

## 15. Music and screen

Emma Helene HEGGDAL

**On The Trans-generic, Trans-historical and Trans-medial in Anne Carson's Series of Poems "TV Men"**

Caroline LEMAK BRICKMAN

**"Part ravishing beauty, part sofa" : Joseph Brodsky, Kanye West, and the "Re-upholstered" Female Body**

Elisa RONZHEIMER

**In Formation. Recasting Poetry in Beyoncé's Visual Album *Lemonade***

Emma Helene Heggdal (Oslo, NO)

**On The Trans-generic, Trans-historical and Trans-medial in Anne Carson's Series of Poems "TV Men"**

The Canadian poet and classical scholar Anne Carson is widely recognized as one of the most innovative writers today, yet there is still much left to explore within her consistently in-between poetry. Choosing genre designations such as "A novel in verse" or "Essays" while maintaining fundamentally lyrical elements in her writing, Carson experiments with genre conventions in ways that put into question what a poem can be. Reading Carson's series of poems called "TV Men" from *Glass and God* (1998) and *Men in The Off Hours* (2000), my paper explores the series' manifestation of three instances of between-ness: the trans-generic, the trans-historical, and the trans-medial.

Containing short stories about people being filmed, short, aphorism-like sentences, longer prose-shaped reflections, and even lines resembling dialogue, the series has been claimed not to be poetry at all. Yet in the collections mentioned above, the pieces are consistently described as poems – and they do contain strikingly poetic language, and often an engaging rhythm created both by the use of words and by the use of enjambment. The lyric subject materializes as an *I*, a *we* and a distanced *him* or *her*, and yet all these are problematized as positions. Insisting on bringing other genres into the poem, Carson expands the poetic horizon.

Crossing generic and contextual boundaries, the poems also create a trans-historical temporality. Evoking fictional as well as historical figures such as Hector, Lazarus, Artaud and Sappho, different times and situations converge in the modern day "now" of the poem. At the same time, the reflections on and explicit use of the TV as a medium brings in questions

both of the simultaneous and the episodic forms of the poems themselves. The TV (television), which makes things visible, paradoxically also makes things disappear. Carson's incredible amount of references to both real and imagined origins, and untranslated fragments of French sentences, creates an experience of looking into an erratic system of linguistic traces, real and fictional at the same time. This shows how the poems reflect on both TV and poetic language as medial, and on how they both entertain and seduce, reveal and cover over.

Reading of these poems, I will reflect on the concept of the lyric and its limits through a discussion of Jonathan Culler's definition from *Theory of the Lyric* (2015) that differentiates the lyric from other poetic genres. My claim is that Carson's continuous crossing of boundaries demonstrates both the problem of defining the lyric and the lyric's productive between-ness.

Caroline Lemak Brickman (Berkeley, USA)

**“Part ravishing beauty, part sofa” : Joseph Brodsky, Kanye West, and the “Re-upholstered” Female Body**

This paper is an extension of a larger project on the development of lyric modernism and postmodernism, wherein 20th and 21st century poets turn to peculiar metaphors in order to accomplish cognitive and conceptual work in their lyric. I seek here to address an unconventional trope found in the work of both Russian-American Nobel Laureate Joseph Brodsky and contemporary American rap artist Kanye West, in which the body of a woman is graphically described in the terms of upholstered furniture. The two poetic works I focus on here are Brodsky’s 1988 lyric cycle “Centaur” [Russian *Kentavry*, also 1988, translated by the poet] and Kanye’s song “Blame Game,” on the 2010 album *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*. In Brodsky, the furniture-for-femme trope dominates the cycle’s second poem. The poem is primarily dedicated to the description of a romantic date at the theater between two centaurs whose non-human half is not horse but thing: Sophie is “part ravishing beauty, part sofa”; the love she makes with her date “consists of tulle, horsehair, / blood, bolsters, cushions, springs, happiness...” The poem’s capacity to visualize the fusion of extremely disparate images (object with human being) has been critically understood, variously, as a comment on Brodsky’s experience of the Soviet diaspora in the U.S., as a laboratory for bilingual *paronomasia*, and as an awkward metaphor for the figure of metaphor itself. It is this last reading that I take up and further, via comparison with the 2010 Kanye song. The “re-upholstered” female body appears at the end of the track, in an obscene skit featuring comedian Chris Rock and vocalist Salma Kenas. (In rap, a skit is a spoken conversation which is inserted into the song and breaks with the rhythm and music.) Rock spends the skit complimenting Kenas on her virtuosic lovemaking skills, to which she replies, by way of explanation, that Kanye West has taught her everything she knows, and has “re-upholstered” her genitals. Sex is thus figured as the transfer of knowledge; the transfer itself is figured as an objectifying procedure so specific and irrelevant to the human body that it is difficult to visualize.

This paper has two aims. The first is specific to the poems and their immediate contexts; the second hopes to make an offering to contemporary conversations about lyric theory. In the case of each poem, I argue, the upholstery-body trope illuminates a set of class anxieties, as it encrypts the socio-economic symbolic status of domestic objects in material cultures (the late Soviet Union and contemporary Black celebrity culture, respectively) in the discourse of the eroticization and objectification of the female body. Second, the trope shows something about the workings of metaphor itself. In each case, the process of metaphorization – figuring a concept in terms of an image – is laid bare, and metaphorized anew: we witness the “blood, bolsters, cushions, springs” of the conceptual procedure, as it passes from one being to another.

Elisa Ronzheimer (Bielefeld, D)

### **In Formation. Recasting Poetry in Beyoncé's Visual Album *Lemonade***

The Kenyan-born Somali poet Warsan Shire has situated her lyric poetry 'in the in-between,' describing her writing process as one of relinquishing a desire to belong and instead accepting a transitory mode of being unable to make a home in the world. The state of the in-between is not only a topic of Warsan Shire's lyric poetry, it also shapes its media and genre. Most strikingly, Shire's collaboration with Beyoncé Knowles on the visual album *Lemonade* (2016) prompted questions about the place and function of her poetry in the pop artist's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In Beyoncé's video album, adaptations of Shire's poems appear in between the musical tracks. Still, these poems are much more than mere transitions. Instead of merging with the songs, the poems articulate a voice of their own, thus raising the question of their generic attribution. The presentation attempts to provide a framework for locating Warsan Shire's pop video poetry in between genres.