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A Poetic Reading of Wittgenstein's Tractatus

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Philosophy should really be written only as one would write poetry
(Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten)
Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

Summary

Centenary scholarship on Ludwig Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico–Philosophicus remains entrenched in a tenacious stalemate between "resolute" and "standard" readings. Recently, a number of scholars have identified both dominant interpretations as failures because they treat the work as "self–repudiating" — effectively suggesting that the Tractatus fails by its own standards. This paper proposes a third interpretive framework to move beyond this impasse: an alternative reading that could possibly be a "poetic" one. This framework, in some significant sense, aligns with the strong internalist position in regard to the contemporary debate on how to interpret Wittgenstein's unusual texts — maintaining that his stylistic choices are not merely peripheral but are internally related to his philosophical insights. However, the paper addresses two arguments in support of this claim: first, the substantive and conceptual evidence for a poetic intentionality within the text, and second, the structural similarities between the Tractatus and the modernist poetry of 1922. Furthermore, this paper offers a poetic re–reading of the most debated aphorism 6.54. This view moves beyond the idea that the text is "self–repudiating". Instead, this proposed interpretative framework identifies the work as a successful treatise in the sense that its efficacy is attainable through its poetic insights — where its final call to "silence" functions aesthetically to "suggest" to the readers to see the world "rightly".

Keywords: *Wittgenstein; modernism; Dichtung; mimesis; opaque literalism*

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Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico–Philosophicus* stands as one of the most influential and perhaps the most debated treatises of twentieth–century philosophy. Despite the passage of a hundred years (1921–2021), the work remains the site of tenacious controversy in regard to various interpretations of it — particularly due to the difficulty that one must read the text in view of its self–proclaimed status as "non–sense" (*Unsinn*).[1]This difficulty is traditionally settled by two opposite modes of readings: the "standard (or metaphysical) reading(s)" and the "resolute (or anti–metaphysical) reading(s)".[2]Interestingly, some recent scholarships have identified several difficulties occurring in both of these dominant readings. One of the major difficulties of these interpretations is that they suppose the work to be "self–repudiating" suggesting that the *Tractatus* fails by its own standards.[3]To overcome this interpretative impasse as well to identify *Tractatus* as a successful treatise along with its self–proclaimed tag as "non–sense", this paper proposes an alternative interpretative framework alongside the well–known "standard" and "resolute" readings. This paper aims to highlight that this alternative interpretative framework could possibly be a "poetic" one. This framework, in some significant sense, aligns with the strong internalist posi-

1 See, for example, Crary & Read (2000), which serves as the classic example of this interpretative debate. In this context, however, it is important to clarify the various layers of meaning of the term "nonsense". Within Wittgenstein scholarship, as well as in Wittgenstein's own usage, we find two distinct meanings of the "non–sensible": "senseless" (*Sinnlos*) and "non–sense" (*Unsinn*). "Senseless" (*Sinnlos*), is a reference to a "violation of the bi–polarity condition" i.e., more specifically, a statement becomes "senseless" if it does not have any corresponding "state of affairs" (*Sachverhalt*) in the world and thereby can never be a "picture" of the world. "Non–sense" (*Unsinn*), on the other hand, indicates "an attempt to say the unsayable". Wittgenstein clarifies this latter sense of the "non–sensible" more explicitly in his *A Lecture on Ethics* (1929/1965, 11–12) (for more on this see: Sarkar, 2016; Sarkar, 2021; Hacker, 2000). Notably, while "resolute readers" tend to view all nonsense as a mere lack of meaning (plain *Unsinn*), "standard readers" maintain the distinction that some nonsense is "illuminating" or "substantial" in its attempt to show the inexpressible. However, this paper employs "non–sense" in the latter sense to mean "an attempt to say the unsayable". Crucially, this "attempt" is not understood in a discursive or doctrinal sense, but rather as a suggestion facilitated by the text's formal density (*Dichtung*).

2 "Standard reading(s)" is variously categorized in literature as the "traditional", "metaphysical", "non–resolute", or "ineffable" interpretation(s). Proponents of this reading(s) argue that the *Tractatus* points toward the "higher" transcendental truths that, while sensibly inexpressible, can nonetheless be "shown" (see e.g. Anscombe, 1959; Kenny, 1973; Malcolm, 1986; Pears, 1987; Hacker, 1986; 2000; Chandra, 2002; Pradhan, 2007; Tarai, 2023). Conversely, the "resolute reading(s)" (also termed "anti–metaphysical" or "austere") rejects the notion of "illuminating nonsense", arguing instead that Wittgenstein intends a therapeutic dissolution of philosophical illusion (see e.g. Diamond, 1991; 1988; Conant, 1991; 2000; 2002; Conant and Diamond, 2004; Goldfarb, 1997).

