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Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

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Henrieke Stahl (Trier)

The 'Novel in Poems' – An Emerging Genre

A new genre has emerged in contemporary literature: the 'novel in poems.' This genre hybridizes the novel and poetry in order to construct characters and a plot through relatively autonomous poems in series. The 'novel in poems' appears in different subtypes, which can be categorized according to the following criteria: (1) the presence of one speaker versus several speakers, (2) the presence of a speaker as lyric protagonist and/or narrator, and (3) the presence of a blend of distinct modes of lyric, narrative, and dramatic representation in various forms of combination. Specific characteristics of the 'novel in poems' are: 1) variation of constituent poetic forms with different degrees of semantic autonomy and brevity; 2) hyper-structuring through symmetries, holism, and equivalences; 3) a tendency to differentiate mediating instances within the text; 4) the reduction or elimination of the narrator or of narrative principles and the use of an omnipresent textual subject; 5) the presence of metapoetic reflections on topics such as poetry and creativity; 6) an emphasis on voice, person, and subjectivity; 7) episodic plot construction through montage techniques and a tendency toward chronological order; 8) the predominance of present speech and action; 9) contradictions between the speaker as subject and addresser, via the lyric fiction of performativity, and the function of narration; 10) a necessity imposed upon the reader to reconstruct the plot and characters. This essay establishes three subtypes within the proposed genre: a lyric 'novel in poems' with one speaker (Irina Ermakova), a polyphonically narrative 'novel in poems' that combines third-person narration with several anterior speakers (Lana Hechtman Ayers), and, finally, a dramatic 'novel in poems' with shifting primary speakers (Glyn Maxwell).

Keywords: verse novel, poetry book, novel in poems, Irina Ermakova, Lana Hechtman Ayers, Glyn Maxwell

Over the last decades, poetry has shown a prominent tendency towards long forms, in which poems are combined with genuinely narrative and/or dramatic features and generic elements.¹ This is particularly true of newer Anglophone literature, in which one finds a “boom”² in verse novels, as well as other larger hybrid forms of poetry. One example of this is “The Monkey’s Mask” (1994), a detective novel by Australian author Dorothy Porter. The film adaptation of the novel, produced in 2000 under the same title, has brought Porter global fame. Few people recognize, however, the novel’s rather unusual form, composed entirely of poems.³ Porter explains in an interview that she was inspired to develop this technique by a prison inmate whom she instructed in a creative writing course:

The title of my book comes from a late Basho haiku, and I got the idea of writing *The Monkey’s Mask* when I was doing creative writing workshops in prisons, in Long Bay gaol. I was teaching haiku, and one guy said “You could write a detective novel in haiku.” At first I thought he was just taking the mickey, but later I thought he was absolutely right! Those moments of revelation, in the present tense with the senses working moment to moment, that acute awareness, are when detective fiction is at its most interesting. This is very close to poetry. [...] Of course I didn’t attempt to write *The Monkey’s Mask* in haiku, although I think linked haiku can go on forever and do all sorts of things, but it gave me the idea that each poem could be very, very intense, and the reader would feel physically in a particular moment.⁴

¹ See brief adaptations of this article in Japanese and French: Stahl (2019c, 2020). Another version of this article in German is forthcoming under the title „Der Gedichtroman: Prototyp und seine Erscheinungsformen in der Gegenwart“ (Stahl forthcoming a).

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² Detmer (2007: 198). See also Cadden (2011: 21): “The revival of the verse novel began tentatively in the 1990s with works for adults by writers such as Derek Walcott, Dorothy Porter, and Fred D’Aguiar, and for young adults at roughly the same time with novels by Virginia Euwer Wolff and Karen Hesse. The form for young adults has become an important publishing trend since the turn of this century.”

³ In this very interview, Porter describes her book as a postmodernist genre hybrid: “The genre crossing of *The Monkey’s Mask* is a postmodern cliché, as was its non-privileging of high culture over pop” (in: Minter 2008).

⁴ Dorothy Porter in: Minter (2008). Yet Porter’s previous novel “Akhenaten” (1992) has already been composed of poems; cf. Kempton (2018: 161-167). Porter later wrote other novels consisting of poems: “What a Piece of Work” (1999), “Wild Surmise” (2002), “El Dorado” (2007). The last novel, also a crime novel, is more complex: while the earlier novels were tied to a protagonist who is responsible for all the poems in the first person and is at best relativized by paratexts and symptoms, for example as mentally ill, as in “Wild Surmise”, in “El Dorado” the speakers of the poems change, whereby neither the assignment to the persons involved nor the situation of the poems in the plot are made explicit. In terms of receptive aesthetics, this novel aims at reconstruction by the reader, who has to deduce events and surprising turns of the plot from the poems, which in turn do little more than outline the figures’ state of mind. The exciting plot motivates the reader to a kind of detective work, in which the reconstruction

The 'novel in poems' has become popular in the English-speaking world during the last 20 years, in both 'high' and 'low' markets, and – most astonishingly from a European perspective – particularly in young adult literature⁵.

In contemporary European literatures, comparable texts are relatively rare and have emerged to a large extent independently of the new English-language movement, as seen in Russian-language examples of the last twenty years, which have also developed a notable trend towards narrative poetry and the use of narrative devices in lyric genres.⁶ However, the verse novel, with its decidedly novelistic character in the Anglophone world, still remains an exception in Russian literature. What is more, only a few examples of the 'novel in poems' exist in Russian, and they show striking differences from the trends found in Anglophone literature. The Russian examples are generally much closer to the "poetry book"⁷ than to the novel. In German-language literature, which has also recently developed a narrative trend towards the 'long poem,'⁸ or even new forms of epic poetry (Cotten, Grünbein, Schrott, et al.),⁹ the 'novel in poems' has hitherto

of the plot and the uncovering of the criminal case are brought to coincidence through the use of episodic narration in the form of lyrical poems that concentrate on a current state of mind of changing speakers and through reduced paratextual information.

⁵ Cadden points out in 2011 that in the public library of Edmonton/Alberta alone, out of 125 entries on the newer verse novel, only 5 were published in the 20th century – telling proof of the immense upswing of this form (Cadden 2001: 21). Already in 2005 Joy Alexander spoke of a "new genre" especially in the field of children's and teenager literature of the last ten years (Alexander 2005: 269).

⁶ Cf. Kukulin (2015); Stahl (2019b).

⁷ In Russian literature, the 'book of poetry' or 'poetry book' exists as a special form that has been developed since the beginning of the 20th century and constitutes not a collection but a whole composition constituted by the poems. See on the 'poetry book' in Russian and Belorussian literatures: Barkovskaja / Verina / Gutrina (2015).

⁸ The term „Langgedicht“ goes back to Walter Höllerer (1965). More recent long poems have been published by Paulus Böhmer, Kurt Drawert, Alban Nikolai Herbst, and others.

⁹ Cf. for instance: Raoul Schrott: *Erste Erde. Epos*. München 2016; Ann Cotten: *Verbannt! Versepos*. Berlin 2016; Durs Grünbein: *Vom Schnee oder Descartes in Deutschland*. Frankfurt am Main 2003. In Germany, a trend towards lyric-epic hybrids has only recently emerged, but is comparable to the Russian case, with a focus less on plot and more on the impressions of a single speaker. Hence, Heinz Schlaffer still notices in 2016: "Erzählen in Versen erscheint heute als eine seltsame, weit zurückliegende Art zu dichten." "Dreihundert Seiten in Versen erschrecken einen ungedulden, an rasche Lektüre gewohnten Leser, dreißig erträgt er – gegenwärtig auch sie nicht mehr" (Schlaffer 2016: 243, 246). It is no coincidence that Rüdiger Zymner places Ransmayr's novel „Der fliegende Berg“ ("The Flying Mountain"), written in flutter-sentences – which nonetheless represent free verses – in the context of Anglophone literature: „Es erscheint nun vor diesem Hintergrund plausibel, auch die jüngeren deutschsprachigen Erzähldichtungen in den Kontext des von Detmers angesprochenen ‚Booms‘ zu rücken, der sein Zentrum insbesondere in den anglophonen Literaturen hat. Christoph Ransmayrs ‚Der fliegende Berg‘ wäre somit als Glied einer globalisierten Genrebildung zu betrachten, denn im Zusammenhang einer allein deutschsprachigen Geschichte der Erzähl-

existed merely in the form of translations of popular titles from English literature, such as Dorothy Porter's aforementioned novel, or, more recently, a slam novel by Elizabeth Acevedo.¹⁰

In the English-speaking world, the 'novel in poems' is generally subsumed under the term 'verse novel,' or 'novel in verse,' and is largely classified as narrative poetry.¹¹ However, such categorizations obscure the specificity of this phenomenon. This is because these novels, being made up of individual poems, seem closer to poetry than to the novel. Yet, they are not poetry cycles nor poetry volumes. The specificity of the 'novel in poems,' therefore, can only be understood if a genre of its own is assumed, located *between* the poles of a poetry volume and the novel.

