# Language Poetry: Theory and Practice

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**ABSTRACT**

This article aims to review the basic and typical features of Language Poetry and analyse them in a number of the best representative of this particular mode of versification. Language Poetry appeared in the second half of the 20th century and soon found many followers and practitioners who celebrated and commended its emphasis on formal and visual qualities of poetry and regarded linguistic and lexical elements as significant instruments in conveying certain feelings, ideas, or thoughts. The central questions of the present article are: what are the standard characteristics of Language Poetry and what functions do they play in a typical Language poem. To answer the question, first a brief historical and conceptual digest of the term is given and then the various formal and thematic implications of the employed Language Poetry aspects are explored in some of the well-known Language poems including "Poem" and "My/My/My" by Bernstein, "A Substance in a Cushion" by Stein, "Chronic Meanings" by Perelman, "the nose of kim darby's double" and "NON" by Ron Silliman, "A Song of Degrees" by Zukofsky, and "Fleecing" by James Sherry. The present research argues that all of these poems are clearly theme-based as much as they are clearly form-based. In other words, Language Poetry is not simply and merely about the semantic load or potentials or the visual effect of the selected/arranged words, which may seem nonsensical, since meaning and content – or even the didactic message – is almost always a very important aspect of Language Poetry.

## Introduction

An important American poetic practice in the late 20th century is Language Poetry or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E P=O=E=T=R=Y, which was named after a magazine bearing the same title and which flourished in the 1970s. Language Poetry, as an avant garde poetic movement, did not simply intend to bring renewed interest to linguistics or language in general; rather, it took it upon itself to bring about critical awareness concerning the structures, constituents, and codes of poetic language itself. In effect, its principal objective was to show how linguistic elements are represented and formulated to transmit ideas, thoughts, and meaning through poetic language, hence the title of the movement. In developing their poetics, members of Language Poetry took as their starting point the emphasis on the method evident in the Modernist poetic tradition, particularly as represented by Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky. Language Poetry has been a controversial topic in American letters from the 1970s to the present. Even the name itself has been problematic: while a number of poets and critics have used the name of the journal to refer to the group, many others have chosen to use the term, when they used it at all, without the equal signs (=), while "Language Writing" and "Language-centred Writing" are also commonly used. Beside Stein and Zukofsky, some of the other major Language Poets are Steve Benson, Abigail Child, Tina Darragh, Carla Harryman, Madeline Gins, Michael Gottlieb, Fanny Howe, Susan Howe, Marjorie Perloff, Bernadette Mayer, James Sherry, Jean Day, Rosmarie Waldrop, and Hannah Weiner. The list accurately reflects the high proportion of female poets across the spectrum of Language Writing movement. African-American poets associated with the movement include Hunt, Nathaniel Mackey, and Harryette Mullen.

On the West Coast, an early seed of Language Poetry was the launch of *This* magazine, edited by Robert Grenier and Barrett Watten, in 1971. Published in New York and edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* ran from 1978 to 1982, and featured poetics, forums on writers in the movement, and themes such as "The Politics of Poetry" and "Reading Poetry." Equally significant for understanding this movement of divergent, though interconnected, poetic practices is Ron Silliman's poetry newsletter *Tottel's* (197 - 1981), Bruce Andrews's selection in a special issue of *Toopick* (1973), as well as *Tuumba Press* edited by Lyn Hejinian and *ROOF* edited by James Sherry. Some other literary magazines associated with the movement in the 1970s and the 1980s are *A Hundred Posters*, *Big Deal, Dog City, Hills, Là Bas, MIAM, Oculist Witnesses,* and *QU*. Significant compilations of Language texts include Silliman's selection "The Dwelling Place: 9 Poets" in *Alcheringa* (1975), "The Politics of the Referent," edited by Steve McCaffery for the Toronto-based publication, *Open Letter* (1977), and Charles Bernstein's "A Language Sampler" in *The Paris Review* (1982). In addition to magazines and presses, a number of poetry reading series, especially in New York, Washington, and San Francisco, were important venues for the establishment of Language Poetry and for the development of dialogue and collaboration among its practitioners. Most influential gatherings were the Ear Inn reading series in New York, founded by Ted

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Greenwald and Charles Bernstein, Folio Books in Washington, founded by Doug Lang, and the Grand Piano reading series in San Francisco.