3 We borrow the phrase "self–repudiating" from Moyal–Sharrock (2007). According to her, an interpretation of the *Tractatus* is "self–repudiating" if it, in some sense either directly or indirectly, maintains Wittgenstein's own work as a "deliberate hoax" or "self–destructive condemnation" (Moyal–Sharrock, 2007, 149). However, in the next section (Section 1), we clarify the sense in which both dominant interpretations (resolute and non–resolute) are "self–repudiating," by following Moyal–Sharrock and others.

tion — which maintains that Wittgenstein's style is essentially his method — within the contemporary debate on how to interpret his unusual texts (Stern, 2017, 42).[4]However, this paper proceeds throughout the following five sections.

The first section delineates the "interpretative impasse" by analyzing the failures of both of the dominant readings to account for the functional utility of "non–sense". The second section highlights the bibliographical evidence to provide the substantial groundwork for the proposed poetic framework. The third section examines how the *Tractatus* collapses the "ancient quarrel" between philosophy and poetry by reframing logic as a mimetic tool, demonstrating its role as a performative aesthetic mode. In the fourth section, we attempt to situate the text within the high modernist context of 1922, introducing the strategy of "opaque literalism" to explain how the text's formal density functions as a modernist grid of containment. Finally, we apply this poetic framework to *Proposition 6.54*, arguing that the "ladder" is a successful experiential trajectory rather than a logical failure, where the final "silence" is the intended aesthetic climax of the work.

1. The Interpretative Impasse

While there are several paradoxes within the *Tractatus*, the book itself stands as paradoxical, as the author himself brings the charge of self–refutation in *Proposition 6.54*: »My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as non–sensical, when he has used them — as steps — to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it. He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.)«.This passage is supposed to be the most controversial in Wittgensteinian scholarship. This passage generates the difficulty as follows: How can a book composed of "non–sensical" propositions convey any truth at all? This difficulty further generates the interpretative tension as follows: »How to interpret this passage without invoking self–denial or self–refutation« (Sarkar, 2025, 134). This interpretative tension is primarily divided into two main camps, namely, the "standard reading" and the "resolute reading".

4 This debate concerns whether Wittgenstein's unconventional style is peripheral or essential to his philosophical insights (Kahane, Kanterian, and Kuusela, 2007, 20). The interpretations on this regard are divided into two poles — externalists and internalist views. Externalists (see e.g., Glock, 1990; Hintikka, 1991; Strawson, 1954; Hilmy, 1987) argue that style is merely "external" to content; they believe the philosophical spirit can be extracted and restated in conventional prose without loss of meaning. Conversely, internalists maintain that style and method are internally related. This position is further divided into two perspectives: moderate internalists (see, e.g., Kenny, 2005; Schulte, 1999; Keinzler, 2001) see the style as serving methodological ends that can still be independently justified; and strong internalist (e.g., Cavell, 1966, 1996; Stern, 1996; Stern, 2017), argue that the »style is more or less the method« (Stern, 2017, 42). (For more on this debate see: Kahane et al., 2007, 20–23; Stern, 2017, 41–44).

The "standard" reading(s) maintains that »the role of 'nonsense' in the *Tractatus* is to make us grasp ineffable truths which 'strictly speaking' cannot be said or thought« (Kuusela, 2006, 35). That is, the standard readers believe that the "nonsense" shows a hidden, transcendental truth that can be apprehended throughout a transcendental doctrine although it can never be said. Peter Hacker (2000), one of the loyal readers of standard readings, observes that »there are, according to the author of the *Tractatus*, ineffable truths that can be apprehended« (Hacker, 2000, 368). Anscombe (1959, 173), almost in the similar style, notes that the reader of the *Tractatus* »sees what logic reveals as 'shewn' — i.e. it shews how little has been done when these problems have been solved«.

The "resolute" reading(s), on the other hand, »emphasize(s) the incomprehensibility of the notion of ineffable truths« (Kuusela, 2006, 35). That is, the resolute readers believe that the ineffable part of the *Tractatus* (including ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics, religion etc.) is mere nonsense to be "thrown away" as linguistic error. James Conant (1991, 344), one of the prominent figures of the resolute readers, notes that »the silence which Wittgenstein wishes to leave us at the end is one in which nothing has been said and there is nothing to say (of the sort we had imagined there to be); the silence we are left with is not a pregnant silence that comes with a conscious posture of guarding the sanctity of the ineffable«. Such a remark of Conant (1991) implies a strict »austere conception« of "nonsense", arguing that the "ineffable" insights of the *Tractatus* is a not a »pregnant silence« that can prove to be a meaningful something rather than an »illusion of meaning« (Conant, 2000, 177). Similarly, Cora Diamond (1988, 7) labels the standard reading's position of "ineffable" reading as »chickening out«. To »chicken out« is to fail to take the propositions as »plain nonsense« by retaining the belief that the text secretly gestures at ineffable truths (Diamond, 1988, 7).

