

University of Pardubice
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Anglo-American Poetry Slam in the Context of Orality and Performativity
Bc. Adéla Paurová

Master thesis
2020

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Akademický rok: 2018/2019

ZADÁNÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: **Bc. Adéla Paurová**
Osobní číslo: **H18419**
Studijní program: **N7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglická filologie**
Téma práce: **Anglo-americká slamová poezie v kontextu orality a performativity**
Zadávající katedra: **Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

Zásady pro vypracování

Adéla Paurová se ve své práci zaměří na relativně nedávny druh poezie a jejího přednesu, tzv. slam poezii. Od svého vzniku v 80. letech se vyznačuje snahou publikum zaujmout obsahovými ale hlavně formálními aspekty přednesu. Hlavním cílem autorky tedy bude zmapovat primárně formální rysy a tendence, ke kterým se performeři slam poezie nejčastěji přimykají. Ve svých úvahách bude metodologicky vycházet z teorie rétoriky a kulturních teorií zabývajících se rozdílem mezi mluvenou a psanou řečí (W. Ong, M. McLuhan, apod.). V rozbořech předloží detailní analýzu básní a přednesů vybrané skupiny britských a amerických autorů (zejména Harry Baker, Kate Tempest, Ben Norris, Porsha, Sunni Paterson). Autorka se bude snažit určit míru a povahu průsečíků mezi slamovou poezií, která je obecně považována za ryze současný fenomén, a poezií z období před vynálezem knihtisku.

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:
Rozsah grafických prací:
Forma zpracování diplomové práce: **tištěná**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

- Bernstein, Charles. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Bruce, Heather E., and Bryan Dexter Davis. „Slam: Hip-Hop Meets Poetry—A Strategy for Violence Intervention.“ *The English Journal* 89, no. 5 (May 2000): pp 119-127.
- Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral poetry: its nature, significance, and social context*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, Indiana, 1977.
- Furniss, Graham. *Orality: The Power of the Spoken Word*. New York: Springer, 2004.
- Glazner, Gary. *Poetry Slam: The Competitive Art of Performance Poetry*. San Francisco, CA: Manic D, 2001. (iBooks)
- Hoffman, Tyler. „Treacherous Laughter: The Poetry Slam, Slam Poetry, and the Politics of Resistance.“ *American Humor Studies Association. Studies in American Humor, New Series 3, No. 8, Special Issue: Humor in Popular Culture* (2001), pp. 49-64.
- Roberts, Neil. *A Companion to Twentieth-century Poetry*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Slinn Warwick, E. „Poetry and Culture: Performativity and Critique.“ *The Johns Hopkins University Press. New Literary History, Vol. 30, No. 1, Poetry & Poetics* (Winter, 1999), pp. 57-74.
- Smith, Marc Kelly, and Joe Kraynak. *Take the Mic: the Art of Performance Poetry, Slam, and the Spoken Word*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks MediaFusion, 2009.
- Somers-Willett, Susan. „The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry.“ *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association, Vol. 38, No. 1, Special Convention Issue: Performance* (Spring, 2005), pp. 51-73. (jstor.org)
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-friendly Guide*. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Ong, J. Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Taylor & Francis Group: Milton, 2002.
- Woods, Scott. „Poetry Slams: The Ultimate Democracy of Art.“ *Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma. World Literature Today, Vol. 82, No. 1* (Jan. – Feb., 2008), pp. 16-19

Vedoucí diplomové práce: **PhDr. Ladislav Vít, Ph.D.**
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Datum zadání diplomové práce: **30. dubna 2019**
Termín odevzdání diplomové práce: **31. března 2020**

Prohlašuji:

Tuto práci jsem vypracovala samostatně. Veškeré literární prameny a informace, které jsem v práci využila, jsou uvedeny v seznamu použité literatury.

Byla jsem seznámena s tím, že se na moji práci vztahují práva a povinnosti vyplývající ze zákona č. 121/2000 Sb., autorský zákon, zejména se skutečností, že Univerzita Pardubice má právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití této práce jako školního díla podle § 60 odst. 1 autorského zákona, a s tím, že pokud dojde k užití této práce mnou nebo bude poskytnuta licence o užití jinému subjektu, je Univerzita Pardubice oprávněna ode mne požadovat přiměřený příspěvek na úhradu nákladů, které na vytvoření díla vynaložila, a to podle okolností až do jejich skutečné výše.

Beru na vědomí, že v souladu s § 47b zákona č. 111/1998 Sb., o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších předpisů, a směrnicí Univerzity Pardubice č. 9/2012, bude práce zveřejněna v Univerzitní knihovně a prostřednictvím Digitální knihovny Univerzity Pardubice.

V Pardubicích dne 27.3.2020

Adéla Paurová

I would first like to thank my thesis supervisor PhDr. Ladislav Vít, Ph.D. The door to his office was always open whenever I ran into a trouble spot or had a question about my writing. He consistently allowed this paper to be my own work but steered me in the right direction whenever he thought I needed it. I would also like to thank my parents and my friends for their support.

V Pardubicích dne 27.3. 2020

Adéla Paurová

Annotation

This master thesis explores the relationship between a supposedly new phenomenon called Poetry slam and traditional oral poetry. It analyses the form and content of Poetry slam performances by presenting the works of English, American, and Canadian authors and shows similarities between this contemporary poetry movement and established oral poetry, which dates back to the period before the invention of the printing press, especially oral poetry from Ancient Greece. Poetry slam is also analyzed from the point of view of orality and literacy and their effect on the development of oral poetry in the 20th century.

Keywords

Poetry slam, traditional oral poetry, orality, literacy, performance, opposition, poetry movement, tertiary orality, secondary orality, competition, spoken word poetry

Annotace

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá vztah nedávného fenoménu „Slam poetry“ a tradiční orální poezie. Analyzuje formální a obsahové aspekty jednotlivých vystoupení britských, kanadských a amerických slam básníků a hledá podobnosti s mluvenou poezií, která je datována do doby před vynálezem knihtisku, především se jedná o mluvenou poezii Antického Řecka. „Slam poetry“ je také analyzována z pohledu teorie rétoriky a kulturních studií zabývajících se vztahem orality a literality a jejich dopadem na rozvoj mluvené poezie v jednadvacátém století.

Klíčová slova

Slam poetry, tradiční orální poezie, oralita, literalita, vystoupení, opozice, básnický styl, terciární oralita, sekundární oralita, soutěž, mluvený přednes poezie

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	8
1. SPOKEN WORD TRADITION.....	13
1.1. Orality vs literacy.....	13
1.2. Oral Poetry.....	20
1.3. Performance Poetry and Spoken Word Poetry.....	22
2. POETRY SLAM.....	26
2.1. What is and what is not Poetry slam?.....	26
2.1.1. Poetry slam as a competition.....	30
2.1.2. Poetry slam as a performance.....	36
2.1.3. Poetry slam as a form of resistance.....	43
CONCLUSION.....	54
3. RÉSUMÉ.....	58
4. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	61

INTRODUCTION

Poetry slam is often described as a new phenomenon or even a literary movement that has been popularized all over the world. There have been many discussions as to what exactly Poetry slam is and why it has become so popular lately, but the answers to these questions are often unclear. Some critics claim that Poetry slam is the result of the opposition to academic poetry, others claim that it is the opposition to literacy (the dominant literary world), some assert it has socio-historical roots. Opinions on the origin and potential benefits of Poetry slam differ; this could be because it has not yet caught the attention of the Academy and the sources and analysis of this topic are limited. Slam poets see Poetry slam as a revolutionary movement. They praise the breaking of barriers between the poet and the listener, the ability to bring poetry near to the common people. Literary critics see Poetry slam either as a pleasant permutation and hope for the revival of poetry, or as a downfall of literary culture and sometimes even as the “death of poetry.”

Nevertheless, regardless of varied opinions on the quality of the presented poems or the way they are presented, Poetry slam has been able to gain interest with millions of people all around the world. Competitions such as *Def Poetry Jam* or *Brave New Voices* have become the largest venues for the performance poets, and new competitions arise every year. There are several reasons why Poetry slam has become so popular, yet it seems that there is a one essential reason that prevails. It is oral.

Firstly, it seems essential to mention that Poetry slam is a form of oral poetry, and that the concept of orality will be thoroughly discussed as it is one of the fundamental characteristics of all oral performances. In the Western world, orality has been for centuries regarded as an inferior form, with the superior form being literacy. Since the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, all the literary works were to be printed; otherwise, the works were not accepted as valuable, a way of thinking which still prevails to this day. Literacy has helped to shape the world as we know it and has created the hierarchy by which people judge the outside world. It helped to spread knowledge and education and thus is considered as the next stage of evolution from “primitive” orality. For centuries, writers have aspired to have their works published and receive the appropriate recognition. Literacy also meant power.

Interestingly, the first thing colonizers all over the world did was to teach the inhabitants the basics of literacy. They taught them how to read and how to use the language of the conquerors.

Orality, on the other hand, has been often downgraded, having the attribute of being primitive and small-scale. However, it is important to say that orality has never actually disappeared; in fact, it is impossible for orality to vanish, even though literary culture started to flourish after the invention of the printing press. Orality has been continuously present, perhaps to a less visible extent currently than before, but still distinctly alive. Needless to say, the momentous events in human history have been affected by the very orality that has been underestimated for years. Famous speeches might never have been so influential if they were simply written down and shared among people in print. The power of oral performances is enormous, and the fact that Spoken word has become popular right now is not a coincidence.

Secondly, it could be useful to look briefly at the history of Poetry slam and the influences that marked its development. Poetry slam competitions began in the 1980s in Chicago. Mark Smith is considered to be the founder of the movement as he was the one who started experimenting on stage during regular poetry readings. He believed that poetry readings are too structured and often tiresome, and so he decided to communicate more with his audience and turn them into direct judges instead of just listeners. Even though Mark Smith is believed to have introduced the concept of Poetry slam, he cannot claim sole credit for its development. The movement has been influenced by various movements and genres. Black Arts Movement, Beat poetry, jazz poetry, rap, hip-hop - all these styles have influenced it in one way or another. Importantly, they all share one essential detail; all of these movements or genres are based on orality. Jazz poetry or Beat poetry would hardly ever have become popular if its poetry was only written.

Poetry slam is not only performance poetry but also a poetry competition. The competition formula was introduced in order to involve the members of the audience in the judgment of the poetry. The competition formula in poetry is nothing new; there have been competitions organized throughout the centuries, starting with Ancient Greek competitions, African griot poetry and the songs and contests in the Arabic world.

However, the fact that it is the audience who gives poets the points and not literary critics or other poets changes the situation. Some of the slam poets apply different rhetorical strategies to persuade the listeners. They usually choose compelling or controversial topics, such as racism, gender issues, political affairs, and religion. Often, they try to encourage or discourage,

praise or blame, accuse, or defend. All of these are rhetorical strategies that are used for different oratorical speeches.

Nevertheless, as the poets can choose any topic they want and often the selection varies depending on the venues and specific goals of the performer (they can either choose an optimistic or negative tone in their poems), it will be more practical to analyze the formal aspects of different performances and how they affect the results of the competitions. The performer is the crucial point in slam as in any other performance that is based on oral expression. It is crucial that the members of the audience can not only hear the original poem from the author, but that they can see them performing it as well. Interestingly, the poet has to create a particular image so that people will find the staging trustworthy and sincere, which leads to a question, “to what extent is Poetry slam authentic?” If it is influenced by movements such as Beat poetry and jazz poetry, shouldn’t the poems be created on stage? Shouldn’t poetry be the result of improvisation, or, as was believed in Ancient Greece, the result of a genius mind? Poetry slam presents itself as a new revolutionary movement that goes against the elite poetry institutions and wearisome academic poetry readings. The poetry academies that are dependent on literacy are sometimes seen as old-fashioned, stagnant, and not being able to accept change. Poetry slam is supposed to represent the opposition, a new movement based on orality, which represents an opportunity for young and inexperienced poets but also for inexperienced consumers of poetry. Thanks to its accessibility, Poetry slam was able to spread from Chicago to other cities and later to other countries. Nowadays, there are thousands of different types of competitions organized all over the world, including only the women slam contest, the open mic contest, the bizarre slam, and the erotic slam contest. There are also slam competitions organized only for youths to support the creativity of teenagers. Poetry slam has millions of supporters and new poets who want to join appear every day, and yet Poetry slam’s claim to being revolutionary is problematic. Admittedly, Poetry slam has helped poetry in general to get to a broader context and maybe as well to change the way that poetry is understood. However, the influence of orality and traditional oral poetry is so strong that it must be taken into account, especially when talking about seemingly new movements.

Throughout the 20th century new media appear, and most of them are based on the oral transmission of information or experience. The advent of radio, television, and the internet changed the way people perceive the distinction between orality and literacy. The popularity of YouTube

videos, vlogs, music videos raises, and these new media replace the traditional literary media. The tendency with oral communication and expression is evident. Literacy and written word have dominated the Western world for centuries, and now it seems that the oral form has come into power once again. However, orality that can be experienced today cannot ultimately be compared to orality of before the invention of the printing press and to orality of oral cultures where literacy does not exist. Actually, in some cases, the borderlines between spoken and written word have become blurred. A great example would be social media or, in general, chatting through different applications. The oral form profoundly influences the written form as the written text serves as a substitute for conversation. People have entered the stage of the so-called “tertiary orality” (in other sources; the term “secondary orality” can be found as well). The written word is influenced by the spoken word and vice versa. The two opposite psyches, orality and literacy, (according to Ong and McLuhan) seem to start to cooperate and not only in everyday life but also in the literary world (a good example would be growing popularity of audiobooks). That might also explain why many musicians publish videos of their greatest musical hits on YouTube.

However, the types of media that are used for oral communication often lack the human interaction and people desire to experience things on many sensory levels. One has to go to a concert to see the singer, to listen to songs, to feel the atmosphere, to let the performance sink in. It seems that the same thing is expected from literature nowadays, specifically poetry. The written book, no matter how well written, can never appeal to the senses the way live performance will.

One could question whether Poetry slam serves a useful purpose in the name of poetry or not, but setting that aside, what is left is Poetry slam’s evident appeal to senses and emotions. It has been already mentioned that it is difficult to define what Poetry slam exactly is, and it seems that the only secure way to define it is by the comparison to academic poetry either negatively or positively. However, what makes Poetry slam so compelling to some and repugnant to others? To claim that Poetry slam rebels against other literary movement seems oversimplified in this context. The literary movements and genres certainly oppose each other, and the moods change depending on the socio-historical background. Performance poetry, however, does not seem to represent a novel or revolutionary movement that can change the course of poetry as it

is, it seems that it follows a certain pattern in line with the oral performances. Orality and literacy, therefore, do not have to be viewed as two oppositional psyches, just as academic poetry and slam poetry do not have to be viewed as two oppositional movements.

On the contrary, there might be cooperation to be found. After all, the abundance of text in today's society could enable the oral forms and oral poetry to occupy more space as it was the case before the invention of the printing press and even longer before that, going back to times of Ancient Greece.

In this thesis, the Poetry slam will be analyzed from the point of view of orality and traditional oral literature. The term traditional oral literature will be explained and examples of oral poetry starting from Ancient Greece will be provided. However, the main purpose is to analyze the performances of various contemporary slam poets from English speaking countries, such as the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America, where the poetry movement started in 1980s. The analysis of poems will be mainly focused on the form as the content of poems is too broad to be analyzed deeply, however it will also be mentioned as one of the essential factors in Poetry slam. Additionally, it will show different points of views how Poetry slam can be understood and examine the close relationship between traditional oral poetry and this contemporary poetry movement.

