must not leave his theories and teachings "within the reach of innocents to use without rhyme or reason."<sup>8</sup> It is a negative disjunction, an either/or: such a thing can only be one or the other but never both. If reason is lacking, surely there is rhyme. Although we must not intimate a false dichotomy, idiom suggests that if one were inclined to search for an alternative to the *ratio* of a certain 'reason,' one

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Lacan, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Lacan, *Écrits I* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 261; emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 165.

might attempt to develop that alternative in terms of rhyme.

Such attempts perhaps embody a kind of “antiphilosophy” akin to the one described by Alain Badiou in his discussion of Paul. What gets Paul,

into difficulty in Athens is his antiphilosophy.... The problem lies in knowing how, armed only with conviction ... one is to tackle the Greek intellectual milieu, whose essential category is that of wisdom (*sophia*) [*la sagesse*] ... It is thus a question of intervening *ouk en sophiai logou*, ‘without the wisdom of language.’ This maxim envelops a radical antiphilosophy; it is not a proposition capable of being supported by a *philosophia*.<sup>9</sup>

This sentiment is echoed by Ernesto Laclau as he tries (much like Paul) to formulate a populist reason beyond philosophical reason; which is to break with formal logic that defines *rationality* or deductive *ratiocination*. Laclau envisions such a break as an affirmation beyond proof or provability. This is not a break with truth but the condition for the possibility of the emergence of truth.

What if an affirmation is the appeal to recognize something which is present in everybody’s experience, but cannot be formalized within the existing dominant social languages? Can such an affirmation—which would be, as in Saint Paul, ‘madness for the Greeks and scandal for the Heathen’—be reduced to a lie because it is incommensurable with the existing forms of social rationality? Patently not. To assert something beyond any proof *could be* a first stage in the emergence of a truth which can be affirmed only by breaking with the coherence of the existing discourses.<sup>10</sup>

This antiphilosophical truth is part of “everybody’s [everyday] experience” that must break with the existing codes of coherent proof. A populist reason has the practicality of what Walter Benjmain calls the storyteller.

Consider Laclau’s “everyday experience” with the experience of the storyteller. It is because the storyteller may counsel and advise *many* that he is said to relay “not only his own experience but no little of the experience of others; what the storyteller *knows from hearsay* is added to his own.” This hearsay is close to what Giorgio Agamben calls *gossip*. The storyteller breaks with *verifiability*, which is formulated in Benjamin’s distinction

9 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 28-9; *Saint Paul: La Fondation de L’universalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 28.

10 Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005), 26-7.

between intelligence and information. *Information* “lays claim to prompt verifiability;” something that can be affirmed after the fact. “The prime requirement is that it appears ‘understandable in itself.’” Whereas philosophy, formal logic, ratiocination, rationality, and information must “sound plausible,” the *intelligence* of the storyteller, the populist reasoner, the rhymer, or the antiphilosopher is not afraid of miracles. In fact it is “inclined to borrow from the miraculous;”<sup>11</sup> similar to what Badiou calls being “armed with nothing but conviction” against the informative logic of verifiability.

Similarly, Agamben envisions a truth beyond verification that he calls “the good use of gossip.”

[T]o the extent that it entertains a nontrivial relation to truth that eludes the problem of verification and falsification and claims to be closer to truth than factual adequation, *gossip is certainly a form of art...* it accounts for the possibility of an error that does not entirely undermine the definition of truth.<sup>12</sup>

Truth is not undermined by errors, nor is it necessarily the byproduct of fact. On this point, Agamben’s understanding of gossip echoes part of Benjamin’s “On the Program of the Coming Philosophy,” that believes “the great problem of the false or of the error is opened up, whose logical structure and order must be ascertained just like those of the true.”<sup>13</sup> As such, truth (as thought through in these particular texts of Badiou, Laclau, Agamben, and Benjamin) can no longer be explained “in terms of correct understanding,”<sup>14</sup> i.e., existing philosophical norms of formal verifiability or proof.

“What are we to understand by experimental verification? The answer to that involves the whole logic of induction.” Verifiability is confined to induction. Alongside this gossip and hearsay is the *conjecture* of Charles Peirce who develops three different modes of reasoning: in addition to deduction and induction is added *abduction*. The latter, in critical rebellion against deduction and induction, partakes in conjecture. “The conclusion of an abduction is problematic or *conjectural*, but is not necessarily at the weakest grade of surmise.” To ‘take account’ of abduction is to break with the notions of provable truth.<sup>15</sup>

11 Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Modern Criticism and Theory* ed. David Lodge (New York: Longman, 2000), 15, 29; [Pts. VI and XIX].

12 *The Time That Remains*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 8; italics added.

