

TEXTUAL FUNCTIONS OF “EXPRESSION GAPS” FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTEGRAL LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT. *Textual Functions of “Expression Gaps” from the Perspective of Integral Linguistics.* This contribution proposes a critical-constructive examination of Eugenio Coseriu’s study “Die Ausdruckslücke als Ausdrucksverfahren (Textlinguistische Übung zu einem Gedicht von Kavafis) [‘Expression gaps as means of expression (Text-linguistic exercise on a poem by Cavafy)’]”, which focuses on the role played by “expression gaps” in the constitution and articulation of textual sense. Of particular interest is a type of “objective omission” highlighted by Coseriu in his analysis of C.P. Cavafy’s “IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR”, which prompts the recovery and poetic exploitation of sequences posited as missing parts of a prior original text. The 1987 study is one of Coseriu’s detailed text analyses which, along with similar interpretive sketches from *Textlinguistik* (1981), provide significant clues for elaborating the conceptual framework of “text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense” envisaged in Coseriu’s work. In this case, we will argue that expression gaps in the definition proposed in 1987 can be included in a set of text-constitutive procedures, along with evocative sign relations, textual (including metaphorical) functions, and the forms of suspending incongruence and incorrectness on the basis of adequacy. Moving on to a more specific level of analysis, the role of triggering

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multiple layers of “de-subjectivation” or “objectivation” played by expression gaps, identified by Coseriu in his interpretation of Cavafy’s poem, can also be viewed as a device for the hierarchical articulation of sense-units in genuine texts considered as global signs. This warrants a reconsideration of expression gaps in the broader perspective of text typology, both from a functional and from a historical angle. The case is made by way of a parallel analysis of the Zen-inspired short story “The Ghoul-Priest” by Donald Richie, which evidences similar functions of expression gaps as devices for sense construction, thus attesting to the wider hermeneutic relevance of Coseriu’s (1987) interpretive suggestions.

Keywords: *Eugenio Coseriu, Integral Linguistics, Text linguistics, Hermeneutics of sense, Textual meaning, Expression gaps, Textual lacunae, Evocation*

REZUMAT. Funcții textuale ale lacunelor de expresie din perspectiva lingvisticii integrale. Prezenta contribuție propune o examinare critic-constructivă a studiului lui Eugenio Coseriu „Die Ausdrucksücke als Ausdrucksverfahren (Textlinguistische Übung zu einem Gedicht von Kavafis) [‘Lacunele de expresie ca procedeu expresiv (Exercițiu textual-lingvistic pe marginea unui poem de Kavafis)’]”, focalizat asupra rolului jucat de „lacunele de expresie” în constituirea și articularea sensului textual. Un interes deosebit îl prezintă „omisiunea obiectivă” evidențiată de Coseriu în analiza poemului lui C.P. Cavafy „ IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR”, procedeu ce reclamă recuperarea și exploatarea poetică a unor secvențe postulate ca fragmente absente dintr-un text original anterior. Studiul din 1987 este una dintre analizele de text detaliate ale lui Coseriu care, împreună cu schițele interpretative din *Textlinguistik* (1981), oferă importante indicii pentru detalierea cadrului conceptual al „lingvisticii textului ca hermeneutică a sensului” prefigurată în opera lui Coseriu. În cazul de față, vom susține că „lacunele de expresie” în definiția din 1987 pot fi încadrate într-un set de procedee constitutive ale textului, alături de relațiile semnifice evocative, funcțiile textuale (inclusiv metaforice) și formele de suspendare a incongruenței și incorectitudinii pe baza adecvării. La nivelul mai determinat al analizei textuale, rolul de activare a unor multiple straturi de „de-subiectivare” sau „obiectivare” îndeplinit de lacunele de expresie, identificat de Coseriu în interpretarea poemului lui Cavafy, poate fi privit și ca un mecanism de articulare ierarhică a unităților de sens în textele autentice considerate ca semne globale. Se justifică astfel o reconsiderare a lacunelor de expresie din perspectiva mai cuprinzătoare a tipologiei textuale, atât din punct de vedere funcțional, cât și din punct de vedere istoric. Aceasta idee este probată prin analiza paralelă a povestirii de inspirație Zen „The Ghoul-Priest” [‘Preotul-vampir’] de Donald Richie, care prezintă funcții similare ale lacunelor de expresie în calitate de procedee pentru construcția sensului, atestând astfel relevanța hermeneutică mai largă a sugestiilor interpretative din Coseriu (1987).

Cuvinte-cheie: *Eugenio Coseriu, lingvistică integrală, lingvistica textului, hermeneutica sensului, sens textual, lacune textuale, evocare*

1. Introduction

1.1. This contribution proposes a critical-constructive examination of Eugenio Coseriu’s study “Die Ausdruckslücke als Ausdrucksverfahren (Textlinguistische Übung zu einem Gedicht von Kavafis) [‘Expression gaps as means of expression (Text-linguistic exercise on a poem by Cavafy)’]” (1987), which focuses on the role played by “expression gaps” in the constitution and articulation of textual sense. In a minute analysis of C.P. Cavafy’s poem “IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR”, Coseriu highlights a type of “objective omission” from the text’s surface which prompts the recovery and poetic exploitation of sequences posited as missing parts of a prior original text. Recovering these missing parts, in the manner of a philological *restitutio*, becomes a rationally preliminary step to the interpretation of the text, and at the same time affects the way in which the global sense of the text is construed.

The purpose of our examination is twofold. On the one hand, Coseriu (1987) offers an impressively intricate text analysis which, along with similar interpretive sketches from *Textlinguistik* (1981), provides important clues for fleshing out the conceptual framework of “text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense” envisaged in Coseriu’s work. In this context, it will be argued that “expression gaps” in the definition proposed in 1987 can be understood as part of a set of *text-constitutive procedures*, along with evocative sign relations, textual (including metaphorical) functions, and the forms of suspending incongruence and incorrectness on the basis of adequacy.