1. SPOKEN WORD TRADITION

1.1. Orality vs literacy

“Oral tradition, also called orality is the first and still most widespread mode of human communication. It refers to a dynamic and highly diverse oral-aural medium for evolving, storing, and transmitting knowledge, art, and ideas.”¹

The definition from Encyclopedia Britannica sums up the essential qualities of orality. Orality is dynamic and evolving, that is to say, that when defining orality, one should not imagine it only as “talking” but as one of the means of sharing ideas and forming societies. Orality lies in the heart of people’s quotidian experience. People share their thoughts, transmit knowledge, and express their emotions by using orality. Even though it is often contrasted with literacy, which is a very recent phenomenon in the history of societies, orality is not possible to be simply excluded. That is why the spoken word has always been the subject of many studies as it has represented one of the primary influencing means in human society. The famous speeches such as “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” by Winston Churchill, “I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King Jr., or Adolf Hitler’s “Reichstag speech,” have helped to shape our history. Also, they often serve as examples of how vital changes can be made when the chosen medium is in oral form. The power of oral performances can be enormous. Nevertheless, the relationship and approach that people have taken to orality and orality itself has been changing throughout history. Moreover, these changes have helped to shape orality that people face today, either in everyday life experience or when deciding to write a poem that is meant to be performed.

Generally, two academic approaches are concerned with the function and the process of orality. Graham Furniss characterizes it as “the Great Divide debate”². On one side of the division, there is the approach that treats orality on the same level as literacy. Steven Feld, an American ethnomusicologist and linguist, claims that oral and written symbolism overlap and that they should not be treated separately. The forms that are often present in oral expressions, such as repetition, prosody, and parallelism, cannot be just a consequence of orality. Orality, in his

¹ “Oral tradition,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed November 22, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/oral-tradition>.

² Graham Furniss, *Orality: The Power of the Spoken Word* (New York: Springer, 2004), 131.

view, should not be regarded simply as a state of mind but a complex, creative and inventive medium.³ This approach to orality is also shared by Ruth Finnegan, Emeritus Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences at The Open University, who has done excessive works and studies with various members of “oral societies.” The writing is not known in oral societies, and therefore all the information they share is through oral transmission from person to person and generation to generation. She explains the complexity of orality in her article “Orality and literacy: epic heroes of human destiny?”⁴ There, she describes her first fieldwork among the Limba people in Northern Sierra Leone. Interestingly, Finnegan admits in her other book, “Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies,” that the stories lost all their power when written down. Spoken text depended on the teller and their way of telling the story, the audience, and the whole context of the situation.⁵ In her own words:

Observing the process of story-telling brought home very clearly that these stories were not fixed artefacts – final and correct texts – which could be collected and dissected once and for all, but rather the changing and creative formulations of individual human tellers, putting forward their own interpretations of various traditional conventions and themes to particular audiences on particular occasions, different each time. These were not (as I had assumed the basis of my earlier classical training) finalized texts, and they had to be studied as active processes, not frozen products⁶

Orality in her view is not just a verbal expression, and the reason why the other factors have been often overlooked when studying orality, she claims, is the preference of literacy in the western world. “Oral expression is multimodal - it may be verbal but is emphatically not just verbal; and second that one reason this has so often been overlooked is the potent western ideology privileging linguistic expression.”⁷ Surely, orality has existed alongside literacy in the Western world as well, but it seems relevant to say that the written works were more appreciated since the invention of the printing press.

³ Steven Feld, “The oral and the literate in music” *Academia Music Ltd.* Edited by Tokumaro Yoshiko, Yamaguti Osamu. Vol. 21 (1989):16–28.

⁴ Ruth Finnegan, “Orality and literacy: epic heroes of human destiny?” *International Journal of Learning*, (June 2008): 10–16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/370171>.

⁵ Ruth Finnegan, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* (Cambridge University Press: Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham, Volume 14, 1990), 131–134.

⁶ Finnegan, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 134.

⁷ Ruth Finnegan, “Orality and literacy: epic heroes of human destiny?” *International Journal of Learning*, (June 2008): 10–16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/370171>.

Contrastively to literacy, the importance of oral performances lay very often in the performance itself, not in the single spoken word and even less in the written transcription. The oral performance can be described as a multi-sensory experience, the performance poets and artists that use the spoken word do not use only their words to transmit the message of their works, they use intonation, repetition, intensity, gestures, mimics, movements in general. Even though Finnegan describes the storytelling of Limba people, one can talk about very similar patterns and experience when going to a spoken word poetry event. She claims, that the performance was very much dependent on the delivery skill of the story-teller and the interplay with the audience by using questions and turning the listener into a replier.⁸ The interaction and delivery skills are one of the essential features of Poetry Slam as well – poets and audience interact all the time. The oral performances are also visual (not just auditory), the performer chooses how they will share their story or a poem. The visual experience is also one of the reasons why the audience and participants of storytelling, singing, and oral performances can get so excited about it. The spoken word, therefore, is not just a matter of words that can be said out loud but a mixture of various modes. Orality in this point of view is regarded as highly complex and diverse as it is capable of going beyond the words and the participants can, therefore, get a multidimensional experience from being present at the Poetry Slam event, performance poetry event, ritual songs, songs in choir, theatre plays or a simple dialogue.

However, opposing this view, there is another viewpoint in terms of “orality” and “literacy,” in which “literacy” is regarded as an absolute necessity in human society, and oral communication might be slightly downgraded. This attitude is shared by many scholars, for instance, Walter J. Ong or Marshall McLuhan. In McLuhan’s words: “Until writing was invented, we lived in acoustic space, where all backward people still live: boundless, directionless, the dark of the mind, the world of emotion, primordial intuition.”⁹

Ong adds: “without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials, cannot produce other beautiful and powerful creations. In this sense, orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing.”¹⁰ Both McLuhan and Ong, claim that literacy is another stage of

⁸ Finnegan, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 135.

⁹ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Random House, USA, 1967), 48.

¹⁰ Walter Ong J., *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 14.

a successful human being. In their view, literacy is seen as an essential element for the development of science and general understanding of literature, history, philosophy, and understanding of language itself. Orality is seen as a state of mind and, in a sense, the first phase of human communication, which is often regarded as non-linear, boundless, and emotional. Orality and literacy are treated as two different psyches in contrast to Finnegan and Feng. For instance, Finnegan mentions that members of oral societies do not understand why their ritual songs and stories should be recorded or written down as they treat their story-telling as a complex medium that can function properly only when performing.¹¹ Ong, on the other hand, claims that many oral cultures left in the world are aware of the necessity of literacy to develop and their gain of the vast number of powers if they move from “oral society” to “literate society.” Basically, in Ong’s and McLuhan’s view, literacy is needed for progress in society. “We have to die to continue living.”¹²

Ong and McLuhan put orality and literacy in contrast to each other, and they seem to say that these two terms shape different realities and experiences. Orality is often depicted as small-scale, organic, and repetitive. To support this argument, Ong uses the example of the story of Homer and *The Iliad and Odyssey* and the discovery made by Milman Parry.¹³

Milman Parry (1902 – 1935), an American scholar of epic poetry and one of the most important contributors in the study of transition from oral to written culture, devoted his whole life to the studies of Homer and he succeeded in providing satisfactory answers to many of the linguistic and historical questions concerning the epic poems.¹⁴ Many literates have noticed the differences when comparing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* with other Greek poems. For centuries there have been many doubts concerning the style of writing, origins, and the authorship of the poems. The poems seemed to be fragmented and simply out of the line. After years of studying South Slavic heroic poetry, Parry finally presented his hypothesis that the poems are in a way prefabricated and that all of them consist of a formulaic structure, he also mentioned the de-

¹¹ Finnegan, “Orality and literacy: epic heroes of human destiny?”, 10–16.

¹² Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 14.

¹³ Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 19.

¹⁴ “Modern Inferences,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Homer-Greek-poet/Modern-inferences#ref21037>.

pendence of the choice of words and word-forms on the shape of the orally composed hexameter line.¹⁵ Milman Parry's discovery, therefore, supports the Ong's view of orality, which is said to be repetitive and very often redundant. As Milman Parry suggests, it seems that Homer followed some given patterns. Parry classified these patterns as "formulas" which can be defined as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given idea"¹⁶ (in rhetoric, these would be called "topos" – lines of topics to follow for developing arguments). These stereotyped phrases need to be repeated over and over so that they would become a fixed set. The repetitive phrases have a significant role in oral culture as they represent the most effective means of remembering the bigger chunks of texts.

This phenomenon was observed not only in Greek literature but also in Anglo-Saxon literature. Here is the part of Old English poetry where the formulaic variation is prominent:

Hrothgar mathelode helm Scildinga ("Hrothgar spoke, protector of the Scildings")
Beowulf mathelode bearn Ecgtheowes ("Beowulf spoke, son of Ecgtheow")¹⁷

These repetitive patterns can, therefore, be useful in poetry, and they are not only used strictly in oral cultures. The patterns are used, for example, throughout the improvisation during the spoken word performances. Kelsey Savage performed an improvised poem in 2017 in Vancouver¹⁸, she asked audience members to give her a few words and that she will create a poem on the stage using these words. Letting listeners to choose the words for a poem is one of the favorite improvisational techniques of slam poets and also the audience members as they are directly involved in the poem. Interestingly, the poem is not created on the stage. The poet just follows already given patterns that they have prepared. During the performance, they will try to fit in the new words into already created structures. Usually, the members of the audience want to challenge the poets, and so they yell out the words that are very difficult to put together in one poem. Kelsey Savage, for example, was given the words bumblebee and doorknob and was able to cover both of them by using these prepared structures in order to complete the task.

¹⁵ Milman Parry and Adam Parry. *The making of Homeric verse: the collected papers of Milman Parry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 9.

¹⁶ "Oral formulaic method" Poets.org, accessed November 24, 2019, <https://poets.org/glossary/oral-formulaic-method>.

¹⁷ Theudebrand, "Oral Tradition 1/2," posted December 25, 2016, YouTube video, 12:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15fi-hjIXIs>

¹⁸ Vancouver Poetry House, "Kelsey Savage – Improvised Poem: Bumblebee & Doorknob," posted September 6, 2017, YouTube video, 07:28, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFGD5vcu8kw>.

Kelsey Savage uses the repetitive phrase “Do you remember...” so that she would stick to the rhythm. Sometimes the repetitive phrases serve as a way how to change the subject of the poem. “Do you remember the days, do you remember the ways, do you remember the nights...” The next thing that helped her to follow the rhythm was the alliteration. From time to time, she uses the word “space” that is followed by words such as “insect,” “incest,” “sat,” “slept,” “silk,” “scarf.”

In another improvisation performed at the Blue Jay Listening Room in Jacksonville in 2018, the repetitive phrase that poet used is “feeling good”, as for example in this phrase, “everyone feeling good, I am feeling little cold, let’s go get some more wood.”¹⁹ To keep finding new variants on the words such as “wood”, “good”, “cartoon”, “noon”, the poets usually choose one syllable words that are not difficult to rhyme and they can be inserted in various phrases.

The repetition of phrases often works as a means of remembering the whole poem and divide it into parts, but that is the case of poets who learn their poems by heart and not the ones who improvise. It could be claimed that Poetry slam uses the elements of the ancient oral poetry or oral performances, and there are indeed some characteristics that can confirm this claim. However, there are differences, and one of them being is that the performance poets usually learn the poem by heart after writing it down, which means that the influence of the printing culture is already present.

In the modern age, we face a new phenomenon that is sometimes called “secondary orality” or even “tertiary orality”. Walter Ong defines the term “secondary orality” in his book *Rhetoric, romance, and technology: studies in the interaction of expression and culture* this way:

Secondary orality is founded on—though it departs from—the individualized introversion of the age of writing, print, and rationalism which intervened between it and primary orality and which remains as part of us. History is deposited permanently, but not inalterably, as personality structure.²⁰

¹⁹ Underdog Improv, “Miss America Slam Poetry | Short Form Improv Comedy,” posted June 23, 2018, YouTube video, 6:29, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7bfGVg41fY>.

²⁰ Walter Ong J., *Rhetoric, romance, and technology: studies in the interaction of expression and culture*, (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 285.

In cultures with primary orality, socialization and memorization played a significant role. The oral performances were often repetitive. One could find the increasing amount of redundancy. The term primary orality is applicable in oral societies as these societies depend only on the oral factors. Ong uses primary orality as an example of the first phase of development, which then produced the secondary orality that is directly dependent on the existence of writing and literary culture. Television, telephone, radio, and other electronic devices serve as an excellent example of “secondary literacy” in high-technology culture. Even though the form is spoken, it does not have the features of primary orality. The expressions and thoughts are created by people who have been confronted with literacy, and their utterances are based on it. The secondary orality does not antecede writing and print, as it is the case in primary orality, but it follows and depends upon writing and print.²¹

However, the term “secondary orality” is used slightly differently by Jiří Kraus. He applies the term “tertiary orality” for Ong’s explanation of “secondary orality.” “The dependence of a spoken text on a written template gained its specific form at the time of the rise of so-called secondary orality, which is to say at the moment when writing began to enter the primary oral society, i.e., a society without literature.”²² For Kraus, secondary orality had come to existence much earlier. From his point of view, the secondary orality was the period when the writing was integrated into different structures in society. He mentions the creation of new institutions either in public or private spheres and the creation of new textbooks, encyclopedias that greatly influenced spoken language and gradually helped to shape an entirely new communication system.²³ The existence of new technologies such as telephone or television are not taken into account yet. The modern technological era that uses electronic devices for the communication is a kind of mixture of oral culture and literal culture. Literacy has affected the oral expression, and that is why he calls it the “tertiary orality.”²⁴ Tertiary orality might have different understandings; one of the understandings of the term could be the synonymic expression of Ong’s term “secondary orality.” Another understanding of this term could be the new phenomenon of blending orality and literacy thanks to the new media. The difference between the spoken and written language when posting on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)

²¹ Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 167.

²² Kraus, Jiří, “Political Speech in Orality-Literacy Conflict,” trans. Adéla Paurová, *Forthcoming*, 8.

²³ Kraus, “Political Speech in Orality-Literacy Conflict,” 8.

²⁴ Kraus, “Political Speech in Orality-Literacy Conflict,” 20.

has become less and less evident. The written form of chat messages seems to be closer to spoken form than to written form. The electronic devices enable us to fasten the communication and attain the desired result in a much quicker way. Audiobooks, YouTube videos of different performances, music videos – all these popular forms of entertainment show how much important orality is for people. Indeed, the influence of the invention of press print is enormous, as Ong believes, the society would never have evolved into this phase without it. For centuries, literacy has been regarded as a superior means of communication. However, the invention of new media seems to be another breaking point which gives orality more space to slowly affect everyday communication and influence the literary culture as well. In a society flooded by text, orality begins once to dominate, and it comes in various forms – watching television, listening to radio, going to a poetry performance event, uploading the video poem on YouTube, watching the performance online or listening to audiobooks.

1.2. Oral Poetry

The oral literature is not easy to define as it does not have clear boundaries and a precise start. Songs, ballads, tales, and epics existed before writing was invented. Haun Saussy said in one of his lectures that “the oral literature goes back as oral language.”²⁵ The same could be said about oral poetry. People have used the rhymes to memorize the stories and to pass them on. These stories were usually shorter, and consequently, the form started to be more emphasized than the content of the story itself. As Albert Lord states: “We can suppose that repetitions of sounds and patterns of words put together to be imitative and to have the power of magic came to set models of duplication and of balance and proportion which had an appeal to an innate human aesthetic sense.”²⁶ This quote refers back to the formulas, repeated themes (defined by Milman Parry) that were used in oral poetry. The well-structured poems with these repetitive motives and with new ideas put into the metrical lines had a high chance of being shared along. The chances of having the poems passed on were even higher when the performer was a skillful storyteller, which means they were capable of communicating and conveying the message of poems and distributing performances to their listeners. This could have been achieved by oral

²⁵ The University of Chicago, “Haun Saussy on The Curious History of Oral Literature,” posted August 14, 2014, Youtube video, 25:04. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAIR9qrveDQ>.