13 Op. cit., 107.

14 Ibid.

15 Charles Sanders Peirce, “Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction,” in *The Essential Pierce*, Vol

Reason's other, be it antiphilosophy, populist reason, storytelling, or abduction, is no longer of mere reasoners. Although Badiou is very much concerned with the vocation of poetry in a new truth process resistant to the logics of verifiability and the certainty of *ratio*, rhyme is not one of his concerns. There's no rhyme or reason to Badiou. Where idiom invites us to think an alternative to reason as rhyme, only Agamben (and perhaps Benjamin<sup>16</sup>) consider this path.

### §3

#### *Earlids of Karl Rahner*

Before Badiou dubs Paul a "poet-thinker of the event"<sup>17</sup> and prior to Agamben, who identifies the same as the instauration of poetic rhyme as a function of messianic time,<sup>18</sup> it is the Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, who finds poetry in Paul. "In truth, is the hymn to charity which St. Paul sings, not a poem?"<sup>19</sup> Rahner thanks god that every word of scripture is not poetry and even suggests that the words chosen by god, spoken of by Paul and evoked by Laclau (above) are not only to confound human wisdom and reason, but also to "confound poetry."<sup>20</sup> If a new populist reason is to sound as madness to the Greek and scandal to the Roman, Rahner would have us believe that it is to sound as lunacy to the poet, as well.

Rahner's proclivity to associate poetry with the straightforward words of Hellenism (be they by either *alethia* or *ratio*) stems from his specific conception of the status of true poetry. Rahner is guilty of a certain kind of 'a-prosody' the likes of which Agamben seems to hear in the poems of Friedrich Hölderlin. Agamben finds the non-rhyming poetic method of Hölderlin to be symptomatic of the latter's announcement of a "new atheology."<sup>21</sup> As the problem with Hölderlin is a certain lacking rhyme, the problem with Rahner is his denigration of rhyme as inauthentic poetizing.

The poet is not a man who in a superfluous, more pleasing form, in 'rhymes', in

2 (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998), 232, 235-6; [Pts. II and IV]; italics mine.

16 For this possibility in Benjamin, see his "Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin," trans. Stanley Corngold, in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 29, where he considers rhyme as "half a doubling" in rebellion against the logical principle of identity, occurring "in the chain of an infinitely extended event corresponding to *the infinite possibilities of rhyme*." Italics mine.

17 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul*, op. cit., 2.

18 Agamben, op. cit., 85.

19 Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. III, *Theology of the Spiritual Life*, trans. Karl H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967), 315.

20 *Ibid.*, 314.

21 Agamben, op. cit., 87.

a sentimental torrent of words, says in a more complicated way what others—philosophers or scientists—have said more clearly, more soberly, and more intelligibly. To be sure, there are ‘poets’ of this kind, too, *who are no poets at all, but mere rhymers*.<sup>22</sup>

Mere rhymers are not poets to these Catholic ears. Rhyme is too sentimental and superfluous. Rahner’s distaste and understanding is incognizant of the messianic method, suggested by Agamben, by which rhyming end words refer to lines prior and passed; gesturing to and fro through the time that remains to the end of the poem. Rahner hears Paul as poet and, as such, more than mere rhymers, but this needs be amended with Agamben, who hears Paul as rhymers, more than mere prosody.

#### §4

##### *Messianic Rhyme*

In the fabulous section called “Poem and Rhyme” in *The Time That Remains*, Agamben examines a poem by Arnaut Daniel to explain how the lines of the poem are,

animated through the play of alternating and rhyming end words, in a way that each of them uses and recalls the one in the preceding stanzas (or it recalls itself as another). At the same time, it announces its own repetition to come in the lines that follow. Through this complicated to-and-fro directed both forward and backward, the chronological sequence of linear homogenous time is completely transformed into rhythmic constellations themselves in movement.<sup>23</sup>

For Agamben, every poem (especially if it rhymes) is a “soteriological device.” Annunciation and salvation occur as the poem announces rhyming end words and then retrieves them; as if retrieving them from Floods and Waves. This “transforms chronological time into messianic time.” The poem is a sort of time machine that,

from the very start, strains toward its end. *A kind of eschatology occurs within the poem itself*. But for the more or less brief time that the poem lasts, it has a specific and unmistakable temporality, it has its own *time*.<sup>24</sup>

That Agamben can discern eschatology and soteriology in rhyming has everything to do with his bold hypothesis that the very method of writing rhyme is part of the

22 Rahner, op. cit., 301. Emphasis added.

23 Agamben, op. cit., 82.

24 Ibid., 79; italics added.

messianic heritage left by Paul. Paul borrows from the formalism of Greek art and the semantics of Hebrew poetry and achieves heights unknown to either tradition. Rhyme “issues from Christian poetry as a metrical-linguistic transcodification of messianic time.” It is also “structured according to the play of typological relations and recapitulations evoked by Paul.”<sup>25</sup> Agamben sums up his ambitious hypothesis with the following lines:

rhyme, understood in the broad sense of the term as the articulation of a difference between semiotic series and semantic series, is the messianic heritage Paul leaves to modern poetry, and the history and fate of rhyme coincide in poetry with the history and fate of the messianic announcement.<sup>26</sup>