On the other hand, the role of triggering multiple layers of “de-subjectivation” or “objectivation” identified by Coseriu in his analysis on Cavafy’s poem supports the claim that expression gaps can also be viewed as a specific device for the *hierarchical articulation of sense-units*. This standpoint warrants a reconsideration of the status of expression gaps in the broader perspective of text typology: (a) from a functional angle, as an over-arching principle of sense construction at the level of the individual text, and (b) from a historical angle, for unraveling how expression gaps correlate with the affiliation of an individual text to a given discourse genre, or trigger evocations of certain discourse traditions². This point will be underpinned by the parallel analysis of a Zen-inspired short story, “The Ghou-Priest” by Donald Richie (1991 [1982]), which evidences similar functions of expression gaps as devices for sense construction, and thus attests to the wider hermeneutic relevance of Coseriu’s (1987) interpretive suggestions.

² For the distinction between the functional and historical dimensions in an integral-linguistic text typology, see Tămăianu(-Morita) 2001, 57-60 and 92-102, 2012a, 14-27.

1.2. The object of Coseriu's analysis is C.P. Cavafy's poem "IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR" (1917), one of several epitaphs for fictional ancient Alexandrians, in this case the funerary inscription for a certain Lefkios (Leucius). Among the poems pertaining to this genre, only "IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR" relies heavily on typographical layout to visually signal the fact that the ancient inscription has undecipherable parts. As Peter Mackridge points out in his *Introduction* to Cavafy (2008, xxx), this text is thus configured as a poem that "can't be read aloud" – the exception that proves the rule that most of the others are "oral" in nature, emphasizing "musicality, rhythm, melody and harmony". Coseriu analyzes the Greek original in parallel with his own German version, based on a published 1983 translation by W. Josing, adapted in order to follow more accurately the constitution of the source text (cf. Coseriu 1987, 376, footnote 6).

For the purposes of the present discussion, we examined two English translations (Cavafy 1992 and 2008). Both versions faithfully convey the cultural and historical evocations anchored in the culturally-loaded words and phrases "Lord Jesus Christ", "the month of Athyr [Hathor]" (October or November, the third month of the Egyptian calendar), "Kappa Zeta" (the number 27, indicating Leucius' age at death) and "Alexandrian". In Cavafy (1992) the character's name is maintained in the Greek form ("Lefkios"), whereas the 2008 version uses the Latinized form "Leucius".

We finally decided to give precedence here to the 2008 version (see Figure 1), which keeps closer to the linguistic constitution and visual layout of the original Greek text, in a way similar to the German version used by Coseriu for his own demonstration.

ΕΝ ΤΩΙ ΜΗΝΙ ΑΘΥΡ		IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR	
Μὲ δυσκολία διαβάζω	στην πέτρα τὴν ἀρχαία.	With difficulty I read	upon the ancient stone:
«Κύ[ρι]ε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ».	Ἔνα «Ψυ[χ]ήν» διακρίνω.	'LO[R]D JESUS CHRIST.'	I discern a 'so[U]L'
«Ἐν τῷ μηνί [νι] Ἀθύρ»	«Ὁ Λεύκιος[ς] ἐ[κοιμ]ήθη».	'IN THE MON[TH] OF ATHYR'	'LEUCIUS WAS LAID TO SL[EE]P.'
Στὴ μνεία τῆς ἡλικίας	«Ἐβ[ί]ωσ]εν ἐτῶν»,	Where age is mentioned	'HE LI[VE]D TO THE AGE OF'
τὸ Κάππα Ζήτα δείχνει	ποῦ νέος ἐκοιμήθη.	the Kappa Zeta* shows	he was laid to sleep so young.
Μὲς στὰ φθαρμένα βλέπω	«Αὐτὸ[ν] . . . Ἀλεξανδρέα».	In the abraded part I see	'H[IM] . . . ALEXANDRIAN.'
Μετὰ ἔχει τρεῖς γραμμὲς	πολὺ ἀκρωτηριασμένες:	There follow three lines	quite mutilated;
μὰ κάτω λέξεις βγάζω—	σὰν «δ[ά]κρυα ἡμῶν», «ὀδύνην»,	but I make out some words	like 'OUR T[EA]RS' and 'SUFFERING'
κατόπιν πάλι «δάκρυα»,	καὶ «[ἡμ]ῖν τοῖς [φ]ίλοις πένθος».	and then once more 'TEARS',	and 'TO [U]S HIS FRIENDS BEREAVEMENT.'
Μὲ φαίνεται ποῦ ὁ Λεύκιος	μεγάλως θ' ἀγαπήθη.	It seems to me the love	for Leucius was deep.
Ἐν τῷ μηνί Ἀθύρ	ὁ Λεύκιος ἐκοιμήθη.	During the month of Athyr	Leucius was laid to sleep.

Figure 1. Greek original and English version by E. Sachperoglou (in Cavafy 2008, 92-93)

It must be noted, however, that from a methodological point of view the choice of translated version is of secondary importance for the issue at hand, because it mainly serves the instrumental purpose of more readily making the

relevant textual material accessible to the English-speaking reader. As will be detailed below (2.1.), the text-constitutive role of expression gaps does not derive directly from idiomatic significations or from their associated designations. In terms of Coseriu’s (1962 [1955-1956], 1981, 1988) threefold model of language, unraveling the functions of expression gaps on Level III (Text / Discourse) only makes *indirect use* of units from Level II (language-specific organization), as indices to the nature of the absent textual sequences.