Hybridization, however, does not signify an accretion but rather a fusion of genre characteristics, which thereby leads to a transformation of those characteristics borrowed from the blended genres. The resulting form thus develops its own qualities, which neither the poem nor the novel, nor the verse novel, nor any of its experimental or even epic forms, demonstrate in the same ways. The presence of these distinct qualities is one reason why I propose to consider the 'novel in poems' as a new genre. This assumption is further supported by the fact that this form has evolved with distinct breadth and already functions as a model used by authors, who, in turn, produce a range of genre interpretations.

The traditional verse novel occupies a place on the scale between the poles of the poetry volume and the novel that is closer to the novel than to the 'novel in

dichtung müsste Ransmayrs Text lediglich wie ein beinahe unfassbarer Solitär erscheinen“ (Zymner 2009: 153).

¹⁰ So far only Porter's "The Monkey Mask" (German: 1997, 2001) has been translated. Elizabeth Acevedo's "Poet X" (2018), a popular youth novel in poems, about a slammer, was published in German in 2019.

¹¹ Although more recent publications on the verse novel by Addison (2017) and Kempton (2018) deal with works of this form, they do not notice the generic specificity which sets them apart from verse novels that do not consist of poems, nor that this form has developed particularly intensively since the end of the 20th century. Their publications do not classify the verse novel according to formal and functional aspects, but rather according to epochs (Addison 2017, Kempton 2018: Part 1) and the more recent publications according to thematic aspects (Kempton 2018: Part 2). The difference between a novel form made up of lines and / or stanzas, i.e. a verse novel, and a novel as a series of independent poems is not considered. Nor does Zymner (2009) address a specificity of the novel in poems that distinguishes it from the novel in verse or a particular stanzaic form.

Other terms for related phenomena are, for example, 'novelized poem,' 'novel-poem,' 'novelistic poem,' 'poetical novel,' 'novelized poem,' 'poeticized novel'; a terminologically concise differentiation of the terms has not (yet) been given. Cf.: Hughes (2010: 97); cf. also the title of Nick Bujak's doctoral thesis: "The Novelistic Poem and the Poetical Novel: Towards a Theory of Generic Interrelation in the Romantic Period" (Bujak 2014) or Richard Lansdown's essay: "The Novelized Poem and the Poeticized Novel: Byron's Don Juan and Victorian Fiction" (Lansdown 1999).

poems,' because it is not, like the latter, composed of individual poems. Furthermore, the verse novel frequently features a narrator, most often in the third person, and is usually written in the past tense, while the poem is generally characterized by a speaker and the imaginative presence of the speech act. In addition, the chapters – or even stanzas – of a verse novel fail to fulfill the criteria of a poem because they are not marked by short and autonomous units of text as poems, by and large, do.

The 'novel in poems,' unlike the verse novel, thus represents a "series of poems"¹² that is used to depict a plot with characters and their external and internal worlds. The relative autonomy of the constituent poems, which makes their individual reading and publication possible, can indeed vary by degree. On the scale between the poetry volume and the novel, the 'novel in poems' merges with the verse novel when, on the one hand, the autonomy of the poems is greatly weakened or disappears in favor of contiguity,¹³ and, on the other hand, when the textual forms that constitute the novel hardly or no longer correspond to the characteristics of a poem. Conversely, the 'novel in poems' turns into a poetry book, or even a collection, when the plot is greatly weakened or absent and vice versa: a cycle or book of poems becomes a 'novel in poems' when individual poems are linked to form a sequence that constitutes, or at least presupposes, a plot.

In the literary tradition, the most likely examples of this phenomenon are those which, beginning from the form of the poetry cycle, ultimately approach the novel; more recent literature, in contrast, moves bilaterally between both poles as established genres, proceeding from either one towards the form of the other.¹⁴ Here, different tendencies can be observed. In the Anglophone world, proximity to the novel dominates, while Russophone literature is beginning to develop its own 'novel in poems,' which hardly existed until recently, via the lyric cycle and the poetry book.

This article thus proposes to critically distinguish the 'novel in poems' from the verse novel in order to introduce it as a new generic category. First, the new genre will be theoretically modelled. Then, tendencies in the development of this new genre will be shown through three representative examples: Irina Ermakova's book "With Red Ink on Black Silk", which is composed of lyric

¹² Karen Hesse describes her novel in poems "Witness" (2000) on the cover as a "series of poems" and divides it, at the same time, into five "acts," according to the classical dramatic model.

¹³ Mariko Nagai's "Dust of Eden" (2014), for example, borders on the verse novel. Although it consists of individual poems that are summarized in parts (on the cover the book is explicitly called a "novel-in-poems"), they function as diary entries and show little autonomy.

¹⁴ Cf. for instance in Addison (2017), Chapter III, the section "Sonnets. George Meredith, Modern Love" (Addison 2017: 147-153), also Kempton (2018: 86-94). "Meredith further subverts, or expands, the form by devoting a cycle of fifty sonnets to the dissection of a failed marriage" (Kempton 2018: 89).

tankas that develop a single tragic plot; Lana Hechtman Ayers' "Red Riding Hood's Real Life", which constructs a polyphonic form with a narrator and several speakers; and, finally, Glyn Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile", which demonstrates the dramatic potential of this new genre.

The 'Novel in Poems': Ideotype, Phenotype, Phenomena

Literary genres are historically and culturally variable groups of texts and are theoretically modelled in different ways depending on their assumed preconditions and objectives.¹⁵ Three approaches in particular are currently in use for their study.

(1) The definition of genre can be made by classification, with the help of a set of characteristics abstracted from phenomena.¹⁶ This classification is problematic in the case of hybrid phenomena, as they are devalued as marginal or transitional, insofar as they are positioned between taxa. Therefore, an exclusively classificatory approach is not suitable for the description of the 'novel in poems,' as its manifestations range on a scale between the poetry volume and the (verse) novel.

(2) The problem of localizing the transitional phenomena between such taxa is attempted by approaches that, starting from Ludwig Wittgenstein, order texts according to family resemblance.¹⁷ Such an approach starts from phenomena arranged according to similar relations. Generic fields can thus be determined. These fields form a structured spectrum of relations of aesthetic similarity with respect to selected features.¹⁸ In turn, these features are abstracted from representatives. In this way, the representative phenomena obtain a prototypical function insofar as they are established as centers, around which the generic fields are formed according to graduated similarities on the basis of their distinct features.

(3) The disadvantage of a model using prototypes is that concrete phenomena are regarded as a benchmark against which other concrete phenomena are measured. Such axiological judgements are avoided by a vertically dominant model that works with invariants. The invariants form a transhistorical abstract concept that cannot be represented by the phenomena themselves but rather allow them to be

¹⁵ Cf. the surveys of genre theories with further literature in: Lamping (ed., 2009), Zymner (ed., 2010), Anz (ed., 2013, vol. 1, especially chapter 2). An introduction to the generic term, which was transferred from logic to biology and literature: Baumgartner / Krafft / Nobis (1972).

¹⁶ Dieter Lamping (2000) and Volker Klotz (2011), for example, use a classifying approach to the poem.

¹⁷ Cf. for more detail on this matter, for instance, Wittbrodt (1998).

¹⁸ Cf. the concept of the generic field in Bourdieu's sense: Trilecke (2016). See on the transfer of the field concept to relations of aesthetic features: Stahl / Rutz (2013).

ordered.¹⁹ For this approach, a problem arises in which the relations of cultural-historically-based phenomena are neglected. For this reason, integral approaches are generally preferred today.²⁰

This paper proposes an integral approach. It works with invariants of a constitutive principle of construction as well as with relations of similarity, which refer to the expression of variable principles of representation in concrete phenomena. These principles of representation are, in turn, considered transhistorical invariants, but some of them hold, at least in the case of European literature, prototypical genre meaning. Both the constitutive principle of construction and the variable principles of representation are understood as concepts in the sense of mental representations that guide cognition.²¹

The distinction between a constitutive principle of construction and its combination with variable principles of representation can be illustrated with two terms borrowed from genetics. The principle of construction functions like an idiom, which cannot be found paradigmatically present in a phenomenon, but which nevertheless constitutes it and underlies it as an invariant. The combination of the idiom with the variable principles of its articulation forms the phenotypes; the latter are closer to the concrete phenomena than the former, but likewise are not realized in a single phenomenon. Idioms and phenotypes both serve as a classification grid, which enables an ordering and correlation of concrete phenomena.