²⁶ Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, ed. Mary Louise Lord, (Center for Hellenic studies: Harvard University, 1995), <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6284.albert-bates-lord-the-singer-resumes-the-tale>.

aesthetics patterns that are called the figures of speech nowadays. Lord mentions, for example, alliteration and assonance (repetitions of sound), which soon became regular features of other oral styles, and anaphora or epiphora (repetitions of words at the beginning or end of lines).²⁷

These patterns can often be found in other fields where orality was of great importance, for example, Greek lyric poetry, the odes in theatrical performances, but also rhetorical speeches. Hendrik Willem van Loon explains the difference in the development of Greek poetry and Greek theatre. The origin of these two is quite different. Greek poems were created by collecting and retelling of rhymed stories that praised bravery of ancestors. Greek theatre, on the other hand, was created thanks to the parades organized in honor of the god Dionysos. These amusing processions were later transformed into the theatre performances as one of the members of the dancing and singing chorus stepped forward and started a conversation with another member - the first dialogue. Then the other members joined, and the theatre was created.²⁸ However, there are some similarities when describing the Greek plays. Usually, throughout the plays, there were choruses, which worked as a storytelling device; it served as a link between the audience and the play. The choruses helped the audience to have an idea of the crucial aspects of the play. Some of them were narrated, and some of them were sung. In general, these choruses had two main functions. Firstly, they were supposed to pull the audience into the piece on a sensory level by using imagery, music, and rhythm. Secondly, by using different rhetoric means, they helped the audience to alienate from the events happening during the play and view the characters from an outside perspective.²⁹ These parts in the theatre were called odes (from the Greek word “oidos,” which meant “singer”), and they were separate from the action of the play. The odes were often the combination of poetry, dancing, and singing. Gradually, they developed into a more personal lyric composition.³⁰ One of the examples could be the lyric poet Sappho who composed poems that were supposed to be sung and accompanied by a lyre. Alternatively, a Greek poet Pindar, sometimes considered to be “the greatest of the classical Greek poets.”³¹ The odes have been used then for centuries, beginning with Roman poet

²⁷ Lord, *The Singer Resumes the Tale*, 17-19.

²⁸ Hendrik Willem van Loon, *The Story of Mankind* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000), 72.

²⁹ H.D.F. Kitto, “Educational Theatre Journal” *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 1956): 1-8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i360768>.

³⁰ H.D.F. Kitto, “Educational Theatre Journal” *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (March 1956): 1-8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i360768>.

³¹ “Pindar,” Poetry Foundation, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/pindar>.

Horace, whose particular style has served as the model for the specific type of ode – Horatian Ode, which has been preferred for his “intimate and reflective”³² style during the Elizabethan time and Romantic period. Nevertheless, the odes, that are known today have alienated from the original use in Ancient Greece. In comparison with Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” for instance, the odes in Greek plays were addressee oriented, served more as a connecting device, and most importantly, they were not composed for reading, they were recited. It could be therefore said that Greek epic poems (Iliad and Odyssey) and Greek lyric poems (poems of Sappho) had quite a different development. However, they share one important thing, and that is the power of the spoken word that helped to shape the future development of poetry, including the poetry movements in the 21st century. Spoken word has never been actually silent, maybe only sidelined for some time and even though it is not very often used when talking about traditional poetry (if one wants to learn what spoken word actually represents and searches on different sites, they will find the definition that characterizes it only from the modern point of view), it is evident that the oral poetry movements are not a recent phenomenon. They only represent the natural development of oral literature that can be seen throughout history.

1.3. Performance Poetry and Spoken Word Poetry

As it was already mentioned in the previous chapters, the performance poetry can be dated back to ancient times when epic poems were recited in public for entertainment, and lyric poems were incorporated in the theatrical events in the form of odes. However, performance poetry is usually described as rather a modern movement that is transforming poetry into theatrical events. In the Anglo-American tradition, the spoken word poetry is usually regarded as the poetry reading on stage or poems learned by heart and performed. With the influence of the American culture, it is often ascribed to the hip-hop culture, jazz poetry, and contemporary poetry, such as poetry slams.

The origins of spoken word, performance poetry, and later on slam poetry are difficult to describe easily. Different scholars offer various explanations. Dana Gioia, in his book *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture*, explores the topic of new popular forms of poetry

³² “Horatian ode,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Horatian-ode>.

that regenerate the art. He describes the cultural shift of printing culture with the relation to the popularization of oral media. Gioia calls this trend “the end of print culture”³³, which has led to the development and spreading of oral poetry in various forms such as rap, hip-hop, poetry slam, performance poetry, and spoken word poetry. His explanation is rather sociolinguistic as he refers to the study that the Americans spend less and less time reading and prefer other media that are oral-based, a phenomenon that can be seen worldwide. “We are currently living in the midst of a massive cultural revolution. For the first time since the development of moveable type in the late 15th century, print has lost its primacy in communication.”³⁴ The abundance of text and the new media have helped to create new poetry forms that have been created without any support from academic institutions. According to Gioia, the essential is not the quality of these new poetry forms, but vitality and popular appeal. The poetry is primarily oral and often recited from memory, some of it is not even written down, or it is improvised on the stage. Poets are therefore turned into performers, and readers are turned into listeners, which for Gioia does not have to be negative or dissatisfactory for the literary poetry, as he believes that the new oral culture has created the conditions for its revival. “The relation between print and speech in American culture today is probably closer to that in [William] Shakespeare’s age than [T. S.] Eliot’s era—not an altogether bad situation for a poet.”³⁵ The decline of printed poetry does not have to mean a decline of poetry altogether necessarily. Actually, in his essay “Can Poetry Matter,” he already described the issue of poetry as cultural force slowly vanishing, and he recommended that the poets should venture outside their confined world.³⁶ Ten years later, the changes in the poetry world started to be visible as even the poets, who usually publish their poems, started to organize author readings more frequently.

Other scholars, such as Gregory Nagy, argue that the roots of slam poetry and other performance poetry styles date back to storytelling traditions and oral history, which go far back as Homer. In his book *Poetry as Performance*, Nagy describes essential elements of oral poetry and its connection to performance. He provides a synchronic analysis of living oral traditions

³³ Dana Gioia, *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture* (Saint Paul: Minnesota, Graywolf Press, 2004), 5 – 9.

³⁴ Gioia, *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture*, 3.

³⁵ Gioia, *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture*, 15.

³⁶ Dana Gioia, “Can Poetry Matter?” *The Atlantic*, May, 1991. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1991/05/can-poetry-matter/305062/>.

and reveals that composition and performance are part of one process.³⁷ In his other book, he uses the citation of Albert Lord, “an oral poem is composed not *for* but *in* performance.”³⁸ For oral poetry, performance is the essential key to the success. The fact that the performance is happening here and now can lead to innovations.³⁹

Even though Nagy discusses the traditional oral poetry, the characteristics can be shown in the performances of poetry slam, in improvisations but also in poems that are learned by heart. Poets can innovate their poems during performances, they can react to their audience, to the current events that happen around them (during a Poetry slam competition in Paris, one of the slam poets, for example, added one more phrase in his older text to comment on the actor’s death during the performance). He also talks about the formula as to the form and the theme as to the content. Form and concept therefore overlap. The poet follows a particular pattern to give the essential idea of the poem but still meet the metrical conditions and follow the desired rhythm. The Poetry slam can be therefore regarded as the result of the desire for oral poetry that is based on the tradition which has been present in human society for centuries. Gioia claims that the need for oral expression has never been entirely suppressed and that a book alone will not be sufficient to attract a readership nowadays.⁴⁰ This is especially true when talking about the Poetry slam events. The Poetry slam is about the present moment, about the performance itself, the performer (the poet), the listeners who can create the right atmosphere. Publishing a book with slam poems would not be enough. Even though the poems are often elaborated, poets use many figures of speech, play with words and work well with the rhythm; these are usually not the reasons why people will go to see the performance. Poetry performance is very often about here and now, and the element of orality and spontaneity is essential in the presentation of these poems.

In the more modern view, the beginnings of the performance poetry are influenced by these two movements: the Harlem Renaissance and the Beat Generation. Both of these movements transformed the popular understandings of poetry. The Harlem Renaissance is defined as “the blossoming (c. 1918–37) of African American culture, particularly in the creative arts, and the most

³⁷ Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1996), 5–16.

³⁸ Gregory Nagy, *Homeric questions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 17.

³⁹ Nagy, *Homeric questions*, 25.

⁴⁰ Gioia, *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture*, 23.

influential movement in African American literary history. Embracing literary, musical, theatrical, and visual arts.”⁴¹ The Harlem Renaissance was mainly influenced by the African American culture and the music developed by black musicians, such as jazz or blues. The encounter of American and African American cultures created poetry that represented the independent identity of African Americans, who usually chose, for their poetry, the themes of slavery and discrimination. These themes are still prevalent in Poetry slam. Among the most known poets are Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Arna Bontemps. They are often connected with jazz poetry, poetry that is defined by its rhythm incorporated from jazz music. Jazz music is used as a poetic inspiration. Jazz poetry is also closely linked to the Beat Generation and the Black Arts Movement. The Black Arts Movement is also deeply rooted in the fight for civil rights for the black community, but the movement was more radical than the Harlem Renaissance. The Beat poets started to perform their poems in bars and coffee places or in underground venues where they read out loud their poems. The first public appearance of the Beat poets is considered to be the evening poetry reading in San Francisco, where Allen Ginsberg performed his poem “Howl.”⁴² Poets emphasized the ability of self-expression and the significance of their voice. Usually, they represented groups or cultures that were not heard or regarded as relevant (e.g., black artists). The poetry was offered to broader public and therefore became more accessible, and since publishers were not quite willing to publish poems of Black Arts Movement poets and other performer poets as they were not recognized as representatives of respectful form of art, the performances stayed mainly in bars and cafés which helped consequently Poetry slam to flourish.⁴³

The origins of performance poetry can, therefore, differ. According to Gioia, it is the development of the society and the new era of “textual annoyance” to some extent that popularized the performance poetry and made it a new movement. According to Nagy, the oral poetry has never vanished; it has just been changing the forms throughout the centuries. The performance poetry is constructed on the same basis as other poems that are meant to be performed or shared orally. Finally, the view that is generally shared is that performance poetry has come to life thanks to

⁴¹ “Harlem Renaissance”, Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-Renaissance-American-literature-and-art>

⁴² Sean Wilentz, “Bob Dylan, The Beat Generation, and Allen Ginsberg’s America,” *New Yorker*, August 13, 2010. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/bob-dylan-the-beat-generation-and-allen-ginsbergs-america>.

⁴³ Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” *The Drama Review*, Summer, 1968, vol. 12, no. 4, 29. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/community/text8/blackartsmovement.pdf>

the African American influence and their culture that is oral-based, which helped to promote jazz music and later jazz poetry, rap, hip hop and also the Beat poets who started to perform their poems in bars and other underground cultural places. Indeed, the African American culture has had a significant impact on oral poetry and music in general. The songs of freedom and survival of the African slaves that were brought to America are well known and studied from various points of view.

Performance poetry can be, in fact, everything that has been described as it does not have clear boundaries and rules. However, the claim that the performance poetry and Poetry slam have emerged from oral poetry and orality in general, more precisely from the need of people to express themselves in an oral form, seems most likely. It seems that Poetry slam only reflects the needs of oral expression, which have been present for centuries and can go back as far as ancient Greece. Its popularity surely has risen thanks to new understanding of orality and development of technology that is largely oral based (poets can upload their poems on YouTube and create the audiovisual record that might be shared among millions of viewers). Nevertheless, more importantly, performance poetry and spoken word should not be associated only with the emerging movements in the 20th century, such as jazz poetry, Beat poetry and Black Arts Movement but with oral poetry in general. Thus, performance poetry should not be viewed as a new movement.

2. POETRY SLAM

2.1. What is and what is not Poetry slam?

In simple terms, the Poetry slam is defined this way.

A form of performance poetry that combines the elements of performance, writing, competition, and audience participation. It is performed at events called poetry slams or simply slams. The name *slam* developed from the power of the audience, to praise or, sometimes, destroy a poem, and it also underlines the high-energy performance style of the poets.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ "Slam poetry," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed December 13, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/art/slam-poetry>.

Poetry slam is therefore genuinely performative. It is often compared to stand-up events or rap and hip-hop songs. Rap can be used as a defense against the racial and social inequality, and so does slam. Hip-hop, on the other side, often deals with the aspects of identity and tries to provide the listeners with different points of view on the world, and so does slam. The stand-up comedy uses humor and jokes to make people laugh by talking basically about anything, and so does slam. Stand-up comedians create an illusion that they are having a conversation with the audience when they have just a long monologue. The audience, therefore, feels involved in the performance. Additionally, the performance is often dependent on the skills of a performer and their style of storytelling, and so is slam. Poetry slam is therefore not easily defined as far as the content is concerned, it undoubtedly shares some formal traits with other styles as well, but it will be clearer to talk about the form rather than the content. One thing is sure; all of these styles need to be performed orally in order to be successful.

Marc Kelly Smith, often called by his given nickname Slampapi, the founder of the Poetry slam, defines Poetry slam this way.

Slams are captivating poetry events that focus a live audience's attention on the presentation of poetry that's been composed, polished, and rehearsed for the purpose of being performed—very often in a competitive arena, but not always. It's a carnival, a pageant, an interactive classroom, a town hall meeting, a con game, a versified boxing match, and a church-like revival that electrifies and animates the people listening to and watching it.⁴⁵

Marc Kelly Smith, in one of the interviews, said, that he grew up in an environment that did not encourage artistry and yet he has always wanted to become a poet. His poems were not, however, very successful from the beginning, so he decided to become a construction worker instead, but he did not stop attending the poetry readings.⁴⁶ He said that he has suffered during the readings and that “the poets were about as animated as roadkill. No facial expression. No gesture. No intonation. No sign of life whatsoever. Even the poet's skin seemed ashy, as if he had just stepped off the set of *Night of the Living Dead*.”⁴⁷ He decided, therefore, to create his poetry style and called it the Poetry slam. This new style of poetry was supposed to bring life into the poetry performances, and the audience became the judge of the quality of the given

⁴⁵ Marc Kelly Smith, *Take the Mic* (Naperville: Sourcebooks MediaFusion, 2009), 3.

⁴⁶ “Marc Kelly Smith,” RoadtripNation, accessed December 15, 2019. <https://roadtripnation.com/leader/marc-kelly-smith>

⁴⁷ Smith, *Take the Mic*.

performances (the audience can express during the performance and judge the poets at the end of their reading).