2. Coseriu’s notion of “expression gap”

2.1. Coseriu sets the spotlight of his analysis upon “Das Nicht-Sagen”, the ‘Not-saying’, or also “das Verschweigen”, ‘keeping silent’ (1987: 373), starting from the observation that ‘keeping silent’, as a non-linguistic act, *does not have any idiomatic signified* (Level II), but can obviously contribute to a great extent to the constitution of textual sense (Level III)³.

Such textual fragments, missing from the surface of the text’s verbal constitution, are perceived as necessary for effecting the overall semantic articulation of the text, and therefore need to be retrieved on the basis of expression clues actually present in the text, or by establishing meaningful connections (correlation, opposition, etc.) with sense-units that do have a material expression in the text (Coseriu 1987, 376 and 381).

The recovery and poetic exploitation of absent parts of a prior original text, possibly a fictional hypotext, is an invitation or request to the reader to join in as the respective gaps are being explored and then filled out. Recovering the missing parts proceeds in a way similar to a philological *restitutio*, and it is only after this preliminary step that *interpretation* can genuinely begin, because the manner and results of the ‘reconstruction’ decisively affect the construal of the text’s global sense.

Coseriu insists that this procedure must be distinguished from the well-known device defined in ancient rhetoric as *aposiopesis* (Lat. *reticentia*, ‘the willing suspension of speech’), pointing out that the latter should be more properly called “subjective aposiopesis” (Coseriu 1987, 373). By contrast, the focus in Cavafy’s poem is on a strategy that can aptly be considered an “*objective* aposiopesis”. In other words, although the expression gaps which appear in a poetic text are obviously motivated by the text’s overall expressive intention, they are presented as *separated from this subjective purport* and projected into/onto the “things”

³ “Das Schweigen als nichteinzelnsprachliche Erscheinung hat zwar keine bestimmte *Bedeutung*, es kann aber in beträchtlichem Ausmass zum *Sinn* der Texte beitragen” (emphasis in the original). (All English equivalents and translations from Coseriu 1987 are mine – E.T.-M.)

themselves, in a process that Coseriu calls “Entsubjektivierung” (‘de-subjectivation’), i.e. “das Objektiv-Machen” (‘rendering objective’) (374). This procedure, typical of literary classicism, not only links Cavafy to the respective textual and aesthetic tradition, but is in fact, Coseriu maintains, *the* poetic device *par excellence* in Cavafy’s oeuvre (374-375). In other words, with Cavafy, de-subjectivation functions as a fundamental principle of sense-construction which coherently justifies diverse individual text-constitutive units, as well as diverse text-constitutive procedures applied for their articulation, and therefore can be held to represent a *typological principle* of his body of poetic work considered as a global text⁴.

Coseriu discerns several progressive steps or layers of de-subjectivation (“Stufen der Objektivierung”, 375). The first step is achieved by projecting feelings and emotional contents onto worldly facts and states of things, by separating them from their original empirical context and presenting them as “memories” of another self – reminiscences from either individual or collective-historical destinies. A second layer is achieved by taking up events and persons depicted by other writers and historians, and placing them in the spotlight by “isolating them, reducing them to their essence, and making them into universal instances of human existence” (375)⁵.

A third, even higher, level is delineated if the ‘object’ of the poem is not simply and directly a character or event from the past, but another previous text, either entirely fictional or partly borrowed from existing sources. If this initial object-text presents itself as lacunary, then a further layer of de-subjectivation is achieved, because the poetic ‘I’ will also assume a metalinguistic stance and try to reconstruct the gaps before engaging in an exegesis or commentary upon it (375-376).

As far as the third and fourth layers are concerned, we would like to suggest that a fruitful connection can be established between Coseriu’s interpretive outlook on the process of pinpointing and recovering expression gaps, and one subtype of hypertextual practice defined in G. Genette’s (1997 [1982], 254) model of transtextual relations, namely with “extension” (augmentation by “addition”)⁶. To this perspective we can further associate an observation Genette

⁴ In the framework of our text-typological model, this pertains to the “textual form of the third degree”, which is configured by “the homogeneous principles that govern the sense-construction process in each ‘real’ text, a far-reaching unity that explains coherently all the different constitutional units, procedures and strategies at work in each individual text” (Tămăianu-Morita 2012a, 19).

⁵ See also a convergent comment by Mackridge (*Introduction to Cavafy* 2008, xxvi): “In his mature poetry Cavafy looks at the human predicament with the detachment of the historian who takes a long-term view”.

⁶ Materially, this is one form of the quantitative transformation of “augmentation”: elaborating a textual version whose component parts are arranged in a “more or less symmetrical order” with the original, but at a different scale (Genette 1997 [1982], 228-229).

The arrows in this conventional representation stand for what we have called “textual procedures (devices)”. It is our contention (Tămâianu[-Morita] 2001, 124-133; 2012a, 10; 2014, 136-138) that expression gaps can be included in a set of text-constitutive procedures, along with evocative sign relations, textual (including metaphorical) functions, and the forms of suspending incongruence and incoherence on the basis of adequacy. In the following sections, this view will be adopted for ascertaining the theoretical and methodological relevance of Coseriu (1987).

