

**Breaking (Down) the Sound Barrier: Explorations of Sound Patterning as a Distinct
and Disparate Layer of Meaning**

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Abstract

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This paper is an exploration of how sound and sound play create layers of meaning and complexity in poetry in relation to and alongside semantic meaning. Employing Stephen Burt's description of the nearly Baroque, Baroque Baroque, and rococo to categorize kinds of poems, techniques such as syntax, alliteration, assonance, and rhythm are identified and addressed in various contemporary poems from Karen Volkman, Lucie Brock-Broido, and Jorie Graham. The study concludes by identifying how the techniques may affect the writer's creative work.

Breaking (Down) the Sound Barrier: Explorations of Sound Patterning as a Distinct and Disparate Layer of Meaning

Why sound—why noise? It's the elaborate and the elaboration. The ornate and the ornery. In the poems I've been drawn to over the past two years, the ones that invoke a variety of registers and sonic gestures are the ones that explore and experience their complexities of meaning in sonically interesting motions. For the past few years, I believe that pertaining to craft, much of my development has been related to the construction and de-construction of narrative and narrative fragmentation—how to develop a narrative within a poem. In this thesis, I seek to close read certain poems for their patterns of sound play and structure, including alliterations, repetitions, and rhythms. By focusing on these moments and the chiasmi they form in the course of poems, I seek to identify how the effects of these moments develop different levels of dialogue for the reader compared with the semantic meaning of the words themselves.

The poets whom I've been reading and the ones discussed here are contemporary; however, they demonstrate how my own poetry roots and lineage have emerged and intertwined. Karen Volkman, Lucie Brock-Broido, and Jorie Graham may be the most recent branch on my poetic ancest-tree, but they've offered me a different connection to some of my other poetry relatives. These poets have given me a way to link sound to more semantically driven narrative structures. Understanding their use of sound techniques and patternings has led me to consider how narrative can exist on different levels within a poem.

In this essay, the exploration of sound pattern partakes in a multi-step approach. I seek to distinguish between elaborately “noisy” poems and quieter, more semantically

driven ones. Particularly, I propose close readings of selections from Volkman and Brock-Broido as more sonically ornate examples and a close reading of a poem of Graham to identify how sound patterning can function on a quieter scale. The presence of sound patterning in both kinds of poems opens up a different kind of narrative space—it builds a multi-dimensional world that requires a different sort of work than a poem without (or with limited) sound pattern. And so, in the explorations or close-readings of sound, I’m looking to identify how these sound patterns manifest, what forms they take. Particularly, I’m interested in the presence of a hinge—a fold—a chiasmus—of sound, and through that fold and folding-over, how the reader participates in the experience of the poem.

To identify distinctions between “loud” and “quiet” poems, I propose an alignment with some of Stephen Burt’s terminology that he presented in an essay for the *Boston Review* regarding his conception of the “nearly Baroque,” the “Baroque Baroque,” and the rococo as it pertains to poetry. For Burt, poets of the “nearly Baroque” put “excess, invention, and ornament first,” and the poems by this definition “exhibit elaborate syntax and sonic patterning, without adopting pre-modernist forms.”¹ Furthermore, nearly Baroque poems have “subjects—things and characters in a preexisting, historical world—and often include proper nouns. But they rarely focus on one subject; instead, they weave together several topics or scenes in sinuously complicated, multiply subordinated sentences.”² The nearly Baroque, on the line level, is complex sonically and grammatically. The sinewy phrasings echo in sinewy content, combining time, space, and subject to explore previously disassociated moments. I would

¹ Burt.

² Ibid.

suggest that Karen Volkman's work associates in certain ways with Burt's nearly Baroque.

The Baroque Baroque, a category that Burt suggests pertains particularly to Brock-Broido, extends the essence of ornament and elaboration into "grandeur, theatricality, and violence" with the intention of producing "marvel and even shock."³ In this categorization, ornate constructions create not just texture within the poem but also spectacle for the reader—it's the reader's reaction that's key here. While Burt's proposition of the Baroque Baroque partially defines content, I also would propose that sound patterning exemplifies and, at times, challenges these goals.

