

Symbols and Allegories in Goethe's "Maifest" (Mayfest)

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ABSTRACT

Although the field of semiotics is fairly new in academia, the ideas that are discussed and researched date back centuries, if not millennia. The field itself seeks to study symbols that are either visual, such as art in various media or, as this essay demonstrates, poetry, which is written language and often considered visual art in-and-of-itself. It also includes auditory signs, which are spoken words and sentences, or musical notes and acoustic signals of objects which can be seen and heard simultaneously. The field of poetry in semiotics, however, is very unique because it contains both spoken symbols and allegories at the same time: allegory refers to concentrated ideas that can also be depicted in paintings. The way that allegory in poetry differs from that in paintings lies in the fact that the message in poetry is conveyed through written or orthographic communication, very similar in effect to spoken language, save for the fact that orthography is a visual sign as opposed to an acoustic one which is spoken language *per se*. Basing upon Roman Jakobson's six-factor six-function communication model, this paper discusses and enhances the links between semiotics and poetics. It also demonstrates the interplay between symbol and allegory in Goethe's love poem, "Maifest" (Mayfest).

Keywords: semiotics, poetics, sign, symbol, allegory, communication, Roman Jakobson

歌德〈五月節〉中的跡象與符號

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摘 要

雖然符號學的學術研究在最近幾乎是一個新興領域，但其研究可以追溯到數百年甚至是千年以前。符號學主要研究符號本身視覺上（例如藝術上）的媒介功能，或者是其做為文章與詩歌表達的作用模式。符號作為一種撰寫的語言本身常被認為是一種視覺藝術，但是符號學同時也包含了聽覺意涵：字彙與句子本身，（或者是那些具有抑揚頓挫與物理性質的聲音訊號）可以同時被人們看見或聽見。詩歌在符號學中十分特別——因為它同時包含了說話的符號與寓言，其中寓言所代表的是濃縮的想法，就如同繪畫一般。寓言在詩歌中的表達方式與繪畫中最大的不同點在於，在詩歌中的傳達乃是經由撰寫或拼字來溝通，這十分類似於口語的功效，但是拼字相較於以口說為主的語言則是一種視覺現象。基於羅曼·雅各布森（Roman Jakobson）的六因素—六功能溝通模型，此篇論文探討並且強調了符號學與詩學之間的連結。此文章亦專注闡述了歌德（Goethe）的愛情詩——〈五月節〉在符號與寓言間的相互作用。

關鍵詞：符號學、詩學、跡象、符號、寓言、溝通、羅曼·雅各布森

Symbols and Allegories in Goethe's "Maifest" (Mayfest)

Abram Antler

Although the field of semiotics is fairly new in academia, the ideas that are discussed and researched date back centuries, if not millennia, as they were treated as a part of both rhetoric and speech. The field itself seeks to study symbols that are either visual, such as art in various media or, as this essay will cover, poetry, which is written language and often considered visual art in-and-of itself. It also includes auditory signs which are spoken signs (words and sentences) or musical notes and acoustic signals of objects which can be both seen and heard simultaneously. The field of poetry in semiotics, however, is very unique because it contains both spoken symbols and allegory at the same time; allegory refers to concentrated ideas that can also be depicted in artwork from Renaissance painters including Michelangelo and da Vinci. There is one key fundamental, though, in the difference between poetry and paintings. At the risk of stating the obvious, it must be said that the message in poetry is conveyed through written or orthographic representation. It is more closely linked to spoken language though the signs are visual. Paintings, though, are entirely visual signs and have no real equivalents in speech. The field of poetry, though, is a critical area of semiotics overall because of its uniqueness and requires a lot of research and discussion among enthusiasts as well. What makes poetry so important is that it serves on two primary levels: First, it serves on the linguistic (pertaining to language) level especially if it is to be considered a speech act. Second, it serves on the symbolic level, especially where semiotics is concerned.

Perhaps the biggest proponent of the study of poetry both in the field of semiology and in the field of linguistics, which is the systematic study of language, so far has been the linguist and semiotician, Roman Jakobson. He feels that while poetry has been studied closely in the field of semiology, the linguistics field also needs to focus more on poetry in a very similar way despite the field's dependence on spoken and transcribed data as the focal point (namely *acoustic* data). Still, one question that looms large is whether or not poetry, as yet another semiotician, Robert Innis, in his important work, *Semiotics: An introductory Anthology*, suggests, can ever be considered "a

‘speech event’ [which] can [be] implement[ed] in any act of verbal communication” (145). To this effect, a rudimentary question must be raised: Can poetry truly be considered a speech act, especially if it, like paintings, has visual signs and coded messages through its orthography? Also, as will again be asked further along in this work, how are the ways in which a poem can be considered a speech act observable? The burden to show that poetry and even *poetics*, which is the study of poetry up close which includes the allegorical applications along with the language, can constitute a speech act and therefore is a legitimate field in linguistics (much as phonology, syntax, semantics, and discourse already are) lies with Jakobson. Even if Jakobson himself is able to demonstrate that poetry *is* a legitimate speech act, the field of linguistics would need to be broadened and even extend to orthography, or written analysis, to an even greater extent than it already has been regarded in a traditional sense. Also, there needs to be an adequate basis to demonstrate that poetry is a legitimate speech act rather than merely a theoretical one.