3. Coseriu’s analysis on Cavafy. A meta-analysis

3.1. Coseriu (1987, 377) identifies three levels of de-subjectivation in Cavafy’s poem. In other words, three ‘texts’ coexist within the same text, each one embedded in the next. If we interpret this claim through the lens of the notion of “sense articulation”, it would be more accurate to say that three levels of sense-constitution are hierarchically articulated through the symbolic ‘hinges’ represented by expression gaps. Coseriu’s stance is summarized in the following synopsis (*Table 1*):

Table 1. Synopsis of Coseriu’s analysis of the levels of “de-subjectivation” in Cavafy’s poem

Text-constitutive levels	Explication
‘Text 1’	‘The object’ that the poem ostensibly refers to: a funerary inscription on an “ancient stone”, <i>as is</i> , with lacunae, a text linked to its own “situation” (the historical-cultural context of Hellenistic Alexandria)
‘Text 2’	The (partly) reconstructed funerary inscription, posited as the genuine ‘original’ text
‘Text 3’	The poem itself (whose ‘I’ effects the philological reconstruction and takes an interpretive stance towards it, in a metatextual key)

The *material* expression gaps appear in ‘Text 1’. They are partly recovered *as text-constitutive units* in ‘Text 2’, where they are duly marked typographically (“SO[U]L”, “MON[TH]”, “HI[M]” etc.). Finally, they function *as units of sense* in ‘Text 3’, at which level the poetic I’s decision as to which gaps are reconstructed and which are not is also, in itself, a component of the sense construal process (377)⁹.

⁹ It is on this point (the hierarchical linkage “Text 3” à “Text 2” à “Text 1”) that a view through the lens of Genette’s model can enrich the paths of interpretation, by showcasing the meaning transmutations brought about by the “additions” and “supplements”.

Accessible on the surface of the text, the units with actual linguistic expression (“das sprachlich Gesagten”, Coseriu 1987, 378-379), through their signifieds and designations, convey ‘facts’ about Leucius: the time of his death (month of Athyr, year unknown), aged 27, (maybe) Alexandrian. Although the type of text is not overtly mentioned, the form and content schemata of these actualized units place ‘Text 1’ in the genre of funerary inscriptions.

Other units function as explicit markers of the shift between text-constitutive levels: “With difficulty I read”, “I see”, “I make out some words”.

On the other hand, the final section of the poem breaks the chain of objective and emotionally restrained philological / archaeological reconstruction acts, by an unexpected subjective stance-taking: the poetic I’s conjecture that the dead youth *seemed* to have been well loved by many friends (“It seems to me the love for Leucius was deep”) ¹⁰. This is placed in a direct opposition with the abrupt return to a cold factual tone in the last line, which rounds up the answer to the implicit question raised by the title (‘What happened in the month of Athyr?’): “Leucius was laid to sleep”.

3.2. Coseriu (1987, 379) emphasizes that all the elements described above pertain to the “level of signification and designation”. This statement must be understood through the lens of the principle of the double articulation of sense, as referring not merely to the signifieds and designations of lexical and grammatical units, but to the level of *textual constitution* (the signifier of the text as a global sign) (cf. *supra*, Figure 2).

Proceeding towards the level of *sense* requires the further step of taking into account the *evocations* that several key constitutive units trigger: the month expressed according to the Egyptian calendar connects with Athyr (Hathor), the goddess of sensual love and tombs, while the reference to the “soul” of the departed in close vicinity to “Lord Jesus Christ” blends in a Christian background, establishing the text’s chronotope as Alexandria in a time of cultural symbiosis of Egyptian, Hellenic and Christian elements¹¹. Nevertheless, the fragmentary inscription

¹⁰ In this context, Coseriu (1987, 381) points out that the text maintains intact the ambivalence between hetero- and homosexual love: in the configuration of the textual world, what matters is *Love* pure and simple, without further determinations. We believe that this interpretation is fully consistent with the general strategy of “de-subjectivation” that permeates the text with its embedded semantic layers.

¹¹ Mackridge describes this cultural-historical background as follows: “In those of Cavafy’s poems that are set in ancient Alexandria, the various characters from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds are united by the Greek language and Greek culture. Some characters are Coptic Christians, while others are Jewish. Yet the peaceful coexistence of two polytheistic religions (Egyptian and Greek) allowed great freedom of choice to the inhabitants of Hellenistic Egypt” (*Introduction to Cavafy* 2008, xxiv).

does not allow for depicting Leucius as a specific individual, since none of the contingent details that build up a person's destiny have survived the implacable passage of time. Therefore, the "Leucius" of 'Text 1' and 'Text 2' functions, rather, as symbolic of his time-and-place. Consequently, Coseriu maintains, his death is not just the death of a man, but the dissolution of a whole era (279-380).

Another strand of sense is configured by the poetic I's stance in 'Text 3' towards 'Text 2'. The sudden shift from 'objective' philological *restitutio* to a 'subjective' impression in the final section of the poem ("It seems to me the love for Leucius was deep"), captures the underlying theme of Love-and-Death in a *sarcastic* tonality: the love for Leucius and the sadness at his passing away may have been genuine, but they may also simply reflect the conventions of the genre 'epitaph' (383). When all is said and done, 'Love' is a supposition, and only 'Death' is an undeniable 'fact'.

Referring to other poems than the one under discussion here, Peter Mackridge points out, in the *Introduction* to Cavafy (2008, xxxviii), that "Cavafian irony emerges from a discrepancy between different degrees of knowledge", be it "the irony of fate (or the disparity between a belief or attitude and the 'truth')", or "a disparity between attitudes (of the same or different characters)". As the protagonist of "IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR" no longer has a chance to speak for himself, it is the faint traces of what might have been the voices of "his friends", recorded in the words "OUR T[E]ARS", "SUFFERING", "once more 'TEARS', and "BEREAVEMENT" from the inscription, that lend themselves for use in a disparity with the knowledge of the poetic I. This is the source of the type of "sarcasm" Coseriu identifies in the poem, more akin to another mechanism of Cavafian irony described by Mackridge: "The character who speaks in the poem is often situated at the time of the action in the past, and his limited perspective contrasts with the omniscience brought to the poet-historian by hindsight" (xxxviii).