Burt's third classification is the rococo. In art history, rococo is identified as that which "treated its material as an indispensable and irreplaceable occasion for the flourish of the maker's hand."⁴ The presence and awareness of the artist is key in this definition. Within the craft of poetry, this metacognition appears through the poet's word choice and their treatment of it. In certain aspects—though not as an all-encompassing frame—I would align Graham with this idea. In approaching Volkman, Brock-Broido, and Graham through the skeleton of the nearly Baroque, Baroque Baroque, and rococo, I will examine how sound play and patterning draw in and distance these categories in order to develop the dialogues present in each of their works.

Karen Volkman's *Spar* allies itself with and departs from Burt's construction of the nearly Baroque. The poem beginning "I never wish to sing again as I used to" exemplifies certain traits particular to the nearly Baroque, particularly the "elaborate

³ Ibid; according to art historian Roy Eriksen, in Burt.

⁴ Burt.

syntax and sonic patterning,” and its use of particular nouns/persons.⁵ However, while this poem does “weave together several... scenes,” it doesn’t do so in the requisite “sinuously complicated, multiply subordinated sentences.”⁶ Instead, Volkman departs from the nearly Baroque with her syntactically clear arrangements. Furthermore, while Volkman has adopted and engaged with preexisting forms to complicate “what poems can do,” the use of certain forms does not produce Burt’s requirement of a feminist riposte. Rather, in an interview with Academy of American Poets, Karen Volkman noted that in *Spar*, “relations of sound became a way to establish connections leading to completely unexpected insights, and even to unexpected aspects of the mind and emotions.”⁷ Sounds and sound play led Volkman through the poems as opposed to having employed a predicted and predictable path into sound. The combination of sonic patterning, different levels of diction, and syntactic and formal structures creates a conversation distinct from that of the semantic meaning of the poem.

There are a few different sonic patterns in this prose poem. As a whole, the poem exists in a series of folds and folding-overs of sound that give the poem a torqued mirroring. Burt identified “unfoldings and refoldings” as an aspect of the nearly Baroque as based on Gilles Deleuze’s analysis of G. W. Leibniz.⁸ However, Burt uses the fold image to identify a *refolding*—a return so that images “double back.”⁹ I propose to distinguish my use of “fold” here. For Volkman, her sound patterning does not double back but rather advances itself using chiasmic reflections. And so, the foldings-over of

⁵ Volkman, 36; Burt.

⁶ Burt.

⁷ Academy of American Poets.

⁸ Burt.

⁹ Ibid.

sound create echoes to advance the pattern through the poem. It may echo, but it does not return.

This idea of folds and advancement is pronounced in the poem's opening phrase. "I never wish to sing again as I used to" announces the semantic argument of the poem: even if the speaker doesn't *wish* to sing as in the past, the potential that the singing would occur still exists. Doubt or revolt is present for the speaker here. Yet, the sounds create a second layer of dialogue that indicate that the speaker will and must continue to sing or speak with relation to the past with inescapable relation.

The line continues: "I never wish to sing again as I used to, when two new eyes could always stain the sea."¹⁰ This semantic argument here is forced into conversation with its sonic echoes, which in turn undermine the forced declaration of the statement. As identified in the previous paragraph, the speaker may not want to sing as she did in the past, but wishing doesn't necessarily indicate refusal. So, the possibility still remains that the speaker will once again sing—although reluctantly. The "when" of the first line indicates the sonic fulcrum, where the poem creates its first folding-over and tugs against the speaker's semantic desires. Assonance links the first half of the grammatical phrase with the second, employing the *os* of "to," "two," and "used" to bridge the syntactic pause through the assonant "oo," as it is phonetically spelled.¹¹ This provides the poem's opening with sonic consistency where the semantic meaning suggests change.

