

REUVEN TSUR

## Linguistic Devices and Ecstatic Poetry.

## »The Windhover« – Tongue-Twisters and Cognitive Processes

Certain verbal structures have been pointed out in Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem »The Windhover« as typical, and conducive to an ecstatic effect: tongue-twisters, adjective pileups, the scarcity of finite verbs and the use of such verbs as *hurl* and *achieve* as nouns. The relationship between such verbal devices and ecstatic quality is usually assumed, not accounted for. This paper explores the possible contribution of such verbal constructions to an ecstatic effect. It invokes Bergson's distinction between perceptions that are »clear, distinct, juxtaposed or juxtaposable one with another, and tend to group themselves into objects«; and »a continuous flux, [...] a succession of states each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it«. The latter underlies what he calls »Metaphysical Intuition«. I argue that Bergson's description »in reality no one begins or ends, but all extend into each other« can be applied to both the semantic and phonetic component of such phrases as Hopkins' »dapple-dawn-drawn falcon«, in a way that has psychological reality. One typical feature of ecstatic experiences is usually described as »depersonalization«. The scarcity of finite verbs contributes to such an effect. Abstract nouns and nominalized verbs and adjectives in referring position reinforce this effect and contribute to the effect of perceived »flux« – as opposed to objects that have stable characteristic visual shapes with stable contours, that resist fusion.

Speech sounds are transmitted by a stream of rich precategorical auditory information, which is immediately recoded into phonetic categories, and excluded from awareness. Some of the precategorical auditory information, however, lingers on subliminally in active memory, and is available for certain cognitive tasks and aesthetic effects. Similar sound patterns may, in certain conditions, enhance such lingering information; but, in some other conditions, they may inhibit it (lateral inhibition). In the second part of the paper, a recording of this poem is submitted to instrumental analysis, and electronic manipulations to generate alternative solutions. The purpose of these exercises is to explore the vocal strategies by which a performer may boost or inhibit the interaction of gestalt-free elements across word and phrase boundaries.

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