The Poetry slam can be described as “the martial art of poetry”⁴⁸ as the performances are time determined and competitive. The performers have three minutes to perform their poems and the audience are given cards with points (0-10, 10 is the highest). After the performance, the audience members will raise up the points, which might help poets to win the competition. “Poetry slams deliberately took verse outside of the academy, taking evaluative power away from academic critics and giving it to popular audiences.”⁴⁹ It is said that Poetry slam wanted to democratize the poetry and take it down from the ivory tower to the ordinary people who can also appreciate poetry, but are not part of some elitist poetry groups and can be directly part of the evaluation of the performances. On one side, it seems that this could be the new way how to promote poetry and especially oral poetry. On the other side, there are arguments that poetry slam is actually the death of art. Harold Bloom, for example, expressed his opinion about the Poetry slam in the *Paris Review*:

Of course, now it’s all gone to hell. I can’t bear these accounts I read in the Times and elsewhere of these poetry slams, in which various young men and women in various late-spots are declaiming rant and nonsense at each other. The whole thing is judged by an applause meter, which is actually not there, but might as well.⁵⁰

Moreover, another former slam poet Nathan A. Thompson who expressed his worries about the future of poetry in the article in the online publisher *Independent*. In the article, he criticizes the competitive formula of poetry slam, which, in his own words, does not help to create the poems of quality. “I have performed at many slams and the audience is almost always half drunk and if you want to win you have to pitch your poem pretty low. The result is a scene rife with the poetic equivalent of nob jokes – and plenty of actual nob jokes.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Jakob Schweppenhauser and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen, “Performing Poetry slam and listening closely to slam poetry.” *SoundEffects*, Vol. 7., no. 1. (2017): 65.

⁴⁹ Susan B.A. Somers-Willett, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), 6.

⁵⁰ Antonio Weiss, “Harold Bloom, the Art of criticism No.1,” *Paris Review*, issue 118., spring 1991. <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2225/the-art-of-criticism-no-1-harold-bloom>.

⁵¹ Nathan A. Thompson, “Poetry slam do nothing to help the art form survive,” *Independent*, February 2013. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/poetry-slams-do-nothing-to-help-the-art-form-survive-8475599.html>.

The fact that Poetry slams are usually performed in bars, and the audience is the judge can create pressure for the poets, who sometimes push the poem too far, and they are very often too expressive. To win the competition, one has to please the crowd and so the poets try to stir up emotions, it can be laughter or crying. However, the poets sometimes exaggerate the form of the performance, and it can end up with screaming and yelling and a feeling of the more emotions the listeners are faced with, the more points the poet will receive. As for example in the poem “And the Psych Ward Says”⁵² from Anita D. The poem questions the sanity of people and she chose to present the poem as an ironical monologue of a nurse who kept the patient in an asylum. Anita chose to stand straight with her hands in front of her chest and use the intonation that suggests the instant persuasion. She chose not to use any rhyming patterns and therefore her poem is more about the theatrical rehearsal she showed during her performance. Unfortunately, all the exaggeration in her performance seems that the author is not trying to pass on the message, but she wants to shock the audience. There are also uses of vague phrases such as: “But the static is still loud enough to drown out the sound of the woman screaming in 2B That’s just Cindy. She just does that sometimes. Well...she didn’t always. But she does now.” In this poem, one cannot talk about the richness of imagery and usage of figures of speech, but one can talk about theatrical performance, which is very present in this poem. The expressions in her face, the gesture, the posture, all that can be very effective and, in the end, very well evaluated by the audience members.

The question of quality of these poems, however, is entirely subjective and cannot be analyzed from the objective point of view. Many poets praise Poetry slam, and many denounce it and do not classify it as poetry. Marc Kelly Smith defines it as poetry. The line where poetry starts and where it ends is very blurred. Nevertheless, the Poetry slam uses figurative language, it often applies rhyme and rhythm and is able to share the emotion of the poem, which is the most crucial thing in Poetry slam and as Thomas Dylan said, “Poetry is what makes me laugh or cry or yawn, what makes my toenails twinkle, what makes me want to do this or that or nothing.”⁵³

⁵² Button Poetry, “Anita D. – And the Psych Ward Says,” posted November 7, 2019. YouTube video, 2:56. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxV6s4oM1hg>.

⁵³ “Dylan Thomas Quotes,” Azquotes, accessed December 19, 2019. https://www.azquotes.com/author/14584-Dylan_Thomas.

Poetry slam can do that; it is one of the reasons why it became so popular all around the world, and therefore, at least according to definition by Dylan, it would be classified as poetry.

2.1.1. Poetry slam as a competition

Poetry slam is competitive and performative. The competition is essential in Poetry slam as winning will help poet to advertise themselves better. The poets who often win competitions are later desired more for other performances and not only for the poetry slam competitions. To win the competition, one has to please the crowd in the time limit of 3 minutes. If the poet is not able to fit their performance into the time limit, they will lose points.

Generally, there are performers competing one after one and sometimes they even react to each other. This type of competition is called “flyting.”⁵⁴ The aim is to demonstrate the skill of a performer. It is also sometimes compared to another type of competition, “the dozens,” that can be found mainly in oral cultures. “Playing the dozens” is “an African-American custom in which two competitors -- usually males -- go head to head in a competition of comedic trash talk. They take turns “cracking on” or insulting one another...The dozens is a contest of personal power -- of wit, self-control, verbal ability, mental agility, and mental toughness. Defeat can be humiliating, but a skilled contender, win or lose, may gain respect.”⁵⁵ This kind of competition is usually common in rap, but even in Poetry slam, the competitors perform one after one, so there is a slight resemblance. However, they usually do not directly insult each other but only allow themselves some witty remarks.

Historically, poetry competitions are nothing new and surely not a recent phenomenon, they can be seen throughout the whole literary history (François Villon, for example, presented his ballade “Je meurs de soif auprès de la fontaine” in a poetry competition that was organized by the prince⁵⁶). Other poetry contests involved the Ancient Greek competitions, the Persian competitions, contests of the songs in the Arabic world and African griot poetry. In Greece, for example, the tendencies to competing and measuring one’s strengths have been strong. Not

⁵⁴ Helen Gregory, “Texts in Performance: Identity, Interaction and Influence in U.K. and U.S. Poetry Slam Discourses.” (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2009), 46–47.

⁵⁵ “Dozens,” Urban dictionary, posted September 25, 2004.

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=dozens&defid=771260->

⁵⁶ “François Villon,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed December 13, 2019.

[https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francois-Villon.](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francois-Villon)

only the physical competitions (athletics or war) but also arts competitions and especially poetry. Mark Griffith claims in his publication that Greek poetry was composed explicitly for performance as the poetry contests were viral and prestigious.⁵⁷ These poetry competitions had stringent rules, and the judges were often confronted with two impulses: conservatism and innovation. Innovation was supposed to shock the audience or to make the rival insecure about his performance. However, all in all, Greek judges tested mainly these three categories: a) knowledge and factual accuracy, b) moral and educational integrity, c) technical skills, and aesthetic/emotional impact.

The first two categories are concerned with the topic of the poem, and these are very often hard to judge. It was sporadic for judges to know precisely the facts of the topic that the poet chose to talk about, and morality is also hard to measure. However, the artistic expression of technical skills and theatrical performance can be judged objectively to some extent. The third category is described by Griffith this way, “musical and histrionic powers can excite the ear and eye as well as the mind, dazzle and delight an audience, and arouse in it irresistible feelings of wonder, sympathetic engagement, and emotional release— “tears and laughter,” “pity and fear.”⁵⁸

In practice, it was the third category that was judged the most as in oral performances, the power of the performance, and the way it is presented seem essential for winning the competition. In the Greek poem “Works and Days” by Hesiodos, there can be found a remark of a competition of two poets, Hesiodos and an unknown poet. Ralph Rosen claims that these two poets were supposed to meet for the poetry competition to contrast their styles and that the second one could be Homer.⁵⁹ In this contest, the other poet is unexpectedly defeated by the sole verdict of the king, based on Hesiod’s more peaceful and productive poetic “message.” The result of the competition is often based on the performance and the ability of a poet to adjust their performance for the audience. In Mark Smith’s words: “Slam poets learn early that they had better be tuned into their audience’s sensibilities to have any hope of surviving their stay onstage, let alone winning a competition.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Mark Griffith, “Contest and Contradiction in Early Greek Poetry,” *UC Berkeley: Department of Classics* (January 1990): 185–207. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3hp009zn>.

⁵⁸ Griffith, “Contest and Contradiction in Early Greek Poetry,” 189.

⁵⁹ Rosen, Ralph. M. “Homer and Hesiod.” In *A New Companion to Homer*, edited by Barry Powell and Ian Morris (Mnemosyne: Bibliotheca classica Batava, Supplementum 163, New York: Brill, 1997), 467.

⁶⁰ Mark Smith, *Take the Mic*, page 12.

Nevertheless, it is important to say that competitions at the Poetry slam events are judged by the members of the audience, therefore anyone who bought the ticket. The fact that people who are not literary critics or renowned poets has been greatly influencing the process of the competitions, and it enables poets to apply different strategies during their performances. It almost seems that the slam poets apply various rhetoric strategies. In the article “Beyond persuasion: A proposal for an invitational rhetoric,”⁶¹ the rhetoric is defined as the study of intentional communication. In general, the way how we create our ideas and share them with others. For a rhetorical situation to arise, one needs to have the text, the purpose, the audience, and the context. In the case of Poetry slam, the text would be the content of the poem, the purpose can differ, but usually, it is to win the competition, the audience is the crowd at the event and the context would be the environment of the venue. For example, the performance of the poem varies if it is performed in an open-air venue or a small bar. There are different strategies a slam poet can use in order to win. In rhetoric, these would be called “branches of oratory.”⁶² Three categories can be mentioned that fit the context of Poetry slam: epideictic, deliberative, and judicial. Epideictic is used to praise or to blame someone or something, deliberative is used to encourage or discourage behavior, and judicial is used to accuse or defend.

In the following analysis of the poem “Angry Black Woman”⁶³ that Porsha performed in 2014 and became the Champion of the Individual World Poetry Slam Finals in Arizona, the explanation will be provided for the possible reasons for her success, and various examples will be shown of her achievement of persuasion of the members of the audience to give her higher points. If the three Greek criteria are applied (knowledge and factual accuracy, moral and educational integrity, technical skills, and aesthetic/emotional impact) on different slam poems, it can be realized that the emotional impact is the most important thing for a poet to win the competition. She managed to perform a compelling poem within the exact three minutes (she followed the rules of the competition and even used it for her own good). Porsha managed to stir up emotions by talking about very current topic and, at the same time, to administer the performance that amazed the crowd. She talked about the issues of black women in society

⁶¹ Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, “Beyond persuasion: a proposal for an invitational rhetoric,” *Communication Monographs*, Volume 62. (March 1995): 2–4.

⁶² “Rhetoric & Slam,” Slam Rhetoric, accessed February 4, 2020. <https://slamrhetoric.wordpress.com/rhetoric-and-slam/#ancient>.

⁶³ Poetry Slam Inc, “IWPS Finals 2014 – Porsha O. Angry Black Woman,” posted February 18, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSoITsaSs0M>.

(knowledge and factual accuracy). Her poem talks about the stigma of angry black women; in this context, it works as a critique of a society (moral and educational integrity), and finally, she managed to apply poetic devices and figures of speech into her poem (technical skills and aesthetic/emotional impact). All three criteria were appreciated, even though the audience members might not be even familiar with them. From the point of rhetoric, Porsha used mainly the epideictic and judicial strategy as she expresses her anger about the social situation of black communities and accuses the government, the media and basically everyone for not doing the right thing. “I’m mad that the government and media are controlled by the same people”, “I’m pissed off at gentrification,” “I’m *pissed off* at hip hop,” “I’m *pissed off* at Black on Black crime.”⁶⁴ She also blames the society for seeing her automatically as “the angry Black woman,” “Only because I’m a little tired of the stereotype about the angry Black woman,” “Cause as you can see I am Black, and a woman, and I’m not angry at all.”⁶⁵

However, after the thorough analysis, it seems that Porsha won the competition mainly because of the sudden changes of rhythm in the poem and her passionate performance and not because of the issues she addressed. Many poems talk about racism, blackness, and other issues, but she was able to administer it with real passion. She started by these lines:

Let me just say that I am a very beautiful person.
I’m sweet, and intelligent, and funny, and awkward...
And I just had to say that,
Only because I’m a little tired of the stereotype about
The angry Black woman.
Whoop-de-doo, right?
‘Cause as you can see I am Black,
And a woman,
And I’m not angry at all.⁶⁶

At this point, the members of the audience expect the poem to be very calm based on the introduction and based on her intonation, very gentle gestures, and slow movements. However, Porsha decides to change the rhythm completely after the last line.

Hell, I’m *pissed* the fuck off!
I’m mad as *hell*.
I’m so mad,

⁶⁴ Poetry Slam Inc, “IWPS Finals 2014 – Porsha O. Angry Black Woman.”

⁶⁵ Poetry Slam Inc, “IWPS Finals 2014 – Porsha O. Angry Black Woman.”

⁶⁶ Poetry Slam Inc, “IWPS Finals 2014 – Porsha O. Angry Black Woman.”

I'm gettin' ready to break my foot off in everybody's ass,
But pretend this is class so I can tell you why I'm mad at the education system.⁶⁷

The turnover in the poem makes the members of the audience cheer. The sudden changes in the pace and rhythm are usually well appreciated in Poetry slam, and Porsha created the right tension to be able to elevate the pace and to be able to speed up as the poem evolves. It starts to resemble a rap song the way she uses the rhymes. She uses the repetition "I'm mad" and also replacements, which carry the same meaning e.g., "I am pissed". She starts to apply different types of rhymes to follow the rhythm. For example, the outside-in rhyme, in other words, enjambment, which adds flow to Porsha's rhyming debut.

Mad, 'cause "education is the key,"
Yet they keep the poor locked out.
They get hand-me-down books
And hand-me-down chairs.
Hand-me-down teachers
Who give them hand-me-down stares.⁶⁸

The repetition of the compound "hand-me-down" with the rhyming of words such as "chairs" and "stares" create the rhythm that we can find in rap songs, for example. The poem is also filled with metaphors. E.g., the metaphor of the education representing the key, yet the key is accessible just to those who can pay. Throughout the poem, she usually starts with the phrase "I am mad".

I'm mad because Barbie is the standard of beauty.
I'm mad that the government and media are controlled by the same people,

I'm mad at Black men for reasons I don't have time to list,
I'm mad,
I *hate* that I only got three minutes to say this poem And I got about ten minutes worth of angry.

I'm pissed off at gentrification.
I'm *pissed off* at hip hop,
I'm *pissed off* at Black on Black crime,
I'm *pissed off* that Ricky Rolls got all the crack⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Poetry Slam Inc, "IWPS Finals 2014 – Porsha O. Angry Black Woman."

⁶⁸ Poetry Slam Inc, "IWPS Finals 2014 – Porsha O. Angry Black Woman."

⁶⁹ Poetry Slam Inc, "IWPS Finals 2014 – Porsha O. Angry Black Woman."

