

Thursday 28 March

1pm Milgate Room, AD Hope Bldg, SLLL



Detail from Edouard Manet, Stéphane Mallarmé (1876)

Paul Magee

Writing is Speaking

Why is it that when we read a passage of dense theoretical prose, say in Frederic Jameson, or encounter a “garden path” sentence (e.g. The old man the boat), or just generally want more clarity from the text in front of us, that we slow down and sound the words out? The direct answer is that ‘intonation contours and sentence rhythms provide patterns which group words into phrases and highlight new and important information’ (Slowiaczek and Clifton 1980, p. 581). Sounding the words out is a way of performatively guessing at that missing grammatical coding, the sonic one. I am interested in what such a reparative act presupposes about the nature of writing. Does it not imply that the writer conceived those words—however un-colloquial their register (Biber and Conrad 2010)—as speech in the first place? Are distinctions between orality and the literary really that firm, once we hone in on what happens in “inner speech” (Vološinov/Bakhtin 1971; Vygotsky 1961), in the moments of a clause’s initial generation? Further: what relation does poetry-writing bear to that founding indistinction between the spoken and written?

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