Jakobson begins by showing that there is a state of urgency as follows: “[T]he linguist whose field is any kind of language may and must include poetry in his study” (“Closing Statement” 173). He moreover issues the following statement: “If there are some critics who still doubt the competence of linguistics to embrace the field of poetics, I privately believe that the poetic incompetence of some bigoted linguists has been mistaken for an inadequacy of the linguistic science itself” (“Closing Statement” 173). Nevertheless, there is still a need to demonstrate how exactly poetry is a speech act much like spoken language itself. Additionally, even if one can successfully demonstrate the connection between poetry and speech acts, many questions potentially abound which can make the connections tenuous and not sturdy; such questions will be raised after examining how poetry can be considered a speech act much as spoken language, as a given, already is.

Spoken language in linguistics, to reiterate, contains the following disciplines: phonetics, syntax, semantics, and discourse—all four being inseparable parts of linguistics. To be able to substantiate both the claim that poetry is a speech act and to do justice to Jakobson’s call for action in the field of linguistics to include poetry, a linguist needs to examine the phonetic quality of the poem (in this essay, the German poem, “Maifest,” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe will be the focus), especially the consonants and vowels that are used. In addition, one needs to look at the diction and

how the pacing of the poem's symbols work together (stress and emphasis, similar in phonology already, especially in English and German).

In addition to examining the phonology that the poem contains, there is also a need to look at the syntax as well. The order of words, especially the pauses held by commas, give clues to the meaning of the poem and also can connect it to speech acts themselves. Yet another important issue is the use of end marks such as periods, exclamation points (one method used to convey strong feelings), and question marks which also are rising intonations and crucial for semantic meaning and even discourse, the two remaining areas that are present in speech acts and therefore studied in linguistics.

Semantics simply refers to the *actual meanings* of words, and poetry sometimes relies on ambiguity of words (*wear* being a verb—to *wear clothes* or *wear* being a noun, which means *overuse—the wear on the furniture*). In this sense, there is a correspondence to both verbal speech and poetry, even an inextricable link.

There is, nevertheless, one more area which is perhaps the most difficult area to examine in determining whether or not poetry truly is a speech act in-and-of-itself. It is in the area of discourse. In his *Selected Writings*, Book III, "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry," Jakobson devises a six-fold matrix to explain how poetry can indeed not only be thought of as a speech act, but to function as one effectively as well.

The poet is the message sender and the reader is the recipient, which goes without saying and risks redundancy to state. What doesn't go without saying, however, is that the message sender and recipient must have a relationship which contains the message itself. Knowing that this relationship between a message sender and a recipient is crucial, Jakobson outlines "six factors" that each "determines a different function of language" (22). In other words, each individual component has a separate function as he also so states in his *Selected Writings*, Book III "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry" compendium of essays:

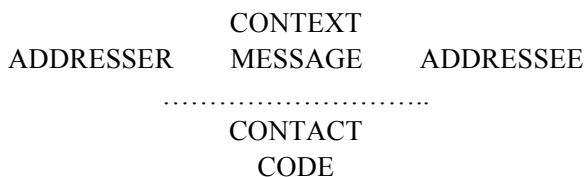


Fig. 1. Roman Jakobson's scheme of communication.

This six-fold matrix plainly states the way in which the message sender, or the “addresser,” sends the “message” or the “context” through the written means or the “contact” which contains the “code” to the “addressee,” who is the audience or reader of the poem. There are some difficulties, however, that are underlying.

Where this six-fold matrix may fall short is in showing the link between the message sender and the intended recipient, especially since language, as Ferdinand de Saussure lays claim to in his *Course in General Linguistics*, “is something used daily by all,” and requires a “masse parlante,” (77) or the entire speech community, not a private act, which is usually the case with reading poetry. Jakobson also points out yet another serious limitation of this six-fold matrix: “Although we distinguish six basic aspects of language, we could, however, hardly find verbal messages that would fulfill only one function” (*Poetry of Grammar* 22). In his own words, he is stating that spoken messages often fill more than one role and therefore are to be treated differently than decoding printed words.

In anticipation of this situation, he creates yet another six-fold matrix which yields the following modification:

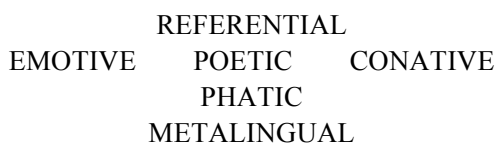


Fig. 2. Roman Jakobson's diagram of six functions corresponding to Fig. 1; *Poetry of Grammar* 27

The six-fold elements here change completely from the previous one to reflect poetic elements that are not essential to spoken language but *can* be present in the spoken variety regardless. It does an injustice to *discourse*, however, and therefore leaves it out of the picture entirely. Similarly, this move from one six-fold matrix to another demonstrates a chasm between poetry and speech acts themselves even though metalanguage is crucial to both poetry and speech acts, which Jakobson contends is the poetic function here. Jakobson further asserts that for poetry to function in much the same way as a speech act, “we must recall two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behavior, *selection* and *combination*” (“Poetry of Grammar” 27; italics original). To further clear up any inherent discrepancies between poetry and speech acts, Jakobson continues to discuss *equivalence*, which

means linking written poetry to spoken aspects such as phonology and syntax, two crucial areas in linguistics:

The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence. In poetry one syllable is equalized with any other syllable of the same sequence; word stress is assumed to equal word stress, as unstress equals unstress; prosodic long is matched with long, and short with short; word boundary equals word boundary, no boundary equals no boundary; syntactic pause equals syntactic pause, no pause equals no pause. Syllables are converted into units of measure, and so are morae or stresses. ("Poetry of Grammar" 27)

In other words, the largest overall function of poetry, as his second six-fold matrix specifies, especially in regard to his "metalingual" function, is that there is now an equivalence of spoken words and utterances to written ones in poetry. This change can allow for poetry to be a speech act, therefore.