The fact that she chose the topic of the angry black woman supports the language and gestures she uses. At the beginning of the poem, she is very gentle, and her gestures are calm. This changes throughout the poem; her gestures become frantic; the volume of her voice keeps increasing; the pitch of her voice is getting higher. Facial expressions show anger, and at the same time, they generate empathy among the listeners. The goal of the poet is to persuade the members of the audience that they want to pass the message, not just to perform what they have rehearsed or wrote down. “Poets perform the fact that they are not performers.”⁷⁰ Porsha, in her performance was able to captivate the listeners by the combination of chosen topic, rhythmical patterns, figures of speech, rhyming, voicing, gestures, mimics, and body language. To create a powerful poem, one should involve all these characteristics in the poem. The competition can sometimes motivate people to offer their best they have and give the poet some rules they should follow not to be penalized, on the other hand, it can, in some cases, be quite contra-productive as the poets are forced to compete against other poets who yell or move more, and this can evolve into a completely different competition. Porsha concludes her poem by going back at the beginning of her poem and makes a calm conclusion with the line:

And finally, you see I have every right to be pissed the fuck off.
But most of the times, despite what you believe, I’m really, really sweet.⁷¹

The competition is one of the entertaining elements in poetry and can be defined as one of the essentials of Poetry slam. Without this factor, it could be called performance poetry. On one hand, it can worsen the quality of the performances as the poets try to win the competition and rely on the “strong performances” as was mentioned by the former slam poet Nathan A. Thompson and the literary critic Harold Bloom. On the other hand, it helps poets to follow some given rules, and they can receive direct feedback from the members of the audience. Another positive feature about the competitive style of Poetry slam is that the audience members are involved in the performance and judging of the poems. They are not excluded from the poetry world. It can be seen on the video of Porsha’s performance that the audience is essential for the performer, she reacts to the applause, and she maintains eye contact with the audience members all the time. Her anger is raw, and she spreads her anger to her listeners. She has only three minutes to

⁷⁰ Lesley Wheeler, *Voicing American Poetry. Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 128.

⁷¹ Poetry Slam Inc, “IWPS Finals 2014 – Porsha O. Angry Black Woman.”

share the message, and she has used every second of it. She managed to use powerful metaphors to support the rhyming; she has applied several repetitive structures to emphasize the important points in her poem and compelled the members of the audience to focus on her monologue by interacting with them. She was able to unite rhetoric and performativity and all these essential details helped her to win the slam competition. It could be said that as the bards were trying to win the competition to achieve admiration with ladies, so are the slam poets, except that they are trying “to win the audience’s heart.”

2.1.2. Poetry slam as a performance

The focus on the acting and the act of performing is crucial in Poetry slam. Furthermore, as it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, the ability to get in touch with the audience is the key to the whole slam event, which is often contrasted with the so-called academic poetry readings. “If there’s one lesson the academy might learn from the slam, it’s that the audience matters...one of slam’s greatest accomplishments is the grassroots infrastructure its adherents have built geared specifically towards performance...”⁷² The slam poets encourage the members of the audience during their performances to express themselves; the poets want to hear the reactions. Mark Smith often gets in direct contact with his audience; he steps off stage, touches the audience members, climbs on the table. Julie Marie Schmid defines this behavior as “transformational: by transgressing the boundary between the stage and the floor, he breaks down the barrier between these wealthy suburbanites and himself and establishes a connection with his audience.”⁷³ In *The Anthropology of Performance*, Victor Turner describes this as the “transformational potential of reflexive social dramas.”⁷⁴ The slam events are based on the community building, and they should sabotage in a way the hierarchy of a performer and the listener. These strategies were already presented earlier in Finnegan’s works about storytelling in African tribes and the dependence of the performance on the performer.⁷⁵ The performer is the key to the Poetry slam event, and the boundaries of the performer and listener is supposed to be blurred. Mark Smith suggests stepping off the stage and interact directly with people;

⁷² Gary Glazner, *Poetry Slam: The Competitive Art of Performance Poetry* (San Francisco: Manic D Press, Inc., 2000), 36.

⁷³ Julie Marie Schmid, “Performance, poetics, and place: public poetry as a community art.” (Phd diss., University of Iowa, 2000), 17.

⁷⁴ Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), 83.

⁷⁵ Finnegan, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 135.

others try different strategies on how to approach the audience. One of them is, for example, to represent a likable person who appears to be on stage just by accident, this would be the case of Harry Baker. In the next part, two of his poems and performances will be analyzed.

In the following analysis, the primary focus will be on the verbal aspects of the performance, which will include the analysis of the rhythm and rhyme, the articulation of the text, phrasing, variations in volume, intensity, and others. The first analyzed poem is called “Paper people”⁷⁶ and the author is Harry Baker, the winner of the London Slam Championship in 2010, the European Slam Championship in 2011, and finally the World Slam Championship in 2012.

Listening to the performance, one can agree that there is a certain flow as far as the rhythm is concerned. The Poetry slam, in general, is not bound by any rules the poets need to follow, but the poem should follow some rhythmical patterns to be successful. The poem “Paper People” is based on the trochaic meter, but there is no strict trochaic metrical construction, it works more as a rhythmical platform. “I’d like some paper people. They’d be purple paper people. Maybe pop-up purple paper people. Proper pop-up purple paper people.”⁷⁷ The rhythm is also emphasized by the usage of alliterations and rhymes that are applied throughout the poem. “proper pop-up purple paper people,” “proper pop-up purple people paperclip.” The rhyming in the poem also helps the rhythm, for example in “There’d be a paper princess Kate but we’d all stare at paper Pippa, and then we’d all live in fear of killer Jack the Paper-Ripper” or when the outside-in-rhyme (enjambment) is used: “Paper politicians with their paper-thin policies, broken promises without appropriate apologies.”⁷⁸ However, there are no strict rhyming patterns, there are a few end rhymes, but the structure of the poem is created more by the alliterations, especially the “p” chains.

Repetition is also one of the means of how to let the rhythm flow. The repetition of the phrase “There’d be a little paper me. And a little paper you.”⁷⁹ helps the author to divide the poem into different parts and also helps to catch the attention of the audience. Harry Baker, during his

⁷⁶ Poetry Slam TV, “Harry Baker – Paper People,” posted May 2, 2014. YouTube video, 06:36. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIRuBZ-W3gw>.

⁷⁷ Poetry Slam TV, “Harry Baker – Paper People.”

⁷⁸ Poetry Slam TV, “Harry Baker – Paper People.”

⁷⁹ Poetry Slam TV, “Harry Baker – Paper People.”

performance, does not fully respect the trochaic meter as he sometimes changes the rhythm so that it would sound more natural, more similar to everyday speech. He uses pauses and tempo to achieve this. In the first verse, he starts very slowly, but as the poem develops, he raises the tempo of his speech until the verse 6, which represents the climax of the first part: “How do you prop up pop-up purple paper people?”⁸⁰ and after this line, he slows down again “I hear you cry. Well, I ...” In the subsequent verse, he starts to speed up again, and the verse “A cheeky pack of Blu Tack just in case the paper slipped”⁸¹ is tough to understand. However, after this line, the tempo drops down, and Baker starts slowly again. The dramatical drops of tempo are the most important thing for this performance as it creates tension and makes the listener attentive and insecure throughout the whole poem.

The performance is directly connected to the performer, watching Harry Baker performing the poem adds another dimension to the performance. He often repeated that he would characterize himself as “a geek.” His casual clothes, crooked posture, and a sad, shy smile also contributes to the impression of his work. Harry Baker seems to be almost embarrassed by the cheerful applause that he always receives after the performance, which may also be one of his strategies on how to have an even more significant impact on the audience. In his other poem “Real Men,” which will be analyzed later in this chapter, he talks about the crying of men and especially his crying. Harry Baker, therefore, creates an image of a sensitive young poet.

As far as the expressions and gestures are concerned. The most frequent expression is the “well-placed smile,” which is often contrasted with a kind of a worried look. Interestingly, the smiles are often present at the identical moment if we compare the same poem from different events. For example, Harry Baker has the equivalent facial expression during the performance at the TedxExeter talk in 2014⁸² as during the performance at the Poetry slam event in Swansea in 2013.⁸³ Especially in verse 6, which is followed by the drop of tempo, “How do you prop up pop-up purple paper people? I hear you cry. Well, I ...” These similarities prove that the performance was prepared to the last detail. Poetry slam poems are usually pre-rehearsed, and it is

⁸⁰ Poetry Slam TV, “Harry Baker – Paper People.”

⁸¹ Poetry Slam TV, “Harry Baker – Paper People.”

⁸² TEDxTalks, “Grand Slam Poetry Champion | Harry Baker | TEDxExeter,” posted April 29, 2014. YouTube video, 14:05. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxGWGohlXiw>.

⁸³ Canopy Swansea, “Harry Baker – Paper People,” posted February 5, 2013. YouTube video, 03:35. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ao6GQSUzx7Q>.

strongly advised by Mark Smith to do so in order to administer a successful performance. Nevertheless, it is often claimed that Poetry slam is inspired mainly by jazz poetry and Beat poetry. In these performances, improvisation is the key. The slam poets do not try to hide that their poems are learned by heart, but still, the ability to improvise on the stage is in a way expected. That is why poets often pretend that they have included something in the poem that they have never said before. Nevertheless, if there is a listener who attends all the slam poetry events, they will notice that the performances often do not change. It is not, therefore, very similar to jazz poetry, which should be improvised, but it is more similar to acting or Greek poetry recitals. Plato expresses the most famous critique of poets in *The Republic*. “Then must we not infer that all these poetical individuals, beginning with Homer, are only imitators; they copy images of virtue and the like, but the truth they never reach?”⁸⁴ Indeed, the slam poets perform something on a stage they have performed hundreds of times already, and many of the natural nuances that the audience members can spot are probably learned. Such as Harry Baker’s smile, his worried look, the typical gestures of a rapper, yet not representing the typical masculine role of rap, fragile look, rhythmical movements which follow the drops in tempo of speech. Baker’s voice is also vital; the playfulness of words seems to be present in his timbre as well. His voice quivers when he slows down, which creates an impression of vulnerability. It often shifts from the fragile boy who speaks quietly and calmly with the confident rapper who makes dominant gestures and tries to prove his point. Similarly to Porsha and her initial and final calm manner of presenting the poem, the main topic of the poem was very dominant and was meant to show the anger of “the angry black woman,” but she managed to surprise the audience by changing the rhythm and tempo. Plato would say that all these learned details show that the poets are imposters, and even though Poetry slam poets do not claim that they improvise all the time in their poems, it is somehow expected from them to include at least slight improvisation. After all, it is still oral poetry. Most of the slam poets just learn their poems by heart and then perform them on stage. The improvisation is usually not part of the show.

The second poem by Harry Baker that will be analyzed is called “Real Men.” This poem was presented in Bristol during the competition called “Raise the Bar.”⁸⁵ Harry Baker chose a theme

⁸⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Duluth: University of Minnesota Duluth, 2011), 314. <https://www.d.umn.edu/~cstroupe/handouts/8906/Dialogues%20of%20Plato%20Book%20X%20Jowett.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Raise the Bar, “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB,” posted October 10, 2015. YouTube video, 03:41. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cK2D-b8qEKM>.

of gender and presented a poem about the perception of manhood in society and provided the audience with many examples from his own life. For instance, the fact that men are not supposed to cry but yet he does. The performance was rewarded with a very cheerful applause and he won the competition in the end.

Harry Baker chose to talk about the gender issues that are often discussed nowadays and the perception of men in society. At the beginning of the poem, he presents some actions he did, and that could prove to be “manly.” Such as “going skinnydipping in the sea on New Year’s Day...I’ve gone up for thirds in an all-you-can-eat buffet.”⁸⁶ Another prove of being a man can be found in the second stanza of the poem “brave men are cavemen.” Usually, the term “real man/men” is understood to be ironic. He often provides the audience with examples of what a real man should do so that he could be the man others want him to be, but immediately after that, he adds an example from his own life that would not probably be worthy of a man. “And cavemen are men who do not really show emotion. I say, if something is real, it’s something you can feel.”⁸⁷ and another “Cause something in the animation pulled an emotional trigger...and you may snigger if you see these guns are not the manliest.”⁸⁸ He often uses the issue of crying as he claims that men are not supposed to cry, and yet he cries a lot, and still, he is a man. The author, throughout the poem, searches the meaning of being a man while trying to prove that there is no clear definition. He also mentions that it might be even humiliating sometimes as he does not often fit in the definition of a man, and yet he is one. For example: “I did Movember, and nobody even noticed...but know this, I am a man.”⁸⁹ He mentions the pressure there is on teenage boys who try to find courage. “...and when I was 13, I’d stand on my head until the sky was green, and the grass was blue.” The rhetorical statement of the poem is to show that men can be vulnerable as well. The statement is supported by the performative quality of phrasing, rhythm, pausing, tempo, voice quality, and other crucial poetic devices. The chosen topic of gender stereotype makes the poem undoubtedly powerful, but more importantly, it was rather the form and the wordplays that he chose to use that got him the results he desired.

⁸⁶ Raise the Bar, “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB.”

⁸⁷ Raise the Bar, “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB.”

⁸⁸ Raise the Bar, “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB.”

⁸⁹ Raise the Bar, “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB.”

Throughout the whole poem, Baker uses repetition quite often, and the listener might get the impression that the poet is trying to persuade himself and also the others in the audience that he is indeed a man. Interestingly, the phrase “I am a man” is often used at the beginning of the author’s explanation of what manhood could be in his view. On the one hand, the echoing phrase “I am a man” certainly serves as one of the means how to attract people’s attention. On the other hand, it also serves for the author to remember better the passages. Harry Baker usually presents pre-written and pre-rehearsed poems, but he also needs to have some patterns in order to memorize the poem entirely and follow the rhythm easier. The word “man” serves a useful purpose as it rhymes with many other words, and the repetition of the word helps the poet to structure the poem. One of the most frequent repetitions is the phrase “real men,” which is the title of the poem as well. It helps the poet to remind the audience what the poem is actually about and also to create new images and rhyming patterns. There are also many other repetitions, such as the conjunction “and,” which functions as the emphasis and helps to create the dactylic meter, although not entirely regular, “And some say that real men are brave men, and brave men are cave men, and cave men are men who do not really show emotion.” Another repetition would be the phrase, “Cause real men have issues, and real men cry, that’s why they make man-sized tissues for their man-sized eyes.”⁹⁰

Even though Harry Baker is not known for the improvised slam poems, he interacts with the audience by directly addressing the ladies in the crowd when he is explaining his sexual orientation. “whether a man’s eyes are dry or not determines that he may be gay...But I am not...ladies”. It seems that the word “ladies” was added during the performance. In his other performances, for example, in 2011 in Green Mill in Chicago, he presented the same poem, and the referring to ladies in the crowd was missing.⁹¹ It is possible that the addressing was added later during other performances, which would be more probable.

Another essential part of a slam poem is the rhyme and the rhythm. Baker rhymes more than one syllable which is very frequent in slam poems as it evokes the rhythm of a song that is usually expressed by music, but as the slam poets cannot use any properties, just their voice,

⁹⁰ Raise the Bar, “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB.”

⁹¹ Baker Harry, “Harry Baker – Real Men,” posted May 1, 2011. YouTube video, 04:46. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz_lkjVRDaQ.

body and words, they need to bring the rhythm by using rhyming. In the line “Cause real men have issues, and real men cry, That’s why they make man-sized tissues for their man-sized eyes”, Baker used the two-syllable rhyme for the words “issues” and “tissues” and imperfect rhyme by using “cry” and “eyes” and the audience very well accepted the line as they started to clap and cheer. The recognition can reassure the poet that the rhyme was appreciated, and maybe this moment will influence the ones who give points at the end. Baker also uses the internal rhyme (the author rhymes the words inside the line) which usually works as the prelude to the main point he is trying to make. “if something is real, it’s something you can feel..”, “When faced with death, he didn’t hesitate or take a breath, “Cause something in the animation pulled an emotional trigger, and you may snigger...”. In the last example, the internal rhyme is combined with the three-syllable rhyming of the words manliest and manliness.

Another very popular rhyming is the compound rhyme that catches the attention of the audience. Harry Baker uses for example “Not to be misused by never-been-kissed youths”⁹² or “in the sea on New Year’s Day, I’ve gone up for thirds in an all-you-can-eat buffet”⁹³ or “regardless who has been doing press-ups all afternoon” and finally “the main form of catharsis is Pixar flicks.” In the poem, we can also find other poetic figures, such as consonance. “When watching Wall-E, I wasn’t worried about which of my friends’ willies was bigger.”⁹⁴ When performing the slam poem, the choice of words is crucial. However, these figures of speech that have been mentioned can be used in written poems as well or in poems that are read aloud. Harry Baker was able to combine all the poetic devices that poems usually have and create the rhythm that made the audience cheer and clap.