Further lulling the poem into a consistent sonic state is the consonance and alliteration of the opening stanza-paragraph. The *s* is particularly prominent through the opening moments: "sing," "as," "used," "eyes," "stain," "sea," skip," and "set" hiss

¹⁰ Volkman.

¹¹ Volkman; Dictionary: "to," "two," "used".

through the poem's opening.¹² The sound here emphasizes the speaker's stasis, even though she semantically wishes for change. The consonance and alliteration here force the reader into a sonic experience different from the one the brain comprehends, thus tugging at the lines between logos and melos.

Diction also emphasizes moments of tension for the reader in creating the poem's universe. When Volkman writes that "the clock went backward for a skip, to rise, to set," the reader is lulled into a casual frame of mind.¹³ "For a skip," while not idiomatic in today's speech, is of a casual tone, and the idea of a clock and of rising and setting are all of a lower register (as opposed to hourglass/chronometer, raising/lowering, aloft/sinking, etc.). However, the reader here is also at an impasse, as logically, clocks don't go backwards and time doesn't rise or set. Moments such as this one (and others throughout the poem) build tension, as the reader must then decide whether to swallow the semantic surreal-ity or rely on the false sense of security that the lower diction provides.

The combination of syntax and form in this particular poem also present some layered meanings. There are numerous instances of parallel structures in this poem; however, the final lines of the poem complicate parallel structure with their elaborateness. The last two paragraph-stanzas of the prose poem read:

She who listens poorly will always be calling. She who sounds
silence drowns with the dumb.
She who cuts her hands off must drink with her tongue.¹⁴

¹² Volkman.

¹³ Volkman.

¹⁴ Volkman.

The parallel sentence structures create semantic meaning that (more or less) is clear for the reader. In sum, if one were to go about life actively refusing means of communication (or communicating badly), one will always be wanting.

However, the rhythm and sound play develop and complicate those meanings into a layered, complex structure. The syntactic sentences invoke a rhythmic continuity that extends past the primary verb of the sentences. “Always be calling,” “drowns with the dumb,” and “drink with her tongue” all are made of four beats, with two unstressed syllables sandwiched between two stressed ones. Though the first iteration here carries an extra unstressed syllable (“cálling”), the final two phrasings shake off the remainder to end on the stressed “dúmb” and “tóngue.” This rhythmic pattern creates a physical, bodily unity, further emphasized by the assonance of “dumb” and “tongue.” Whereas the semantic meaning is an opposition between speech and silence, the sound pattern contradicts this claim.

In terms of overall structure, this selection of Volkman is a prose poem composed of three longer paragraphs/stanzas, followed by two shorter ones. While using the prose line as opposed to the poetic one, the divisions here indicate a kind of expanded Shakespearian sonnet, featuring development, turn, and concluding couplet. The last couplet, beginning the repetitions of “She who” discussed above, semantically cycles back to the opening phrase “I never wish to sing again as I used to” in its discussion of the importance/implications of sound and silence. However, whereas the opening of the poem is structured through its aforementioned sound folds, the elaborateness and layers of the ending couplet—composed of parallel structure, rhythm, and assonance—create a structural resolution, just as a sonnet would. Instead of returning or refolding into the

preexisting sounds, the final couplet pushes outward through its rhyme of “dumb”/“tongue.” This use of rhyme as opposed to a mirrored sound propels the reader to move forward, thus serving as a satisfying end to the poem—through relying on preexisting poetic structures—as well as guiding the reader into the next poem of the book.