Interestingly, a number of recent Wittgensteinian scholars observe several difficulties in both of these dominant readings. Notably, Oskari Kuusela (2006) observes paradoxes in both methodological readings of "ineffability". For the standard reading, the paradox lies in its central assumption that the nonsensical propositions of the *Tractatus* can nonetheless function to show or demonstrate ineffable philosophical truths. Kuusela argues that genuine "nonsense", by definition, lacks the logical structure necessary to communicate or demonstrate anything, leading him to conclude: »But this [standard reading(s)] leaves us with a paradox: if his doctrine is nonsense, it does not demonstrate anything; in order to demonstrate something it must not be nonsense« (Kuusela, 2006, 39). Conversely, the paradox in the resolute reading emerges from its conflation of the *Tractatus*' specific therapeutic method of "elucidation–with–nonsense" (6.54) with the general, correct definition of philosophy as elucidation (4.112).

By treating these two distinct methodological modes as the same, the resolute reading mistakenly makes "talking nonsense" the very definition of philosophy. This creates a contradiction as it claims that the goal of philosophy is to use nonsense, even though Wittgenstein says in 6.53 that the »correct method« should avoid nonsense entirely and only say what can be said clearly. Kuusela (2006,

44–45) summarizes this as follows: »The problem might be summed up thus: whereas there need not be anything odd in one asserting that a particular book does not adhere to the correct method of philosophy, to say that philosophy as it should be practised does not adhere to the correct method and creates a paradox. Conant's interpretation leads us to this paradox by projecting the sense of 'elucidation' in 6.54 on the remark 4.112.« Kuusela (2006, 65) highlights that these two paradoxical conflicts stem from the commitment of both readings to a »monolithic method of clarification–with–nonsense«, leading to the standard reading's metaphysical dogma and the resolute reading's rigid reduction to mere linguistic error.

Similarly, Moyal–Sharrock (2007) reinforces this interpretative failure by arguing that both readings impose a pejorative meaning onto a technically descriptive term, thereby failing to account for the »grammatically elucidatory« purpose of the *Tractatus*' propositions. Sharrock (2007, 148) clarifies the failures of these two readings in the following way: »nonsense is not always a defamatory, but primarily a technically descriptive qualification, and is not therefore necessarily indicative of Wittgenstein rejecting or disavowing his own Tractarian 'propositions'. For Wittgenstein, nonsense is neither uniformly gibberish (as the Therapeutes have it), nor uniformly a violation of sense (as the standard reading has it); nonsense can also be what demarcates sense and is therefore not itself endowed with sense.« The fundamental failure of both the standard and resolute approaches is their restricted focus on the "saying/showing" dichotomy, which leads them to overlook the distinction, as Sharrock identifies, between saying (the factual depiction of the world) and speaking (the legitimate articulation of the formal conditions of language). Ganguly (1968, 8)[5]precisely identifies the inadequacy of this "binary" in understanding the *Tractatus*: »At the same time Wittgenstein is consistent in that the meaning ascribed by him to the term 'saying' does commit one to believing that the statements in the *Tractatus* are 'nonsense' unless a third item is included in a descriptive system which is neither saying nor showing but merely suggesting or pointing«. Ganguly, therefore, identifies that the paradoxical concluding statement (*Tractatus* 6.54) is logically untenable if restricted to the technical distinction between "saying" and "showing" alone. His "third item" provides a framework for understanding the *Tractatus* as a text that functions through strategic means.[6]

However, the critiques identified by Kuusela, Moyal–Sharrock, and Ganguly collectively demonstrate that both of the readings force the *Tractatus* into a state

5 Sachindranath Ganguly's *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: A Preliminary* (1968) is an extraordinary, yet underrated commentary. This commentary presents a rigorous, sympathetic critique developed during his time teaching at the University of Bristol; it is unique for its comprehensive engagement with early scholars like Russell and Anscombe and for its pioneering focus on the "problem of description" as the core of the Tractarian framework.

6 Ganguly's "third–item" of "pointing" or "suggesting" is further elaborated in Sarkar (2025), which critiques the logical stalemate of 6.54 and highlights the necessity of a performative or "suggestive" mode of communication in Wittgenstein's early thought. For a comprehensive view on this interpretation, see Sarkar (2025).