Another part will analyze the performative acts such as body language, eye contact, interaction, and intonation with the audience. Harry Baker uses many pauses during his performance with different purposes. Right at the beginning, he makes a pause just after the first line of the poem, “I am a man.” The pause lets the audience to understand what the poem will be about and also to see the point Baker will be trying to make in his poem. Sometimes he also uses the pauses when he expects there will be a reaction from the audience. “I’ve gone up for thirds in an all-you-can-eat buffet, and I have not once worried about how much I weigh.” After this line, he

⁹² Raise the Bar, “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB.”

⁹³ Raise the Bar, “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB.”

⁹⁴ Raise the Bar, “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB.”

makes the pause and smiles, which is directly followed by laughter from the audience. According to Finnegan, this is one of the main assets of oral performances – the storyteller is able to make contact with the audience⁹⁵, the performers can even use questions which can be answered by the people in the audience. In this case, Baker is using eye contact, and he is not focused on just one point, but he is trying to appeal to as many listeners as possible. He usually uses eye contact and smiles when he is explaining something personal, and then he is leaving space for people to laugh or express any other emotion. Such as in this case, “And I cry quite a lot.” A reaction is expected after this. Therefore, Baker waits a few moments and continues talking after a pause. Finnegan mentions that the oral performance is often very much influenced by the skills of the storyteller.⁹⁶ Harry Baker is one of the most known British slam poets, and hence it could be said that he is regarded as a skillful slam poet and in a way storyteller. The good slam poet should use pacing and pauses to enhance the essential details in the poem, maintain eye contact, and have more or less authoritative body language to show the confidence but also at the same time relaxed. Baker applies these rules throughout the whole poem. He does not lose contact with his listeners.

All of these formal aspects of his poem create a powerful performance. Harry Baker goes from confident postures with his arms straighten up and his dominant gestures to an uncertain and shy boy who struggles with the world of masculine power. Additionally, he presents himself as a sensitive boy; therefore, his gentle movements, his shy smile help him quite a lot to achieve the intended effect. As was already mentioned earlier, the slam poem is not just about good rhyming but mostly about a poet who can provide the audience with the multi-sensory experience and who can persuade the audience members that the performance they are about to see will not repeat ever again in the same manner and that they are lucky to be part of this magic moment.

2.1.3. Poetry slam as a form of resistance

Poetry slam is often portrayed as a movement that has come to an existence as an opposition to “academic” poetry. Bob Holman, an American poet and poetry activist, characterizes it as “an

⁹⁵ Finnegan, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 135 – 136.

⁹⁶ Finnegan, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 135–136.

art form that was originated as an opposition or a resistance.”⁹⁷ The term “resistance” is quite broad and can be understood from different points of view. Firstly, Poetry slam is understood as a response to the dominant literary academic world. Jason Camlot, associate professor at Concordia University in Quebec, claims that Poetry slam has emerged as an opposition to corporate culture, white middle-class, and in general against academic institutions.⁹⁸ Partly, he is right; Poetry slam is, in fact, influenced by the Black Arts Movement, which was fueled by the anger of black communities in America in the sixties, seventies. In Camlot’s view, The Poetry slam is seen as a means of forceful action. Amiri Baraka characterization of Poetry Slam agrees with the definition provided by Camlot, in his poem “Black art”, he defines poetry as a means of fighting, “We want ‘poems that kill. Assassin poems, Poems that shoot guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys.”⁹⁹ To understand more how poetry slam opposes academic poetry, the analysis of two poems will be provided. The first one will be the poem “My Shakespeare”¹⁰⁰ by Kate Tempest, and the second one will be the poem “We Made It” by Sunni Patterson.

Kate Tempest is an English spoken word performer, and she has been named the *Next Generation Poet* by the Poetry Book Society association. Her performances are desperately sold out, and she goes to tours around the world with her spoken word events. Thanks to her successful performances, she does not take part in slam competitions anymore, but she organizes her events and tours. The poem “My Shakespeare” expresses her understanding of Shakespeare and the way he influenced her work and people’s lives. She says that “his legacy exists in the life that lives in everything he’s written,” she understands the importance of his works and the accomplishments. There are many references to William Shakespeare’s plays. Right in the first stanza, there are all in all four references. “He’s in every lover who ever stood alone beneath a window,” referring to Romeo and Juliet, “in every jealous whispered word,” referring to Othello, “in every ghost that will not rest,” referring to Macbeth play and “he’s in every father with a favorite,”¹⁰¹ referring to King Lear.

⁹⁷ Pauly Arroyo, “I’m a Nuyorican,” in *Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe*, ed. Algarín, M. and Bob Holman (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 391–392.

⁹⁸ Jason Camlot, “Poetry in Performance.” in *The Facts on File Companion to 20th -Century American Poetry*, ed. Burt Kimmelman. (New York: Facts on File Inc., 2005), 391–394.

⁹⁹ “Black Art,” Genius, accessed January 7, 2020. <https://genius.com/Amiri-baraka-black-art-annotated>.

¹⁰⁰ Royal Shakespeare Company, “My Shakespeare – a new poem by Kate Tempest,” posted April 17, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_auc2Z67OM.

¹⁰¹ Royal Shakespeare Company, “My Shakespeare – a new poem by Kate Tempest.”

As far as the form of her poem is concerned, it is primarily based on the usage of stress and emphasis. Kate has stated many times during her performances, “My poetry is meant to be performed,” and “Poetry is not a dead language.” Her performances resemble more to an argumentative monologue or eloquent speech as there are not many rhyming patterns; usually, she succeeds in inserting rhyme at the end of her stanzas.

He’s in every young man growing boastful,
Every worn out elder, drunk all day;
muttering false prophecies and squandering their lot.
He’s there – in every mix-up that spirals far out of control – and never seems to
end, even when its beginnings are forgot.¹⁰²

She also uses repetition, which is very frequent in oral performances. There is a repetition of the pronoun “he,” which refers to William Shakespeare. “He’s in every young man growing boastful... He’s there – in every mix-up that spirals far out of control – and never seems to end, even when its beginnings are forgot... He’s in every girl who ever used her wits. Whoever did her best.” The repetitions help to repeat the rhythm and to create a structure in the poem.

Kate Tempest speaks Caribbean lite patois, which can also be heard during her performances. This linguistic aspect helps Kate to create the image of a girl from a bad neighborhood. Harry Baker presented himself as a shy, sensitive guy, Porsha as an angry black woman; Kate Tempest chose a different strategy; she represents the common people who fight against the surrounding world and the unjust society. Even in the poem “My Shakespeare,” which is supposed to be about the famous English author, she chose to use the tone of anger, which is typical for her performances. She often applies expressions that are familiar to performers who have been raised on hip-hop. The rhythm of her poems is very similar, and there are not many variations, probably to imitate the rhythm of hip-hop songs or rap songs. All in all, the tempo stays the same. Lloyd Evans, the poetry editor and theatre critic, wrote for *The Spectator* that “she cannot create expectation, uncertainty, surprise or relief. Every line sounds like its predecessor, half-sung on a falling note, and every word seems to exult in its contact with the dolorous and moribund.”¹⁰³ She has been criticized and praised by different critics, and interestingly one of the

¹⁰² Royal Shakespeare Company, “My Shakespeare – a new poem by Kate Tempest.”

¹⁰³ Lloyd Evans, “Kate Tempest, few would describe the south Londoner’s poetry as ‘moreish’. Less-ish, perhaps,” *The Spectator*, October 6, 2016. <https://beta.spectator.co.uk/article/kate-tempest>.

things that have been pointed out was that she is praised by the elite, which she should not be as the Poetry slam and performance poetry, in general, go against the dominant literary world. Kate Tempest is therefore seen as a representative of a creative writer from ghetto with her background of hip-hop music, which is interestingly seen positively by the academic poetry institutions or as Evans says “by the elite.”¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, she was invited to Royal Court to present her poems, and with her poem, “My Shakespeare” made an impression at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

The academic poetry, term that slam poets often use, does not necessarily mean the “opposition.” Admittedly, Kate’s poetry is different as it is meant to be performed, the impression of the poem is, therefore, partly dependent on the performer, and sometimes it can have positive or negative results. Nevertheless, without any doubt, the poems of Kate Tempest are meant to be heard. This would be one of the most significant differences to so-called academic poetry, as this poetry is usually meant to be read in private (there are, of course, poetry readings, but these seem just to serve as promotion for the book, not to show the skills of a performer.) Kate Tempest is an interesting example of the resistance to academic poetry; she wants to be heard; she creates performative poems, that are meant for common people, not for the poetry elite, yet she receives prizes from these academies. It can be said that Kate Tempest is an excellent example of merging these two seemingly opposite poles.

Helen Gregory examines in her doctoral thesis the interactions and oppositions of academic poetry and poetry slam and as she states, “many of the references reflect criticisms by slam participants of the dominant literary world and vice versa, often framed in terms of a clash between performance or stage poetry and what is seen as being more traditional page poetry.”¹⁰⁵ She describes in her studies that slam poets express their “feelings of rejection.” Usually, the slam poets are marginalized from the literary event and publications. Most of the slam poets publish their poems on their own and those who aspire to the recognition of the academic circles, they often stop doing Poetry slam.

¹⁰⁴ Evans, “Kate Tempest, few would describe the south Londoner’s poetry as ‘moreish’. Less-ish, perhaps.”

¹⁰⁵ Gregory, “Texts in Performance: Identity, Interaction and Influence in U.K. and U.S. Poetry Slam Discourses,” 272.

People who are aspiring to academia are afraid to be aligned with slam ... academia in this country particularly is so elitist and so much the bastion of the privileged that if you can get your leg in there, you certainly don't want your work to then be labelled either as 'spoken word' or as 'slam poetry'.¹⁰⁶

The Poetry slam is criticized for its popularity and performativity. The academic poetry, on the other hand, is criticized for its snobbery and inaccessibility. Pierre Bourdieu claims in his work *Distinction* that certain genres or literary movements are considered to be more legitimate than others. The dominant literary world, in other words, publishers, creates the classification. A tiny percentage of collections of poems are selected for the press, and therefore, it is essential for the poets to be part of the dominant literary groups and to appeal to publishers, where to send their manuscripts and how to present themselves.¹⁰⁷ "Poet's success relies upon them conforming to established conventions."¹⁰⁸

Kate Tempest is a good proof that these two seemingly oppositional sides (legitimate or not) can be fused. Firstly, she chose the topic of the most celebrated British writer and applied it to her performance, which was appreciated by the so-called "academy." Secondly, her performances are based on hip-hop and rap songs; therefore, her gestures and the tempo she chooses in her poems reflect this fact. Her poetry is consequently appreciated by different groups, and her poems/songs have become popular all around the world. In her case, Poetry slam and academic poetry associations joined forces. Poetry slam has emerged as the opposition to academic poetry and elite publishing groups, but there are more and more slam poets who want to publish their collections of poems, and there are more and more academic poets who want to address a broader audience. The merging of these two seemingly different forms might result in enjoyable cooperation. Kate Tempest already proved that it is possible. Her poems are performative and yet being published by influential publishers such as Bloomsbury Publishing. Additionally, she keeps releasing new musical records as well, and there are many promotional videos on YouTube. The fact that poets can express through different types of media also supports the cooperation of the academy and performative poetry.

¹⁰⁶ Gregory, "Texts in Performance: Identity, Interaction and Influence in U.K. and U.S. Poetry Slam Discourses," 273.

¹⁰⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of the Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge: Massachusetts. Harvard University Press, 1996), 46–52.

¹⁰⁸ Gregory, "Texts in Performance: Identity, Interaction and Influence in U.K. and U.S. Poetry Slam Discourses," 83.

Admittedly, some critics review Poetry slam and Kate's poetry as simply no good, but the fact that she has managed to unite these two forces is undeniable. The academy is praising a performance (slam) poet, and it is probable that in future there will be more examples of this cooperation. The boundaries of written, academic poetry and performed, oral poetry become more and more blurred.

This is the last part of her poem, "My Shakespeare." She mentions that Shakespeare is in every "royal and rascal," and so can be the poetry, either performed or written down.

See – he's less the tights and garters – more the sons demanding answers from the
absence of their fathers.
The hot darkness of your last embrace.
He's in the laughter of the night before, the tightened jaw of the morning after,
He's in us. Part and parcel of our Royals and our rascals.
He's more than something taught in classrooms, in language that's hard to understand,
he's more than a feeling of inadequacy when we sit for our exams,
He's in every wise woman, every pitiful villain,
Every great king, every sore loser, every fake tear,
His legacy exists in the life that lives in everything he's written,
And me, I see him everywhere, he's my Shakespeare.¹⁰⁹

The next type of resistance that should be mentioned when talking about Poetry slam is the notion of underground poetry of minorities counter to the literary mainstream of the dominant literary world. To explore this notion further, the poem "We Made It"¹¹⁰ by Sunni Paterson will be analyzed as far as the form and the content are concerned.

Sunni Paterson is a New Orleans poet who is celebrated for her powerful poetry. She usually chooses the topics of slavery, police brutality, the standards of beauty, acceptance of one's identity, the social conflicts in black communities, the understanding of God, and more. She is also an activist who tries to educate others about her community through performance poetry. Thanks to her performances, she speaks to the masses about the current problems not only of

¹⁰⁹ Royal Shakespeare Company, "My Shakespeare – a new poem by Kate Tempest."

¹¹⁰ Def Poetry Jam Performance, "Sunni Patterson – We Made It," posted March 14, 2007, YouTube video, 03:11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwtDfKpqxeo>.

black communities but about the issues in society in general. Going back to the rhetorical strategies, it could be said that she uses the deliberative strategy as her poems are meant to encourage and sometimes also discourage people in different communities. In her poem, she uses the words of encouragement. She wants to let people know that our choices will always be our own, “But all that matters is this: Which side will we pick? Which path will we choose? Either win or lose 'cuz death don't come in vain.”¹¹¹

Audre Lorde describes her as “a Black woman warrior poet doing (her) work to ask you, are you doing yours?”¹¹² Some critics describe her as “a poet who holds oratorical skills akin to those of Martin Luther King, Jr.”¹¹³

The performance of her poem “We Made It” on *Def Poetry Jam* has over six hundred thousand views on YouTube and has been praised by many critics. The success of this poem is the combination of the mastery of rhythm and skillful use of pacing. To achieve the right rhythm, she applies internal rhymes and assonance. There is usually a repetition of vowels “o” and “u,” and she often prolongs the vowels at the end of the lines. The result is that the poem resembles a song. The internal rhyme can be found for example in this line “Take a long, long look. I’m a cook in the kitchen asking the Mrs. to taste the dinner.”

The opening lines she chose are compelling and engaging; she uses the detailed descriptions of her surroundings and is able to make the audience empathize with her.

So I'm from a stock that pitch cocktail
bombs and hand grenades.
We pour Cayenne Pepper around the perimeter
of a building to keep the police dogs at bay.

I'm the panther party in the Desire Housing Projects in New Orleans.
I'm a nigga turning a gun on the National Guard.
Take a long, long look.
I'm a cook in the kitchen asking the Mrs. to taste the dinner.

Take a long, long sip 'Cuz death ain't always this good.

¹¹¹ Def Poetry Jam Performance, “Sunni Patterson – We Made It.”

