Stevens says, “A poet’s words are things that do not exist without the words.” We attempt through words to express the truth of our existence, our thoughts, and feelings. And we respond to these words not only with analysis but with our physical senses, as in the case of William Blake’s mellifluous phrasing in “To the Evening Star,” “to wash the dusk with silver.”

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**SOUND POETRY.** If poetry is the verbal art in which “sound and sense are arranged in ideal tension, sound poetry (also “sonorist rhythms,” “phonetic poetry,” or poesie sonore) alters this relationship by multiplying, reducing, or denying semantic reference, while amplifying the phonetic and aural properties of lang. Some sound poems attempt to generate natural signifying relationships between sound and meaning through phonetic symbolism; others use sound as antagonistic or indifferent toward meaning. Sound poems challenge the limits of natural langs. and produce the illusion of lang. before, beyond, or after meaning, from the Adamic to the utopian.

Surveys of sound poetry often furnish it with a long genealogy encompassing all ancient and mod. uses of preverbal speech codes such as “onomatopoeia, *glos-"solalia, the *incantations of oral poetry, *nonsense verse like Lewis Carroll’s ‘Jabberwocky,’ and Stéphane Mallarmé’s formulation of *transitio sonore.* While these codes are among sound poetry’s principal resources and precedents, the practice of sound poetry has fairly distinct origins in an extensive, international network of avant-garde poets from the late 19th c. into the 1930s, and it has been extended and theorized by neo-avantgarde poets from the 1940s to the present (see avant-garde poetics).

In Europe, nearly all the historical avant-garde movements practiced a version of sound poetry. In the pamphlet *Declaration of the Word as Such* (1913), the Rus. futurist Aleksei Kruchenykh coined the neologism “zaum” (transrational or beyonsense) to describe poems he had written “in their own language,” of which the most notorious example is “Dyr bul shchyl,” though Vélimir Khlebnikov’s 1910 “Zaklyatie smezom” (“Incantation by Laughter”) also anticipated this tendency. While Kruchenykh’s poems deploy nonce words or write through source texts via lipogrammatic removals of all consonants (see lipogram) in the attempt to “destroy language” and install referential indeterminacy, more ambitious zaum’ poems, such as
Khlebnikov’s “Zangezi,” dramatize a universal lang., of the future that fixes references at varying planes of psychic evolution, purporting to vocalize the speech of gods, birds, and other nonhuman phenomena. The Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro’s *Alazor* (1931), the voyage of a poet-parachutist ejecting himself from the lang. system into what Octavio Paz calls a “post-Babelic” fantasy of ling., reunification, bears comparison (see CREATIONISM).

Experiments contemporaneous to zaum’ in Italy include Aldo Palazzeschi’s examples of a poesia del divertimento, playful poems in which infantile stutters and syllabic refrains are a refuge for the crepuscular poet discarded by the culture of modernity. Although he was briefly associated with it, “futurism, Palazzeschi’s ludic sound has little in common with F. T. Marinetti’s parole in libertà (words in freedom), a poetry that attempts to enact a synthetic “mimesis of the city or mod. warfare, most often through martial onomatopoias such as *Zang Tumb Tuum* (1912). Guillaume Apollinaire voiced a familiar objection in his remark that this scientific notation of machine noise could be faulted as “gags” or trompe-oreilles.

In the germanophone context, “Dada sound poetry built on examples of nonsense poetry like that of Christian Morgenstern. Most often cited among the many varieties of sound poetry produced by the Dadaists, Hugo Ball’s “gadji beri bimba,” a cycle of five lauzedichte (nois poems) or verse ohne worte (wordless verses), posited a primitive refounding of the word in reaction to the commodification of lang. Performed at the Zurich Cabaret Voltaire in 1916, these poems offer a prophetic authority for sound poetry based on a magical “innermost alchemy” of antiquated words and a liturgical performance register, while also suggesting that this scientific notation of machine noise could be faulted as “gags” or trompe-oreilles.

While even its staunchest proponents, such as Jolas, considered sound poetry to be a limited ling. strategy in the wake of World War II, the genre has a rich postwar life in Fr. *lettrisme*, esp. in the work of Isidore Isou (1925–2007) and Henri Chopin (1922–2008), as well as in that of Bob Cobbing (1920–2002) in England, Ernst Jandl (1925–2000) in Austria, Jackson Mac Low (1922–2004) in the U.S., and later bpNichol (1944–88) and Steve McCaffery (b. 1947) in Canada. McCaffery, alongside Chopin and Fluxus artist Dick Higgins (1938–98), have been instrumental to the validation of sound poetry as a historical genre and performance practice. The U.S. Language poets emergent in the 1970s bear out that influence, as in Bernstein’s remark in “Artifice of Absorption” that “there is no fixed / threshold at which noise becomes phonically / significant; the further back this threshold is / pushed, the greater the resonance at the cutting / edge” (see LANGUAGE POETRY). With some exceptions, Chopin’s distinction holds that sound poetry before World War II is phonetic poetry, preserving an attachment to words and syllables as compositional units, while, after the war, lettrisme arbitrarily assigns phonetic values to letters, moving sound poetry toward performance scores for “sub-phonemic” levels of noise.