Notwithstanding this partial homology, "IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR" displays a much more complex configuration of *sarcasm* as a unit of sense. Poignantly, Coseriu (1987, 383) concludes his interpretation of the poem with the comment that the *sarcastic perspective* spans over the three constitutive layers of the text. To begin with, in 'Text 1', the badly damaged funerary inscription evidences the frailty of human existence, and of all the perishable objects that may be expected to attest to its reality. Further on, in 'Text 2', the duality of the goddess Hathor reveals itself to be, in fact, a stark *asymmetry*: love is fleeting, whereas death and graves are forever.

At this point in the discussion one could make the case that Coseriu's sweeping stance on the issue of "sarcasm" may need to be mitigated or toned down. If a simple, synthetic formulation is sought for, it can indeed be stated that the goddess Hathor combines the opposing aspects of love and death

(“Liebe-und-Tod”, cf. Coseriu 1987, 380). Upon closer look, however, a more complex and coherent (non-contradictory) picture emerges: Hathor is the “House of Horus” and the protective “Eye of Ra”, governing over maternity, sensual love, music and dance, *and also* guiding souls into the afterlife and towards resurrection. If this nuanced evocation is taken into account, then Leucius’ death in the month of Hathor is meant to hint at the possibility that he himself and “his friends”, as inhabitants of their own world(view), might have found in this timing a soothing glimpse of hope (maternal protection alleviating the pain of death, and the goddess’ guidance towards resurrection). Interestingly, however, if this is the case, Coseriu’s own interpretation is not refuted, but enhanced: the “sarcastic” tonality of the text only gains in tragic depth. A youth died, and those close to him rationalized his death by resorting to their belief in resurrection, supported by their own cultural constructs – but then all that remains now is the badly damaged funerary inscription on the cold gravestone, read by a detached outsider, centuries after their whole civilization died out.

Finally, in ‘Text 3’, the poetic I’s sarcasm is self-directed in a meta-textual key: the last line of the poem hints at the futility of the philological strife to reconstruct the gaps only to find something that ultimately amounts to what was known from the very beginning (‘In the month of Athyr a young man died’).

Let us sum up the main points we aimed to demonstrate in Section 3. Judged in the broader framework of Coseriu’s “text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense” in conjunction with a text-typological model we developed within its premises, Coseriu (1987) can be held to bear out that, in C.P. Cavafy’s poem “IN THE MONTH OF ATHYR”, the strategy of recovering the missing content of “expression gaps” represents a specific *superordinated procedure for the hierarchical articulation of sense-units*. This strategy engenders multiple layers of “de-subjectivation” or “objectivation”, which delineate corresponding levels in the text’s constitution. In turn, other text-constitutive devices (in this particular case, various instances of evocative sign relations) are subsumed to this principal procedure. Other strands of sense, such as the poetic I’s stance (here, the multi-layered sarcastic attitude) reinforce the paths of interpretation in minute detail. As far as we can discern, “Die Ausdruckslücke als Ausdrucksverfahren” is the only published Coserian paper that unfolds in a fully concrete manner and exemplifies with crystal-clear clarity the otherwise abstract notion of *sense articulation* (without, however, explicitly mentioning the concept).

4. A parallel textual illustration

4.1. If the textual role of expression gaps identified by Coseriu in Cavafy’s poem is indeed valid as a general procedure of sense construction, we should be able to find it instantiated in other texts as well.

In our own experience as a reader of literary works from various linguistic-cultural areas, we chanced upon a text that seems to be well-suited for a parallel (analogical) examination: Donald Richie's short story "The Ghoul-Priest. A Commentary" (Richie 1991 [1982]).

Included in a collection entitled *Zen Inklings. Some Stories, Fables, Parables, and Sermons*, "The Ghoul-Priest" consists of a basic narrative line representing the faithful English translation of a Japanese original, Ueda Akinari's "Aozukin", 'The Blue Hood' [1776], interspersed with para- and metatextual segments ostensibly meant to restore and clarify Ueda's original for the benefit of the contemporary Western reader. "Aozukin" belongs to the literary genre *kaidan* (lit. 'stories of strange things', tales of ghosts and other supernatural creatures), very popular with commoners in the Edo Era (1603-1868) – horror stories with an entertaining as well as a moralizing purpose.

"Aozukin" recounts the feats of the virtuous Zen master Kaian, who travels to the northern part of Japan, and, having reached the village of Tonda in Shimotsuke Province, asks for a night's lodging at a large, well-to-do household. At the sight of the sage wearing his blue-hooded mantle, the villagers flee in panic, shouting that the 'mountain ogre' has once again turned up. The master of the house welcomes Kaian and explains the cause of the commotion. At a nearby mountain temple there lived a high-ranking priest who had been revered for his wisdom and good deeds, but one year before everything had changed. The priest had taken a boy servant of outstanding beauty, some thirteen years of age, and had fallen in love with him. However, sometime later, the boy fell ill and died. Not being able to let go of his passion, the priest kept the dead body close to himself for days, and finally took to eating the corpse's flesh and licking the bones. The priest had become a ghoul. To satisfy his craving, he then began to dig up the village graves, terrifying the locals. That is why, when Kaian showed up, head and shoulders covered in his dark blue hood, people thought the ghoul-priest had once again descended upon the village.