Jakobson's own question: "What makes a verbal message a work of art?" ("Closing Statement" 147) is by now a much easier one to answer. His own answer is satisfactory: "Poetics deals with problems of verbal structure, just as the analysis of painting is concerned with pictorial structure. Since linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics" ("Closing Statement" 148). The other questions raised, by contrast, are not nearly so easy to answer. A second question that can be raised after the initial one about messages being considered a work of art is as follows: how can phonetics and even other linguistic fields of study, including syntax, semantics, and even discourse, be included in poetry? The answer to said question is simply to analyze the poem, much in the same way as signs in spoken language are studied, or as more plainly stated by Saussure, "differences in signs and differences in significations" (77). But the questions that follow become more difficult to answer. A third question is what if there is no clear relationship between the message sender and the recipient? This question, given the presence of literary hermeneutics, becomes very hard to answer and may even remain open as a result. A fourth question that can be raised is can someone still capture elements including phonetic variance in poems, one that presumes

that a person is very familiar with the connection of the sound to a symbol? This question is perhaps a bit easier to answer than the third question posed, but there is also the issue of whether or not the sounds are central to the poem and not the verbal symbols instead. A fifth question which is related is how important is phonetics to poetry overall? Even though verbal *alliteration*, or the use of the same consonant or vowel in the beginning letter of each word in a poem, and *assonance*, the use of the same vowel sound in each word, are truly a crucial aspect to poetry, it is not the sole focus of the poem. And the sixth and final question is what are the ways in which poetry can be considered a speech act and how can they be outlined in both the fields of literature and linguistics? In order to answer this final question, there must be stages covered in this research essay which outline and discuss how poetry *functions both as verbal art and a speech act simultaneously*. This final question does bring to bear the possibility of a complete disconnect between poetics and linguistics and thus might make it possible that poetry is *not a speech act*, but rather, mere *verbal art* using written prose in the place of spoken phrases; in this case, Jakobson's six-fold matrices can be challenged rather than validated. Still, studying a poem's language is crucial to understanding both the poem and its message alike and this study of language in poetry is what gives rise to poetics, the branch of semiology which seeks to focus on poetry in isolation from other aspects in semiotics including both art and spoken language. It requires this isolation to show the link between the message sender, or the poet, and the reader, and in order to connect the reader to any message recipient, the term, *interlocutor*, to stand for the receiver of a message, can be utilized. The field of poetics requires both a linguistic and a semiological analysis at the same time, since poetry and spoken language differ in the effects on the interlocutor. The reasons being are not only because the field of linguistic study, especially that of discourse, is difficult at best to analyze in poetry, but also because linguistic study disavows and distances itself from allegory, crucial to understanding the message of the poem, and even to the field of poetics as well. The other issue that is problematic and related to the issue of discourse is that of *literary hermeneutics*, or the field of how people come to both interpret and understand text of any kind, especially poetry. The understanding of allegory is vital to the issue of overall comprehension of the poem and merely looking at a poem linguistically can create a lack of understanding which is counterproductive and doesn't allow the interlocutor to receive the message that was intended.

Allegory refers to a figurative meaning (as opposed to a literal one) of a work of art carried out through the objects that it contains, be it physical (paintings and sculptures, just to name two) or verbal, poetry namely. Many poets, especially Romantic poets, used allegory consistently throughout each poem that they wrote. They did so by using objects that stood for something else while at the same time, standing for themselves. Tzvetan Todorov, a philosopher and semiotician, explains this situation---it creates a duality since the objects in poems stand for something external while at the same time representing themselves in his *Theories of the Symbol*: "[T]he duality is stronger in allegory, more harmoniously absorbed in the symbol" (220). That is to say, symbols are always connected to another concept, yet they remain objects in-and-of themselves at the same time, the idea behind allegory. These objects are signs that carry meaning and allegory therefore depends on them to form a code, which, in the case of poetry, is verbal. Goethe, whose work will now be the focal point, both spoke and wrote about his preference for symbols over allegory; and perhaps ironically, his work in the field of semiotics is best known for its use of allegory, especially in poetry.

A very good example of both symbol and allegory in poetry can be seen in Goethe's poem, "*Maifest*" ("Mayfest" or "Mailed") which deals with these following symbols: the strong emotions he has for the woman that are natural and heightened by his exposure to the outside, the mayflowers, the heavenly scent and air, his blood coursing through his veins contrasting with the cold dew, and even the song and dance which contain the "code" of the poem itself. These symbols and the code itself are inseparable from the poem's language. There is some debate waging over whether or not this poem's title is about an annual May festival which takes place in Germany every year on the first Sunday of May or if the title has nothing at all to do with a festival. Scholars argue that the poem's title is strictly about Goethe's intense and perhaps even inexpressible love that he has for a young woman. The only way to verbalize it for this woman who would be the "addressee" of this poem is through connecting his feelings to the sights and the smells (overall sensual experiences) of May when flowers are in full bloom, colors are the most dramatic, and the weather is sunny and happy, yet the mornings are cloudy and gloomy. The original German poem that is unedited and appears in Hundert Gichte's book of Goethe's poems *Goethe Das Leben, es ist gut*, pages 19 and 20, will now be included. And what will follow is a look at the various aspects of the poem in its unedited

and full form in its German form without a translation, though English equivalents will be used in explanations of it.