This forward motion is particularly important, as it complicates the semantic meaning of the poem itself. The last ideas of the poem (“She who listens poorly;” “she who sounds silence;” she who must “drink with her tongue”) complicate questions of communication through silence and speech. This in turn creates one of the most important foldings-over of the poem. As discussed in the preceding paragraph, the patterns in the last two paragraphs resolve the poem in such a way as to prepare the reader for the next poem in the book. At the same time, however, the semantic resolutions harken the reader back to the poem’s opening line—“I never wish to sing again as I used to” —that produces an echo of this opening sentiment that seems to fold the poem back onto itself. The series of warnings or divinations of the last “couplet” provides a distinction from the speaker’s “I” of the first stanza; however, the poem’s ending on this particular idea asks the reader to linger mentally on the agencies of speech and silence twisted through the rest of the poem. The semantic ties of the poem request a lingering that the rhythm and rhyme refuse to offer, creating a challenge—though a potentially delightful one—for the reader.

Lucie Brock-Broido’s work also employs sound patterning that aligns and forms tension with the semantic text. A particular example of this is the poem “Mental Museum” from *Stay, Illusion*, in which the sound patterning complicates the semantic

narrative of the work. The poem itself exists on an internal, mind-based space, during which the speaker sifts through violent and tender images that culminate in the viewer looking at a museum-resembling glass case of strange and unfamiliar artifacts. Even in this mental space, the speaker is continuously looking out (at a person, at a landscape, at the museum case). However, the musical work of this poem offers a doubled reading of it in which the sound patterns double back and identify the self as part of what's on display.

As previously identified, Burt correlates Brock-Broido with the “Baroque Baroque,” a full embodiment of the presence of “theatrically extended sentences” as well as being “a mode of excess doubled and tripled, of decadence brought up to date without apology.”¹⁵ The syntax and semantic work certainly participate in this classification, but I propose to articulate how the sound structures—particularly doublings and triplings— affect the poem and reader. Whereas Karen Volkman’s sounds centered around echoes through chiasmi and the folding-overs of sound, Brock-Broido’s echoes in “Mental Museum” act primarily as interlocking repetitions, creating a sort of accordion structure that propels the reader into and through the poem. By accordion, I aim to describe the structure of pairs of repeated sounds that stretch through and across syntactic caesura that guides the reader through and across the breath- and idea-break of the line.

From the outset, this folded-sound structure is announced and invoked in the poem. The title, “Mental Museum,” indicates an attention to sound pattern through the alliterative “m.” This sonic choice alerts the reader to how the poem develops its meaning: attention must be given to sonic structure as well as (and in relation to) semantic meaning. A museum, for example, is a place where one goes to re-experience

¹⁵ Burt.

history or the past. However, a “mental” museum actively involves the reader in this experience. Though semantically, this museum may be one connected or belonging to the speaker, the charge of the alliteration invests the reader’s mind in this experience as well.

The alliterative *ms* exist throughout the rest of the poem and particularly in the second line. The speaker claims that there is no avoiding “the gun/ in your mouth and the aftermath, a vast migration of stem cells.”¹⁶ Semantically, the phrase indicates a change after the caesura—the “you” would have been physically altered once the gun in the mouth went off. However, the consonance of the continued *ms* from “**m**outh” and “**a**fter**m**ath” through “**m**igration” and “**s**tem” (and even “**m**embrane” of the following line) produces an aspect of consistency across the caesura, indicating that there is a different mental outcome from the triggered gun as opposed to its physical reality. The contrast between the physical and mental states of the “you” further is emphasized by the assonance of the *as* in “**a**fter**m**ath, **a** vast,” emphasizing continuity that the caesura would normally break.¹⁷ The mental considerations of the speaker toward the “you” are not the same as the physical implications here.

The conflict between the semantic and sonic possibility continues through the end of the grammatical sentence. The conditional mood of the verb here indicates that the physical damage that could have occurred from the gun’s presence has a physical possibility of healing: the wound “could have grown into/a crop of mauve scars.”¹⁸ For the speaker in this moment, there is the chance of returning to physical wellbeing. However, the assonance folded across the next grammatical pause, “a **c**rop of mauve

¹⁶ Brock-Broido, 43.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

scars, the lot,” resists the semantic suggestion of healing.¹⁹ Phonetically, the vowels in this line are sonically parallel: the o of “crop,” a of “scar,” and o of “lot” all form “ä” in phonetic transcription.²⁰ Even though the line’s caesura hinges at the declaration of the numerous scars (“the lot”), the vowels’ assonance resists this transformation.