**Discussion**

In the present article, first the characteristic and typical features of Language Poetry are enumerated and introduced; on the next level, these formal and conceptual qualities are identified and discussed in a number of the best and most renowned representatives of this particular mode of writing. The reasons for their application and their stylistic and intellectual relevance are also explicated. The central questions of the present research, consequently, are: What are the general and standard characteristics of Language Poetry (both theme-wise and form-wise) and how and to what purpose are they employed in a number of Language poems? The selected poets are Charles Bernstein, Gertrude Stein, Bob Perelman, Ron Silliman, and Louis Zukofsky. Obviously, there are so many contemporary poets who can be, one way or another, linked to Language Poetry that it is impossible to write about their poems in a single article. This article, therefore, focuses on a few but massively influential Language writers whose poems capture all of the standard and recurrent aspects of Language Poetry. Having said that, not all of the poems composed by these writers are necessarily samples of Language Poetry. The poems (or excerpts thereof) for analysis include: "Poem" and "My/My/My" by Bernstein, "A Substance in a Cushion" by Stein, "Chronic Meanings" by Perelman, "the nose of kim darby's double" and "NON" by Ron Silliman, "A Song of Degrees" by Zukofsky, and "Fleecing" by James Sherry.

Typical features of Language Poetry as a highly and characteristically experimental poetic practice include:

● emphasis on the involvement of the reader as well as on non-narrative, non-conventional poetic form. As Silliman has put it, "the reader is forced to deduce [meaning] from the partial views and associations posited in each sentence" (1987, 84).

● random thoughts, observations, and at times seemingly nonsensical expressions (McGann, 198, xii)

● little or no sympathy with the presence of the speaker or of the poet

● the discontinuity and fragmentation of lines, which replace stanzas as the bases of the structure of the poem (Perloff, 1998, 3)

● the rejection of the boundaries between prose and poetry, especially in longer texts, so that poetry approaches prose

● emphasis on visual effects and the formation of words on paper

● the formation of lexical clusters or random lexical collages which are seemingly meaningless

● belief in Bernstein's dictum "there is no natural writing style" (1997, 43)

● belief in "the notion of prosodic variety" as formulated and practised by Zukofsky (Quartermain, 2002, 62)

● systematic and deliberate derangement of grammar and syntax via shifting, inserting, or deleting certain words or ignoring the rules of spacing, punctuation, capitalisation, or other mechanics of writing

● the coinage of new words by intentional deletions and omissions or word combinations

● the intensity and force of linguistic units and blank spaces

● the frequency of apparently meaningless lexical repetitions and bizarre and incongruous juxtapositions of words, phrases, or fragments

● the mixture of various registers and styles

● index-writing or writing long lists of similar or similar sounding words

On the nature and function of Language Poetry, Michael Cuddihy has written that Language Poets

see the language and language habits poets inherit as hindrances to perception and feeling, but even more, to the precise expression of these. However esoteric or difficult much of their work may seem to some people, their concern with form and the investigation of the structure of the self through the medium of language aims at the liberation of the larger society. If there is an avant-garde in poetry today, it will most likely be found among them. We want our readers to be able to sample the modes of this writing instead of merely hearing about it. (in Silliman, 1982, i)

Explicating the term in his *Poetry and Language Writing*, Arnold has asserted that Language Poetry

has been variously defined as non-referential or of diminished reference, as textual poetry or a critique of expressivism, as a reaction against the 'workshop' poetry enshrined in creative writing departments across the United States. It has been variously described as non-academic, theory conscious, avant-garde, postmodern and oppositional. (2007, 1)

In the same vein, defining Language Poetry, Shetly has argued that "being members of the avant-garde, its exponents could lead critics into the thickets of radical theory" in which they may or may not have believed (1993, 139). It does not imply that Language Poetry is only a sort of abstract, purely experimental, or automatic writing which hails and celebrates aestheticism, formal or linguistic effects of word and phrases, or the poetics of theory-based writing. In contrast, Language Poetry may contain strong social or personal themes and messages. As Hartley has asserted, "most Language poets attempt to remind us of the socially contrived basis of any writing. They do not do so, however, by abandoning modes of writing, for such an action is impossible. It is the mode-that-is-meant, so to speak, the exploration of the possibilities for meaning-production, which lies behind most Language poetry" (1989, 3).