Maifest
 Wie herrlich leuchtet
 Mir die Natur!
 Wie glänzt die Sonne!
 Wie lacht die Flur!

Es dringen Blüten
 Aus jedem Zweig,
 Und tausend Stimmen
 Aus dem Gesträuch,

Und Freud und Wonne
 Aus jeder Brust.
 O Erd o Sonne
 O Glück o Lust!

O Lieb' o Liebe,
 So golden schön,
 Wie Morgenwolken
 Auf jenen Höhen;

Du segnest herrlich
 Das frische Feld
 Im Blütendampfe
 Die volle Welt.

O Mädchen Mädchen,
 Wie lieb' ich dich!
 Wie blinkt dein Auge!
 Wie liebst du mich!

So liebt die Lerche
 Gesang und Luft,
 Und Morgenblumen
 Den Himmels Duft,

Wie ich dich liebe
Mit warmen Blut,
Die du mir Jugend
Und Freud und Mut

Zu neuen Liedern,
Und Tänzén gibst!
Sei ewig glücklich
Wie du mich liebst!
(Gichte 19-20)

Before the translation, notice that the second and fourth lines rhyme in each stanza, following an ABCB rhyme scheme with one exception: the second stanza; the syllabic structure also has a nice flow to it with five beats in the first and third line of each stanza nicely complemented with four beats in the second and fourth lines, giving the poem a very smooth and fluid feeling. Also, note that there is an assonance of [u] vowels which contrast nicely with the [I] vowel sounds as well. Also, the glide consonant, [l], provides alliteration throughout the poem (lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33, 35, and 36). The presence of these [l] glides that are consistent throughout the poem but skip lines are a deliberate part of the poem and give it an acoustic flow which sounds very nice when recited orally.

Grammatically or syntactically, there are commas which provide a natural pause and there are exclamation points, two periods, and a semicolon which are clearly important to the poem itself and even the message that he has for the message's ideal interlocutor throughout his poem. In a very true sense, the function of the comma is more syntactic than symbolic, contrasting from the exclamation points which will be discussed next. Prior to discussing the exclamation points, however, there is a very interesting absence of these commas and natural pauses in the fifth stanza where only line 20 has any punctuation at all, a period which, as will be mentioned very soon, seems to have a function very similar to commas in the poem as well. The function of these commas is to merely give natural pauses which equate with taking a breath when you speak. Where you see the exclamation points in lines 2, 3, 4, 12, 22, 23, 24, 34, and 36, there is a sudden and sharp pause in the poem, different from the periods in lines 10

and 20 and the semicolon in line 16, which will be discussed as well due to its importance to the poem. The exclamation points which curiously break up the flow in lines 2, 3, and 4 and then again in lines 22, 23, and 24 are not out of place! Rather, they are sharp breaks in the lines which emphasize the feelings of the poem, something of a rarity in poems in general, yet of central, perhaps even symbolic, importance in “Maifest.” Each time they come up, it is expressing either a German word or phrase, such as line 12’s “O Glück o Lust!” (19) being mere expression (“Oh fortune oh desire” as will be seen in the English translation). The periods in line 10 and again in line 20 are regular pauses in the poem that seem to be natural diction and have more of a speech or syntactic function rather than one that is important to the symbolic aspect to the poem. These pauses are essential to written or orthographic language (including poetry) and also in speech as well since people cannot speak forever and must take a pause, making this poem essentially lend itself to Jakobson’s notion of a speech act. These two periods are more lengthy pauses than the commas that appear in lines 6, 8, 13, 14, 21, 26, 28, 30 and 33 which act as very brief pauses both in the written prose and in the oral recitation of the poem. Perhaps the most important syntactical aspect of the poem which arguably has a dual function as a semantic aspect as well is the semicolon in line 16. The semicolon acts as a pause in much the same way as the commas and the periods, but is slightly longer than the commas and slightly shorter than the periods. The line which reads “Auf jenen Höhn;” (19) and translates into English roughly as “[The morning clouds] From every hillside;” is semantically an important transition in the poem. It is roughly the midpoint of the poem, sitting in line 16 and creating a wonderful symmetry to the poem as well. It also acts as a very important transition, making it symbolic as well. The transition essentially goes from the natural aspects of the poem, or the discussion of the natural setting, to the woman whom he focuses the poem on. Although the semicolon can be viewed as a symbol, its function is more of a syntactical one.

Most importantly, though, are the symbols in the poem---the semantic and semiotic aspects of the poem alike. They carry the meaning of the poem that gets unlocked as the poem is read. Nature, or *Natur* in the poem, is a rather general or collective term, for which aspects such as the sun (*Sonne*), meadow (*Flur*), twigs (*jedem Zweig*), bushes (*Gesträuch*), clouds (*Morgenwolken*), flowers (*Morgenblumen*), earth (*Erd’*), hillsides (*Höhn*), the dampness of the ground from the dew (*Im Blütendampfe*), and even the

animate lark flying overhead (*Lerch*) all fall into place. Moreover, these symbols, which each have a very important niche in both nature and in this very poem can be seen independently, yet each seem to be connected to the joy and expressions of love felt by the author of the poem, Goethe, especially in the presence of the woman whom he dedicates the poem to.