## §5

### *The Dichtung of Verdichtung*

In Chapter 4 of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud bridges the dream of *uncle R.* to the dream of the *smoked salmon* by way of explaining what might be called the politics of distortion:

The *political writer* who has unpleasant truths to tell to those in power finds himself in a like position [with the dream-work]. If he tells everything without reserve, the Government will suppress them ... The writer stands in fear of censorship; he therefore moderates and disguises the expression of his opinions. He finds himself compelled ... to refrain altogether from certain forms of attack, or to express himself in allusions *instead of by direct assertions*; or he must conceal his objectionable statement in an apparently innocent disguise.... The stricter the domination of the censorship, the more thorough becomes the disguise.<sup>27</sup>

Consider such a ‘political writer’ in light of Badiou’s assertion that Paul’s *Epistle to the Galatians* “is an entirely political text.”<sup>28</sup> This is a link between the dream of *uncle R.* (which discusses the way in which *association* works) and the dream of the *smoked salmon* (which introduces notions of *identification*), both of which hinge on the fundamental psychoanalytic notions of *overdetermination*, *overinvestment*, or *cathexis*.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 85-6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 52; italics mine.

<sup>28</sup> Badiou, op. cit., 24.

It is the threat of powerful government that compels the writer to forms of indirect communication (as opposed to Freud's 'direct assertions') through various disguises.

These limitations imposed on the political writer, later are set on *the poet*. To explain the mode of condensation, as in wit, he draws an analogy to the poetry. "When a poem is to be written in rhymed couplets, the second rhyming line is *bound* by two conditions: it must express the meaning allotted to it, and its expression must permit of a rhyme with the first line."<sup>29</sup> The best poems, Freud continues, are those in which the effort to find a rhyme is undetectable. This is also explained by way of *wit*, by which the arrangement of words permits an ambiguity of more than one thought. Later, the reader is reminded once again that "for the purposes of dream-representation the spelling is much less considered than the sound of words ought not to surprise us when we remember that rhyme exercises a similar privilege." Such representations seem "almost witty."<sup>30</sup>

Where Freud devotes an entire book to the ways by which wit correlates to unconscious censorship in the dream-work, his allusion to the poet seems soon forgotten; not resurrected until Lacan reminds us that the word for 'condensation' [*Verdichtung*] is derived from the word for 'poetry' [*Dichtung*]. This shows condensation's "connaturality with poetry, to the extent that it envelops poetry's own properly traditional function."<sup>31</sup> Given the necessity of an indirect communication set by the limits similar to the *bounds* of a rhyming poetic line, one might amend Freud's study on jokes with one on *Rhyme and Its Relation to the Unconscious*. After all, one of the kinds of jokes he analyzes is "a joke dependent on sound," such as the rhyme between the French "*Rousseau*" and "*roux et sot*."<sup>32</sup>

In *Moses and Monotheism*, poetry is, once again, explained as a method of *distortion*, specifically as Biblical literature.

The Biblical record before us contains valuable—nay, invaluable—historical evidence. It has, however, been *distorted* by tendentious influences and elaborated by the products of *poetical invention*. In our work we have already been able to divine one of these *distorting* tendencies.<sup>33</sup>

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29 Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, op. cit., 229; emphasis added. [Chapter VI, Section D.]

30 Ibid., 277-8.

31 Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious" in *Écrits*, op. cit., 152.

32 Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. Joyce Crick (New York: Penguin, 2002), 22-3.

33 Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jone (New York: Vintage, 1967), 50.

But *poetry is to be distinct from religion*; the former is more akin to epics. Freud believes the Moses tradition accomplishes something that the best of poets could never have accomplished; that is, transform the Arabic Jahve-volcano-god into the object of the older (Egyptian) Mosaic worship. “In one the result is poetry, in the other a religion, and we have assumed that the latter ... was reproduced with a faithfulness for which, of course, the epic cannot provide a parallel.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the Bible distorts history through its poetry, for Freud, but the religions of the Bible, themselves, are far more powerful than poetry.

We have seen how Agamben describes messianic time, which he finds in rhymes of Paul, by way of the structure of a lyrical poem. The time of a rhyming poem, where, e.g., the last rhyming end word of one stanza becomes the first end word of the next, renders the poem a soteriological device, for Agamben. It transforms chronological time into messianic time. It is through its rhyming gesturality that linear time (the verticality criticized by Lacan) is completely transformed. Further, rhyme issues from this *christic* (or what will become *Christian*) poetry. Paul is said to fuse the *form* of Greek art with the *semantics* of Semitic poetry; reaching heights unknown to both.

Not only is the unconscious structured like a language,<sup>35</sup> but the unconscious functions like the language of a rhyming poem (as do jokes<sup>36</sup> and dreams). After Agamben, one may posit that the whole of psychoanalysis has, since its inception in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, partaken in an *identification* with that one who comes to be called Saint Paul. This is not a question of Freudian infidelity to *Logos*,<sup>37</sup> but of a true Pauline heritage unconditionally assumed by psychoanalysis—its reliance on the *Dichtung* of *Verdichtung*, which is the very logic of cathexis.