Language Poets also drew on the philosophical works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, especially his concepts of language-games and meaning as use. They rejected the use of expressive lyric sentiment present in a number of earlier poetry movements of the 20th century to which the Language Poets felt a kinship. Language Poets' conscious attempt was espousing the work of the Modernist poetry of the first half of the 20th century with the poststructuralist work of the late 1950s and the 1960s, during which time certain groups of poets had followed William Carlos Williams in his use of idiomatic American English instead of what they considered the 'heightened,' or overtly poetic language favoured by New Critics. In particular, New York School poets like John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara and The Black Mountain poets like Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan stressed both speech and everyday language in their poetry. Many of these poets used procedural methods based on mathematical sequences and other logical and organising devices to structure their poems in such a way that their carefully constructed and meticulously-crafted form is depleted of any premeditated content, a practice which Language Poets did not hesitate to borrow. In fact, the application of process, especially at the level of the sentence, was to become the basic tenet of the Language Poetry praxis.

However, unlike New York School poets and The Black Mountain poets, Language Poets typically underlined metonymy, synecdoche, and extreme instances of paratactic structures in their compositions, which, even when employing everyday speech, created a far different texture, incomprehensible and difficult to understand at first glance. On the other hand, the New American poets privileged self-expression, while Language Poets tended to downplay expression and regard the poem as a construction in and of language itself. However, it must be added that for all their playful, throw-away appearance, considerable knowledge and literary skill is needed for deciphering Language poems as their linguistic fragments have to be entertaining and at the same time and at some level, meaningful or aesthetically, verbally, or formally impressive.

Most of the poets whose work falls within the scope of Language Writing are still alive and still active contributors. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Language Poetry was widely received as a significant discipline in innovative poetry and Postmodern literature (see the next chapter) in the United States, a trend accentuated by the fact that some of its leading proponents took up academic posts in Poetics, Creative Writing, and English Literature departments in prominent American universities. This implies that Language Poetry remains an interesting legacy that will continue to bewilder and invigorate generations of poets and readers.

After the presented import on the nature and function of Language poetry, now the selected Language poems (listed earlier) are concisely commented on. The first poem for a brief analysis is Bernstein's "Poem":

here. Forget.
There are simply tones
cloudy, breezy
birds & so on.
Sit down with it.
It's time now.
There is no more natural sight.
Anyway transform everything
silence, trees
commitment, hope
this thing inside you
flow, this movement of eyes
set of words
all turns, all grains.
At night, shift
comets, "twirling planets,
suns, bits of illuminated pumice"
pointing out, in harsh tones
cancers & careers.
"Newer Limoges please."
Pick some value
mood, idea, type or smell of paper
iridescent, lackluster
&, "borne in peach vessels,"
just think
"flutter & cling"
with even heavier sweep
unassuaged
which are the things
of a form, etc
that inhere.
Fair adjustment
becomes space between
crusts of people

strange, rending:
as sound of some importance
diffuses
"as dark red circles"
digress, reverberate
connect, unhook.
Your clothes, for example
face, style
radiate mediocrity
coyly, slipping
& in how many minutes
body & consciousness
deflect, "flame on flare"
missed purpose.
Your eyes
glaze
thought stumbles, blinded
speck upon speck
ruffling edges.
"But do not be delighted yet."
The distance positively entrances.
Take out pad & pen
crystal cups, velvet ashtray
with the gentility of easy movement
evasive, unaccountable
& puffing signs
detach, unhinge
beyond weeds, chill
with enthusiastic smile
& new shoes
"by a crude rotation"
hang
a bulk of person
"ascending," "embodied." (1978, 59)