The numerous expressions of joy, including the German terms *lacht* (*laughter*) which connects to the natural symbols and elements in the poem, seem to be dependent on line 4: "Wie lacht die Flur!" (19), translated roughly as "And the meadows laugh!" in English, which once again appears below. The numerous emotions of joy are expressed by the following German words: *Freude* (joy), *Wonne* (great delight), *Glücklich* (happy), and *liebe* (love). All of these expressions of both love and happiness are spawned from the beautiful and natural scenery that is pure and uncorrupted. The symbols in the poem, however, are still apparent even when translated into English.

The following is *my own* translation of the poem into English. Prior to revealing it, the admission that the rhyme scheme of the second and fourth lines as well as the rhythm of the poem have both been lost needs to be made:

Mayfest
(Sometimes translated into English as "Mailed")
Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832)

How marvelously nature
Shines on me!
How the sun glistens!
And the meadows laugh!

The thousand voices
Penetrate from each twig
And bleed in
To the bushes

And joy and great delight
From every breast.
Oh earth oh sun
Oh fortune oh desire!

Oh lovely love,
As the golden grace,
The morning clouds
From every hillside;

Blessed are you
The fresh fields
In dew-filled dampness
The whole world is here.

Oh woman woman,
How I love you so!
Just as the sparkle in your eyes!
Shows your love for me!

Just as the lark
Loves singing and the air,
And morning flowers
Fill the sky with scent,

How I love you
With warmest blood,
You give me youth
And pleasure and courage

With new songs to learn
And dances to know!
Be forever happy
As you love me!

Not much is lost in the translation, but the poetic language used by Goethe, especially the [u] vowels and the [l] consonants which make the poem very smooth and soft—even pastoral, are replaced because the German words are replaced by English equivalents. What gives the poem its pastoral aspect in the original German is that the [u] vowel sounds and the lateral [l] sounds roll softly rather than sound hard like consonants such as [p] [k] [t] plosives or even tense vowels like [i]. Additionally, the reader can also feel a very

soft rhythm that comes from each stanza only having an alternate of five syllables in the first and third line of each stanza and then four in the second and fourth lines, giving a consistent and peaceful rhythm to the poem that has a soothing effect on the reader. Finally, it is necessary to mention that the syntax of the poem, i.e. the fact that the stanzas are broken with commas instead of periods, contains according to David Hill's analysis of "Mayfest" in *Literature of the Sturm und Drang* the "intensity of feeling forces" (29). Still, the objects in the poem, especially the rich aspects of May itself—the morning flowers, the heavenly air and fragrance, the hot blood that flows through the poet's veins, the aspects of songs and voices from both the meadows (including the laughter) and the lark flying overhead, and the songs sung and enjoyed by people—are all apparent in both the original and in a translation of the poem into English. It proves that the objects in allegory are impossible to separate from a poem and its overall meaning, for they are expressed through the poem's language code.

In addition to the already mentioned symbols of the poem, the poem's title, "Maifest" in German and "Mayfest" or "Mailed" in English, can be interpreted as the deep happiness which, like the love he has for this woman, gives him his youth. Again, there is some debate over whether the "fest" refers directly to people getting together and celebrating with joy and excitement in the atmosphere or if "fest" merely is the strong feelings of happiness and love he has for the woman that he must express poetically rather than in mere spoken words alone. Making this situation where the poem isn't about a festival even more feasible is the presence of nature in the first two stanzas, where all that can be heard is natural sounds like human laughter from the meadows and the thousand voices emerging from the trees and then getting absorbed by the bushes. While Germany does hold the Maifest holiday each year on the first Sunday in the month of May to celebrate both culture and nature, i.e. the presence of May flowers, the poem doesn't really seem to be about the festival at all. Saying so does injustice to the aspects of nature in the poem. For instance, the personification of the meadows and the trees with both human laughter and voices makes the presence of people essentially irrelevant. However, Goethe does seemingly bring people into the poem when he mentions "every breast" or, in the original German, "Aus jeder Brust" (19). Also, there are the morning flowers which are colorful and represent different human emotions. Each color can adequately describe a person's different feelings, even though the poem really only focuses on the emotions of happiness, joy, and love. Yet

another important object in this poem is the scent from the heavens, or, in the original German poem, “De Himmels Duft” (20), which implies divinity (even though Goethe was not truly a loyal Christian in any real sense) and possibly even the cosmic attraction that he has for this woman. A third important symbol is the hotness of his blood, *Blut* (or directly from the poem—*Blüten*, *Blütendampfe*, and *Blut*) (19-20), which is mentioned in the original poem in lines 5, 19, and 30 respectively, which flows through him, effectively connects him to nature, and is even present throughout nature in the form of water from the condensation from the morning clouds that forms the dew in the meadow and is the sign for the passion that he has for her. Finally, the “new songs to learn / And [new] dances to know,” or original lines 33 and 34 “Zu neuen Liedern, / Und Tänzen gibst!” are representative of human expression of feeling through both songs and motion which again implies youthful exuberance that he has for this woman; it also is a good parallel to the natural sounds that come from the meadow in the first two stanzas as well (“the laughter from the meadow” and the “thousand voices from the twigs”). These objects are easy to visualize as one reads this poem and the meaning or “code” of the poem all tie to the affinity he has for this young woman whom Goethe is dedicating this poem to. But the true embodiment of nature in the form of this woman can be seen with the mention of what roughly translates into English as “the sparkle in [her] eyes” in line 23, or in the original “Wie blinkt dien Auge!” (20). Arguably, the most important objects, however, to understanding the allegory of this poem and its intended meaning are a look at the natural aspects of the poem, namely the morning flowers, the dew on the grass, and the heavenly smell that comes from the fresh May air and the flowers that May brings in. While it may be elucidated what the inner meaning of the poem is, how the poem can be considered a speech act is yet another important issue that must now be raised.