A second set of assonant vowels propels the “crop of mauve scars” into the next moment of the poem. Semantically, the “crop of mauve scars” would have saved the “lot of us,” who were “broken at the throat” due to gun’s shooting.²¹ Once again, the assonance of certain vowels contradicts this intention. Here, “**mauve**,” “**broken**,” and “**throat**” all carry the vowel phonetically transcribed as “ō,” though alphabetically spelled in various ways. This phonetic repetition creates mental associations for the reader in the continuation of reading through the constructed clauses. While the reader is propelled forward by the grammatical construction and semantic suggestions, the mind reminds itself of the previous moment through the recollection of sound. The assonance, structured in accordion-like zigzags, align with Burt’s assertion of Brock-Broido as being a means of “counteract[ing] entropy... time, and death,” all elements that the semantic meaning of “Mental Museum” investigates.²² However, as the sonic folds disengage from the semantic implications of the moment, the lines become a bodily experience, one that exists in a “mental” transfer from speaker to reader, rather than an experience of “museum”-like observation.

From these accorded folds of phrases linked by assonance, the poem gains momentum through a shift into a repeating rhythmic pattern. The two phrases “Brókĕn ät

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Dictionary: “crop,” “scar,” “lot”.

²¹ Brock-Broido.

²² Burt.

the throat, bowed in the ink,” separated by commas, uses a parallel structure that could be experienced as an anapest-iamb construction—though this poem is not of formal verse, those feet could serve as representation of the motion at stake.²³ This rhythmic structure is particularly noticeable, as it is the first moment in the poem when the text falls into a repeated, identifiable rhythm. Along with the alliteration of “broken”/“bowed,” the pause inflected by the comma separating these clauses creates an instance of this accordion structure through linking its way from one coupling to the next. In this particular moment, the accordion serves to reconsider the previous statement, to redefine it. As opposed to being broken, the speaker becomes “bowed,” becomes blanketed—rather than existing in the state of destruction, it becomes one of protection. The parallel rhythm here emphasizes the semantic reconsideration on the speaker’s part. By employing the same anapest-iamb construction, the speaker’s mind seems to exist in a state of stutter in this reconsideration, identifying a consideration of the mental state as well as of the physical state in this poem.

After this key rhythmic moment, the sounds return to the uptake of the folded structure. This aforementioned moment extends: “bowed in the ink/ Of last speaking, less pink against the paler walls.”²⁴ The sounds interlock themselves here, with “ink” becoming “pink” becoming “paler.” The motion from internal rhyme to alliteration transfers the focus and the mental process through the line and meaning. Meanwhile, the transfer of sound focus from the end of the words to the beginnings of them also transfers the reader and speaker’s mental space to the point of origin rather than to a point of growth or transformation.

²³ Brock-Broido.

²⁴ Ibid.

These interlocking moments of folded repetition, stretching across caesura, trail through the rest of the poem. Sonic moments interlinking grammatical phrases punctuate the poem with the speaker being constantly in a state of self-correction, thus presenting the reader with this accorded echo, a stutter surfacing in the mental space of the poem. The doubled sounds in this poem suggest a degree of crazed thought, a slight insanity that the speaker can't shake off. As such, the effects of this patterning create a different space in the poem: the mental museum not being a place of history but shifting this concept into an asylum for the speaker. However, the reader too is implicated in this transformation, as the sound patterning here is felt and emphasized in the reading of the poem. Because the unifying sound folds trace through the long-lined, heavily enjambed, highly variant, syntactically trickling structure, the patterning isn't at first evident, engaging the reader in the layer of sonic structure as well as semantic one.