of "self–repudiation", albeit for different reasons. As Kuusela (2006) argues, the "standard" reading falls into a logical paradox by claiming that "nonsense" can successfully communicate "truths", while the resolute reading collapses into a methodological paradox by defining philosophy through a method (nonsense–elucidation) that the text itself ultimately rejects as incorrect. Moyal–Sharrock (2007) identifies the root of this failure in a shared, narrow conception of "non–sense" as either a "violation of sense" or "mere gibberish". By treating the text as a "ladder" that is eventually disavowed, both camps effectively treat the work as a failed attempt at communication. In this context, Ganguly's (1968) introduction of this "third item" — "suggesting" or "pointing" to — functions as a strategic means to provide a way out of the interpretative stalemate. Building upon Ganguly's insight, this paper proposes that this "third item" is best understood through an "aesthetic and modernist framework" which we prefer to call a "poetic reading". In this framework, the "non–sense" of the "ladder" is not a logical error to be discarded, nor a secret door to a metaphysical realm; rather, it is a deliberate formal constraint designed to guide the reader toward a non–discursive epiphany. Therefore, the transition from this interpretative impasse to meaningful insights requires us to step outside the binary of "saying/showing" and investigate the substantive and conceptual reasons for treating the *Tractatus* as a work of poetic intentionality.

2. Bibliographical Evidences for Poetic Reading

This naturally raises the question of why we should attempt to re–evaluate the text through a poetic lens. Before examining the conceptual and structural motivations for this claim, we must first consider the substantial bibliographical evidence that supports such a framework. Firstly, in the preface, the author disqualifies the work as a "textbook" (*Lehrbuch*). He says: »Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it — or at least similar thoughts. — So it is not a textbook. — Its purpose would be achieved if it gave pleasure to one person who read and understood it« (Wittgenstein, 1922, 3). A "textbook" aims to transmit information to the uninitiated by providing a linear, cumulative path toward the mastery of a specific doctrine. In contrast, the *Tractatus* functions as an experiential encounter that demands the reader already possess a certain internal orientation, making the text a mirror for recognized thoughts rather than a vessel for new data. Moreover, the text seeks to afford "pleasure" (*Vergnügen*) to those who have already "thought the thoughts" expressed within it. In this context, Marjorie Perloff (1996, 41) points out that by introducing "pleasure" as the barometer of the work's success, Wittgenstein shifts the criterion of truth from the scientific to the aesthetic. She suggests that this "pleasure" is derived from the formal density of the work — its "compositional rigor" — rather than its propositional content. This shift from "content" to "form" was immediately recognized by Gottlob Frege. Upon reading the manuscript, Frege expressed a bewilderment

that confirms the work's departure from standard logical discourse. He wrote to Wittgenstein in 1919: »What you write me about the purpose of your book strikes me as strange. According to you, that purpose can only be achieved if others have already thought the thoughts expressed in it. The pleasure of reading your book can therefore no longer arise through the already known content, but, rather, only through the form, in which is revealed something of the individuality of the author. Thereby the book becomes an artistic rather than a scientific achievement (*eher eine künstlerische als eine wissenschaftliche Leistung*); that which is said therein steps back behind how it is said (*wie es gesagt wird*). I had supposed in my remarks that you wanted to communicate a new content. And then the greatest clarity would indeed be the greatest beauty« (Dreben & Floyd, 2011, 41).

Such an observation of Frege is crucial. It suggests that in the *Tractatus*, the "scientific" goal of communicating data is subordinated to the "artistic" achievement of formal expression.[7]

Secondly, Wittgenstein's own self–characterization regarding the text reinforces this aesthetic priority. In a 1919 letter to Ludwig von Ficker, the editor of the literary journal *Der Brenner*, Wittgenstein explicitly sought to place his work in a literary context, stating: »The work is strictly philosophical and at the same time literary« (Monk, 1990, 177). His choice of *Der Brenner* — a journal known for publishing poetry and cultural criticism — reveals that he viewed his work as a contribution to the humanistic tradition of *Dichtung*. This conviction remained consistent throughout his life; in the notes later collected as *Culture and Value*, he famously says: »I think I summed up my position vis–à–vis philosophy when I said: philosophy should really be written only as one would write poetry (*dichten*)« (Wittgenstein, 1980, 24).[8]This statement suggests that the "truth" of a philosophical work is inseparable from its "density" (*dichten*), its rhythm, and its formal compression. Moreover, several prominent Wittgensteinian scholars characterize his work as a piece of philosophical art. For instance, as early as 1912 in a letter to Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell writes: »His [Wittgenstein] disposition is that of an artist, intuitive and moody. He says every morning he begins his work with hope, and every evening he ends in despair–he has just the sort of rage when he can't understand things that I have [16.3.12]« (Monk, 1990, 43). This was not a mere comment on his temperament but an observation of his intellectual process. Similarly, Rudolf Carnap notes that: »His point of view and his attitude toward people and problems, even theoretical problems, were much more similar to those of a creative artist than to those of a scientist; one might almost say, similar to those of a religious prophet or a seer. When he started to formulate his view on some specific philosophical problem, we often felt the internal struggle that occurred in him at that very moment, a struggle by which he tried to penetrate from darkness to light under an intense and painful strain, which was even visible on his most expressive face. When finally, sometimes after

7 For more on this, see Bremer (2021, 176–77).

8 We follow the translation of Marjorie Perloff (2011, 715).

a prolonged arduous effort, his answer came forth, his statement stood before us like a newly created piece of art or a divine revelation. Not that he asserted his views dogmatically… But the impression he made on us was as if insight came to him as through a divine inspiration, so that we could not help feeling that any sober rational comment or analysis of it would be a profanation« (Monk, 1990, 244).