¹¹² Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, (Crossing Press; Reprint edition, 2007), 43.

¹¹³ “Sunni Patterson: New Orleans Poet, Singer, and Activist,” Thirteen Media with Impact, posted March 24, 2009. <https://www.thirteen.org/unsungheroines/women-cat/sunni-patterson-new-orleans-poet-singer-and-activist/>.

It's eyes poppin' out they sockets.
It's a lifeless body rockin' backwards and forwards.
It's a boy stabbed forty-seven times in front the church house.¹¹⁴

She enhances the details and uses many repetitions to support the argument and follow the rhythm of the poem. For example, in the first, second and fourth lines in the second stanza, “I’m the panther party...”, “I’m a nigga turning a gun...”, “I’m a cook in the kitchen...”. And also, in the third stanza in the second, third and fourth line. “It’s eyes...”, “It’s a lifeless body...”, “It’s a boy stabbed...”.

Her intonation and pacing resemble a preacher in a church or even the gospel songs (which can be seen as ironic as she speaks about the abuse of children in churches in her poem). She speaks very clearly and loud enough for everyone to hear, and she does not mispronounce any word. The rhyming supports the rhythm and the pacing as well. In the fifth stanza, she uses the assonance by creating the rhymes such as “bed”, “dead”, “read”. During this part, the audience starts to clap as they can easily follow the rhythm and expect how the poem will develop.

Like a few months after the hurricane.
Husband and child found the trinity bloody in bed.
His wife, his son, his other daughter was dead.
And on the end table, there was a message that read
"I couldn't stay here, not for one minute longer,
and it made no sense for me to leave alone 'cause who would
take of my babies with they mamma gone?¹¹⁵

Her gestures and movements emphasize the rhythm; they provide the audience with the visual aid of the content of the poem. For example, in the fourth stanza of her poem.

It's a man forty- three stuffing
his penis in a nine year- old girls mouth. Naw.
Death ain't always taste good. Just don't sound like something
I wanna eat when I hear them say "It was like a train came through the room.
Left mamma so depressed she was unable to move until one day.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Def Poetry Jam Performance, “Sunni Patterson – We Made It.”

¹¹⁵ Def Poetry Jam Performance, “Sunni Patterson – We Made It.”

¹¹⁶ Def Poetry Jam Performance, “Sunni Patterson – We Made It.”

Sunni Patterson, in this part, makes few allusions to eating in the context that is not often associated with food, and when she talks about the abuse of a child, she makes a gesture of eating the chips. The next gesture that supports her argument is pointing to her chest when she talks about her desires, “I wanna eat when I hear them say...”. She often uses hand gestures; she points to her teeth when talking about the commands, “Bend over, touch your toes, son show your teeth.” However, she does not use only hands to enhance the content of the poem, but all her body, she turns around so that she could face everyone in the audience, bends forward and backward.

Tell that mamma "Keep that casket open, let the world see,
it ain't just hot in Mississippi. Hell, it's hot wherever you be.
From the rooftop to the cellblock. Step on up to the auction block.
Bend over, touch your toes, son show your teeth.

Lift her titties, examine his balls, now it damn near sound like a hip-hop song, but
that's slavery at its peak.
A circus for all the "freaks" they'll warn you caution when you speak.
Can't afford the truth to leak but will say “blessed are the meek”. And are the ones
who make peace. And are the ones persecuted for the sake of righteousness.¹¹⁷

All gestures and movements feel essential to the poem and its success. Her style of delivery reflects the severity of the topic. She uses the pitch to emphasize the crucial moments and arguments in the poem. “Lift her titties, examine his balls, now it damn near sound like a hip-hop song, but that's slavery at its peak.”

Her closing lines are half said and half-sung, and as soon as she starts to clap, the audience clap as well, which can be understood as one of the means how to engage the audience.

Not for us to remain enslaved or our spirits to remain in cages.
It comes so we might be courageous.
To fulfill our obligation, to God and all creation,
and stand in determination,
able to look death in the face and say:
We made it.
We made it.
We made it.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Def Poetry Jam Performance, “Sunni Patterson – We Made It.”

¹¹⁸ Def Poetry Jam Performance, “Sunni Patterson – We Made It.”

Sunni Patterson talks about many topics in her poem, but the main focus would be the conflicts of black community members and the problematic history of slavery in America and, in general, the oppression. The topics of oppression are quite frequent in Poetry slam, and as it is regarded as the underground poetry, it is not surprising. The involvement of the oppressed groups is regarded as an important indicator of the diversity that is not often found in the academic circles of poetry and is frequently mentioned as one of the biggest positives of Poetry slam. Poetry slam as a whole indeed makes diversity, and there are many social groups represented, as it is open to anyone.

Nevertheless, to claim that Poetry slam is the underground poetry and that it goes against the stream of the dominant literary world is at least questionable. Firstly, according to the study of Helen Gregory, who observed the participants in the slam competition in the U.K. and U.S., the majority of the slam events were male dominated (average of 68% of slammers and 59% of the audience). In terms of the ethnic background of slam participants, only 35% of slammers and 29% of the audience had an ethnic background.¹¹⁹ Additionally, to revert the claim that Poetry slam is the oppositional, “underground” movement, one can look at the success of the Poetry slam all around the world. There are dozens of slam competitions not only in the U.K. and in the U.S., but its popularity has reached Europe and Asia. There are millions of people who attend the poetry slam events, not only in bars but also in big venues. Kate Tempest, for example, performed at the music festival *Primavera Sound* in Barcelona at the stadium that had a capacity for almost four thousand people, or in Roundhouse in London with the capacity of more than five thousand places.

Poetry slam performances are more and more desired at the open-air venues as an entertainment or as a supporting program at different events. It is therefore profitable to join forces with academic institutions. Slam poets will be perceived as prestigious poets and academy will be able to address broader audience. Therefore, it would not be possible to say that Poetry slam opposes “the Academy”. Poetry slam has been also popularized in the past years thanks to their performative and competitive form and if, at the beginning, it was regarded as an underground

¹¹⁹ Gregory, “Texts in Performance: Identity, Interaction and Influence in U.K. and U.S. Poetry Slam Discourses.”, 212.

movement, it is certainly not possible to present it the same way today because it seems that Poetry slam has become the mainstream movement, something that Poetry slam was opposing to at the beginning.

CONCLUSION

This thesis discussed the contemporary poetry movement, Poetry slam, and its relationship with oral poetry and oral performances. It analyzed Poetry slam not only as a new movement that emerged in the 20th century, but also as succession of traditional oral poetry. The interaction between Poetry slam and oral medias, such as radio, television, but mainly different channels on internet (YouTube and Vimeo for example) was also taken into account, because thanks to these new oral media of the 20th century, Poetry slam has been popularized all around the world, having millions of followers and adherents, and is said to be one of the most famous poetry movements.

The invention of the printing press in the 15th century has shaped the progress of the Western world and it influenced attitudes towards the spoken word. Written literature and later also so-called academic writings were regarded as the superior form. Literacy was regarded as the next stage of development, whereas orality, on the other hand, was regarded as the first stage and, therefore, as something primitive. Poetry Slam is an oral performative form of poetry and is often described as the opposition to previous literary development and academic poetry writings. However, to describe Poetry slam only as a form of resistance is an oversimplification. The claim that Slam poetry is simply opposing the traditional form of poetry seems to be based on the notion of written poetry as representing the superior form and oral poetry representing the inferior form of poetry. Written poetry and spoken poetry represent, therefore, a contest between literacy and orality.

Nevertheless, orality has existed alongside literacy for centuries, and it seems that today it is more present than ever. This is undoubtedly influenced by the advent of spoken media such as radio or television, although more importantly, it seems that Poetry slam expresses the inherent desire people have to express themselves orally. This thesis proves that Poetry slam is not just a result of 20th century developments, but it goes back farther to traditional oral performances.

By analyzing different performances and their formal characteristics, it can be said that the notion of Poetry slam being the opposition does not represent the main feature. The principal features of Poetry slam performances are often very similar to those of oral performances historically. The chosen performances have been analyzed from different points of view.

Firstly, the improvisation in Poetry slam and the usage of given structures were discussed. The similarities between Poetry slam and traditional oral poetry was shown with the performance of Kelsey Savage, who improvised on stage during a slam competition in Vancouver. She chose to use repetitive phrases and alliterations to create the structure of the poem. The repetitive phrases or groups of words, which tend to have the same metrical form, are used to express a given idea. In contemporary performances, poets usually include one-syllable or two-syllable words that can be rhymed easily, and they insert repetitive phrases to gain more time to think or to divide the poem into different parts. These repetitive lines are also often used in rhetoric as they help the speaker to follow the arguments and emphasize the main points.

Secondly, Poetry slam shares similarities with the theatrical performances of Greek theatre, the odes. The choruses used rhythm and imagery to pull the audience into the theatrical piece on a sensory level and were intended as a storytelling device. Some of the performances were sung, which is not very common in Poetry slam. However, the poems that have a rhythmic pattern as their base, and, therefore, resemble a song, are much appreciated. Nevertheless, musical instruments are not allowed during Poetry slam performances, but a poet can still use their own body, for example, making the drum sound by beating to one's chest is a possibility (this technique was already used during one competition.) Sunni Patterson is an expert concerning rhythm; she even sometimes sings during her performances. In her poem "We Made It" she was able to master the combination of imagery and rhythm.

Thirdly, Poetry slam also shares some characteristics with rhetoric in general. This topic was not analyzed in detail as the primary goal was to describe and compare the formal aspects of Poetry slam. An example of epideictic and judicial oratory can be found in Porsha's poem "The Angry Black Woman," as she used the rhetoric of blaming and accusing the society of the issues faced by black communities. Sunni Patterson, on the other hand, used deliberative oratory as she is encouraging people around her to make their choices. These branches of oratory, however, were discussed only in the context of poems as there is not much space for rhetoric in this thesis, therefore, the main focus of this thesis was on the formal aspects of Poetry slam.

Fourthly, Poetry slam was analyzed from the point of being a competitive event. The poem “The Angry Black Woman” was chosen to show different aspects of a performance during a competitive event. During the competition, the goal of the poet is to persuade the members of the audience to pass their message, not just to perform what they have written down and rehearsed. The poets should be able to captivate the listeners by the combination of the chosen topic, usage of figures of speech, rhythmical patterns, rhyming, gestures, mimics, and voicing. Competitive poetry events have existed for centuries; in Ancient Greece, there were even poetry categories established by the poetry judges. The most important part of one category was the emotional release poetry could provoke in the audience, and that is precisely the goal of Poetry slam. However, one difference should be mentioned; in Poetry slam, the judge can be anyone from the audience who came to see the show. This was not possible in Greece. Today Poetry slam is praised mainly because it gives space to anyone either to perform or to judge. Surely, there are inevitably differences between historical poetry competitions and the poetry competitions of today, and especially so with Poetry slam competitions. The fact that Poetry slam is competitive poetry can have a negative or positive affect, but it is one of the reasons why it has become so popular. The competition makes the audience members feel included.

Fifthly, Poetry slam was analyzed from the viewpoint of performativity. The analysis of Harry Baker’s poems was provided to show various aspects of a Poetry slam performance. As was already mentioned, the slam poets encourage the members of the audience during their performances to express themselves. They can either improvise and let the listeners choose the topics of their poems or try to connect with them by other means. Some of the slam poets, including Harry Baker, choose the strategy of playing a specific role. Harry Baker, for example, represents a shy boy who tries to fit into society but does not know how. Kate Tempest, who was discussed in the chapter “Poetry slam as a form of resistance,” chose a strategy of a poor girl representing common people and underground community at the same time. Both of them found a way to make their performances accessible to people and blur the boundaries between a performer and a listener. Examples of storytellings in Africa were provided as the performer often asks questions during their performance and motivates listeners to participate in the performance. Similarly, slam poets also often engage in discussion with audience members and want them to be part of what is going on stage because the slam event is always about the here and now, the element of spontaneity and orality is essential in the presentation of the poems.

Lastly, Poetry slam was analyzed as a form of resistance. Firstly, Poetry slam claims that its performances oppose traditional poetry readings and academic poetry with their performativity, orality, and accessibility. It is often regarded as an opposition to the dominant literary world, which is governed by literacy, and therefore by publishers. However, it was proved that literacy does not have to be in opposition to orality, but that these two sides can cooperate. The example of Kate Tempest's poetry was provided as she represents the blending of academic poetry and performative poetry. Her poems are meant to be performed on stage, and yet she has been awarded for her work by the poetry academy. Secondly, Poetry slam is sometimes described as an underground movement that supports mainly minority groups. Topics of oppression and the involvement of oppressed groups is indeed an important part of the diversity that can be found in slam. Poetry slam events are open to everyone. However, as studies have shown, the numbers of minorities at events are actually not very numerous. It is also questionable to talk about underground poetry when slam poets sell out the stadiums of more than three thousand people for their performances, which also brings the question of money to light.

In summary, after a varied analysis and looking at the new phenomenon from different angles, Poetry slam does not seem to be a revolutionary movement. This thesis did not discuss the benefits or menaces of Poetry slam to poetry in general, but rather explained the reasons why Poetry slam has become so popular lately and provided definitions that should clarify exactly what Poetry slam represents. It also explained the relationship of Poetry slam to traditional oral poetry, but also to orality and today's development of oral media. Certainly, oral media significantly affected the development of different fields that are based on oral expressions, and poetry has been positively affected as well. After centuries of the dominance of literacy, orality is beginning to get ahead again, even though it is still greatly influenced by literacy. Poetry slam is, therefore, the result of the pure desire of humans to express themselves and share experience orally, a desire which dates back to Ancient Greece. Poetry slam shares many characteristics with traditional orality and, therefore, could be regarded as a succession of traditional oral poetry.

3. RÉSUMÉ

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá relativně nedávným druhem poezie, slam poetry, a jejím vztahem k „oralitě“ a „literalitě“. Slam Poetry vznikla v osmdesátých letech v Chicagu, práce tedy zkoumá tento druh poezie v anglofonních zemích od Ameriky, Kanady až po Anglii.

Práce se nejdříve zaměřuje na definici slova „orality“ a „literality“ ze dvou různých pohledů. Walter Ong a Marshall McLuhan považují tyto dva termíny za protiklady (dvě různé lidské psyché) a uvádí, že oralita je první fází literality, a je tedy primitivnější. Dávají velký důraz na psané slovo a jeho důležitost pro společenský rozvoj. Na druhou stranu, akademici jako Ruth Finnegan či Steven Feng, tvrdí, že oralita a literalita nejsou protikladnými termíny a odmítají považovat oralitu jako nižší formu lidského vyjádření. Naopak oslavují mluvené slovo a dodávají, že mluvená poezie či jiné formy literatury jsou mnohem víc než první stádium psaného slova. Na mluvené slovo není totiž nahlíženo pouze jako na ústní vyjádření, ale také jako na mnoha smyslový zážitek. Práce netvrdí, že jedno tvrzení je správné a druhé chybné, ale spíše se snaží poukázat na vývoj, který vychází z těchto dvou termínů. Walter Ong totiž mluví o tzv. sekundární oralitě, to je stav, kdy mluvené slovo je ovlivňováno písemným slovem a přispívají k tomu různé technologie, které jsou založeny právě na mluveném slovu – televize, rádio, ale také kanály jako je YouTube například. Tento stav je také občas definován termínem „terciární oralita“, pojmenování uvádí Jiří Kraus ve svém článku. Mluvené slovo je čím dál častěji využíváno nejen v běžné komunikaci, ale také v literatuře, příkladem mohou být audioknížky, sledování básnických představení na YouTube, či poslouchání písniček online. Slam poetry se stala populární do značné části právě díky těmto médiím, jelikož se vystoupení různých básníků mohla šířit po internetu. Nicméně, je důležité zmínit, že osobní kontakt bude vždy převyšovat nad technologií a je tedy do jisté míry nenahraditelný. Atmosféra daného vystoupení a ten pocit, že je divák součástí něčeho, co se děje teď a tady, se totiž nedá přenést na obrazovku.