The question pertaining to the ways in which a poem can be considered a speech act as of now notwithstanding remains unanswered. In an effort to answer the major question about how a poem is a speech act, to begin with, it once again becomes both appropriate and essential to look at the language of the poem. The assonance of the [u] vowel sounds accompanies the alliteration of the lateral [l] sounds, making for a consistency in the spoken sounds. The short stanzas represent short clauses so that the message is very clear to the message recipient or addressee. To reiterate, the stanzas being broken up by commas also add the drive of

feelings when we look at the poem's syntax. In addition to the language, there is one more issue as of now not yet addressed. Still to be discussed is the significance of the poem's title, especially in respect to any potential allegories that it has.

Why a reader can validate the claim that the poem is about the May festival of Germany held annually can be seen in the final four lines or lines 33-36 of the translated English poem: "With new songs to learn / and dances to know! / Be forever happy / as you love me." In other words, they are enjoying being in a festive environment with singing and dancing. One can easily see that it is not only the two of them together, but they are in an atmosphere that involves great happiness with singing and dancing, celebrating the beginning of a beautiful month. The allegories that are pertaining to the song and dance are just as important as those of the flowers, the morning dew on the grass, the blood running through his veins, and even the songs and dances that represent a deep-rooted happiness.

On the other hand, Todorov (mentioned earlier) lays claim to the historical fact that Goethe preferred symbols to allegory and even argued in his own words that in poetry (and even visual art), the

objects will be determined by a deep feeling which, when is pure and natural, will coincide with the best and loftiest objects and will ultimately render them symbolic. The objects represented in this way appear to exist for themselves alone and are nevertheless significant at the deepest level because of the ideal that always draws a certain generality along with it. If the symbolic points to something else beyond representation, it will always do so indirectly. (199)

In other words, Goethe argues that specific ideas are essential in poetry and general ideas allow for what Todorov calls "discursive expansiveness" (204). Likely, the end result is that the meaning becomes entirely too general and possibly yielding multiple meanings if poems are defined by allegorical rather than symbolic meanings.

Italian philosopher, writer, and novelist Umberto Eco seemingly restates this point that Todorov makes when he elaborates on the distinction between symbols and allegories. Eco defines a symbol in his groundbreaking work, *The Limits of Interpretation*, as "either a signifier correlated to its meaning by a law, that is, by a precise convention" (8), whereby others

can yield the same interpretation. Eco implies that allegories, even in poetry, are dependent upon images and from these images, the underlying concepts can be obtained. Although Eco does reveal that “the classical world took symbol and allegory as synonymous expressions” (9), both symbol and allegory are easily distinguishable from one another. In his own words: “the well-known distinction between symbol and allegory [are] drawn by Goethe” (8) as that which is interdependent on one another rather than indistinguishable from one another. Eco characterizes Goethe’s interpretations of symbols, especially the ones used in poetry as first experience (such as his experiences with being in nature and enjoying all of the sights and the sounds that are brought forward) and then somehow brought into an independent idea or an aspect of nature that is focused upon individually. Then from there, finally, a symbol is used to capture this idea in language. It is a three-fold process. That is to say, Goethe defines symbols, especially those in poetry, as the “signifiers” (8) for which the meaning is contained and later understood. The problem with allegory, as Eco elaborates, is that unlike a symbol; it is “incomplete, something else that it evoked, revealed, but does not conventionally say” (9). Nevertheless, Goethe’s poem, “Mayfest,” invokes nature and while there are symbols, the images of the poem convey allegory since the entire poem is referring to a festival that celebrates nature. Therefore, one can argue successfully that while Goethe preferred the symbol to allegory, allegory is part-and-parcel of his poem, “Mayfest,” and undoubtedly others that focused on nature as well.

Allegories, whether or not they were intended, are also important to answering the question pertaining to whether or not poems are speech acts. Even without a closer look at the symbols of “Mayfest,” it is important to duly note that just as important as it is in a spoken sentence for the meaning of the word to be shared by both the speaker and the listener, the symbols and even deeper allegories (akin to words being a part of whole phrases and sentences) always contain intended meaning that is decoded by the message recipient. In this sense, there is no real distinction between spoken words and printed words in a poem. The symbols and possible allegories used in Goethe’s poem, notwithstanding, deserve more explanation in connection with the symbolic values and will now be looked at more closely. The key area that underlies the symbols that Goethe uses is in nature itself.