The idiom of the 'novel in poems,' which I propose in this article as the conceptual core for determining the new genre, is quite simple: a hybrid of the invariant principles of construction of the poem and the novel as they are established in the modern European literatures. These characteristics are opposed to each other with gradations of manifestation possible in each case (see Table 1):

	<i>Poem</i>	<i>Novel</i>
Size	Brevity	Length
Poetic facture	Distinct	Not Distinct
Plot	Not Distinct	Distinct

The poem represents a self-contained, autonomous, and short text unit with a poetic facture, which is often supported by verse and/or stanza forms and instates (itself in) the special treatment of language material by applying equivalences. The brevity of the poem restricts itself to one or two pages as a standard measure, and the poem also tends to employ shorter lines and include prominent white

¹⁹ Cf. for example Hempfer (2010: 22-23).

²⁰ Cf. the approach of Hempfer (2010) or the suggestion of Fricke et al. (2010: 18).

²¹ Cf. Zymner (2013: 32).

space on the page. The novel, on the other hand, has a length that allows for the development of a plot. According to its structuralist (and Aristotelian) definition, a plot consists of at least two events or changes of state that relate to each other, this relation being usually causal or resultative.²² The minimal length of a novel depends on the literary tradition. There are different standard measures for distinguishing the novel from longer stories with a strong plot: thus, there indeed exist short novels or short stories in poems. The chapters (in epic poetry, also stanzas or songs) and, if applicable, parts of a novel, are usually much longer than the short poem and do not typically possess any relative autonomy from each other.

The difference between the ‘novel in poems’ and the verse novel is thus that the former is not divided into stanzas or songs but is rather composed of more or less autonomous and relatively short poems that can be separated and read individually, even if they form a plot or are summarized in chapters and parts. In contrast to the ‘novel in poems,’ the book of poems and the cycle of poems do not develop a plot in the strict sense, and the coherence of the whole is mostly created by equivalences, central themes, and, sometimes, their development and variation.²³ The speaker in such poems also frequently remains the same in order to guarantee their coherence. Sometimes an action – a love story, for example – forms the background to a book of poems and gives rise to the creation of the poems, which, however, does not so much allow the reader to reconstruct a plot as to observe transformations of the speaker’s state of mind (as, for example, in Aleksandr Blok’s “trilogy” of “books of poems,” which, in his 1911 preface, he called “a novel in verse”²⁴).

The ‘novel in poems,’ taken as an idiom, thus stands between a collection of poems – which as a cycle or book arranges poems paradigmatically according to a dominant thematic concern – and a (verse) novel – which develops a plot in a dominantly syntagmatic way. The ‘novel in poems’ can also be characterized as a kind of serial narrative, which uses poems as units for the construction of a plot and thus bears some relation to episodic narrative forms or even the experimental novel.²⁵

²² Cf. in particular Veldhues (1997: 67).

²³ On the cycle of poems and narrative texts cf. El-Hassan (1981).

²⁴ Blok (1911: 179).

²⁵ Precursors of the ‘novel in poems’ can also be found among the experimental forms of the novel – although here the poetry format used is also experimental and multimodal, for example as a novel assembled from fragments of concrete poetry, such as Raymond Federman’s “Double or Nothing – a real fictitious Discourse” (1971). Cf. on the types of the American experimental novel: Ernst (1992; on Federman: 278). The contemporary ‘novel in poems,’ on the other hand, is rarely experimental and/or hermetic; the reasons for its creation are to be found less in literary experiment than in the focus on moment, subject, (illusory) authenticity, de-hierarchically rendered storytelling with the replacement of the narrator by polyperspectiv-

The manifestations of the 'novel in poems' are to be placed on a scale between the poetry collection or book of poetry and the verse novel, depending, on the one hand, on the poems' brevity and relative autonomy, and, on the other, on how the plot is articulated.

Genres are also determined by the constellations of variable principles of representation that form their respective phenotypes. The phenotypes of the 'novel in poems' can be ordered according to combinations of two categories of principles of representation in particular, which occur in both the poetry book and the novel, but which can manifest themselves in different ways. Here, we will differentiate between subject forms²⁶ – such as figures, speakers,²⁷ composition, or textual subject – and their relation to the author outside the text (I), and, on the other hand, prototypical modes of representation or ways of speaking (II)²⁸.

Thus, according to the subject models that I have theoretically outlined in previous publications,²⁹ the following forms of the subject are distinguished (I): the explicitly marked – fictional or factual – speaker or producer of the enunciation, which is created by the composition of the text and its intertextual and contextual relations. The producer of the composition can be identical with the speaker (in this case, the speaker is also the addresser) or not; for this reason, I assume a textual or 'aesthetic subject.' Its relation to the speaker must be analyzed. The construction of the 'aesthetic subject of the text' is based on the presupposition of a 'transcendental subject' or 'type' as a hermeneutic point of reference, while the author as an 'empirical subject' remains ungraspable per se. The author's forms of expression, whether they exist in texts or other forms, can

ity and montage as principles of (post-)postmodernist narrative, as well as in new trends towards voice, orality, and even performance, which are typical of the digital age.

²⁶ On this subject, see in detail Geist / Reents / Stahl (forthcoming).

²⁷ In the newer theory of poetry, the term 'addresser' is often preferred (cf. Zymner 2019, 26-27; for a critical discussion of the term: Stahl, forthcoming b). The term 'speaker' refers to the imagined person, pronouncing the speech, while 'addresser' means the person or instance producing the text. Even if it is typical for the lyrical poem to expose his/her identity, in some cases – and this tendency is currently becoming more common – the addresser deviates from the speaker and is used to designate the instance responsible for the construction of the speaker and the composition of the whole poem. I name this instance the textual subject, or more precisely, the 'aesthetic subject of the text' (cf. Stahl forthcoming b).

²⁸ „[...] ‚Schreibweisen‘ [sind] selbst keine literarischen Gattungen oder Texttypen [...], aber [können] Texttypen und Gattungen oder aber doch wenigstens einzelne Texte prägen [...]. Schreibweisen sind die medienspezifischen – auf Schrifttexte bezogenen – Ausprägungen allgemeiner, gestaltgebender oder prägender Verfahren, die an und für sich auch in anderen medialen Kontexten vorkommen können“ (Zymner 2013: 25). Zymner also differentiates the three modes of “the narrative, the dramatic and the lyrical.” I prefer to speak more generally of modes of representation.

²⁹ Stahl (2017), Stahl (forthcoming b). On the discussion concerning the implied author and the textual subject cf. Stahl / Geist / Reents (forthcoming) and Stahl (forthcoming b).

in turn be analyzed and related to each other. They represent the ‘aesthetic subject of the author.’ The ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ can also be an invented instance, which can stand more precisely distinguished from not only the subject of enunciation but also the ‘aesthetic subject of the author.’ These three forms of the subject can merge and diverge to variable degrees. The intensity of the development of the ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ and its relation to the ‘subject of the enunciation,’ as well as to ‘aesthetic subject of the author,’ have to be discovered in each text:³⁰

<i>Transcendental subject (type)</i>
<i>Subject of enunciation (producer of the enunciation)</i>
<i>Aesthetic subject</i>
- <i>of the text (producer of the composition)</i>
- <i>of the author (forms of expression of the author)</i>
<i>Empirical subject (real author)</i>

Here, a fundamental question arises as to the constitution of the subject of the enunciation: that is, whether there are one or more speakers throughout the entire text and whether they also act as figures, i.e., as part of the represented world.³¹

The characterization of the subject of enunciation is also connected with three generic modes of representation: the lyric, narrative, and dramatic (II). One of these modes may dominate, or they may appear in various combinations.