Carnap's description is vital because it suggests that Wittgenstein's "compositional rigor" is more than a stylistic preference: it implies that the *Tractatus* functions as a formal performance of philosophical clarification. The "painful strain", Carnap observes, mirrors a methodological transition from conceptual confusion to logical clarity. Consequently, the resulting work should be viewed not as a traditional discursive proof, but as a structured linguistic object designed to facilitate a specific cognitive reorientation in the reader. However, the mentioned bibliographical evidences are substantial enough to suggest that Wittgenstein viewed his own philosophical project as a form of poetry (*Dichtung*).

3. Tractatus *and the "Ancient Quarrel" Between Philosophy and Poetry*

Before delineating the poetic framework of the *Tractatus*, it is necessary to examine the historical tension between philosophical and poetic discourse. This tension is codified by Plato as the »ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry« (Plato, 2000; *Republic*, 607b 5–6). Stanley Rosen (1988, vii–viii) identifies this as a foundational struggle for the "control of reality", originating in the diverging functions of *mythos* and *logos*. In the Platonic tradition, the banishment of the poets was predicated on the claim that *mimesis* (imitation) distorts the *logos* (rationality) and fails to convey the *sophia* (wisdom) possessed by the philosopher. That is, traditionally, the quarrel between philosophy and poetry were viewed as mutually exclusive domains: while philosophy was seen as the literal grasp of reality, poetry was viewed as a secondary and inherently deceptive representation. Although this traditional dichotomy between philosophy and poetry appears to be a serious tension aimed at the poetic framework of the *Tractatus*, an in–depth analysis, however, can successfully reveal that Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* effectively collapses this ancient distinction by making logic itself a form of *mimesis*. Let us have a quick glance at this matter below.

It is a very well–known fact that "Logic" plays a pivotal role in the "Tractarian" understanding of the world. It is the underlying condition that demarcates the boundaries of "what can be said" (saying) and "what cannot be said" (showing). In this context, the author himself clarifies that the book is all about drawing this boundary: »The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence« (Wittgenstein, 1922, 3). Wittgenstein achieves this demarcation with the introduction of *Picture Theory of Language and Meaning*. This framework contends that language pictures or mirrors reality in the sense that »the world is the totality of fact« (*Tractatus* 1.1) or "objects

in a certain relation to other objects" which is represented by proposition. The "Tractarian" world, therefore, is identified with the "Tractarian" language within the isomorphic framework that the "structure of the world" is represented by the "structure of the language". This structural similarity is identified with the idea of "logic" or "logical form" that contains both of the underlying similar forms situated in language and the world. In such a sense, Logic successfully demarcates the boundary between what can be said sensibly or not by picturing or mirroring the structural similarity between language and the world. If we carefully look over the metaphorical role of logic or "logical form", we see that it functions not as a descriptive mark to see the world as a totality of facts, but as an "artistic performance" to identify the world along with the structural similarity of language. This is confirmed when Wittgenstein says, »Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them. What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent« (*Tractatus* 4.121).

This remark suggests that although logical form mirrors the world by representing the structural linguistic similarity, logical form itself cannot be represented by language i.e., more specifically, although logical form is responsible for representation, it is not an item that can be further represented. This characterization makes "logic" as "transcendental" in the sense that it is not a constituent "within" the world of facts, but rather the necessary condition that makes the representation of facts possible. As a transcendental framework, logic does not describe the world from a discursive "outside"; rather, it manifests as the limit of the world itself. Thus, Wittgenstein identifies the role of logic a little metaphorically in the sense that its role is neither to describe facts nor to define them through discursive "saying", but to point toward the world as a "limited whole" (*Tractatus* 6.45) from a position that language itself — as a system of truth–functions — cannot occupy. Furthermore, by establishing that, »Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror–image of the world« (*Tractatus* 6.13), Wittgenstein effectively reclaims the "mimetic tool" of reflection as the primary method of philosophical clarification. This mirroring relationship (4.121) implies that the Tractarian concept of logic does not function as a set of instructions "about" reality, but as an artistic endeavour that "imitates" the logical structure of reality. In this context, Susan Sontag (1967, 5) argues that we should view this project as »philosophy practised as an art form«. She suggests that the resulting "silence" of the work is not a failure of logic, but a strategic act of "asceticism" — a means to achieve a clarity that discursive language cannot provide. In this sense, the "ancient quarrel" is collapsed because the logical rigor (philosophical) is achieved through a rhetorical tool of silence (aesthetic), where the work refuses the insupportable burden of language to better reflect the structure of the world.