Postwar practitioners have placed greater emphasis on noncontextual performance and recording media, often disseminating poems by tape recorder as in the works of François Dufrêne and stressing ambitious research programs over ludic play. Still, much *concrete poetry includes an active sound component, and the long* "visual poetry trad. runs in tandem with that of sound poetry, as typographical innovations often enhance or dictate performance standards (see TYPOGRAPHY).

*Voice has become a major theoretical issue for sound poetry. Antonin Artaud’s scream poems and Michael McClure’s “beast language” offer an affiliation to sound poetry that reconnects the voice to biological priorities, while McCaffery has rethought the voice as a “paleoethnic” instrument in a wider media ecology. A third critical view, exemplified by the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, holds that written, asemantic..."
speech codes are the textual figuration of embodied voice, opening poetry to an “unheard dimension sustained in the pure breath of the voice, in mere nos as insignificant will to signify.” A counterevidence could be located in a group of sound collagists and aleators working in the trad. of John Cage, for whom the approximation of lang. to noise often echoes the voice as a unifying performance principle in favor of random and found materials (see aleatory poetics and constraint).

Sound poetry has a complex but coherent status in the hist. of poetic forms, but it should be stressed that sound poetry also belongs to a hist. of dissonance and noise in 20th-c. cinema, music, phonographic reproduction, and radio, and emerges not by coincidence in a transformative historical period for auditory technologies. The generation of sound poets now reaching maturity, such as the Canadian poet Christian Bök (b. 1966), has suggested that the “theurgical,” antitechnological reaction of early sound poets such as Hugo Ball is untenable for contempor; poets who may be the first “who can reasonably expect in our lifetime to write poems for a machinic audience.” Bök’s work in progress *The Cyborg Opera* refugues the sound poetry inheritance for an “undreamt poets of electronica” or a “spoken techno” that he allies with the technical virtuosity of beatboxers such as Razael. Bök reimagines sound poems as participants in a “growing digital culture,” as in his lettristic drum kit notation systems (“Bhm--T-Nsh--tp’Bhm--T--Nsh [hhs]”), and he also systematically plumbs vernacular phonetic patterns: “my tongue muttering / an unsung lettering.”


H. Feinsod

**SOUTH AFRICA, POETRY OF**

I. Afrikaans

II. English

I. Afrikaans. The first examples of poetry in Afrikaans date from the late 19th c. and formed part of efforts to raise the political consciousness of Afrikaner people by elevating the status of the spoken lang. Afrikaans—derived from the 17th-c. Dutch spoken by the first colonizers of the Cape of Good Hope and influenced by Malay, Creole-Port., Ger., Fr., southern Nguni langs., and Eng.—to the status of a written lang., with its own lit. Because of the racially divided nature of South Af. society, this process partly excluded Afrikaans speakers of mixed racial descent who played a significant role in the develop. of the lang. The primary aims of the early Afrikaans poets were to inspire readers to fight for the official recognition of their lang., to educate, and to entertain. To do this, they focused on the lives of ordinary burghers, their folklore, South Africa as fatherland, religion, and topical events, also using humor in poems that contained elements of the surreal or absurd. The style was mostly rhetorical rather than original, naïve rather than sophisticated.

After the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902), attempts to standardize Afrikaans and produce a body of lit. in that lang. gathered renewed impetus; Afrikaans gained of- ficial status only in 1925. This process gained credibility through the greater sophistication and literary sensibility displayed by poets of the “first generation”: Jan F. E. Ceillers (1865–1940), Torius (pseud. of J. D. du Toit, 1877–1953), and C. Louis Leipoldt (1880–1947). Their early volumes show the effects of the war, but their work included other subjects (the landscape, religion, historical themes, political matters), as well as a variety of poetic techniques and styles, incl. “free verse and the dramatic *monologue*.”

The following generation added new elements to the repertoire of Afrikaans poetry, such as greater individualism, eroticism, and cl. allusions; but it did not make the same impact as its predecessors. Toon van den Heever (1894–1956) can be regarded as the most important of the new poets, while older poets like Eugène Marais (1871–1936) and A. G. Visser (1878–1929) also published distinctive work in the 1920s. Marais explored new terrain in the volume *Duasaltories en ander vertellings* (Rain Bull and Other Tales from the San, 1927), a small collection of stories and poems based on the oral trad. of the San tribe.

The early 1930s brought an important renewal in Afrikaans poetry with the emergence of a group of poets (N. P. van Wyk Louw [1906–70], W.G. Louw [1913–80], J. Krige [1906–87], Elisabeth Eybers [1915–2007]) who consciously reflected on their voca-