Some of the salient Language Poetry features of the poem are: aversion from didacticism, standard grammar or mechanics of writing, as well as of rhyme and traditional metrical patterns, prose-like poetry, run-on lines, juxtaposition of unrelated images, ideas, or concepts, internal rhyming and alliteration, emphasis on the linguistic and lexical potentials and thrust of words and syllables, and bold and unreserved self-expression. Theme-wise, explicitly or implicitly ideas include: nostalgia, loneliness, confusion, ignorance, and mediocrity of contemporary life. In the next poem, "My/My/My" by the same writer, the remarkable formal and conceptual elements are: repetition, collocation of words and ideas, which at the first glance seem to have been randomly deployed and arranged, and the inclusion of a rather easily noticeable theme, namely, selfishness and passion for possession: "my pillow/ my shirt/ my house/ my supper/ my tooth/ my money/ my kite/ my job/ my bagel/ my spatula/ my blanket/ my arm/ my painting/ my fountain pen/ my desk/ my room/ my turn/ my book/ my hopelessness/ my wallet/ my print/ my sock/ my toe/ my stamp/ my introduction/ my luggage/ my plan/ my mistake/ my monkey/ my friend …" (1978, 97). On Bernstein's general poetic style, which is also applicable to both of the selected poems, Aji has written that in his poems, the

line is disrupted, meets an obstacle, becomes a line in the strictest sense of the term, loses itself in a swirl. The itinerary of the text, whose mantra-like repetitiveness induces a numbing of the quest for meaning, places the word in a landscape, as suggested by the title. Yet one is also forced to

see that the word itself creates this landscape. (in Perloff and Dworkin, 2009, 158)

The next selected Language poem, Stein's "A Substance in a Cushion," is manifestly written in prose, not in poetry, even though it is quite rich in its astute application of various kinds of figures of speech:

The change of color is likely and a difference a very little difference is prepared. Sugar is not a vegetable.
Callous is something that hardening leaves behind what will be soft if there is a genuine interest in there being present as many girls as men. Does this change. It shows that dirt is clean when there is a volume.

A cushion has that cover. Supposing you do not like to change, supposing it is very clean that there is no change in appearance, supposing that there is regularity and a costume is that any the worse than an oyster and an exchange. Come to season that is there any extreme use in feather and cotton. Is there not much more joy in a table and more chairs and very likely roundness and a place to put them.

A circle of fine card board and a chance to see a tassel.
What is the use of a violent kind of delightfulness if there is no pleasure in not getting tired of it. The question does not come before there is a quotation. In any kind of place there is a top to covering and it is a pleasure at any rate there is some venturing in refusing to believe nonsense. It shows what use there is in a whole piece if one uses it and it is extreme and very likely the little things could be dearer but in any case there is a bargain and if there is the best thing to do is to take it away and wear it and then be reckless be reckless and resolved on returning gratitude … (1997, 3-4)

In the poem, as Mable has contended, "every word lives, and apart from concept, it is so exquisitely rhythmical and cadenced that if we read it aloud and receive it as pure sound, it is like a sensuous music" (in Stein, 2012, 2). The sentences and phrases seem to be delirious statements in a trance-like state just before falling into sleep; nevertheless, like other typical Language poems, it gradually becomes more and more evocative and suggestive. As Daniel has argued, Stein "needed to speak a language that was deliberately removed from, at odds with, the ordinary. She wrote of her own feeling of being 'misplaced', of being a 'stranger'" (2009, 71). Non-sequiturs, gibberish phrases, and grammatical and stylistic mistakes abound in the excerpt; however, the reader soon realises that a thought or a clue is cleverly embedded in each one of them. In this lie the pleasure and the artistry of Stein's Language poems.