I understand the lyric with Klaus Hempfer as the fiction of performativity. In his book “Lyric – An Outline of a Systematic Theory”,³² Hempfer projects Austin’s definition of the performative speech act: “There is something which is *at the moment of uttering being done by the person uttering*”³³ onto “a sequence of speech acts, which in the act of speaking create the situation that they are discussing at the same time.” Here, the speaker does not “tell” a “story,” but rather “does or experiences what he is talking about at the same time. Lyric speaking, therefore, does not tell what has happened, but rather constitutes in speaking what is being spoken about, or formulated differently: lyric speaking is based on the simultaneity or coincidence of the spoken situation and the discussed situa-

³⁰ Cf. in more detail: Stahl (forthcoming b).

³¹ Additionally, it is necessary to analyze the constitution of the subject of enunciation concerning the use of personal pronouns, montage of anonymous fragments of speech, etc., as well as their state of being (factual or fictional; perhaps neither).

³² Hempfer (2014).

³³ Austin (2018: 60; his italics). Cf. also Hempfer (2014: 31).

tion.”³⁴ The specific feature of the fiction of performativity is the constitution of the object of speech by the act of speaking (performativity), whereby the object is not reported as given but is instead imagined as/in the present. As this act is only semiotic (i.e., it produces meaning) and not situationally pragmatic, it is therefore fictional – even if its content is understood as factual.³⁵ Characteristic for the fiction of performativity is the use of the present tense, or at least an imagination of the speech act's immediacy, since the object of speech is not presented as preceding the act of speech but as being produced by it.

Epic and narrative are modes of representation in which an object is presented as existing outside of speech itself, regardless of whether it precedes in the past or follows in the future. If the present tense is employed, it is generally historical. The temporal and spatial distance between the speaker and the object thus allows for focalization. This is the central difference between the narrative and the lyric modes of representation. Instead of extending reference to a given object, the latter performs the imaginative reality of the object by the act of speech itself.

Finally, the dramatic mode of representation may be said to model itself on the forms of communication in direct speech, which are localized in a space-time-continuum that is assumed as present in a fictional but given reality – not in an imaginative one – that may be staged and not only told. In contrast to the fiction of performativity present in lyric, dramatic speech acts do not imaginatively construct an object or reality through the act itself but merely refer to it.

The manifestation of the three forms of representation in the 'novel in poems' and the verse novel have also been recognized by other critics. Cadden, for example, has described the genre as a transitory phenomenon situated between novel, drama, and poem in overlapping circles;³⁶ and he considers the new verse novel to possess a fundamental affinity with drama in particular.³⁷ However, I

³⁴ My translation, H.S. Cf. the original: „Im Unterschied zu Austin beziehe ich die Performativitätsfiktion jedoch nicht auf einen einzelnen Sprechakt, der eine spezifische Handlung konstituiert, sondern auf eine Abfolge von Sprechakten, die im Akt des Sprechens die Situation entwerfen, die sie zeitgleich besprechen. Nun konstituiert jeder fiktionale Text ‚Welt‘. Das spezifisch Lyrische scheint im Unterschied zum Erzählen gerade darin zu liegen, dass nicht eine Instanz – sei sie nun hetero- oder homodiegetisch – eine Geschichte vermittelt, sondern dass ein Sprecher im Akt des Sprechens das tut bzw. erfährt, worüber er zeitgleich spricht. Ein lyrisches Sprechen erzählt also nicht, was geschehen ist, sondern konstituiert im Sprechen, worüber gerade gesprochen wird, oder anders formuliert: Lyrisches Sprechen basiert auf der Simultaneität bzw. Koinzidenz von Sprechsituation und besprochener Situation“ (Hempfer 2014: 31-32).

³⁵ Cf. Hempfer: „Missverstanden wurde auch mein Konzept der ‚Performativitätsfiktion‘, insofern es mir gerade nicht um die Fiktivität des Geäußerten, sondern um die Fiktionalität der Äußerungssituation geht“ (Hempfer 2019: 56).

³⁶ Cf. Cadden (2011: 26).

³⁷ Cf.: “offer some claims about the genre’s use of voice and its affinity to drama as a form” (Cadden 2011: 2).

suggest it makes more sense to categorize this form as a hybrid of the novel and poetry, as staged performance is generally not fundamental to the actualization of the text. In the literary tradition, moreover, the dramatic mode of representation is by no means restricted to drama alone. Dramatic passages exist in the novel, for instance, and the dramatic monologue is a genre of poetry of its own that has been most extensively cultivated in the English literary tradition. The ‘novel in poems,’ which uses poems in the style of or as a dramatic monologue is indeed a phenotypic variation. Thus, the ‘novel in poems’ can be further defined by combining the three modes of representation along different relations and degrees of intensity, including that of the dramatic.

The phenotypes of the ‘novel in poems’ can be determined by combining the principles of the two classes outlined (I/II). I propose a matrix which is limited to the basic forms of the subject of enunciation (a more elaborated form might also take into account the ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ and the relations to the “aesthetic subject of the author”):

I Subject of enunciation	1 speaker = figure	1 speaker ≠ figure	Several speakers = figures
<i>II Modes of representation</i>			
<i>Lyric</i>			
<i>Narrative</i>			
<i>Dramatic</i>			

Consequently, the texts are to be analyzed, on the one hand, in relation to the idiom (i.e., to be located between the poles of the collection of poems and the novel on the scale) and, on the other hand, in relation to a combination of the forms of the subject of enunciation and its modes of representation, whereby the degree of their respective expression is to be determined.

Let us now apply this model to the three textual examples.

A Lyric ‘Novel in Poems’: Irina Ermakova: “With Red Ink on Black Silk” (1991/2011)

Poems from Irina Ermakova’s book «Алой тушью по черному шелку» (“With Red Ink on Black Silk”) first appeared in 1991 in a mystified manner: the text was presented as a translation of the tanka of a fictional 12th century Japanese poet, Yoko Irinati, whose name is constructed by selecting and changing the let-

ters of Ermakova's name.³⁸ The Japanese poetic form of the tanka, a predecessor of the haiku, consists of thirty-one morae, or syllables, and breaks down into two sections: 5-7-5 / 7-7. However, the poems do not strictly follow the tanka form. The free interpretation of the tanka form is explained by the fact that, within the logics of book, the poems are understood as Russian translations.

In her preface, the author points out that the book is a "novel in tanka," i.e., on the one hand it consists of tanka as individual poems claiming autonomous validity, but on the other hand it is a novel with a distinct subject, meant in a double sense derived from the Russian word «роман»: a novel about a love affair.³⁹

But the speaker of the poems does not narrate the novel: the plot with its central events rather remains unmentioned. Instead, using the lyric's fiction of performativity, the poems reflect the speaker's state of mind, the cause of which is a condition or event that is presupposed. The plot must therefore be reconstructed: the 108 tanka are based on a love story which progresses in phases toward a centrally situated climax (tanka 54), the sexual act of love, and the peripeteia (tanka 55), which immediately follows and initiates the second phase, bringing alienation, the death of the baby, the resurgence of love, and, finally, the announcement of the samurai beloved's seppuku.⁴⁰

The individual poems are arranged in chronological order. The linearity of time and the logic of action is counteracted in the text by the secondary ordering principle of multilateral connections through a network of equivalences: poetically generated relations of similarity that are a basic feature of poetry cycles.

The book thus shows a contradiction that is characteristic of the 'novel in poems': that is, it compensates for missing narration with lyric speech acts, resulting in a double perspective that causes conflict between an experiencing subject, speaking in the present via the fiction of performativity, and a subject who retrospectively composes the poem with an orientation towards narrative. The first dactylic poem demonstrates this clearly:

Розовой пятки
 коснулась волна
 и зашипела, вздымаясь ...
 Сто восемь раз напишу знак ЛЮБОВЬ
 на воде.⁴¹

³⁸ Cf. Ermakova, Irina: *Алой тушью по черному шелку*. Moskau, 2011. Here, the preface: (Ermakova 2011: 10); in the epilogue, Ermakova reports on mystification (ibid., 152-167).

³⁹ Cf. ibid., 11-12.

⁴⁰ In the preface (cf. ibid., 10), he is called Fujiwara no Taifu (a combination of well-known Japanese poets' names, for example Sarumaru no Taifu, and one of the many poets named Fujiwara).

⁴¹ Ermakova (2011: 19).

A wave
 touched the rose heel
 and hissed, surging...
 A hundred and eight times I will write the sign for LOVE
 on the water.