Jorie Graham is not the noisiest poet on the page. Her sprawling, thought-tendrilling poems build lyric narrative often through fragmented sections, weaving together parts and histories and meditations into complete wholes. Graham's third book, *The End of Beauty*, particularly emphasizes this craft with a series of "self-portraits" encompassing figures of mythology, history, and art. While the structure and semantic meaning transports the reader through the poems' narratives, subtle sonic play adds an additional layer of complexity.

This doubling of semantics and sound is particularly evident in "Self-Portrait As Hurry and Delay (Penelope at Her Loom)," which explores and complicates the narrative of Penelope and the shroud she wove and unwove to delay her choice of suitor while waiting for the return of her husband Odysseus from Homer's *Odyssey*. The poem is split

into twenty-three sections of varying lengths, ranging from two words (as in section 6) to fourteen paratactic lines (as in section 11). The explorations of this poem, as indicated in the title, are questions of speed and time and momentum—the “hurry and delay”—of Penelope’s mind and practice as she sat in wait. Syntax particularly helps to develop speed and slowness throughout the course of the poem. The text opens with section 1:

So that every night above them in her chambers she unweaves it.
Every night by torchlight under the flitting shadows the postponement,
working her fingers into the secret place, the place of what is coming
undone[...]²⁵

In terms of structure, the syntax serves a few different purposes. The reader enters the scene in the course of recurring action: “So that every night” involves the reader in the backstory of the poem by emphasizing the repetitive movements Penelope enacts “every” night and, through the ongoing present tense, invests the reader in the stakes of the situation’s outcome. It also invokes the reader in the conversation by starting in the middle of the thought—presumably, the hypotactic sentence would have begun before the conjunctive “so.” This effect introduces the reader to the “hurry” of the self-portrait: beginning mid-thought creates a breathless effect.

The remainder of the section exists within one “sentence” of multiple clauses, which in turn emphasize the “delay.” The series of clauses, which extends through the first eight sections of the poem, gives room to linger in the thought/portrait/state of Penelope’s situation.

This and other complexities exist on the levels of syntax and structure to the poem. However, certain sonic constructions, including forms of repetition and rhythm,

²⁵ Graham, 86.

act in contrast to this current “self-portrait,” proffering steady motion on the reader’s part through the poem as opposed to the advances and returns of “hurry and delay.” This contrast gives room for the reader to enact a different state within the poem than part of the poem’s semantic meaning of it. There exists within the poem’s “self-portrait” contrast between the speaker and how the speaker sees herself, illuminated through the poem’s dichotomies: hurry and delay, Persephone and Odysseus, etc.

The poem’s dualities within the poem refract around the word. The repetition of words, while seemingly moving the reader through the poem and through syntactic clauses of the individual lines, creates a woven sound pattern through the poem that echoes the weaving and unweaving of Penelope’s cloth shroud. Moments such as the opening, “Every night,” followed by the second line’s “every night,” is echoed by the rhyme nearby “torchlight.” Other repetitions include: “secret place”/“the place,” “under”/“undone”/“under”/“undoing”/“undone”/“undoing,” “more richly, *there*”/“what was healed under *there*”/“the soil *they’re* groundcover for”/“the here and the *there*.”²⁶ These repetitions extend over lines and sections to net the reader within the poem and interlace the poem’s vocabulary to keep the reader looping through the same sonic ideas of the poem. The repeated words give the reader an access to recall the words in previous instances. The patterning creates a mental stasis and processing (a “delay”) as opposed to any development of speed or progress (the “hurry”). Because the repetitions occur at irregular intervals, the reader is shocked into mentally returning to the previous instance of the vocabulary rather than shifting the meaning of the word’s new context.

²⁶ Graham, 86-87.