This identification is apparent not so much in Freud’s discussion of Paul in the later sections of *Moses and Monotheism* but more so in one of Freud’s defensive comments against the alleged pan-sexualism of psychoanalysis in *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego*. *Love* is to be understood in a wide sense. It is a central tenet of psychoanalysis that *love* is to include friendly, nourishing, and libidinal relationships. Freud believes

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34 Ibid., 90.

35 Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 55.

36 Cf. Lacan’s suggestion that there are ‘terrific jokes’ and a “form of humor that surpasses all others” to be found in the New Testament; *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 96.

37 See Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 68-9 which closes on the distinction between the religious god of necessity (*Ananke*) and Freud’s god (*Logos*).

this wide understanding of love to be found in Plato but, also “when the apostle Paul, in his famous epistle to the Corinthians, praises love above all else, he certainly understands it in the same ‘wider’ sense.”<sup>38</sup> This identification is also apparent in Jacques Lacan’s explanation of the relationship between the law and the thing by way of the *Epistle to the Romans*.<sup>39</sup>

Here, Lacan discusses the cathexis of the thing alongside Paul’s explanation of sin. Our desire for the thing flares up only in the thing’s relation to the Law. The question of the thing/object is still attached to whatever is lacking in our desire. Thus, “without the Law the Thing is dead.”<sup>40</sup> Where Freud would have us believe that our relation to *original sin* has to do with the murder of the father of the primal horde that is distorted over centuries through totemism, taboo, magic, primitive religion, Mosaic religious law, and finally Paul’s guilt-consciousness,<sup>41</sup> Lacan illuminates how it has little to nothing to do with the mythic primal father<sup>42</sup> and more to do with desire’s transgression or crime and the cathexis of any and all ‘*objet a*’, for the sake of which we will transgress the Law.

The vital importance of cathexis throughout psychoanalysis is related to the thinking of Paul, even before Agamben discovers the poetry of the latter. It is therefore no accident that the equivalential logic of cathexis has, from the beginning of psychoanalysis, been connected with poetry, be it by the comments on the poet in *The Interpretation of Dreams* or the ghost of poetry [*Dichtung*] that haunts the mechanisms of distortion, displacement, and condensation [*Verdichtung*] used to explain it.

## §6

### *Homoteleology & The Textual Horde*

Although Freud associates this thinking with the political writer in *The Interpretation*

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38 Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1959), 30.

39 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 83-4.

40 Lacan is playing with Romans 7:7; substituting ‘Thing’ for ‘sin.’ Ibid. Q.v. Slavoj Žižek: “[O]ne has to instill prohibitions in order to be able to enjoy their violation ... was not this dialectic fully explored by Saint Paul in Romans ... on Law engenders sin, that is, the desire to transgress it?” *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (New York: Verso, 2003), 56.

41 *Moses and Monotheism*, op. cit., 170; q.v., 109-17.

42 To this end, Žižek is correct to point out that Paul’s understanding of community was “the first example of a collective that is not formed and held together through the mechanism described by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism*” in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, op. cit., 130.

of *Dreams*, the equivalential logic of cathexis becomes overtly political in the work of Ernesto Laclau; particularly in his notion of the empty signifier, a schema developed more recently in *On Populist Reason*.<sup>43</sup> It is through a discussion of *the crowd* in Le Bon<sup>44</sup> and *group psychology* in Freud<sup>45</sup> that Laclau arrives at the schemas of empty and floating signifiers of *the people*.<sup>46</sup> The culmination has everything to do with *Verdichtung* (condensation):

A signifier like ‘workers’ ... can ... exhaust itself in a particularistic, sectional meaning, while in other discourses ... it can become the name *par excellence* of the ‘people’ ... [P]opulism involves the division of the social scene into two camps. This division presupposes ... the presence of some privileged signifiers which *condense* in themselves the signification of a whole antagonistic camp.... In this process of *condensation*, however, we have to differentiate between two aspects: the *ontological* role of the discursively constructing social division and the *ontic* content which, in certain circumstances, plays that role.<sup>47</sup>

It is with this line of thought—the dynamic between the crowd, condensation, and cathexis—that we must ally poetic rhyme. To do so, we may look to the poet, Ilya Kutik, who links the drive to rhyme with the poem and the crowd:

I *rhyme* because I’m a fatalist. I sense angels at my elbows; I don’t feel the need to use them to push through *the crowd of words* and assonances. For me, *this crowd is no less corporeal than a real crowd*. The crowd might block the way, but unless such a thing is *fated*, it won’t happen: The members of the crowd will lead and accompany me. ... I repeat that I’m a fatalist.<sup>48</sup>

The poem is a crowd. It is because this crowd of words is no less corporeal than a ‘real’ crowd of the people that the poet is a destiny or has a fate; a *Schicksal*. The later Heidegger’s emphasis on *Dichtung* can now address the Western ‘people’. The

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43 See also Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (New York: Verso, 2001), 127-34; Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, op. cit., pp. 36-46; Laclau, “Constructing Universality” in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (New York: Verso, 2000), esp., 301-04.