Hearing this account, Kaian decides to release the priest from his obsession and help him to achieve Buddhahood. Climbing up to the mountain temple, Kaian spends the night there, sitting in the same room and even offering his own flesh to the mad priest. However, the latter is unable to find Kaian in the room, despite a crazed search all night long. Kaian's holiness had made him invisible to the priest's obsessive desire. This experience determines the priest to accept Kaian's guidance back towards righteousness. Placing his own blue hood on the priest head, Kaian gives him two verses of Chinese poetry to ponder on: salvation would come when the meaning of the verses is understood¹². Back in the village,

¹² The interaction between Kaian and the priest takes the form of a Zen *mondō* (a dialogue between master and disciple) meant to lead the disciple towards *satori* (illumination). The

Kaian tells the locals they would not be bothered by the ghouls any more. One year later, Kaian returns to Tonda and learns that indeed the ghouls had never come down to the village again.

In order to ascertain what actually happened to the priest, Kaian goes back to the temple, finding it totally deserted and decayed, only to hear a faint voice endlessly repeating the verses: the priest's hooded figure is still sitting on the temple stone, trapped in a never-ending search for meaning. Shouting the question “Answer now! What is the meaning of this?” (“somasan! nan-no shoi zo!”, in this context, approx. ‘answer! what are you still doing in this world?’, Ueda 1955 [1776], 105), Kaian strikes the priest with his staff. The priest's body instantly melts away, leaving only the bones under the blue hood that had covered his head. Kaian receives the full gratitude of the locals and becomes the abbot of the temple, which still flourishes to this day.

4.2. In Richie's text “The Ghouls-Priest. A Commentary”, the flow of the faithfully translated narrative of “Aozukin” is interrupted four times by long interpolated segments, each of them organized in a two-fold structure. A first sub-section narrates alternative events put forward as “perhaps” untold parts of Ueda's original. Recovering these lacunae thus helps to reconstruct a more authentic ‘original’, which is offered to the reader as the genuine object of interpretation. A second sub-section follows, in which Richie's narrator provides guidance for this process of interpretation, in the style of Zen commentaries (*teishō*), by reformulations from various angles, illuminating analogies and hints for intuitively grasping the universally-human psychological significance and moral bearing of the events described.

One more such twofold segment is added after the end of the translated story, separated from it both typographically and through an explicit metatextual formulation:

Thus Ueda concludes his tale.

* * *

But perhaps there was more to the story (Richie 1991 [1982], 89).

Using Genette's term, this is a “supplement” which dramatically modifies the sense construed up to that point in the text.

master first gives the disciple a *kōan* (a classic ‘case’ formulated as an insoluble paradox), and the disciple sits in meditation until a solution reveals itself to the mind. The answer is then presented to the master, who judges whether it is a true realization or just a rational speculation. During *zazen* (sitting meditation), the revelation can sometimes be precipitated by the master's well-timed sudden shout and/or blow of the staff.

The hierarchical articulation of text-constitutive layers in “The Ghoul-Priest” evidences three embedded ‘texts’ parallel to those from Cavafy’s poem, as shown in the synopsis below (*Table 2*).

Table 2. Embedded text-constitutive levels in “The Ghoul-Priest”

Text-constitutive levels	Explication
‘Text 1’	Events that are said to have happened 500 years ago, recounted 200 years ago by Ueda’s omniscient narrator, with an embedded secondary narrator (the master of the house): “Aozukin”, the Japanese original
‘Text 2’	The reconstructed and translated text. Instead of the ‘philological’ wrestling showcased in Cavafy’s poem, we see here the <i>translation process</i> , with faithful parts and added segments, some in complete form, others expedited in brief summaries ¹³ (e.g. “In the original story, a long conversation continues [...]”, “The master made many a suitable remark to this [...]”, 83)
‘Text 3’	The final text entitled “The Ghoul-Priest”, whose ‘I’ restores the missing parts from “Aozukin”, makes the English translation, and takes an interpretive stance towards ‘Text 1’ and ‘Text 2’ through ‘commentaries’ and an added new ending

As with Cavafy’s poem, “The Ghoul-Priest” displays explicit markers of the shift between constitutive levels (‘Texts’ 1, 2, 3):

Thus, nearly two hundred years ago, the storyteller Ueda Akinari begins his account of something that had happened three hundred years before that. He was writing a ghost story [...] and he set out to frighten. There is more to his story than this, however (Richie 1991 [1982], 79).

Thus did the master describe the love of the priest, and thus did Ueda invent the words he used. There are, however, other words (81).

Here Ueda pauses. A holy man has cured one who is unholy. When the story is continued, salvation is assured. This is the level of the story that interested Ueda’s readers, and it is for them that he wrote. There could, however, have been more (85-86).

One could take a step back here and note that, at first sight, it might seem that the missing parts have been left out *intentionally* by the original narrator, in

¹³ This parallels the poetic I’s decision, in Cavafy’s poem, as to which expression gaps to recover and which to expedite by mentioning only the most salient units: “There follow three lines quite mutilated / but I make out some words [...]” (cf. *supra*, 3.1).

Ueda’s text: “This is the level of the story that interested Ueda’s readers, and it is for them that he wrote” (85-86). Are we dealing then with *subjective* lacunae, rather than *objective* ones?

Upon closer examination, however, these expression gaps reveal themselves to be instruments in a step-by-step *de-subjectivation* process akin to the one at work in Cavafy’s poem. ‘Text 1’ presents itself as the second-hand account of a much older text, glimpsed through, and to some extent retrieved from the oral traditions of centuries past. ‘Text 2’ further distances itself from the original events by translating “Aozukin” into English for a contemporary Western audience, and by restoring the gaps in hindsight, with the benefit of a higher, philosophical, viewpoint that separates the characters and events from their contingent context and discusses them as instantiations of the human condition in general. Finally, ‘Text 3’ undermines the whole edifice of textual meaning hitherto construed, by placing the whole story under a *sarcastic tonality*: “the level of the story that interested Ueda’s readers”, with its naïve promise of facile salvation, is, at best, a mere possibility or a supposition. The ‘reality’ of what actually happened between Kaian and the ghoulish priest only transpires from the alternative interpolated ending, with several *forms of death* at its core, as will be discussed in the next section.