The following extract from Bob Perelman's "Chronic Meanings," published in his *Virtual Reality*, is the next sample for Language poetry, which deserves a brief treatment:
The phone is for someone.
The next second it seemed.
But did that really mean.
Yet Los Angeles is full.
Naturally enough I turn to.
Some things are reversible, some.
You don't have that choice.
I'm going to Jo's for.
Now I've heard everything, he.
One time when I used.
The amount of dissatisfaction involved.
The weather isn't all it's.
You'd think people would have.
Or that they would invent.
At least if the emotional.

The presence of an illusion.
Symbiosis of home and prison.
Then, having become superfluous, time.
One has to give to.
Taste: the first and last.
I remember the look in.
It was the first time.
Some gorgeous swelling feeling that.
Success which owes its fortune.
Come what may it can't.
There are a number of.
But there is only one.
That's why I want to … (1993, 138)

In the extract, almost all of the lines are grammatically incomplete, if not so semantically, too. Each line consists of five words followed by an unexpected full stop; this might indicate the envisaged sudden death of the speaker in the "Symbiosis of home and prison." The truncated lines can be taken as a reflection of the speaker's truncated life (here that of Lee Hickman, who had contracted AIDS). In other words, a deliberate and well-planned form here denotes arbitrary and imminent death. As in other Language poems, rhyme and metre are absent, scarce, or even accidental. Other conspicuous formal features are alliteration and lexical repetition. It must be added that the speaker talks about an impending death in a non-sentimental and detached way and focuses, instead, on mundane and down-to-earth objects and routines of daily life such as making a phone call, talking about the weather, eating, or making decisions. The phlegmatic tone of the speaker may paradoxically intensify the underlying tension of the poem and his inner turmoil or sympathy; it can be interpreted as his desperate and futile attempt to forget about a looming tragic end. This is what Perelman has said about the poem:

'CM' ["Chronic Meanings"] was written on hearing that a friend had AIDS; it is an attempt on my part to see what happened to meaning as it was interrupted. If one expects a poem to be more or less narrative, focusing sharply or softly on spots of time, "Chronic Meanings" might feel evasive. But in fact I was trying to be direct; the sentences came as matter-of-factly from my experience and imagination as I could manage. At the same time I knew I would be writing down only the first five words of each sentence, so there was a great pressure for some sort of concision, though I certainly wasn't after a haiku-like or 'poetic' compression: I wanted to feel what real-life, conventional articulation felt like when it was halted in the middle. I did work on (edit) the results to avoid habit and redundancy. As opposed to the classical received sense of poetry outbraving time, "Chronic Meanings" seems to me to face the other way, and to try to register time's evanescence." (1996, 1)

The connotation is that Language Poetry can be very theme-based as it is evidently language-based.

The following lines are extracted from Silliman's "the nose of kim darby's double." The usual Language Poetry stylistic tropes are discernible here, too – the lack or scarcity of punctuation marks and capitalisation, the collocation of seemingly haphazardly arranged words and phrases, incomplete sentences, sense behind apparent nonsensicality, colloquialism, the absence of rhyme and metrical patterns, and irregular stanzaic clusters. As in other samples of Language poems, the lines are loaded with imagery, poetic devices, and motifs.

Canyons, paths

dug thru the snow
Tunnels
the walls as high as
shoulders
The weight of it
heavier
when it begins to melt
& then, at sunset
still midafternoon
the temperature drops
wind over the ridge
so that by dawn
each surface
hardens into ice
Dams clog the drains
to turn the window
facing north
into a waterfall . . .
Driving north
past the mall turn, King
of Prussia, past Bridgeport
and the narrow brick streets of Norr'stown
the road eases up, what
was once country
into a more purely rural
suburbiana (golf course
blanketed in white
A gas station that has not yet
turned into a minmart
Swath cut
by the powerlines
right thru the old quarry, the pit
filled with water
is called a lake, each
new townhouse with its private dock
tho if you look upstairs
you will discover the doors to the closets
all made of vinyl
Someone in another room is singing the alphabet
Barely visible in the high slush
fog mixed with rain
a woman waits for her bus
The form of the flower
exfoliating
petals dropping away
to reveal a new, further flower
now red, now blue
each shape a perpetual
revision, this
leaf thick and milky, this
spiky, hard, this
covered with the finest fuzz
blossoms … (2004, 205)