44 Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, op. cit., 21-30

45 *Ibid.*, 52-61.

46 *Ibid.*, 67-100.

47 *Ibid.*, 87. Italics mine.

48 Ilya Kutik, “The Tormentor of Life” in *Hieroglyphs of Another World*, trans. Andrew Watchel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 13.

shortcomings of the ontic *polis*, now, may find expression in the ontological poem. The effort to correlate the distinction between the *ontic* and the *ontological* (or, *politics* and the *political*) must, now, be followed by an effort to correlate *poetry* and the *poetical*. The latter, will partake in the vocation of rhyme, whereas the former wallows lost in ontic aprosody. *Credo*: Benjamin is on his way to devising something along these lines when he distinguishes between *the poem* and *the poeticized* [*das Gedichtete*],<sup>49</sup> which emerges in the very essay in which he proclaims “the infinite possibilities of rhyme.”<sup>50</sup>

Each end word in a rhyming poem serves as a desire (in terms of libido) or demand (in terms of politics). Žižek discerns this when he suggests that,

Freud’s famous *ambivalence of libidinal stances* has nothing whatsoever to do with some biological or psychological oscillation, but *refers strictly to the radical gap between literal meaning and underlying intention. The minimal structure of this reflexivity is, of course, that of poetic repetition*: if I say “window ... window,” a gap separates the word *from itself* and it is in this gap that the poetic “depth” resonates. And the truth of the old cliché about the “poetic origins of speech” is that there is no single occurrence of a word: repetition always-already resonates in it.<sup>51</sup>

This tells us much about poetic repetition, but leaves untouched the matter that *window*<sub>1</sub>, when repeated, rhymes with *window*<sub>2</sub>. Rhyme is always a function of repetition, or, perhaps, iterability. We can apply Žižek’s note to poems in which the rhyming end words are themselves repetitions, such as that found in Charles Bukowski’s “The Genius of the Crowd”:

Those Who Preach **GOD**  
 NEED **God**  
 Those who preach **PEACE**  
 Do Not have **Peace**.  
 THOSE WHO PREACH **LOVE**  
 DO NOT HAVE **LOVE**.  
 BEWARE THE PREACHERS  
 Beware the Knowers.<sup>52</sup>

49 Walter Benjmain, “Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin” in *Selected Writings*, op. cit., 18-20.

50 Ibid., 29.

51 Slavoj Žižek, Foreword to the Second Edition of *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (New York: Verso, 2002), xiv; emphasis mine.

52 Charles Bukowski, “The Genius of the Crowd” in *The Roominghouse Madrigals: Early Selected Poems, 1946-1966* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1998), 31; emphasis added.

But where Žižek's "poetic repetition" illuminates the first six lines of this selection—the relations between 'GOD' and 'God', 'PEACE' and 'Peace', and 'LOVE'<sub>1</sub> and 'LOVE'<sub>2</sub>—it is not especially helpful in regards to lines 6-7, the overtly heterogeneous relation between 'PREACHERS' and 'Knowers'. The same problem occurs when reviewing the rhymes Agamben attributes to Paul:

those <i>weeping</i>	<i>kai oi klaiontes</i>
as not <i>weeping</i> ,	<i>hōs mē klaiontes</i>
those <i>rejoicing</i>	<i>kai oi chairontes</i>
as not <i>rejoicing</i>	<i>hōs mē chairontes</i>
those <i>buying</i>	<i>kai oi agorazontes</i>
as not <i>possessing</i>	<i>hōs mē katachrōmeno</i> <sup>53</sup>

With 'weeping'<sub>1</sub> and 'weeping'<sub>2</sub> and 'rejoicing'<sub>1</sub> and 'rejoicing'<sub>2</sub>, Žižek's "poetic repetition" is helpful. The last two lines are more troubling. Are we to believe that there is no less of a gap between *agorazontes* and *katachrōmenoi* simply because there is no proper repetition?

The technical or rhetorical term for the kind of rhyme that occurs through the repetition of end words is *homeoteleuton*, from the Greek *homo-* (same, like, equal) and *telos* (end). One should note that this kind of poetic rhyme and repetition wrestles, grapples, and supplements both the shortcomings (*and merits!*) of various forms of teleology and, as such, can be heard and read as a radical critique of a canonical tradition that runs from Hegel and Marx to Kant all the way back to Aristotle. It is no accident that Agamben's reading of what could be called the *homotelology* of Paul's rhymes is a break from classical teleology in the direction of eschatology and messianism. Such rhyme calls into question the selfsame identity of any word or moment believed to be *homo-* by way of repetitions that no longer aim in the direction of a determinate end or *telos*.