The connection to nature being essential to the code of meaning in this poem is one that is of no surprise since literary critic and Goethe expert, George H. Calvert, in his work on Goethe titled *Goethe: Biographic*

Aesthetic Studies, contends that "Goethe was a great . . . naturalist . . . and an intellectual lover of nature" (278). Once again, the May flowers have a connection to Goethe himself as does the morning dew which is cold and contrasts with his hot blood flowing through him and the heavenly air that he is breathing, the voices (coming from the meadow, the trees, the lark and even the people) and the sunshine and beaming of the woman's eyes. All are all important and inextricable symbols in the poem. Each of these symbols relates internally to him. This connection to nature is not only present in Goethe, but is moreover an inseparable component of both allegory and poetry alike, as modern semiologists, the aforementioned Todorov and now Paul de Man, both argue. One issue about language code, however, is whether or not poetry and language can truly capture the meaning through representation of nature. Moreover, the question as to *how* poetry is a speech act is not yet answered entirely.

Both Todorov and de Man in their works, the already-mentioned *Theories of the Symbol* by Todorov and *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* by de Man respectively, state in slightly different ways the following about nature: it has aspects that language cannot describe. As Todorov asserts, something "beautiful may be equaled; it cannot be translated" (160). What makes it impossible, however, to use language or to even apply linguistic terms to poetry describing nature through allegory, is the overall use of the symbols of nature themselves. Todorov makes a claim that an "artistic message is *expressible* through poetry, painting, and so on; and at the same time, it is *inexpressible* by means of ordinary language" (160). Again, these ideas conflict with poetry being a speech act and something that linguistics can study alone for the reason that the poetic codes that use allegory through objects are not really speech acts in any true sense. The reason being is that ordinary language, that which is the focal point of linguistics, is insufficient to examine the allegorical objects of poetry, much more closely linked to visual art in this regard.

De Man goes even further in his *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* than Todorov, stating that language is not as important as the symbols themselves, or as he puts it, "a configuration of symbols ultimately leading to a total, single, and universal meaning" (188). This meaning, needless to say, depends upon the objects in both art and the words used to describe them in poetry, all forming the codes of meaning and the allegory. When these codes of meaning converge in

language, not only is it considered allegory, but it is also referred to as a “metalanguage” and, as Jakobson contends, it is also what legitimizes poetry as a speech act in the same way as spoken language. Again, it does so by linking the aspects of poetry to spoken language through the use of the codes and symbols that carry meaning in much the same way as words and utterances do. Therefore, the poet is seeking to eliminate any distinctions between the two forms of language: spoken and written.

Jakobson’s discussion of metalanguage, therefore, cannot be disregarded at this junction between language and symbols in poetry. On the other hand, can metalanguage possibly combine both the language of the poem and the signs in allegory that the objects present? If so, then would it be appropriate to consider poetry a speech act and not verbal art which Todorov and de Man imply is its purpose? Although it is very difficult to answer this question, what becomes apparent is that in both metalanguage and allegory, the code of meaning is what is of utmost importance. Yet another issue raised in this discussion, in effect, is how one can obtain a *universal meaning* with objects in allegory and the code of meaning which will now be considered.

Hermeneutics seeks to find how people understand messages, including allegory in poetry, through the code of meaning. One of the issues of contention and one that ultimately conflicts with the intended meaning and even poses a challenge to de Man’s notion of symbols convening and culminating into a *universal meaning* is what a semiotician whose specialty is hermeneutics, Peter Szondi, in his work, *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, calls “[t]he struggle of different tendencies [of interpretation]” (18). The fact of the matter is that the use of allegory calls on everyone to see the message in entirely the same light and to enable us to “decode” the objects of the poem and therefore understand the intended meaning of the poet. That is to say, what matters is that the message is received and understood by the interlocutor. While there may well be an intended message in the poem, the interlocutor must receive it through embracing the allegory and decoding the meaning of it, and possibly centuries later after it was written and without any knowledge of the identity of the poet if he or she remains anonymous.

In Szondi’s other important work in reference to literary hermeneutics, *On Textual Understanding*, an important discussion about how literary hermeneutics affects meaning unfolds. In a foreword to Peter Szondi’s discussion of codes, symbols, and allegories, semiotician Michael Hays lays

claim to why hermeneutics is a double-edged sword, especially with the removal of historical time difference and his "hermetic poem" (*On Textual Understanding*, 6) which is the idea that poems are essentially timeless since they exist long after the poet reaches the end of his or her life. The real problem that exists, however, is not the lack of availability of the poet. Rather, it is the ability of the poem to "be understood without ciphers" (*On Textual Understanding*, 6). Even though how one comes to understand the poem is what literary hermeneutics seeks to discuss and even to unfold, it is not that important in poetics; what is important is that the interlocutor receives the message that is intended. The question about whether or not the meaning can be understood is not so much an issue of importance in linguistics, however. It is simply the data collected from the speech sample. Also, it is understood that meaning is in the syntax of the message as well which is decoded by the interlocutor. Yet again, here is where poetry cannot really be considered a speech act. When the goal is both understanding and possibly responding to the message, the response truly is something one cannot really do when it comes to poetry but only in true speech acts.