On the one hand, the poem reflects the state of the sensing subject, the young woman, at the beginning of the plot, signalling through classic poetic motifs such as [small] feet, the color of roses, and waves, her youthful readiness for love and erotic experience. This is described through a lyric fiction of performativity, but, at the same time, it takes place in the past tense and thus temporally precedes the act of speaking. The present of the speaker who announces a future act of writing (“I will write”) is, however, at the same time determined from the perspective of the narrative already completed in the future: “A hundred and eight times” the speaker will have written the (Japanese) sign for love on the water. The novel will have 108 poems.

In the Buddhist tradition, 108 is the number of vices to be overcome in the ascent to Buddha-nature.⁴² At the center of the poem, in the third line, are two verbs that predict “surging” emotions, ominous conflicts, and betrayal (the wave “hisses” as a snake would)⁴³ – the actual goal is thus shifted by the poetic construction from the readiness for love and sex to their sublimation (catharsis).

In this way, the lyric fiction of performativity is narratively functionalized – for it is not imagination that constitutes its content in speech but rather a reference to stations of the plot both preceding and succeeding the present speech act. The future that the speaker reserves for the act of writing (“I will write”) is simultaneously determined from the perspective of the plot already completed in that future: the figure only pretends to perform the speech act and imaginatively produce the present, whereas, in fact, she retroactively comments upon and evaluates her earlier experiences. The lyric fiction of performativity thus enters into a paradoxical confrontation with narrative perspective. However, this narrative employment of the lyric fiction of performativity can only be recognized if the poem is read not in isolation but rather sequentially – that is, as the first of the book’s 108 poems. The poem can, however, also be read as an autonomous tanka – in which case, the narrative function, which is only implicit in the poem itself due to its temporality (the past and future tenses of the verbs in the presence of their being uttered), remains inactivate. This tension between lyric and narrative attitudes goes hand-in-hand with the distinction between the speaker, who is shown as present, and a textual subject who portrays that speaker retroactively and manifests itself only in the fact of the larger composition.

⁴² Ermakova specifically refers to this in the commentary to her poem (Ermakova 2011: 133).

⁴³ As David Hock pointed out in a conversation, the last line might function as an allusion to Catullus’s “Carmen 70”. However, in Ermakova’s text the reference is reversed – here the woman talks about the man.

The numerical center of the novel is the climax of the love affair in tanka 54, which is depicted as erotic ecstasy, both aurally and visually iconic. Aurally, the poem's lines consist of a rhythmically successive "O" interrupted by accelerating pauses; visually, it consists of the round, erotic image of the "O" in conjunction with phallic exclamation marks and spermatic dots:

O!
 O!
 O!
 O, извержение вулкана!
 O, извер.....!⁴⁴

O!
 O!
 O!
 O, Erupting Volcano!
 O, Er.....!

This poem, composed in the present tense, contains a premonition of the alienation to come. The "volcanic eruption" is continued in the last verse with the breaking off of the word «извержение» to «извер,» associatively also as «изверг,» i.e., a "cruel man." Moreover, the insertion of commas that distance the "O" from its exclamation mark and the scission of «извержение» prefigure a force of separation. In the next poem (tanka 55), the spermatic dots metamorphose into a grain of rice that the speaker imagines to be resting upon the mouth of the beloved – an image connoting that she has become meaningless for him but is herself still deeply affected by him:

Светильник погас.
 Снова уснул ты.
 Хотела быть зёрнышком риса,
 прилипшим
 к твоей губе.⁴⁵

The light died out.
 Again you had fallen asleep.
 I'd like to be a grain of rice,
 sticking
 at your lip.

The final poem, 108, announces, on the one hand, the *seppuku* of the beloved: "a jagged red lightning bolt slits the pale sky" (the commentary of the real author and fictional translator in the appendix leaves no doubt as to this⁴⁶), but, on the

⁴⁴ Ermakova (2011: 72).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 148.

other hand, it also refers to the novel itself – for it has been written with “red ink,” with blood as a medium of both love and death:

Кривая алая молния
вспорола бледное небо
там, на Юго-востоке ...
Улыбайся,
уходя по-японски.⁴⁷

A jagged red lightning bolt
slits the pale sky
there, in the south-east...
Smile,
parting in Japanese.

The center – the in-between state – of the rising and falling action is especially marked. In tanka 27, for instance, the entrance of moonlight and the love songs of cats into the bedroom indicates that the affair is becoming intimate; while in tanka 80 a moment of ‘regression’ and revival of the erotic relationship is depicted: “again the source of the dried up well beats.”⁴⁸

The manner of speaking in Ermakova’s tanka novel is thus predominantly lyric, yet it extends to a whole plot that follows the tragic model⁴⁹ and is presented indirectly. Few poems demonstrate the latent narrative mode found in the example of the first poem. The reconstruction of the plot behind the poems is rather consciously stimulated by paratexts. The preface, for instance, refers to the symmetrically constructed plot triangle; the commentary, which contains an entry for each poem, not only explains expressions but also gives clues to events and characters hidden behind the poem and suggests interpretative perspectives; the epilogue, meanwhile, provides the story of the book’s genesis, which, in turn, gives some clear indications for its interpretation. These paratexts replace not only a narrator, but also the mediating instance (a subject) located beyond the speaker: in this case, “Yoko Irinati,” the supposed author who is responsible for the original composition. That is, Irinati functions within the main text as the speaker and also as the subject who composes, and thus reflects upon and evaluates her experiences retroactively. She is the “aesthetic subject of the text.” Hence, there is no place available within this construction itself for a further mediating instance that could transcend and relativize the textual subject. That

⁴⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 98 (Russ.: «Снова забил ключ, иссякший / в замшелом колодце»).

⁴⁹ The symmetrical, often pyramidal plot structure can be noticed in many verse novels and novels in poems, also and especially when they have several speakers and show dramatic features; cf.: “Two polyphonic verse novels – Karen Hesse’s *Witness* and Ron Koertge’s *The Brimstone Journals* – are written in five parts, and it’s easy to see that they follow a five-act play’s structure: set up, rising action, crisis and confrontation, climax, and conclusion” (Cadden 2011: 25).

instance is rather constructed by the paratexts, explicitly produced by and identified with the author (Irina Ermakova) herself.

Thus, the two principles – poem and novel – are both present in Ermakova's book. However, insofar as the plot is not presented but only presupposed, and as the poems are dominated by the lyric mode, the work remains closer to the cycle or book of poems than to the novel.

A Polyphonic "Novel in Poems": Lana Hechtman Ayers's "Red Riding Hood's Real Life" (2017)

Lana Hechtman Ayers has called her book "Red Riding Hood's Real Life" (2017) "a novel in *verse*," although the text is composed entirely of *poems*. While many of the book's poems demonstrate semantic autonomy, they can also be understood in relation to the novel's plot. Ayers hybridizes Slavic and German fairy-tale material around the witch Baba Yaga and Little Red Riding Hood, combining this with American social realism. Baba Yaga stands for the emancipation of women through the release of artistic creativity.⁵⁰

The book is a *Künstlerroman*: it is about a thirty-year-old woman who breaks out of her patriarchal marriage when she meets an artist, the Wolf. After a miscarriage, she also leaves the Wolf, the love of her life and her artistic mentor, in order to find herself. And yet, Eve Riding, who calls herself Red Riding Hood, returns to her great love in the end – after many years, aged and with grey hair, she once again becomes the Wolf's partner, now on equal footing and "forever" (see "Epilogue: Happily Ever After"⁵¹).

The book's ten chapters (which is, not by chance, the number of perfection) consist of poems that form a progressive, chronologically constructed plot. At the same time, each poem establishes its validity in and of itself. In contrast to Ermakova, Ayers does not focus on a single speaker but works in a multivalent manner through a host of different speakers: Red's husband, the Hunter; the Wolf; Baba Yaga; minor characters; and even anonymous voices. Furthermore, some of the poems are written in the third person and belong to an extradiegetic narrator.

In the poem, "Red Riding Hood and the Wolf Discuss Rothko,"⁵² the third-person narrator frames a scene of dialogue with stage directions. The epigraph "Time is white / mosquitoes bite / I've spent my life on nothing" from Lorine Niedecker's poem "What Horror to Awake at Night" provides a perspective for interpreting the protagonist's psychological situation, which she herself will only later reflect on (in the poem "Red Riding Hood Conquers Another

⁵⁰ Cf. on this novel more precisely: Stahl (2019a).

⁵¹ Ayers (2017: 209-213).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 54.