It is the issue of repetition that draws Gilles Deleuze into a brief discussion of rhyme and a form of homeoteleuton that he calls "generalized rhyme":

[I]s it the identity of the nominal concept which explains the repetition of a word? Take the example of rhyme: it is indeed verbal repetition, but repetition which includes the difference between two words and inscribes that difference at the heart of a poetic Idea, *in a space* which it determines ... As for the repetition of a single word, we must understand this as a 'generalised rhyme', not rhyme as a restricted

53 Corinthians 15: 42-44, quoted in Agamben, op. cit., 86; emphasis added.

repetition. This generalization can proceed in two ways: either a word taken in two senses ensures a resemblance or a paradoxical identity between the two senses; or a word taken in one sense *exercises an attractive force* on its neighbors, *communicating an extraordinary gravity* to them until one of the neighboring words takes up the baton and becomes in turn a centre of repetition.<sup>54</sup>

After Deleuze, the repetition of homeoteleutonic rhyme would *either* form a “paradoxical identity” of the word by way of catachresis, equivocation, and (maybe) homonymy due to multiple senses of that word *or* transmit forces of attraction or gravitational pull of one sense of a repeated word to neighboring words in proximity to the properly repeated one. As such, the repetition of rhyming words would contaminate or infect even the words of the poem that do not properly rhyme.

If the Deleuzian gravitational forces of poetry are not enough, in regards to the last two lines of both Bukowski and Paul that are not strictly homeoteleutonic, we may, perhaps, look to Jacques Derrida. In an analysis of two lines from *Hamlet*, Derrida moves beyond the “poetic repetition” of Žižek to the idea of “the return of the rhyme.”

*Three things*, then, would decompose in analysis this single *thing*, spirit, or specter—or king, for the king occupies this place, here the place of the father, whether he keeps it, takes it, or usurps it, and beyond *the return of the rhyme* (for example “The Play’s the thing,/ Wherein Ile catch the Conscience of the King”). King is a thing, Thing is the King ...<sup>55</sup>

*Rhyme calls sovereignty into question.* Note how rhyme, also, moves beyond the place of the father; a point made earlier about the move made from Freud’s use of Paul to Lacan’s. The play is no longer the thing by the time one reads the line that follows. The king is the thing and this is so by virtue of “the return of rhyme” (which, we must remember, Derrida still wants to move beyond). The first step is that of rhyme, which allows that “King is a Thing.” The rhyming end word is overdetermined. It is because of rhyme that the ‘thing’ is at least “*three things*”: thing, king, father ... *and spirit*.

Derrida invites us to consider the spectrality to rhyme. Rhyming is *conjuring*. Words are haunted by other words, lines, and even entire stanzas. Rhyming end words are cathected and, as such, are always signifying more than their own particularity;

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54 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 21-2; italics added.

55 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 9; italics added.

beyond their selfsame autonomy, own-ness, or *eigen*. It is along these lines that one might consider Laclau's explanation that "a hegemonic relation is one in which a certain body presents itself as the incarnation of a certain spirit. The hegemonic relation is certainly spectral: a certain body [or, for our purposes, a *corporeal* end word as described by Kutik ~ VB] tries to present its particular features as the expression of something transcending its own particularity."<sup>56</sup> To put things in Benjaminian terms, with each rhyme the poem *cites itself*. Framed in the phenomenological words of Husserl, the rhyming end word is an "*intending-beyond-itself*," a "meaning more."<sup>57</sup>

In this way, a rhyming word achieves the *circulation* that Deleuze, in *The Logic Sense*, attributes to portmanteau or esoteric words. A portmanteau word is a conjunction of the two series of sense of two different words into one, such as Lewis Carroll's *frumious* which Deleuze suggests as a conjunction of *fuming* + *furios*, to which we could add *vorp* (verbal + gospel). A rhyming word is a subtle, almost imperceptible, portmanteau word as it is a conjunction of one word and that very same word's repetition. Deleuze claims that such a word "has no name at all; it is rather named by the entire refrain of the song [or poem] throughout the stanzas and causes them to communicate."<sup>58</sup> As such, this "is the reason why it never exists alone. It beckons to other portmanteau words which precede or follow it, and which show that every series is already ramified in principle and still further ramifiable."<sup>59</sup> Perhaps it is more rhyme than reason: Each rhyming word beckons to other rhyming words which precede or follow it, even to those words that do not rhyme with the word beckoning it.

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56 Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (New York: Verso, 1996), 71.

57 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 46.

58 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 44.

59 *Ibid.*, 47.