Many of the afore-mentioned elements are also present in the following lines from Silliman's "NON," which is also a good example for Language Poetry concrete or pattern poetry. Like other Language poems briefly introduced so far, the poem exhibits rather easily detectable themes; here, they include senility, imprisonment, depression, death, social unrest, mechanicality and superficiality of contemporary life:

Proto-mallie: the flaneur.
"The older I get the more
floors I discover
at Macys." Little red

thermos looks like
fire extinguisher. Ants won't cross
trail of
petroleum jelly. Hat
with no bill, cubist
leather beret.
Sore on my tongue, smell
of dung. Voice's choices
sight's relight. In gaol
they make you surrender
your panty hose
to prevent suicide.
The crowd of protesters
approach, chanting
"out of the boutiques
and into the streets."
Seagull brushes
up against my cap.
Rude Work Ahead.
Velcro strap,
reusable cast.
Dog's name
is Cutty.
Eco-Brutalism, Deep
Semiology. Sturgeon
General. Boot failure!
Odd trim
of the ear's rim.
The neck seen as a tube is
seen incorrectly.
Post-its peeking
from a three-ring binder.
Dog snarls
behind window of
locked Rabbit.
Morning's magic means
make my
daily bread. Ears
put head in
brackets. Hypervariables
in DNA show up
on screen like
Bar code
on a cereal box.
Rushed writing.
one is to words
always an outsider,
tho they invade your head,
colonize dreams … (Ibid., 314)

Zukofsky's "A Song of Degrees" is the next Language Poetry sample. It is a minimalist poem which comprises of only nine words arranged in different fugue-like permutations and combinations. It brings to the mind Scroggins's observation that "Zukofsky looked to the fugal forms of Johann Sebastian Bach and other baroque composers for formal analogies in making his poem" (2015, 37). All of the words, either partially or fully, rhyme; also, all of the words alliterate – two words, namely, "mirror" and "error," through repetition. The most remarkable aspect of the poem, in my opinion, is the shift of meaning caused by the shift of words or punctuation marks in the short phrasal clusters. Ungrammaticality, ellipses, and reductionism (as the poem proceeds) are other stylistic tropes.

(Clear mirror)

Care.
His error.
In her care-
Is clear.
Hear, her
Clear
Mirror,
Care
His error.
In her,
Care
Is clear.
Hear her
Clear mirror
Care his error
In her care
Is clear
Hear
Her
Clear
Mirror
Care
His
Error in
Her
Care
Is clear
Hear
Her
Clear,
Mirror,
Care
His
Error in
Her-
Care
Is
Clear. (2006, 110)

The title of the poem echoes Pslams 120 to 134 in the *Old Testament* (beginning with "In my distress I cried unto the Lord" and ending with "The Lord that made heaven and earth / bless thee out of Zion") each known as "A Song of Degrees." Like the Biblical prayer, the poem suggests a purification process or a spiritual progression: "error"/ "distress" terminates in clarity / blessing. According to Foley,

Zukofsky's title emphasizes the religious aspect of the poem … *The New Scofield Reference Bible* comments that the word "degrees" is better rendered by "ascents": "these Psalms were either sung by pilgrims on the ascending march from the Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem, or…were sung by worshipers from all parts of Palestine as they went up to Jerusalem for the great festivals. An alternate view is that the headings, 'A Song of Ascents,' refer to the fifteen steps leading to Court of Israel in the Temple, and that these Psalms were sung on these steps" … the "degrees" are perhaps the different modes of understanding we have as the poem's syntax constantly causes the words to change contexts. (2007, 5)

The religious overtones of the poem as well as its thematic and semantic load remind us, yet again, that Language Poetry is not simply and merely about form and the constituents of language; put another way, Language Poetry can be as meaning-conscious as it is form-conscious.

The last Language poem to be tersely treated in the present article is Sherry's "Fleecing." The poem clearly lacks a traditional poetic structure; in fact, we can hardly call it a piece of poetry. In addition, figures of speech are absent or rare, to say the least (in the excerpt, seemingly coincidental alliteration is the most conspicuous literary device). The text opens with a quotation from Pierre-Jean de Beranger (1780-1857), whom Portis calls "the most popular French songwriters of all time" (2004, 11).