Myth”⁵³). Mark Rothko’s painting, in front of which both stand, is also a symbolically significant intertext – White, the Wolf, is currently still standing “above” Red, which is why she will later have to leave him. But first they will become a couple. Accordingly, the lines of the poem are written in pairs.

The book also contains poems, however, in a decidedly lyric mode, such as “Red Riding Hood Embraces Her Artist Animus,”⁵⁴ in which Red magically conjures up the goal of her self-discovery: the “artist animus,” who is both Baba Yaga and Wolf inside her.⁵⁵ The hymn that Red sings here is the poem itself, as a performative expression of her creative release. In a symbolic way, Red’s lyric poetry thus represents her narrated visual art: she is not a poet, but a painter.

Many poems hybridize the narrative and lyric functions. The lyric function comes to the fore when a poem is read separately, excommunicated from the plot’s context. Understood autonomously, each poem generalizes the state of a figure. In this case, the act of present speech and its content appear as the speaker’s imagination, presented through a lyric fiction of performativity. The title situates the poem in the plot and actualizes its narrative function by establishing reference to a concrete state or event imposed upon the figure. Thus, a narrative functionalization of lyric poems can also be observed in Ayers’s work. Unlike Ermakova, however, Ayers emphasizes narrative functionalization through the use of titles and epigraphs that point to a narrative instance beyond the speaker and figure, as well as through narrative and/or dramatic passages within the poems themselves.

An example of the narrative functionalization of a lyric poem is “Red Riding Hood Diaries about Sex with Husband Hunter.” The title explains the role of the characters, the subject matter, and the form of presentation within the plot, while the epigraph points to the upcoming divorce and its motivation⁵⁶:

RED RIDING HOOD DIARIES ABOUT SEX WITH HUSBAND HUNTER

Husband, mad hammer, man of force.
(Anne Sexton)

Is this what passion is?
More like tearing
the knot I tied.
Woods of uncertainty.

⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, on the unfulfilled nature of her life as a housewife and spouse of a man who is not erotically attractive to her: “I can be sweeper no more, weeper no more, / Let the broom loom over me no more. / I claim myself as moon” (*Ibid.*, 134).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 163-164.

⁵⁵ Cf.: “I’ll fashion passionate / conflagrations of bones, / spark bones into // wolf-woman configurations. / Harrow every bone, and by this / know myself to the marrow” (*Ibid.*).

⁵⁶ The line is from Sexton’s poem “February 21st”, the following line is “This last week had been our divorce” (Sexton 1988: 264).

Black time.
Subordination.
Silence with no clothes on.

Night's bedrock,
mattress creaking.
Soft moonlight on his cheek,
a disguise.

When you marry an oak,
the body agrees to
lady slippers in shadows.

Conversation dependent on weather,
whether dependent.
The abrupt, unpregnant
pause.⁵⁷

The poem is figured as a diary entry, whereby it remains open regardless of whether the poetic form of the text is attributed to the speaker herself or rather to the narrative instance that employs this form as a medium of expression for the prosaic diary entry of the protagonist.⁵⁸ This is because Red is not addressed anywhere in the book as a poet but exclusively as a painter. The lyric mode and poetic structure imbue the poem with meaning, which maintains explanatory significance for both the characters' psychologies as well as the plot (such as her desire to have children when her husband is sterile: "The abrupt, unpregnant / pause"). Additionally, this enables the reader's own concurrent meaning making, which extends beyond the plot and the book itself (especially through the use of metaphor), as is typical for lyric texts. Separated from the plot, the position of the I opens up to the reader; the subject of the poem thus functions simultaneously as both a 'Leerdeixis' / 'blank deixis'⁵⁹ (lyric) and as a concrete figure in the plot (narrative).

All poems, even those that predominantly utilize the epic or dramatic modes, emphasize – more or less strongly – a poetic facture. For example, the poem "Sticks & Stones"⁶⁰ consists of one-word verses of invective with which various members of society express their contempt for the adulterous Red. Different voices are to be imagined accordingly. Sound play and phonetic transformations link the words. In the end, the protagonist's voice emerges from the chorus: it is

⁵⁷ Ayers (2017: 39).

⁵⁸ In Porter's "The Monkey's Mask" there is also no explanation as to why the lesbian detective records her experiences in poems – the poem is a way of writing which Porter chooses in order to be close to the subject's point of view, on the one hand, and to be able to focus the narrative on central moments, on the other hand.

⁵⁹ Spinner (1975).

⁶⁰ Ayers (2017: 117-118).

she who is now “free” (“free” being the only word written in lower case, connected with “finally” to form a sentence). The poem can be read autonomously as a miniature, depicting the ostracization of a woman who disregards social norms. At the same time, it is connected with the whole of the novel in discreet ways and through equivalences: “Witch” refers to the Baba Yaga, the verb “fallen” to Red’s actual first name, “Eve,” etc.

In Ayers’s novel, in addition to lyric and dramatic passages, narrative traits are evident, both in the poems themselves and in the relatively high degree of coherence between poems. These procedures connect the poems more clearly than is the case in Ermakova’s book, and thus allow the plot to be directly present in the poems themselves. While Ermakova claims that her protagonist is the author of the poems and only locates herself in the paratexts (preface, epilogue, commentary), Ayers also injects her authorship within the poems. The titles and epigraphs are designed such that they do not refer to the speakers of the poems but rather to a mediating instance that provides a framework addressed to the reader that explains the occasion or topic. This instance appears to be identical with the third-person narrator that appears in some of the poems. Through the epigraphs of poems and chapters, as well as the prologue and epilogue, she sets interpretative impulses that complement, or even correct, the views⁶¹ of the poems’ various speakers⁶². These procedures make Ayers’s ‘novel in poems’ polyphonic and multi-perspectival, underlining its narrative qualities and thus bringing it closer to the verse novel on our scale.

The Dramatic “Novel in Poems”: Glyn Maxwell’s “The Sugar Mile” (2005)

In English-language literature, a variety of ‘novels in poems’ demonstrate close affinities to the genre of the dramatic monologue, which is especially prominent in the Anglophone tradition. Examples of this are “New Found Land” by Allan Wolf (2004), Karen Hesse’s “Witness”⁶³ (2000), and Terri Field’s “After the

⁶¹ For example, the epigraph (from the song by Warren Zevon “Searching for a Heart”) in the poem “Hunter Insists on Having His Say” has such a function (Ayers 2017: 36-37). The epigraph suggests that Red will leave her husband Hunter and follow her love, the Wolf, while Hunter, the speaker in this poem, sings of his supposedly so well-behaved housewife whom he wrongly thinks he owns – the motto functions as a tragic irony.

⁶² Cadden rightly points out that in verse novels the sequence of different speakers is often semantically determined – main characters take their turn with their poems or speeches before secondary characters (cf. Cadden 2011: 23).

⁶³ “In *Witness*, Hesse discovers new possibilities for the verse-novel. The book is divided into five Acts and each ‘verse’ has as its title the name of one of the eleven characters featured in the story, so that it is as though they take turns to speak. This is verse-novel becoming drama; it could be performed as a radio play” (Alexander 2005: 277). Zymner notes with regard to this example that here the verse make it possible “to reproduce paralinguistic aspects of ‘natural’ language use (such as pauses in breathing or hesitant speaking), so that one could speak

Death of Anna Gonzales” (2002). Field describes her book as “poems written in the voices of forty-seven people”; Hesse divides her book into “acts” and calls it a “series of poems” (as indicated on the book’s cover); while Wolf describes his book, which is composed of (more or less dramatic) monologue poems, as a “novel.” British author Glyn Maxwell develops what can be regarded as an experimental variation of this phenotype that places high demands on its reader.

In contrast to Ermakova and Ayers’s books, Maxwell’s “The Sugar Mile” manages without either a typical lyric speaker or narrator. The special feature of the book lies in the fact that its poems consist mainly of dramatic speeches. As with Ayers’s work, the poems are delivered by different characters. The titles indeed contain information about places, times, and people, but in contrast to the poems of Ayers, the reader here must conduct further research in order to point more clearly to the speaker or setting of the poem. The poems additionally withhold interpretative strategies from the reader. It is left to the reader to reconstruct what exactly the poem is about, who is actually speaking⁶⁴ and in what situation, what kind of person that speaker is, and what relation he or she bears to other figures. To be able to understand and classify an individual poem, the recipient must read the book in its entirety and take into consideration the novel as a whole. Proceeding in hermeneutical spirals, the reader must reconstruct the plot and the function of its characters, taking on tasks traditionally performed by the narrator or realized through the ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ and/or ‘of the author’ as constructed by paratexts.