4. The Poetic Framework: "Opaque Literalism" and "Modernist Ostranenie"

The previous sections established the limitations of the resolute and standard readings, noting their shared tendency to frame the *Tractatus* as a "self–repudiating" failure. To move beyond this impasse, we have introduced bibliographical evidence for the plausibility of a poetic framework and demonstrated how the text significantly collapses the "ancient quarrel" between philosophy and poetry. This section now focuses on the proposed poetic framework as an alternative interpretive perspective.

Before proceeding on that reading, however, let us have a look at what it means to be poetic in this context. The term *poetry*/*poetic* is the translation of *Dichtung* derives from the Old High German *dihton*, which shares an etymological root with the word *dicht*, meaning dense or "thickened plot" (Perloff, 2011, 725). In our present context, this suggests that the act of "poetizing" is not merely the creation of rhymes, but a process of "linguistic condensation". To write *Dichtung* is to compress a vast expanse of human experience, thought, and sensory data into a singular, "thickened" expression. By "thickening" thought into a formal composition, the writer makes the internal structure of an idea visible. Unlike everyday speech, which is often diffuse and utilitarian, *Dichtung* functions through "precision" and "intensification". It strips away the superficial layers of language to reach a core where meaning and form are inseparable. This "density" allows a single word or image to carry the weight of an entire world–view. However, the question then arises: How is the *Tractatus* poetic in such a sense? This framework is built on two foundations: the historical context of modernism and the linguistic strategy of "opaque literalism".

(1) In the context of literary history, 1922 is often referred to as the *Annus Mirabilis* ("Year of Wonders") because it saw the publication of several groundbreaking works that effectively defined the modernist movement (see North, 1919). Scholars view 1922 as the moment the "modern world" arrived in art. The horrors of World War I had left the old ways of writing about feeling obsolete; the authors of 1922 provided a new, fractured language to describe a fractured world. Historically, this is same year that saw the publication of the English translation of the *Tractatus*, and it coincides with modernist masterpieces such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. This is not a mere chronological coincidence; it represents a shared cultural response to the collapse of traditional European discourse following World War I (Cascardi, 2017, 43). As Marjorie Perloff (1996, 25) argues, the *Tractatus* can be read as »literature of World War I«. This may be one of the reasons, as Perloff argues, that Wittgenstein denies the necessity of a "causal nexus":

5.135 There is no possible way of making an inference from the existence of the one situation to the existence of another, entirely different situation.

5. 136 There is no causal nexus to justify such an inference.

5. 1361 We cannot infer the events of the future from those of the present.

Superstition is nothing but belief in the causal nexus.

For Wittgenstein, who drafted much of the text in the trenches, the war served as the ultimate proof of the failure of the "causal nexus". In this context, the rigid numbering system (1, 1.1, 1.11) functions not as a scientific filing method, but as a "modernist strategy of containment" (Perloff, 1996, Chap. 1). Following the trauma of the war, modernist art sought to "contain" an overwhelming reality within a grid. Each numbered proposition acts like a "stanza" in a poem, creating a spatial arrangement rather than a linear argument. In this spatial layout, the "white space" between numbers forces the reader to navigate the text as a scaffold or map of the world's logical form, rather than following a "direct road" of reasoning. This recursive structure creates a sense of "beginning again and again", forcing the reader into a spatial rather than a linear–cumulative experience.

(2) This historical context necessitated a new type of language in the case of any creative writing — one that refused to be "transparent". This leads to the second foundation: the linguistic strategy of "opaque literalism" (Perloff, 2011, 719).[9] Traditional philosophy treats language as a "transparent" window used to gaze at ideas. In contrast, "opaque literalism" treats words as literal, "thick" objects. Wittgenstein's language is opaque because it resists translation into what he really meant; the meaning is identical to the performance of the logical form itself. By stripping words of their conversational elasticity, he ensures that the reader must confront the formal limits of language directly. This strategy is driven by what Ray Monk calls a "rigorously ascetic sensibility" — a ruthless honesty that rejects all "civilized" or decorative ornaments. In the language of Monk (1990, 256), »There was little common ground between the peculiarly English, self–consciously 'civilized' aestheticism of Bloomsbury and the [Cambridge] Apostles, and Wittgenstein's rigorously ascetic sensibility and occasionally ruthless honesty«. This asceticism is the human spirit behind the *Dichtung* (condensation) of the text. By condensing philosophy into its most 'dense' form, Wittgenstein creates a mimetic mirror: the propositions do not "say" how things are; they "mirror" the logical scaffold of reality through their own bare, stripped–down architecture. The historical context as well as the structural consideration