§  
*Typewrhyming: The Space That Remains*

Above, Deleuze has already suggested that through repetition, rhyme inscribes difference “in a space which it determines.”<sup>60</sup> The time of the poem will have been indissociable from the space of the poem. In the fifth section (called “The Quotable Gesture”) of his essay, “What is Epic Theater? (II),” Walter Benjamin explains that “to *cite* a text entails an interruption of its content.”<sup>61</sup> Citing is interrupting and gestural. Gesture interrupts. When the poet, An Collins, cites the Psalms in her rhyming poetry, it is a gesture to a text beyond her own; a tactic very much prevalent in the sayings attributed to Jesus<sup>62</sup> and the writings of Paul.<sup>63</sup> Benjamin finds such interruption and citable gestures in Bertolt Brecht’s epic theater and the former tries to explain it, at one point, by way of textuality. “An actor must be able *to space* his gestures the way a typesetter spaces type.”<sup>64</sup>

Beyond Collins’ citability, the poems of the *Divine Songs and Meditations* are even more interruptive and gestural in that the typesetter often has to insert words from prior

60 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, op. cit.

61 Walter Benjamin, “What is Epic Theater? (II)” trans. Harry Zohn, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 305. Heeding the suggestion of Samuel Weber, the word ‘cite’ has been chosen to translate the German *zitiern*, rather than ‘quote.’ Citable is “not quite the same as quotable, which is how it has been rendered in English. Even in English, however, to ‘cite’ is not simply to ‘quote.’ This is all the more true in German, where even today the verb *zitieren* still carries with it etymological resonances from its Latin root, *citare*, to set in movement.” Such resonance is apparent in English words such as ‘incite’ or ‘excite.’ But in both German and English, ‘to cite’ “means not simply to set something in movement, but also—as American drivers know only too well—to arrest movement by diverting it,” as in the sense “of receiving a traffic citation.” See *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham, 2004), 45.

62 In Jesus’ use of such as introductory phrases as “You have heard ...” and “But I say unto you ...”, one sees that the repetition of a citation is also an alteration of that citation. Paul’s rate of citation is very high; his letters being “crammed with Bible passages.” See Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 39, 41. Q.v. René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 102.

63 Karl Barth reminds us that the Epistles are full of attitudes “taken over from the psalmist by Paul” in *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), 37. This mode of repetition that alters as it cites is also discussed in Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Reading Derrida / Thinking Paul: On Justice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 93: “Paul is citing while turning almost on its head a passage of Job.”

64 Walter Benjamin, “What is Epic Theater? (II),” op. cit.; See also Samuel Weber, *Benjamin’s –abilities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 102-5.

or latter lines due to lack of space. There are all sorts of remainders. Originally, in lines 2-3 of the second meditation, the typesetter has to make space for 'space'. The 1651 printing appears:

*The second Meditation.*  
**T**He storm of Anguish being over-blown,  
 To praise Gods mercies now I may have  
 For that I was not finally orethrown, [space,  
 But was supported by his speciall grace;  
 The Firmament his glory doth declare, *Psal. 119. 1*  
 Yet over all his works, his mercies are. *Psal. 145. 9*

The vertical has irrupted and interrupted the horizontal. Space is a remainder. The reader of the poem is found in the 'space' that remains (which would be an accompaniment or vestige of the time-that-remains of the poem in Agamben). Reading is interrupted. The last word *read* of line three gestures back to line two; as if we cannot finish reading line two until we have *already* finished reading line three.

Line two is not autonomous; it is only readable if one reads on. Neither is line three, which has been invaded by a word that is not *its own*. Line two relies on the line to come as line three gestures to a line that has passed. Line two hopes while line three mourns; the former cries "The end is near!," the latter, "The end is at hand!"<sup>65</sup> Such textuality affirms the narrativity of the Collins' poems and keeps us from dicing up the text into *quotable* sound bites.<sup>66</sup>

65 With the "[<sup>r</sup>" of the "[space," the typesetter accomplishes something very close to what Agamben discusses in *The Time That Remains* as the "the cut of Apelles," op. cit., 50-3. In the movement of the reader's eyes—in the *Augenblick*—from the 'end' of line two to reading the first few words of line three, there is a uncanny moment in which the reader knows something that she does not know. The end (of line two) has not happened yet it has already happened. This poetic moment thrust upon the reader by the typesetter (and the citer/interrupter) is the messianic paradox; that which claims, somehow, that the end (of the line or the end of the poem or the messiah) has *already come*.

66 This, by the way, is an instructive lesson on how one should read the Bible. The chapter and verse numbers that were inserted into the text much later by editors have the capacity to alienate all lines from each other and render it easier to rip out a pulpit-friendly sound bite from its proper scriptural context. Verses—if there are such things—must be allowed to *gesture* to one another; as they so often *cite* one another. See the reading strategy for the gospel of Mark in Theodore Jennings, *The Insurrection of the Crucified: The "Gospel of Mark" as Theological Manifesto* (Chicago: Exploration Press, 2005), 59; q.v., 49, 55: "Separating pieces of narrative, fragmenting it, invariably destroys it. It can't be done. By the simple act of writing a narrative,

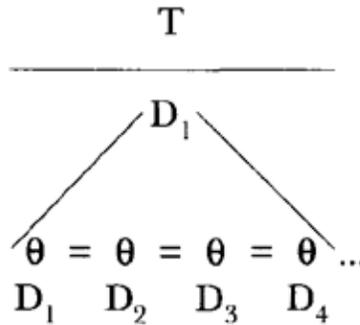
- (1) That this sort of typesetting occurs only with the end words of a line,
- (2) that end words are (typically) the rhymeable words of a rhyming poem, and
- (3) that the words ‘space’ and ‘overthrown’ do not rhyme;

these three poetic and medial phenomena, together, make these lines from An Collins exemplary of how the gesturality of this tactic is the typesetter’s version of rhyme.