The reconstruction of the plot is complicated, as the poems alternate in sudden leaps between two far-flung locations and times, connected by only a single person and the theme of an aerial attack. One plot takes place on the first days of the Blitz on 7th September 1940 in London, the other exactly 61 years later on the Saturday evening of September 8th, 2001, a few days before the attack on the Twin Towers, in a bar on Broadway. Two of the protagonists are affected by these attacks: Joey Stone experienced the Blitz as a boy and lost his young love, with whom he became romantic on the very night of the bombing; in 2001, he is a regular at Raul’s bar. The other one is Raul, who, three days later, on September 11th, will begin a

of an intensification or increase in the scenic or dramatic potential of the novel in verse compared to the prose novel” (“[...] paralinguistische Aspekte ‚natürlicher‘ Sprachverwendung (wie Atempausen oder zögerndes Sprechen) nachzubilden, so dass man von einer Intensivierung oder Steigerung des szenischen oder dramatischen Potentials der novel in verse im Vergleich zum Prosaroman sprechen könnte”; Zymner 2009b: 161; my translation, H.S.).

⁶⁴ Often the speakers are mentioned by their name in the title of the poems, however, in several poems, the reader must figure out who is the person speaking (for instance: “Man in a Little Flower Bed” or “Man Getting off a Bike”; italics – mine).

new job at the Twin Towers, and, as the reader can gather from allusions, he is imagined to be among those who will soon leap to their deaths.⁶⁵

The isolation of the poems from each other is emphasized insofar as, speaking cinematically, one switches in sharp cuts from one person's perspective to another and possibly also between places and times. The coherence of the poems and the background of the events and contexts must be reconstructed on the basis of references in other poems. But the specific situations in which the poems take place – i.e., are spoken – must be reconstructed as well. Thus, the poems usually contain the speech of only one person, with characteristically loud or soft voices, often talking to themselves; or, even, perhaps, internally spoken or reproduced imaginatively in a single stream of consciousness. Differences between addressed and unaddressed speech are signalled by italic or capital print, brackets, and also by the arrangement of lines and stanzas modelling the flow of speech. But what they refer to in concrete terms must be reconstructed according to the context. No fixed system of signs is established: the brackets sometimes signal an aside, at other times an internal soliloquy, etc.

Action, reaction, and the speech of other characters are not reproduced by inserting direct speech, as in a drama or narrative text, but instead presented within the speech of only one figure at a time, who possibly repeats fragments from the words of another but only in the decontextualized form of reported speech. This procedure can be understood alongside the tradition of the dramatic monologue.⁶⁶ Due to this emphatically oral gesture, the impression of a multi-layered audio “recording” is created, which, however, reproduces only one “track” (one voice).⁶⁷ This is clear in “Granny’s” speech, for example, which presupposes that Joey did not drink his tea and told her that he wanted to “have a look”: “Don’t let your tea go cold, / Joey [...] Where are you going, dear? What do you mean ‘to look’?” (“Granny May on the Stairs”).⁶⁸ A later poem continues

⁶⁵ On the reconstruction of the plot, cf. Peter Hühn’s essay in this volume: “Generic Extensions in Contemporary British Poetry” (Hühn 2021). With good reason, Hühn understands some aspects differently from Kempton (2018: 172-176).

⁶⁶ Cadden writes about the proximity of the new novel to the dramatic monologue: “Browning’s dramatic monologue is a close poetic parallel to the feel of the verse novel, for he provides us personal, natural voice and a sense of the scenic, but unlike Browning’s characters, the verse novel’s speakers do not tend to address directly within the poem a character ‘narratee’ – or person addressed in the context of the poem” (Cadden 2011: 22). Maxwell, however, is an example of the fact that an addressee may well be directly involved in the speech act; here Cadden wrongly criticizes Alexander, who has pointed out that the new verse novel develops analogues to the “dramatic monologue” (which does not mean that every verse novel or ‘novel in poems’ does this; moreover, if it does, it can happen in very different ways), cf. Alexander (2005: 271).

⁶⁷ The cover text points out the technique of storytelling through voices (“Told through the alternating voices of adult and child”).

⁶⁸ Maxwell (2005: 12).

where this leaves off, allowing the reader to reconstruct what Joey was looking for: he knew from the location of the bombing that the family of the girl he loves could be affected. In this poem, a brother of Joey's girlfriend speaks about the night they were bombed ("Harry Pray in His Coat"):

[...] But where?
I suppose we're 'refugees'.
World's our oyster, Joey. Here,
Help me with these.⁶⁹

This poem shows how the figure's sometimes very colloquial speech is poetically re-formed. Line and stanzaic forms vary, but they do not serve merely to structure the flow of speech but are also used to create poetic effects in combination with other stylistic devices. Rhyme (approximate cross rhyme), alliteration ("When"- "where"- "World's"), wordplay ("mind"- "mound") and metaphor (hidden in the fixed idiom and underpinning an additional, even contradictory meaning: "oyster") are used here to symbolize and underscore the character's experience.⁷⁰

The elimination of mediating instances and procedures guiding the reader, as it were, turns Maxwell's book into a puzzle. These techniques are meta-poetically reflected upon in the first and last poems of the book. The latter repeats and scrambles the text of the former; they function, we might say, as prologue and epilogue, even though they are each assigned to one of the three parts of the book and not explicitly juxtaposed to the other. With these framing poems, Maxwell stages the 'death of the author.' The "author,"⁷¹ referred to as such in the text, says here: "There can be no first person"⁷² and "The poet is any stranger / seen today, whose past is an empty notebook [...] whose past is an empty *moleskine*."⁷³ Within the book, the "author" is degraded to an eyewitness who simply notes down the speech of others. Thus, he is mentioned several times in the poems of the other characters as being present in the bar – he writes there constantly. Joey accordingly calls him a writer and says to him, turning Maxwell's own first name, Glyn, into Glenn:

⁶⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁰ Other poems also use experimental visual and phonetic forms of poetry, see for example "Julie Pray Looking at Her Fingers," which, as the context demonstrates, expresses the girl's traumatic disturbance and even mental instability (ibid., 22-23).

⁷¹ The "author" is a fictional character (therefore he is put in quotation marks) but refers to the real author of the book. He is also presented as weak in decision making for those passages that do not come from the characters but from himself – through blackouts (cf. ibid., 4, 140 in the framing poems).

⁷² Maxwell (2005: 3, 139).

⁷³ Ibid., 139-140. Cf. the first poem (ibid., 3-4): "The poet is any stranger / seen today, whose past is an empty *moleskine* [...] nothing in his notebook / but this."

And yes, we lovers of poems

must stick together. Don't mind me. Pardon? Glenn?
Glenn? Glenn. It is nice to meet you, Glenn.

[...]

You came here to write, my friend.⁷⁴

[...] Look at him, pen at the ready, like I could say
some poetry.⁷⁵

Moreover, the author in the book receives the “yellow envelope” that contains the story of Joey’s youth in poems, which Joey and other people in his circle speak of from time to time, as well as Julie’s prose notes. The staged author is thus understood as a protocol writer and arranger of the text, but not as its inventor.

Maxwell’s enacted dethronement of the author and the elimination of explicitly guiding instances paradoxically leads to the installation of an all-the-more-powerful, even omnipresent, ‘textual subject’: that is, a mediating instance to which the intentional structuring of the text’s cosmos can be ascribed. This is because the actual coherence of the overall composition is necessary in order to make a reconstruction of the plot possible. The form of the poems thus serves as a principle of fragmentation, montage, and polyphonic perspectivization. Due to the widespread interconnectivity across the text – as well as the situational embedding of the speech acts, which retain only limited forms of the fiction of performativity – the poems demonstrate a significantly lower degree of autonomy than is the case with Ermakova’s, or even Ayers’s, work. The book thus tends still more clearly towards the novel than the previous example by Ayers.

Specifics of the “Novel in Poems”

The three examples analysed above are manifestations of the ‘novel in poems’ with different constellations of lyric, narrative, and dramatic modes. They are also each located differently on the scale we have established between the poetry volume and the verse novel.