9 It is useful to clarify our use of the terms "transparent" and "opaque". Although it is a well–known fact that Wittgenstein always believes that philosophical writings should be very much "transparent". In the context of *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein clearly maintains that the logic of language is "transparent" in its mirroring of the world's structure. In this context, the paper maintains a subtle distinction between logical transparency (the crystalline order of the *Tractatus*) and rhetorical opacity. By "opaque," we refer to what Ray Monk (1990, 256) calls the »rigorously ascetic sensibility« of the text. When we say that the language of *Tractatus* is opaque, we do not mean that it lacks clarity, rather we mean that it resists the "conversational elasticity" of everyday speech. It does not allow for a loose, paraphrasable "translation" of its meaning; instead, the meaning is identical to the formal performance of the propositions themselves. Thus, by "opacity", we mean it to be methodological: it is the text's "formal density" (*Dichtung*) that forces the reader to confront the formal limits of language directly, rather than slipping into the illusion of a comfortable, discursive explanation.

of modernist literary form suggests that one of the perspectives to read *Tractatus* might be a poetic one by identifying the text as "opaque literalism".

5. Textual Application: A Poetic Re–Reading of Proposition 6.54

The primary challenge for any interpretation of the *Tractatus* is the "ladder" metaphor in Proposition 6.54, where Wittgenstein appears to dismiss his own work as "non–sense" (*unsinnig*). In this context, we have already discussed how the two dominant readings indirectly suggest that the text is a failure by its own standards. However, a poetic framework, on the other, can frame the text within a successful treatise as well as dissolve the paradoxical passage (6.54) by suggesting the functional utility of the "ladder". Let us try to elaborate the poetic understanding of the "ladder" on the following grounds.

In a poetic framework, the "ladder" is neither indicating towards the ineffable doctrinal truth, nor rejecting the ineffable truth (only scientific description is correct), rather it stands as an experiential trajectory the success of which rests on its "temporal and rhetorical performance". To say that, as standard readers suggest, the "ladder" is an indication of ineffable truth which can be apprehended through the transcendental doctrine, is to mean that *Tractatus* is incomplete, it suggests further investigations can grasp the ineffability. However, our reading of the "ladder" suggests that this not what Wittgenstein meant. The aphorism 6.5 clearly rejects what standard readers mean:

6.5 When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words.

The *riddle* does not exist.

If the question can be framed at all, it is also possible to answer it.

This aphorism suggests that Wittgenstein not only tells us about the "riddle of life"; he also tells us about its dissolution. The only way to dissolve the "riddle" is to experience that the ineffable truth or transcendental truths cannot be put into words. If there is anything to be said about ineffable truth it is only that it cannot be put into words. This strictly rejects the standard readers' belief that there are ineffable truths that could be further investigated. At the same time, to say that, as the resolute readers suggest, the scientific descriptions are the ultimate and, in such a literal sense, ethics, aesthetics and metaphysics are simple nonsense. The following aphorisms reject such a belief of the resolute readers:

6.342 […] … the possibility of describing the world by means of Newtonian mechanics tells us nothing about the world: but what does tell us something about, is the precise way in which it is possible to describe it by these means.

6.52 We feel that even if all scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched.

These aphorisms clearly suggest although the scientific description of the world or the science of logic is very popular as well as the standard means to talk about the world as a totality of fact, this scientific lens does not tell us the problem of life itself ("riddle of life"). The resolute reading(s) remains incomplete

because it reduces the "riddle of life" to mere logical error, failing to account for the existential weight Wittgenstein assigns to the "problem of life" in 6.52.

However, a poetic reading suggests that the "ladder" facilitates as a temporal, experiential trajectory. By following Ganguly's idea of "suggesting" or "pointing", it points out the limitations of both these domains — the "sayable" and "showable". Within the lens of *Dichtung*, the "nonsense" of the text is a "pedagogical necessity that works neither scientifically nor metaphysically, but aesthetically". The metaphor of 6.54 is performed artistically through linguistic exhaustion. This exhaustion is the "climb". The "climb" is the process of navigating the text's "density" (*Dichtung*). This density creates a linguistic exhaustion that eventually forces the reader to abandon the scientific "saying" in favour of the "seeing" mentioned in 6.54. When we reach 6.54, we "throw away the ladder" neither because the propositions were "wrong" in a scientific sense nor because they lead us to grasp the ineffable truths, but because they have "exhausted their functional utility" to "point out" or "suggest" that the readers "see the world aright" to mean that the world is the totality of fact and at the same time it is value–neutral. Like a poem that ceases to exist once the aesthetic epiphany has been achieved, the *Tractatus* succeeds only by making itself functionally obsolete.