Práce dále popisuje vývoj mluvené poezie napříč historií a stručně nastiňuje vývoj Slam Poetry. Slamová poezie je často vyobrazována jako reakce na akademickou poezii, a její literární vývoj je tudíž vysvětlován jako rebelie proti dominantnímu literárnímu světu, tedy psané poezii. Práce však tvrdí, že tento vztah je komplikovanější, než se může původně zdát. Básníci ze Slam Poetry totiž často s básnickou akademií spolupracují, aby se dostali do oblíbenosti různých nakladatelství.

Navíc, tento poetický styl se dá charakterizovat mnohem barvitěji než jako pouhá opozice. Slam Poetry je založená hlavně na prvcích orality a performativity, stejně tak jako tradiční mluvená poezie.

Práce dále popisuje formální a obsahové rysy jednotlivých básnických vystoupení a poukazuje na podobnosti mezi současnou slamovou poezií a tradiční mluvenou poezií. Analyzuje vystoupení z různých úhlů pohledu. Nejdříve z pohledu soutěžní disciplíny, jelikož Slam poetry je založená na soutěžním principu. Poté z pohledu mnoha smyslového zážitku, jelikož Slam poetry neapeluje pouze na zvukovou stránku, ale také na vizuální, a dá se říct i pocitovou (atmosféra daného místa, shluk lidí, osobnost daného vystupujícího). A nakonec z pohledu Slam poetry jako opozice. V každé této kapitole jsou analyzovány formální a obsahové aspekty několika básní. V první kapitole je analyzována báseň „Angry Black Woman“ od Porshy. Tato báseň byla prezentována v roce 2014 na soutěži „Individual World Poetry Slam Finals“ a Porsha s ní také soutěž vyhrála. Analýza zkoumá, jaké prvky Porsha použila, aby dosáhla kýženého výsledku, a také jaké můžeme najít průsečíky mezi současnou performativní soutěžní poezií a tradiční mluvenou soutěžní poezií.

V další kapitole jsou analyzovány básně od Harryho Bakera. Harry Baker je považovaný za jednoho z nejúspěšnějších básníků ze Slam Poetry, pravděpodobně proto, že se svými básnickými výstupy dokáže uživit. V této části se práce zaměřila právě na básnický výstup a ukázala, jakým způsobem Harry Baker dokáže zaujmout obecenstvo a jaké básnické či dokonce až herecké prvky k tomu používá. Harry Baker je totiž považován nejen za skvělého básníka, ale také nadaného performeru. Úspěch vystoupení tkví také v osobnosti daného vystupujícího, což potvrdila ve svých dílech i Ruth Finnegan, která zkoumá mluvené slovo u různých etnických afrických skupin. Vyprávění byla strhující hlavně díky nadání a schopnostem vypravěče. To samé platí u básníků ve Slam Poetry.

Nakonec je Slam Poetry také zkoumána jako opozice proti akademické poezii. V této části jsou analyzovány básně od Kate Tempest a Sunni Patterson. Kate Tempest je považována za jednu z nejúspěšnějších britských básnířek. Její výstupy připomínají spíše rapové a hip-hopové koncerty než básnické výstupy a ona sama dokáže oslovit až tisíce lidí. Několikrát již vyprodala arény v Anglii, ale také v jiných evropských zemích. Sunni Patterson je také velmi úspěšná, se

svojí poezií cestuje po Americe a snaží se přesvědčit své posluchače o důležitosti a síle mluvené poezie. Obě básnířky představují svojí poezií opozici vůči akademické poezii, a proto jejich vystoupení byla vybrána do této kapitoly. Kate Tempest si většinou vybírá politická témata a svým postojem, vzhledem i způsobem mluvy představuje básnířku běžné pracující třídy, dalo by se říct, že pro některé představuje určitý „underground“. Nicméně, Kate Tempest úzce spolupracuje s různými akademickými básnickými institucemi, a tak se nedá tvrdit, že by zrovna ona představovala jakýsi vzdor vůči akademii. Poetry slam je také často definována jako poezie pro všechny, především pro minoritní skupiny (Sunni Patterson si například vybírá témata, která jsou většinou směřována na černošské komunity v Americe). Nicméně, na samotných slamových událostech v Anglii, Americe a Kanadě, jsou minoritní skupiny opět v menšině. Poetry slam by se tedy neměla hlavně posuzovat jako opozice k akademické poezii, jelikož tak často nepůsobí. V mnoha případech dokonce tyto dva styly spolupracují.

Na závěr je vysvětleno proč by na Poetry slam nemělo být nahlíženo pouze jako na opoziční básnický směr. Poetry slam se nedá charakterizovat pouze jako reakce na psanou akademickou poezii, jelikož její charakteristika je mnohem barvitější. Poetry slam apeluje na prostou lidskou touhu mluveného slova. Mluvená poezie, soutěže v poezii či poezie na pomezí recitace a hereckého výkonu není nic co by nemohlo být nalezeno již dříve. Poetry slam obsahuje mnohé znaky tradiční mluvené poezie, ale je částečně ovlivněna kulturou psaného slova. Mluvené slovo a psané slovo se navzájem ovlivňují, a tak je to i s mluvenou a psanou poezií. Slamová poezie je tedy v této práci charakterizována jako nástupce tradiční mluvené poezie, která je ovlivněná psaným slovem a zpopularizována díky novým mluveným médiím.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of the Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Massachusetts. Harvard University Press, 1996.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*. Cambridge University Press: Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies, University of Birmingham, Volume 14, 1990.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication*. Basil Blackwell, 1988.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral poetry: its nature, significance, and social context*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, Indiana, 1977.

Furniss, Graham. *Orality: The Power of the Spoken Word*. New York: Springer, 2004.

Gioia, Dana. *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture*. Saint Paul: Minnesota, Graywolf Press, 2004.

Glazner, Gary. *Poetry Slam: The Competitive Art of Performance Poetry*. San Francisco: Manic D Press, Inc., 2000.

Grazer, Brian, Charles Fishman. *A Curious Mind: The Secret to a Bigger Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

Johnstone, Keith. *Impro for Storytellers*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1999.

Kerckhove, Derrick de, Lumsden, Charles (Eds.). *The Alphabet and the Brain: The Lateralization of Writing*. Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1988.

Leroy, Vail, and White Landeg. *Songs of Praise - Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia; London: James Currey, 1991.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press; Reprint edition, 2007.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: the extensions of man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.

McLuhan, Marshall, Quentin Fiore. *The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*. New York: Random House, 1967.

Milman, Parry, Adam Parry. *The making of Homeric verse: the collected papers of Milman Parry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

- Nagy, Gregory. *Homeric questions*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.
- Nagy, Gregory. *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond*. Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1996.
- Ong, J. Walter. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Taylor & Francis Group: Milton, 2002.
- Ong, Walter. *Rhetoric, romance, and technology: studies in the interaction of expression and culture*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2013.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited by Charler Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger. Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966.
- Smith, Marc Kelly. *Take the Mic*. Naperville: Sourcebooks MediaFusion, 2009.
- Somers-Willett, B.A. Susan. *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2009.
- Turner, Victor. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1987.
- Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1930.
- Wheeler, Lesley. *Voicing American Poetry. Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2008.
- Willem van Loon, Hendrik. *The Story of Mankind*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000.
- Williams, Nerys. *Contemporary Poetry*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2011.

Parts of books or edited books

- Arroyo, Pauly. "I'm a Nuyorican." In *Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe*, edited by Algrín, M. and Bob Holman, 391-2. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994.
- Blitefield, Jerry. "Populist Poetry or Rantum-Scantum? The Civil Disobedience of Poetry Slams." In *Rhetorical Democracy: Discursive Practices of Civic Engagement*, edited by Gerard A. Hauser and Amy Grim, 107-113. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2004.
- Camlot, Jason. "Poetry in Performance." In *The Facts on File Companion to 20th -Century American Poetry*, edited by Burt Kimmelman, 391 – 394. New York: Facts on File Inc., 2005.

Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. Duluth: University of Minnesota Duluth, 2011. <https://www.d.umn.edu/~cstroupe/handouts/8906/Dilogues%20of%20Plato%20Book%20X%20Jowett.pdf>.

Rosen, Ralph. M. "Homer and Hesiod." In *A New Companion to Homer*, edited by Barry Powell and Ian Morris, 463-488. Mnemosyne: Bibliotheca classica Batava, Supplementum 163, New York: Brill, 1997.

Theses

Gregory, Helen. "Texts in Performance: Identity, Interaction and Influence in U.K. and U.S. Poetry Slam Discourses." PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2009.

Schmid, Julie M. "Performance, poetics, and place: public poetry as a community art." PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2000.

Ramon Lavelle, Sibley Jr. "Oral Poetry in a Literate Culture: a Performance Ethnography of Poetry Slams." PhD diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 2001.

E-books

Lord, Albert B. *The Singer Resumes the Tale*. Edited by Mary Louise Lord. Center for Hellenic studies: Harvard University, 1995. <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6284.albert-bates-lord-the-singer-resumes-the-tale>

Journal articles

Feld, Steven. "The oral and the literate in music." *Academia Music Ltd*. Edited by Tokumaro Yoshiko, Yamaguti Osamu. Vol. 21 (1989):16–28

Finnegan Ruth. "Orality and literacy: epic heroes of human destiny?" *International Journal of Learning*, 10 pp. (June 2008): 1551–1560.

Foss K. Sonja and Griffin L. Cindy. "Beyond persuasion: a proposal for an invitational rhetoric." *Communication Monographs*, Volume 62. (March 1995): 2–18.

Griffith, Mark, "Contest and Contradiction in Early Greek Poetry." *UC Berkeley: Department of Classics*. (January 1990): 185–207. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3hp009zn>

Kitto, H. D. F., "Educational Theatre Journal." *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Mar., 1956): 1-8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i360768>.

Kraus, Jiří, "Political Speech in Orality-Literacy Conflict." *Forthcoming*.

Schweppenhauser Jakob and Pedersen S. Birgitte. "Performing Poetry slam and listening closely to slam poetry." *SoundEffects*, Vol. 7., no. 1. (2017): 64–83.

Thompson Nathan A. "Poetry slam do nothing to help the art form survive." *Independent*. (February 2013). <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/poetry-slams-do-nothing-to-help-the-art-form-survive-8475599.html>.

Vet, de Therese. "The Joint Role of Orality and Literacy in the Composition, Transmission, and Performance of the Homeric Texts: A Comparative View." *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 126. (January 1996): 43–76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/370171>

Weiss, Antonio. "Harold Bloom, the Art of criticism No.1." *Paris Review*, issue 118. (Spring 1991). <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2225/the-art-of-criticism-no-1-harold-bloom>.

Newspapers or magazine articles

Evans, Lloyd. "Kate Tempest, few would describe the south Londoner's poetry as 'moreish'. Less-ish, perhaps." *The Spectator*, October 6, 2016. <https://beta.spectator.co.uk/article/kate-tempest>.

Gioia, Dana. "Can Poetry Matter?" *The Atlantic*, May 1991. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1991/05/can-poetry-matter/305062/>.

Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." *The Drama Review*, Summer, 1968, vol. 12, no. 4, 29. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/community/text8/blackartsmovement.pdf>.

Wilentz, Sean. "Bob Dylan, The Beat Generation, and Allen Ginsberg's America." *New Yorker*, August 13, 2010. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/bob-dylan-the-beat-generation-and-allen-ginsbergs-america>.

Website content

Amiri Baraka. "Black Art." Genius. Accessed February 12, 2020. <https://genius.com/Amiri-baraka-black-art-annotated>.

Azquotes. "Dylan Thomas Quotes." Accessed December 19, 2019. https://www.azquotes.com/author/14584-Dylan_Thomas.

Baker Harry. "Harry Baker – Real Men." Posted May 1, 2011. YouTube video, 04:46. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz_lkjVRDaQ.

Button Poetry. "Anita D. – And the Psych Ward Says." Posted November 7, 2019. Youtube video, 2:56. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxV6s4oM1hg>.

Canopy Swansea. "Harry Baker – Paper People." Posted February 5, 2013. YouTube video, 03:35. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ao6GQSUzx7Q>.

- Def Poetry Jam Performance. “Sunni Patterson – We Made It.” Posted March 14, 2007. YouTube video, 03:11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwtDfKpqxeo>.
- Encyclopædia Britannica. “Francois Villon.” Accessed December 13, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francois-Villon>.
- Encyclopædia Britannica. “Harlem Renaissance.” Accessed November 23, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-Renaissance-American-literature-and-art>.
- Encyclopædia Britannica. “Horatian ode.” Accessed December 12, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/art/Horatian-ode>.
- Encyclopædia Britannica. “Modern Inferences.” Accessed November 24, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Homer-Greek-poet/Modern-inferences#ref21037>.
- Encyclopædia Britannica. “Oral tradition.” Accessed November 22, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/oral-tradition>.
- Encyclopædia Britannica. “Slam poetry.” Accessed December 13, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/art/slam-poetry>.
- Poetry Foundation. “Pindar.” Accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/pindar>.
- Poetry Slam Inc. “IWPS Finals 2014 – Porsha O. Angry Black Woman.” Posted February 18, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSoITsaSs0M>.
- Poetry Slam TV. “Harry Baker – Paper People.” Posted May 2, 2014. YouTube video, 06:36. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIRuBZ-W3gw>.
- Raise the Bar. “Real Men || Spoken Word || by Harry Baker || RTB.” Posted October 10, 2015. YouTube video, 03:41. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cK2D-b8qEKM>.
- RoadtripNation. “Marc Kelly Smith.” Accessed December 15, 2019. <https://roadtripnation.com/leader/marc-kelly-smith>.
- Royal Shakespeare Company. “My Shakespeare – a new poem by Kate Tempest.” Posted April 17, 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_auc2Z67OM.
- Slam Rhetoric. “Rhetoric & Slam.” Accessed February 4, 2020. <https://slamrhetoric.wordpress.com/rhetoric-and-slam/#ancient>.
- TEDxTalks. “Grand Slam Poetry Champion | Harry Baker | TEDxExeter.” Posted April 29, 2014. YouTube video, 14:05. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxGWGohIXiw>.
- The University of Chicago. “Haun Saussy on The Curious History of Oral Literature.” Posted August 14, 2014. Youtube video, 25:04. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAIR9qrveDQ>.

Theudebrand. "Oral Tradition 1/2." Posted December 25, 2016. YouTube video, 12:12.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15fi-hjIXIs>

Thirteen Media with Impact. "Sunni Patterson: New Orleans Poet, Singer, and Activist."
Posted March 24, 2009. <https://www.thirteen.org/unsungheroines/women-cat/sunni-patterson-new-orleans-poet-singer-and-activist/>.

Underdog Improv. "Miss America Slam Poetry | Short Form Improv Comedy." Posted June 23, 2018. YouTube video, 6:29. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7bfGVg41fY>.

Urban dictionary. "Dozens." Posted September 25, 2004.
<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=dozens&defid=771260->.

Vancouver Poetry House. "Kelsey Savage - Improvised Poem: Bumblebee & Doorknob."
Posted September 2017. Youtube video, 07:28.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFGD5vcu8kw>.