4.3. Moving on towards the level of *sense*, the first device that needs to be taken into account, as with Cavafy’s poem, is the *evocation* of the cultural and historical context.

Kaian’s tale is clearly set in space and time: the temple in question is Daichū-ji Temple in Shimotsuke Province (present-day Tochigi Prefecture), and the story of madness and salvation is a ‘founding legend’ of sorts, which survived intact after Ueda Akinari made it famous in the 18th century. Present-day visitors learn about the temple, advertised as a “power spot”, and its famous pair of characters from official publicity materials, and on the temple precincts the tourist can fittingly find, side by side, the graves of Kaian and the ghoulish priest¹⁴. This contextual element is crucial for interpreting the function of the added ending in the overall process of sense construction, as will be demonstrated further on.

The overt theme of the story is the dynamics of *Love & Death*. Though the catalyst of the abbot’s madness is homosexual love and the irreplaceable loss of its object caused by the boy’s death, the reconstructed gaps and the commentaries make it clear that the real theme is *love pure and simple*. Love as possession is “the most common and the most human” of all “shades of love” (Richie 1991 [1982], 81); insatiable lust is just a more noticeable manifestation

¹⁴ See, for example, the corresponding description on the website of the tourist agency Japan Travel <https://en.japantravel.com/tochigi/tochigi-daichu-ji-temple/5196> (accessed July 3, 2025).

of the ultimate obstacle to enlightenment – attachment to worldly desires. The frailty of the human psyche is such that “love carried to the extreme” is transformed into madness (82).

With the life of the loved one vanished, *love* conjoins with *death* and is taken to a grotesque extreme: it becomes necrophilia and necrophagia. The sarcastic view on the destiny of us humans is evident in the stance taken in ‘Text 3’ towards ‘Text 2’ and ‘Text 1’:

A priest might have known this, but priests, too, are human. While this lover knew of the snares of the world and allowed himself no possessions or attachments, this love of his was too perfect, too unique a thing to relinquish (81).

At the level of ‘Text 2’, in the reconstructed alternative episodes, Kaian is made to express *a sarcastic view* towards the oversimplified moralizing focus on just the perils of homosexual love¹⁵, apparent in the villagers’ take on the fate of the priest turned ogre in ‘Text 1’.

– It is not only you I seek to help, said Kaian. I wish also to help the villagers. [...] You had, they told me, become an animal. And that, they thought, was a hard fate.
He stopped and smiled: A hard fate? Is it not what we have all desired? To become the simple beast we also feel ourselves to be? It is but our attempt to lose our troubled selves [...]. It represents, perhaps, the only peace that many of us know. But it is a limited peace. A true and abiding peace is more difficult, if more lasting (87).

In ‘Text 3’ the *sarcastic tone* also appears in a metalinguistic register. Let me explain.

Key to the ghoulish priest’s salvation is the task of understanding “the true import” of a verse (in the original, two verses) from a Chinese anthology, *Shōdōka*” (approx. 7-8 c.):

A luminous moon, the wind in the pine,
A long evening, a transcendent view –
But what is the meaning of this? (Richie 1991 [1982], 85)

In Ueda’s original, the verse (*kōan*) appears twice: once when it is given to the priest by Kaian, and once when it is heard by Kaian one year later, in the echoing voice of the priest’s entrapped mind, to be instantly cut off with a swift blow of the staff. Since ‘Text 2’ reconstructs the gaps from ‘Text 1’, in “The Ghoulish Priest”

¹⁵ “And how excellent he [the priest] might have been had he not taken up with that boy” (Richie 1991 [1982], 83).

the verse has four occurrences: each of the two above is doubled in the interpolated segments.

At face value, it might seem that the repetition vouches for the importance of decoding the poem’s meaning. And the ghoulish priest follows precisely that path, dutifully turning around the words in his mind for a year, unmoved from the temple stone, just as Kaian had instructed. But that strife only leads to entrapment. By the time Kaian returns, the priest must already have been physically dead¹⁶, and only his obsessive desire and attachment had remained – a vagrant soul lost in delusion, a voice “faint as that of a mosquito” (Richie 1991 [1982], 89), ensnared in an endless repetition of the poem. After all, redemption does not come from understanding, and the interpreted meaning of the verse is utterly unimportant. It is only the final blow by Kaian’s staff, only the *action* itself, and above all its timing, together with the reprimanding tone of voice of the question “somasan! nan-no shoi zo!” (‘Answer now! What are you still doing here? / What is this situation?’), that matter. The commentary in ‘Text 3’ unwraps:

The shock of a thought completed, the jolt of form apprehended, the sound of a loud voice after months of silence, the perception of familiar pain – the blow to the shoulder – after years of unfeeling – all of this conspired: *the priest awoke and died*. (Richie 1991 [1982], 90; emphasis mine – E.T.-M.)

The awakening of the lost soul (and the resolution of the priest’s obsessive love) is simultaneous with *death* in its absolute form, of dissolving into non-being pure and simple.

It will be noted, in this context, that the narrator’s “commentary” in the added ending of ‘Text 3’ does not elucidate ‘Text 1’¹⁷, but disassembles and undermines it, and thereby authenticates the sense of ‘Text 3’ as more true to the spirit of Zen than the didactic or moralizing conclusion which rounds up the sense at the level of ‘Text 1’. The commentary in the final section ends with a

¹⁶ This is suggested by the description of the scene as a ‘fading away’ of the priest’s figure: “like frost before the early sun, the figure melted away” (Richie 1991 [1982], 89 – faithful rendering of the Japanese original, Ueda 1955 [1976], 105).