Regarding speech acts like poetry and poetics in general, can speech acts at all pose the same allegory and symbols that poetry contains? Once again, one must consider Goethe's "Mayfest" as a proper case-in-point in the analysis to make a full-blown comparison between spoken language and poetry. Goethe's language, for one thing, uses consistency in both vowel sounds and consonant sounds in the poem, distinct from spoken language which normally doesn't contain patterns at all. Therein lies one inconsistency between speech acts and poetry. Yet another inconsistency, though, arises when one considers the use of the lexicon in the poem, which, just to name four of the objects, include *the mayflowers*, *the sky or the heavens*, *the cold morning dew which contrasts with Goethe's hot blood that flows through him*, *the voices (from nature, people, and the lark)*, *nature and the sun shining (and golden grace)*, *the gleam in the woman's eyes*, *the songs and dances*, and possibly even *the May festival itself*. As broached earlier, the mayflowers likely represent the various colors that comprise human emotions; the sky or *Himmels* could possibly represent divinity even though Goethe's loyalty to Christianity was questionable at best (as mentioned earlier); Goethe's blood likely represents his passion that he has for the woman in the poem; the morning dew once again stands for the contrast with his hot blood; the voices add to the acoustic element of the poem and makes the sensory experiences of Goethe and the woman

legitimate, which that both can share together; the sun shining and golden grace refer to rays of happiness that are cast on him from above the earth or Erd'; and finally, the happiness that people express through song and dance (which legitimizes the idea that "Mayfest" is about a festival in Germany to mark the beginning of May) is truly the catalyst for an instantiation of happiness that Goethe has for this woman upon either his thought of her or her physical appearance. All told, there is a profundity in the terms that are used in the poem which is due to the metaphorical and symbolic aspect of it. Spoken language or mundane speech acts, *per se*, will not with any degree of certainty be metaphorical.

Since poetry itself is metaphorical in its application and can be distinct from speech acts in this sense, it is studied very closely in semiotics for its symbolic and allegorical content. Even though speech acts are associated with the recitation of the poem and with the phonetic aspect of the language used, the metaphorical and symbolic aspect of poetry creates more of a distinction between speech acts and poetry (including poetics) as opposed to a union between the two of them.

What is still inconclusive and still unresolved at this point, however, is whether or not poetry really is a speech act in-and-of itself which Jakobson, perhaps inadvertently, intended it to be when he argued it needed to be studied in linguistics so vehemently. Nevertheless, his demonstration through the six-fold matrix of how poetry is a "metalanguage" and can carry the same meaning as spoken language is very well applied to poetry and linguistics simultaneously.

On the other hand and perhaps at the risk of making the issue of whether or not poetry is a speech act, raising Todorov's ideas further from his *On Textual Understanding* gives a perspective that is seen as contrary to Jakobson's. He claims that literature and spoken language are completely distinct and distinguishable from one another when he argues the following: "Literature would . . . be distinguished from other arts by its oblique, indirect mode of representation. Sounds evoke meaning; but the latter [sounds] in turn becomes a signifier, whose signified is the world represented. In this sense, poetry is a *secondary* semiotic system" (Todorov 132). What Todorov is contending is that poetry is on a very different level from our speech system because speech is connected to sounds and includes those "capable of imitating a noise [onomatopoeia? interjection?]" (Todorov 132), and not simply lines composing a stanza in a poem.

Nevertheless, poetry has much to offer the field of both linguistics and semiotics at the same time. Poetry uses a code of meaning to convey messages between the poet and the interlocutor and does so both in rich language that the field of linguistics can examine closely, yet it also requires the use of allegory through objects that are described which linguistics doesn't deal with. Unfortunately, linguistics alone is therefore insufficient to examine not only the relationship in discourse between the message sender and the recipient, but also to examine the code of meaning contained in the allegory as well since language alone does not extend far enough. The purpose of this essay is in no way to discredit the late Jakobson's work, for it is invaluable to the fields of both linguistics and semiotics alike. It is merely to express that there needs to be both a linguistic and semiological analysis (in other words, one that analyzes both allegory and the code of meaning through its objects in much the same way that fine art is examined) for the poem to truly be understood. Regardless, poetry is truly verbal art because the beauty of language used and the symbols that it contains are aesthetically pleasing and part-and-parcel of both civilization and education at the same time.

When it comes to linguistics, however, poetry is very difficult to integrate into research and analysis. That is because of its reliance on acoustic sounds, signs, and symbols along with the signified, which is the message that is coded, all needing to be taken together to receive the intended message. While it is the case that poetry does have a coded message, the message's meaning exists both within symbols and allegory at the same time. Consequently, it is more complicated than merely the signs and patterns of signs in a sentence which give the meaning.

In conclusion, the field of linguistics as it is known needs to be expanded in order to accommodate poetry and poetics for a twofold reason: Poetry is literature, not signs that are acoustic, and poetry also relies on both symbols and allegory at the same time whereas linguistics alone merely focuses on the acoustic nature and laws of a spoken language primarily.

The question about how a poem can be considered a speech act is by now an answerable one. The consonants and vowels can be looked at in both the original work and even an accompanied translation that equates to the original work. Next, a look at the stanzas and clauses equates with the syntax of spoken language. Once again, it is important to mention that the breaks with commas instead of periods in each stanza is very important in looking at what Jakobson calls the "emotive" aspect of the poem, or the

emotional forces. Additionally, the syllables add the dimension of rhythm to the poem, still important in both spoken language and poetry. Finally, the look at the symbols and allegories is the most crucial aspect that links it to a speech act. In semiotics, the key factor in deriving the meaning is through the shared understanding of what the symbols, spoken or written, equate to. The look at the poem's symbols and allegories are the equivalent of two people sharing the same meaning of a word or spoken utterance, making poetry not only "written art," as Jakobson contends it is, but also a speech act in itself.

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