In Ermakova’s decidedly lyric poems, the plot is not explicitly presented but is rather presupposed. Therefore, the text is closer to the book of poems than to the novel. Ayers’s book, on the other hand, is positioned closer to the novel, because it develops a stringent plot over a longer period of time and employs narrative procedures as well as dramatic modes of representation. The poems, too, are considerably longer – in some cases more than two pages – just as the book is more extensive and divided into chapters. Maxwell’s book, on the other hand, is much closer to the novel than Ayers’s, even while, unlike Ayers, he avoids the construction of an overarching narrative through paratexts and only

⁷⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 27. Raul, however, calls the “author” “Clint” (ibid., 9).

sparingly uses narrative procedures. In his book, poems can be read autonomously only in rare instances; they are largely tied into the respective strands of the double plot that is left to the reader to be reconstructed. Additionally, the dominant dramatic mode and the characters' direct speech are subtly superimposed over the lyric fiction of performativity to the point of its imperceptibility. To an even greater extent than we find in Ayers's book, Maxwell functionalizes poetry as a medium of expression in which poetic characteristics are placed in the service of the dramatic mode. Nevertheless, the book indeed remains a novel. It could not be called a 'drama in poems,' for instance, as its many passages of direct speech are not spoken but instead represent fragments of interior speech or even stream of consciousness. The text, that is, does not require or even permit for staging.

With regard to subject forms and modes of representation, the following may be remarked in summary. Ermakova's book is a romance novel with a single lyric speaker who acts as the addresser, protagonist, and (fictive) poet across all of its constituent poems. This fictive author also co-acts with the 'aesthetic subject of the text.' The real author explicitly sets herself apart from the fictive one through paratexts. The book dominantly uses the lyric mode and only becomes narrative, and rudimentarily so, when individual poems are read in the context of the book as a whole.

The other two books, in contrast, demonstrate complex plots featuring shifting speakers and combine all three modes of representation, but do so in unique ways.

Ayers's *Künstlerroman* utilizes a predominantly narrative structure, while its poems show a combination of lyric, poetic, and dramatic modes – sometimes relying on one mode alone, usually the lyric. In contrast to Ermakova's work, the novel's plot is rarely presupposed; rather, in most poems, the plot is narrated or presented directly as a combination of narrative and dramatic dialogue. The third-person narrator and textual subject act together and distinguish themselves from the first-person speakers of the poems. The difference between figures as speakers, on the one hand, and the narrator and 'aesthetic subject of the text,' on the other, develops perspectives of interpretation and evaluation that deviate from those of the book's characters.

Maxwell's experimental historical novel largely follows the dramatic mode while combining it with other modes of representation. There is no narrator who acts explicitly through paratext; rather, it is precisely such a superordinate subject that is dethroned by the staging of the "author's" farewell in favor of the voices he records. However, a superordinate subject returns, as it were, through the back door at an implicit structural level, as the entire text proves to be planned out down to the last detail. The closely interlocked montage of the fragments forms a narrative ensemble, in which every fragment has its place, and, in the end, produces a coherent mosaic of the double plot, thus referring to a single mediating instance that has composed or arranged the totality of the text: an omnipresent and strongly developed 'aesthetic subject of the text' that

points not to the fictional “author” Maxwell in the text, but to the real Maxwell outside the book – merging with the ‘aesthetic subject of the author.’

For the three texts, the forms of the subject of enunciation can be combined with the three modes of representation as follows (the dominant mode of representation is highlighted in bold, and decreasing degrees of dominance are designated by normal type and brackets, respectively):

Subject of enunciation	1 speaker = figure	1 speaker ≠ figure	Several speakers = figures
<i>Modes of representation</i>			
<i>Lyric</i>	IE		LHA GM
<i>Narrative</i>	[IE]	LHA	LHA [GM]
<i>Dramatic</i>			LHA GM

IE = Irina Ermakova; LHA = Lena Hechtman Ayers; GM = Glyn Maxwell

Despite phenotypical differences, these three examples display common tendencies in terms of form and function that are characteristic of the ‘novel in poems’ as a genre in its own right.

One such attribute is that ‘novel in poems’ tends towards imbuing its poems with different and varying degrees of formal and semantic autonomy. It generally features shorter poems that, when read together, build a single, co-extensive text – here, each over 100 pages – and, in doing so, employs different combinations of lyric, narrative, and dramatic modes of representation. The ‘novel in poems’ is thus characterized by hyper-structuring through symmetries, holistic interconnectivity, and montage. Its guiding principle is that *the higher the fragmentation and reduction of narration, the higher the formal condensation through equivalences*.

Furthermore, the ‘novel in poems’ demonstrates a tendency to differentiate between mediating instances in order to construct multifocal textual presentations, distinguishing, for instance, between one or several speakers versus a narrator, who, in turn, may or may not coincide with the ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ or the ‘aesthetic subject of the author.’ A de-hierarchizing style is distinctive here, reducing instances of order and making the positions of the narrator and textual subject marked rather than implicit, as in the case of Ayers, whose narrator speaks alongside her characters. Alternatively, the absence of a narrator may be equally emphasized or marked and compensated for by the use of characters, composition, and/or paratext. However, as Maxwell’s example shows, such a radical de-hierarchization can turn into an even stronger emphasis on the text’s composition and thus establish an omnipresent ‘aesthetic subject of the text.’

Thematically, the 'novel in poems' often includes a meta-poetic reflection on poetry, or at least on art and creativity. Poetry and poems are thematized by the protagonists themselves, who often appear as poets. The poems thus function like a kind of diary or record. Novels like Ayers's also show how poems can be used as a medium of representation even when neither the speaker nor the protagonist are designated as poets.

The poetic form serves to underscore voice and person. Ultimately, by emphasizing subjectivity and polyvalent perspective, the 'novel in poems' demands the active reconstruction of its plot, which is usually not narrated in the normal sense.⁷⁶ Thus, the popularity of the 'novel in poems' could be read as a harbinger of the reawakening of poetry as a medium for expression of the subject.

Nevertheless, the 'novel in poems' also exhibits fundamental characteristics of the novel: namely, an extensive body of text read sequentially to depict a complex plot featuring multiple characters and focalization from various perspectives. However, the plot becomes necessarily episodic due to the compositional employment of individual poems and thus requires effort on behalf of the reader to assist in its reconstruction. Although typically fragmented, the plot does, however, tend to be ordered chronologically. In the poem, as in the drama, due to the absence or weakening of a mediating instance and the dominance of speech and action in the present tense, deviation from chronology is more difficult to convey, even if it is not impossible in principle. The 'novel in poems' often develops, for instance, an internal conflict between the speaker's imagined present, typical of poems, and the retrospective presentation of the speaker's experience, characteristic of a narrative. This conflict of perspectives is analogous to the dissociation between the speaker and the textual subject in poems. This also has consequences for the lyric fiction of performativity: the poems often make use of such performativity in a traditional form, but, in the context of the novel as a whole, it is subsumed in the function of a historical present-tense narration.⁷⁷ In these cases, imagined and performatively constituted content refers to a narrated object beyond, or besides, the speech act, which is not narrated but merely implied.

The reward of the 'novel in poems' lies in the fact that its constituent parts allow for a higher degree of focalization on singular moments as well as the individual and his or her own inner life. Furthermore, the lyric means of doing

⁷⁶ However, this formulation is not without exceptions – especially in the segment of entertainment literature, or even youth literature, there is a high tendency towards first-person narration with a strong plot flow, as shown by Acevedo's "The Poet X," Nagai's "Under the Broken Sky," Porter's "The Monkey's Mask," and many more. But there are also multi-perspective forms in the youth segment with the use of visual poetry formats; see, for instance, David Elliott's 'novel in poems' for young people, "Voices" (2019).

⁷⁷ In some texts, the fiction of performativity transforms into present-tense narration, as, for instance, in many poems of Acevedo's novel "The Poet X".

so produce an additional hermeneutic level for the construction of meaning and increase the expressive potential of the text. The ‘novel in poems’ is thus a genre suitable for both the poetically well-versed and discerning market of ‘high’ literature as well as for popular entertainment.

Finally, this genre performs two parallel functions that make it attractive to a reader. On the one hand, it is a poetry book that offers its reader an opening for identification, as the individual poems can be extracted and read such that their subject functions as a ‘blank deixis’ to be appropriated by its reader for his or her own semantic needs. On the other hand, it is a novel, which often features exciting stories, plots, and character psychologies.

The rising development of the ‘novel in poems’ should thus be situated in the larger context of transcending boundaries between genres and media that is characteristic of much of recent literature. However, for many contemporary global literatures, the ‘novel in poems’ remains a genre yet to be discovered as, so far, only Anglophone literature has developed a full application of its forms.

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