§7

*Hegemony & Conjurhyming*

Multiplicity of end words in a poem are analogous to “a plurality of demands.”<sup>67</sup> When end words rhyme with others there occurs an “equivalential moment.”<sup>68</sup> The equivalential *moment* of Laclau is part of a specific understanding of time; what Agamben calls the-time-that-remains. One of the versions of Laclau’s schema is the following.<sup>69</sup>



Here, the T stands for Tsarism (which is Laclau’s particular example in “Constructing Universality”) but can stand for any Repressive Political Regime (RPR). The vertical line embodies the separation of that regime from the rest of society. The circles are divided. The bottom of the semi-circles represents the particularity of the demand, whereas the top semi-circle represents their collective antithetical stance against the regime. The top halves identify with an overarching empty signifier (the top D<sub>1</sub>) encompassing all

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Mark has warned us against this procedure...[T]he bits make sense only in relation to one another.”

67 Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, op. cit., 129.

68 Ibid.

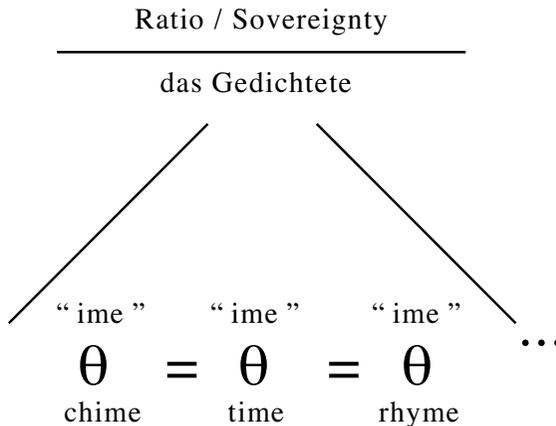
69 Ernesto Laclau, “Constructing Universality,” op. cit., 303. See also *On Populist Reason*, op. cit., 130; cf. 148.

the particular demands. This hegemonic relation between the empty signifier and the demands requires the differential equivalence of this schema.

If it is the case that the hegemonic relation is the precondition for politics, then one could further hypothesize that, *a fortiori*, without poetry there can be no politics. The method of rhyme is a process of identification. Consider the second stanza of Thomas Hardy's "The Sick Battle-God":

His crimson form, with clang and *chime*,  
 Flashed on each murk and murderous meeting-*time*  
 And kings invoked, for rape and raid,  
 His fearsome aid in rune and *rhyme*.<sup>70</sup>

I'm convinced that Thomas Hardy takes us back (at least to §1 of this essay on Lacan). Here, the relation between chime, time, and rhyme is vertical. Rhyme breaks the tyranny of horizontal reading and linear time. As such, chime, time, and rhyme maintain their particularity in their own place as end words of three different lines. But the phoneme "ime"/"yme" falls into the schema as the top semi-circle, allowing an equivalence of chime, time, and rhyme in the "-ime" of each. Following Derrida, "chime" is "time" and "time" is "rhyme." This can be represented as:



*Das Gedichtete*—the poeticized—represents the very method of rhyme, with which each phonemic “-ime” identifies. This stands in rebellion against the *ratio* of the

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Writings of Thomas Hardy*, Vol. XVIII, *Wessex Poems and Other Verses: Poems of the Past and Present* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1898), 132; emphasis added.

Romans (doubling as a RPR for the Paul who pens the *Epistle to the Romans*) the logic of verifiability, the sovereignty that so often accompanies it, and the a-prosody with which it is communicated. The ellipse stands in for what Benjamin calls “the infinite possibilities of rhyme.”

The logic of equivalence as rhyme is but a hair’s breadth away from one of Laclau’s examples that supposes, in the midst of silence, any and all sounds that occur are “*specific* noises.” Yet, they all “have the equivalent identity in *breaking* the silence.” Each end word is a specific noise with an equivalent identity in that they rhyme with other words. The next step is that as rhyme comes about only by gesturing to other lines, each end word, whether rhyming with each other or not, assume an equivalent identity in that they all gesture beyond themselves. Rhyme discovers the hegemony of the poem by way of the time of the poem, which opens further the situation that each end word of any poem—even one that does not rhyme—must gesture in such a way as to achieve an equivalent identity without rhyming noises.

In end times ... any poem is permitted.

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