Along with the repetition, instances of assonance and close rhyme stretching throughout the poem provide the reader with another means of continuity. Just as in Brock-Broido's "Mental Museum," the sound play extends across the line and grammatical breaks. The extension of sound across caesura and line break is especially key for Graham, as it provides a reader with a way of forming connections and meaning through a syntactically complex thought and construction. Moments of assonance such as "night"/"night"/"torchlight" (lines 1-2) and "unweaves *it*"/"postponement" of the first two lines, along with "under"/"undone," "lifts"/"lift," and "have"/"hands" (from 1, 3, and 5, for example) guide the reader from one line to the next as well as proffering an even movement through the poem's semantic journey.²⁷ These moments of assonance serve to identify the process of thought as an evenly paced movement as opposed to the spectrum of motion identified by the self-portrait's semantic intentions.

In addition to repetition and assonance, there persists through the poem a rhythm of two dactyls, which further emphasizes this looping reminder of the thought process of the poem itself. While Graham's work here is not a formally constructed poem, the formal rhythms gesture toward metered verse. Moments including "cólõr aňd prógrëss aňd mótiõv," "fõrwãrds yët bãckwãrds," "béatĩng thëň tóuchiňg thëň," "enlãrgĩňg thëň gáthëriňg," and "knóttiňg thëň clãspiňg ĩt," although appearing at uneven intervals, use a standard rhythm to recall the reader into the poem from out of its free structure into moments of awareness.²⁸ Because of the poem's winding, complicated syntax that often extends across numerous sections—as already indicated—the moments' controlled

²⁷ Graham, 86.

²⁸ Ibid.

rhythm introduces a pause of even breath compared with its surroundings, thus counterpointing the poem's intentions of hurry and delay with one of uniform motion.

The particular sonic elements of this poem all serve to create within the reader a consciousness of the presence of the poem as well as the process of thought. As such, this awareness associates this particular poem of Graham's with Burt's categorization of the rococo and its historical context, as "this seemingly most artificial of styles gave a special place to... 'the real.'"²⁹ The contrast between the winding semantic thought and the punctuated sound patterns creates a sense of control and awareness in the poem that grounds the poem as being a part of this world as opposed to only the world of the poem itself.

The poem itself exists in a fictional frame, relying on the story of Penelope and Odysseus to build connections with the reader. And, as previously discussed, the reader is directly involved in the history through the "immaculate present tense" of the poem's opening, drawing the reader into the story itself.³⁰ I would not suggest that poem is "artificial" in the same ways that rococo is identified; however, I might suggest that the poem's reliance on fictional narrative links itself to the realm of *story* rather than *history*. At the same time, however, the use of the fiction is what allows Graham to examine the "real"—the self, the poem. Moments that directly address language through self-correction or direct address emphasize the poem's awareness of the poem as a poem rather than as a part of the story. For example, self corrections such as "a *mouth* or a gap in the fleshy air, a place in both worlds" and direct addresses such as "Reader, minutes" provide the reader with an understanding both of how the poem exists within its language

²⁹ As what defined the rococo per art critic Glenn Adamson in Burt.

³⁰ Graham.

as well as a reminder that the poem is, really, a poem.³¹ The use of these two techniques serves to fold the poem into itself, bridging the gaps between the poem and the thought of the poem, the sonic and the semantic play, the hurry and the delay.

Over the course of these investigations of Jorie Graham, Lucie Brock-Broido, and Karen Volkman, the identification and exploration of sound patterning has served to reveal a distinct layer of meaning within their poems. This identification underscores how the sound-craft of a poem's text does important and often contrasting work within the poem's argument. Furthermore, it contributes to and complicates the concept of nearly Baroque, Baroque Baroque, and rococo writing through the uses of elaborate structures of sound and syntax: pattern develops out of the conscious excesses of tools such as rhyme, rhythm, and diction.

In terms of my own work and development as a poet, this exploration is particularly useful both for understanding how sound pattern functions as well as how to employ it. By being able to identify and articulate the uses of sound techniques in both noisy and quieter poems, I believe that I will be able to apply this understanding to my own work in order to develop narrative complexity while reveling in sonic play.

³¹ Ibid.

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