The transition from the exhaustion of 6.54 to the climax of Proposition 7 is best understood through Paul Celan's concept of the *Atemwende* (breath–turn) (Perloff, 1996, xvi). In modernist poetics, this is the point where language reaches such density (*dicht*) that it must undergo a rhythmic reversal — a shift from the effortful "saying" of the intellect to the effortless "seeing" of the world as a "limited whole" (6.45). This transition mirrors the very character of the author; as Eagleton (1993, 7–8) writes, Wittgenstein was »an arresting combination of monk, mystic and mechanic: a keen European intellectual who yearned for Tolstoyan *simplicitas*, a philosophical giant with scant respect for philosophy, an irascible autocrat with a thirst for holiness«. Consequently, the final proposition — »Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent« — is not a "gag order" or a defeat of logic, but the ultimate expression of this "thirst for holiness" through *simplicitas*. Rather than a void, silence here serves as a protective *coda* (domain). Following Susan Sontag's (1967, 11) *The Aesthetics of Silence*, silence in modern art is a strategy to complete a spiritual project. This corresponds to Ganguly's "third item": a suggestive mode that protects the transcendental realm of value from the "theoretical noise" of discursive philosophy. As Ganguly (1968, 116) observes, »silence here should not merely be construed as a 'failure of expression' but as a zone where the self enjoys his security and freedom«. The silence at the end of the *Tractatus* is thus a "pregnant" silence; it allows the world, now stripped of metaphysical illusions, to manifest in its "radiant ordinariness". The paradox of the ladder is resolved because the text's success depends entirely on its own disappearance into this zone of freedom.

Conclusion

The long–standing scholarly impasse between the standard and resolute readings of the *Tractatus* stems from a shared assumption that the text must be judged by the traditional standards of discursive philosophy. By framing the work as either a collection of ineffable doctrines or a string of therapeutic nonsense, both camps eventually arrive at a vision of the *Tractatus* as a "self–repudiating" failure. This paper has proposed a third interpretative way — a "poetic framework" — that recognizes the text as a successful and coherent modernist composition. Notably, this poetic framework does not seek to simply erase the historical insights of the standard or resolute readings; rather, it identifies why they remain trapped in an interpretative impasse. By treating the *Tractatus*as a discursive "textbook," both traditional camps are forced to view the work as a "self–repudiating failure" — either as a failed attempt to say the unsayable or a self–destructive exercise in nonsense. This paper argues that the poetic framework can be a better suitable lens, as it recognizes the text's formal density (*Dichtung*) not as a decorative sophistication, but as a "necessary", "internal" mode to suggest or point towards ineffable truths. More specifically, this paper identifies the formal density of the text as successful mode of communication that functions without violating the logical limits of language. Thus, the poetic reading provides the exit from the "self–repudiating" stalemate by framing the *Tractatus* as an aesthetic achievement the success of which lies in its formal architecture. Ultimately, this paper suggests that the poetic framework of *Tractatus* is argumentatively possible and that this reading can be another of the perspectives alongside the standard and resolute readings in Wittgensteinian scholarship.

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Pjesničko čitanje Wittgensteinova djela Tractatus

Swarup Pal[*]

Sažetak

Stogodišnje proučavanje Wittgensteinova djela TractatusLogico–Philosophicus ostaje ukorijenjeno u čvrstoj pat poziciji između "rezolutnoga" i "standardnoga" čitanja. Zadnjih godina nekolicina znanstvenika definirala je obje dominantne interpretacije kao promašaje jer smatraju da djelo "samo sebe dokida" i time učinkovito ukazuju na to da Tractatus zapravo podbacuje prema vlastitim kriterijima. Članak predlaže treći okvir za tumačenje kako bismo se pomaknuli s onu stranu navedene mrtve točke: alternativno čitanje koje bi se moglo nazivati "pjesničkim". Taj okvir, u nekom znakovitom smislu, podudara se s jakom internalističkom pozicijom u odnosu na suvremenu raspravu o tom kako tumačiti Wittgensteinove neobične tekstove — smatrajući da njegovi stilistički odabiri nisu samo periferni, nego da postoji unutarnja povezanost između njih i njegove filozofske metode. Ovaj rad bavi se dvama argumentima koji podržavaju tu tvrdnju: prvo, sadržajnim i konceptualnim dokaznim gradivom o pjesničkoj namjeri unutar teksta te, drugo, strukturalnim sličnostima između TractatusLogico–Philosophicus i modernističkoga pjesništva iz 1922. godine. Rad nudi novo, pjesničko čitanje aforizma 6.54, o kojem se najčešće i vode rasprave. Takav pogled nadilazi ideju da tekst sam sebe dokida. Umjesto toga, predloženi interpretativni okvir identificira Tractatus uspješnim u smislu da se njegova učinkovitost prepoznaje putem pjesničkoga uvida — gdje posljednji poziv na "tišinu" ima funkciju estetski "sugerirati" čitateljima da na "pravilan način" sagledavaju svijet.

Ključne riječi: *Wittgenstein; modernizam; dichtung; mimesis; neproziran literalizam*

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