

Online Proceedings

SESSION 2F

THE POETICS OF PARANOIA: USING LANGUAGE TO IMAGINE THE CONSEQUENCES OF DIFFERENCE

*Session Moderator: Phillip Thurtle, Comparative History of
Ideas*

238 MGH

3:45 PM to 5:15 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

The Art of Ars Poetica: Exploring the Movement of Metalanguage in Poetry about Poetry

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The idea of poetry as a literary practice that is concerned with its own ontology has developed through the device of the *ars poetica* poem—poetry about poetry. Beginning with Horace’s ancient treatise *Ars Poetica*, published in c. 18 BCE, poets throughout history have sought to explain the nature of their craft through the medium of their craft. In the past century, *ars poetica* poems have morphed into examples of metalanguage, in which the poems work as vehicles to carry the defining characteristics of poetry itself. In order to track the movement of metalanguage, I examine the progression of the *ars poetica* poem from the Classical era to the Enlightenment to Modern twentieth and twenty-first century works. My research traces and analyzes the trajectory of poetic modes that discuss language itself. Shifts from didactic to introspective to aesthetic have marked the rhetorical turn of *ars poetica*, thus exemplifying how poetry as heightened language creates the need for metalanguage. In poetry more than any other literature, each component element is significant, so the elements of a poem inevitably turn in on itself. *Ars poetica* poems demonstrate how images, rhetoric, narrative, and linguistic mechanisms can all be self-referential. The presence of metalanguage in poetry suggests that the types of poetic knowledge—sensory, emotional, and imaginative—are more than externally meaning-making about “aesthetic” and “ethic” subjects, but that they are intrinsically expressing the nature and value of poetic theory.