¹⁷ A genuinely elucidatory commentary is, for example, the explanation of the verses in the editorial notes of the quoted edition (Ueda 1955, 106, footnote 2). To summarize: It is in the nature of the moon to shine, and it is in the nature of the wind to blow, but the moon does not shine purposefully or for itself, nor does the wind blow for its own benefit. It is the viewer of those tranquil scenes that feels happiness and peace of mind. Enlightenment (*satori*) is the same: it does not come from intentional pursuit, but follows naturally from actions performed with a pure mind and detachment from any contingencies, actions which will then turn out to be beneficial to others. There is no reason or actual meaning in what the moon and the wind do; it is the very absence of reasons and meaning that the mind must come to terms with.

re-statement of the decisive action: “Kaian finished the quatrain [the verse] and brought down the staff”. Predictably, “Text 3’ should also end upon these words. However, in a last twist of textual sense construal¹⁸, two more sentences follow, typographically arranged on the page as if they constituted another poem to be ... ‘understood’; this time it is a verse given by the narrator ‘Text 3’ directly to the reader:

[...] Kaian finished the quatrain and brought down the staff.
There he stood.
There he stands still (90).

In all probability, “he” designates Kaian. There remains, however, a grammatical ambiguity that allows for positing the ghoulish priest as the pronoun’s referent, as he is also mentioned several times in the respective long sentence. Be that as it may, the timeline of the story is suddenly warped from 500 years ago and 200 years ago into the present – *the reader’s present*¹⁹. The reader cannot know for sure if redemption is forever, or even if the soul is forever, but, from corroborating the cultural and historical evocations, the reader knows for sure that Kaian and the priest are still there, at Daichū-ji Temple, forever housed in their graves side by side. Or so the story goes.

5. Final thoughts

By revisiting Eugenio Coseriu’s concept of “expression gap” in conjunction with the in-depth interpretive suggestions put forward in the 1987 study “Die Ausdruckslücke als Ausdrucksverfahren (Textlinguistische Übung zu einem Gedicht von Kavafis)”, the present investigation has shown that the recovery of expression gaps can function as an overarching text-constitutive strategy, and even underpin analogous hierarchical configurations of sense units in a poem (Cavafy) and a short story (Richie) – two texts pertaining to different literary genres, constituted with different linguistic-idiomatic units (Greek / English) and evoking different cultural backgrounds (Alexandria in the Hellenistic period of Egypt / Zen Buddhism in Japan). Despite these obvious constitutive differences, it can thus be stated

¹⁸ The general typological features of Zen discourse genres evoked in Richie’s volume *Zen Inklings*, such as self-undermining textual layers, the use of insoluble paradoxes, the continuous relativization of word meanings etc., are discussed and illustrated in detail in Tămăianu-Morita (2002, 130-150).

¹⁹ Although an all-encompassing *eternal* present can also be proposed as a variant of interpretation, we believe that the adverb “still” emphasizes the duration starting with a past moment (the time when the narrated events occurred), from the vantage point of a ‘here-and-now’ defined by the reader’s action of reading the text.

that the two texts instantiate the same modality of sense-construction²⁰, and can be subsumed to the same *functional text type*, in the definition proposed in Tămâianu(-Morita) (2001 and 2012a). This expansion of Coseriu’s “text-linguistic exercise” highlights one of the possible functional roles of expression gaps, understood as text-constitutive devices concatenated with, subordinated to, or, as is the case with the illustrations discussed here, superordinated to other text-constitutive devices at the level of individual texts.

On the other hand, regarded from a *historical text-typological standpoint*, expression gaps may correlate with the affiliation of the individual text to a given discourse genre, or may trigger the evocation of certain discourse traditions. In Cavafy’s poem, we note the evocation of philological reconstruction and archaeological exploration; in Richie’s story, the evocation of the discourse traditions of Zen commentary on famous public cases, aimed at relativizing accepted meanings and undermining common-sense patterns of thought. In turn, these evocations mediate the construal of the textual chronotope in each case, with its associated cultural and historical contexts.

Each of the functions highlighted above opens up avenues for further exploration²¹, apt to clarify, refine and flesh out the conceptual scaffolding of Integral Text Linguistics, whose general blueprint and a wealth of hints for development are available in Coseriu’s published work. With this mindset, probing into the functions of expression gaps requires a systematic reading of Coseriu *via* Coseriu: “Die Ausdruckslücke...” (1987) has to be read by way of *Textlinguistik. Eine Einführung [Text Linguistics. An Introduction]* (1981), *Sprachkompetenz. Grundzüge der Theorie des Sprechens [Linguistic Competence. Fundamentals of a Theory of Speaking]* (1988), “Determinación y entorno. Dos problemas de una lingüística del hablar” [Determination and surrounding field. Two issues pertaining to a linguistics of speaking] (1962 [1955-1956]), “Lo erróneo y lo acertado en la teoría de la traducción” [Correct and erroneous questions in translation theory] (1977) – and many more.

Viewed through this metatheoretical lens, “die Ausdruckslücken”, lit. “expression gaps”, reveal themselves to be *expressive gaps*: in the framework of text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense, these two terms can rightly be regarded as interchangeable.

²⁰ This result in keeping with the basic tenet of Integral Linguistics that expressive competence (Level III), with its specific nature and content, is functionally autonomous from idiomatic competence (Level II), as well as from elocutional competence (Level I).

²¹ Moreover, in the framework of text linguistics as a hermeneutics of sense it will also be relevant and important to delve into the sense-constitutive roles that expression gaps may play in texts pertaining to other discourse types and textual genres than the poetic (literary) ones dealt with in Coseriu (1987) and in the present paper.

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