"Alas! poor sheep! You will always be sheared!" – Beranger
Mall
 Questionless motive (duck in pond); on the want market say anything.
What angel demolition team. That fret shorn.
Back and front to wall. Sanguine sanguinary.
Meanwhile continue without lives – a little fish and a little salad. The pitcher lacked likes the batter.
But if we are good, he is not us. Paki bashing. Equal rots.
A free license. Take my work off me for money. Moil of chickens.
Associative giggle. Last licks. To take to the cleaner, if you choose a la mode, again not or but and.
The construction of personality in order to ....
How the phone call peeled the onion for Herbie. Once upon it perch. Fireescape tomatoes.
To make her cat less hot. To run to fat to mean when the police are after you. What grammatical must rhetorical would. Plum wine substitutes for plumbline.
Sheer hype of forgetfulness to let her lie. There there. If you honestly want to know, No.
I will not give you a quarter reminds me of the time means took me for a bundle. Although adjacent to the summer Vatican, he ignores proximity. Causation first or last the way you're looking.
To avoid similar embarrassment, he spent most of the winter rubbing against a tree. Yes, I would like to, sometime … (in Silliman, 1982, 109)

Many of the lines and phrases are ungrammatical and incomprehensible; also, some of them are semantically and syntactically incomplete. Despite all this, the title and a good number of phrases provide us with useful clues for demystifying the text. The word "Fleecing," for instance, means 'ripping someone off' or 'defrauding someone'; it follows that those who are 'ripped off' are ordinary people who are compared to "poor sheep." The words "Mall" and "moil" both underscore the negative connotation of "Fleecing." In the context, therefore, the title of the poem refers to widespread materialism, underpayment, and unfair and exorbitant taxation. Beranger's comic opener, as a result, can be said to intensity the tragic drudgery of tax-payers or their probable bankruptcy. Form and formal deliberation here are not as poignant as, for example, in "NON" or "A Song of Degrees," but it can be argued that the formal sloppiness of the poem can signify monetary or financial chaos and slovenliness of the society. In other words, formal anarchy stands for and speaks of economic anarchy. As in the previous sample Language poems, language and linguistic constituents accommodate certain ideas and themes.

**Conclusion**

This article has sought to review the basic formal and conceptual elements of Language Poetry as an important postmodern style in writing poems and identify and explore them in some of its best representatives. The poems for analysis have been:

Charles Bernstein's "Poem" and "My/My/My," Gertrude Stein's "A Substance in a Cushion," Bob Perelman's "Chronic Meanings," Ron Silliman's "the nose of kim darby's double" and "NON," Louis Zukofsky's "A Song of Degrees," and James Sherry's "Fleecing." It was argued that the unifying and rather ubiquitous formal aspects of Language Poetry include: emphasis on the potential thrust of linguistic and lexical components of each and every word, little or no sympathy for traditional rhyme and rhythmic patterns, writing predominantly through phrases and at times seemingly delirious and confused chains of words and clusters that are usually ungrammatical, incomplete, or non-standard when it comes to the prescribed mechanics of writing. Focusing a small but important number of Language poems, the articles also demonstrated that in spite of all their formal bravado, these poems are quite visibly content-conscious and even content-based in that normally a more or less easily discernible theme or set of themes and motifs are encoded in the fabric of the text. It implies that in Language Poetry, form can be approached as a signifier which refers to and reinforces a certain feeling or thought. The article, therefore, refutes Waldrop's Formalistic assertion that "poets no longer speak of expressing the void, or even expressing nothing, but the very concept of expression is abolished. The poem does not express, it is" (1971, 22). All of the covered poems are replete with messages, personal ideas and viewpoints, and reactionary comments about some social ill or cultural decadence. Is means that Language Poetry is not simply about linguistic aspects of poetry since form and content are equally important; they mirror each other and make each other more poignant and effective.

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