



International Journal of Social Sciences

ISSN:2587-2591

DOI Number:<http://dx.doi.org/10.30830/tobider.sayi.17.6>

Volume 8/1

2024 p. 120-135

MEMORY AND TIME IN ROBERT CREELEY'S *ECHOES*

ROBERT CREELEY'NİN *ECHOES* ADLI ESERİNDE BELLEK VE
ZAMAN

Buket DOĞAN*

ABSTRACT

Robert Creeley's poetry collection *Echoes* (1994) includes a series of eponymous poems that investigate the intricate dynamics of memory and time within the context of modern poetry. The repetition of the word *echoes* throughout the collection suggests a reverberation of memories, highlighting the continuous interplay between past and present experiences. Through his distinctive language, Creeley steers into the ephemeral nature of moments, immediate experiences and yields insight into how memories evolve and shape one's understanding of the past and the present. Following in the tradition of modern poetry, Creeley resorts to fragmented syntax and unconventional grammar structures to put the emphasis on the meditative mood and moments of hesitation, inviting readers to actively participate in meaning-making process. His imagination constructs evocative and multifarious realities which resonate with key themes of modernist literature counting the fragmentation of experience and the subjective nature of reality. By intertwining images, sounds, and emotions, Creeley displays how memories permeate the present resonating within the corporeal space. Through an analysis of Creeley's use of language and imagery, this article aims to explore how depiction of time echoes with memories and experiences in the corporeal setting and to give insight into the interconnectedness of the past and the present in shaping the human psyche.

Keywords: *Robert Creeley, Echoes (1994), Modern American Poetry, Time, Memory.*

* Lect. PhD, School of Foreign Languages, Middle East Technical University. E-mail: buketedogan@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-6847-645X, Ankara, Türkiye.

ÖZ

Robert Creeley'nin şiir seçkisi *Echoes* (1994), modern şiir bağlamında bellek ve zamanın karmaşık dinamiklerini irdeleyen yine yankılar ismini taşıyan bir dizi şiir içermektedir. Seçki boyunca yankılar kelimesinin tekrar edilmesi, anıların şimdiki zamanda yankı bulmasını ve anılarla şimdiki zamanda yaşanan deneyimler arasındaki sürekli etkileşimi vurgulamaktadır. Kendine özgü diliyle Creeley, anlık deneyimlerin doğasına yönelirken anıların nasıl evrildiğine, geçmiş ve şimdi anlayışını nasıl şekillendirdiğine ışık tutmaktadır. Modern şiir geleneğini takip eden şair, düşüncelere dalma ve tereddüt anlarını vurgulamak için parçalanmış söz dizimi ve alışılmadık dil yapılarına başvururken okuyucuyu da anlam oluşturma sürecine aktif olarak katılmaya davet eder. Creeley, modernist edebiyatın ana temalarıyla paralellik gösteren çağrışımlara dayalı ve çok çeşitli gerçeklikler inşa eder. Görüntüler, sesler ve duyguları iç içe geçirerek, Creeley, anıların maddesel alanda yankılanarak şimdiye nasıl nüfuz ettiğini göstermeye çalışmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Creeley'nin dil ve imge kullanımını analiz ederek, zamanın anılarla ve deneyimlerle maddesel ortamda nasıl yankılandığını ve geçmiş ile şimdinin iç içe geçmişliğinin insan psikolojisini şekillendirmedeki etkisini keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Robert Creeley, Echoes (1994), Modern Amerikan Şiiri, Zaman, Bellek.*

Introduction

Rather, the poem is there to affect the reader, to mean something to them that is immediate and powerful, however complex that encounter may prove to be. (Herbert & Hollis, 2020, pp.11-12)

I've never felt that writing was fiction, that it was something made up about something. I've felt that it was direct evidence of the writer's engagement with his own feelings and with the possibilities that words offered him . . . Wherever it is one stumbles (to get to wherever) at least some way will exist, so to speak, as and when a man takes this or that step — for which, god bless him. Insofar as these poems are such places, always they were ones stumbled into . . . (Creeley as cited in Faas, 1978, p. 145)

In the first excerpt I have taken at the beginning of this article, W. N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis voice a prevalent contentious statement about the nature of poetry and the immediate response of an addressee to a poem in their book titled *Strong Words* (2020). Poetry, indeed, is powerful with its potential to affect the reader with its abyssal depths of meanings. In the second excerpt, which would sound like a response to the first one, Robert Creeley expresses his genuine concerns about conveying feelings of a poet to the reader. With the help of his art, Creeley seizes the opportunity to show his awareness of his own act of thinking about what he feels and the tenor of these feelings and his heart. From his perspective, the poet's effort is to break through the mind's enclosures and to

enter fully into the world of images and senses. Thus, his poems conduct a struggle between the self-conscious mind and the instincts of the body. Poetry is a meditative experience for Creeley and he continues to explore the limits and resonances of time and space by paying attention to the public and private dimensions of poetic subjects. The reader is thus an active participant in appreciating Creeley's poetry in which memory and time are interlinked and permeate into the reader with strong images and sounds.

In the wake of World War II, American poetry was undergoing extensive changes and Robert Creeley was central in the rising tide of it. He appeared as a poet associated with the Black Mountain poets; a group of writers centered around Black Mountain College in North Carolina. In Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry* (1960), which was seen as one of the first major gatherings of the poets under umbrella organizations, Robert Creeley was similarly grouped under Black Mountain College movement that had a profound effect on poetry in the mid-20th century and beyond. Creeley's work is inspired by what this movement offers like fostering an environment that encourages interdisciplinary collaboration, experimentation with form, and a focus on the process. Especially, Charles Olson's influence, the key figure associated with the movement, extended beyond the Black Mountain and shaped much of Creeley's work. In his landmark essay "Projective Verse" Charles Olson (1966) defines poetry as a form of "energy transferred from where the poet got (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader" and that "[p]eace comes of communication" (p. 16). In the same vein, Creeley puts the emphasis on the communication between the poet, the reader and the nature of the message conveyed. In his article titled "Define" where he discusses the purpose of poetry, Creeley defies the classifications or boundaries assigned to the poet and claims that poem is a work of one person one mind: "There is no country. Speech is an assertion of one man, by one man. Therefore, each speech having its own character the poetry it engenders will be peculiar to that speck also in its own intrinsic form" (as cited in Herbert & Hollis, 2020, p.101). Rather than engaging his art with the social context and/or the poetic movement in which poetry would flourish, he focuses on the performative aspect of poetry and on the insights it arouses in the reader. Olson and Creeley, the two poets were in close contact with each other for years, extending ideas and writing letters. What Alan Riach draws from Olson and Creeley's reveal is that they "attempted to re-align themselves in a political world waking up to the end of the era of modernism" (2005, p. 142). Apart from Olson and the Black Mountain College movement, Creeley's work is associated with the Beat Generation and postmodernist literary sensibilities. How he handles time and space in his poetry is shaped with modern and postmodern perceptiveness at times. Time is cyclical and disrupted; there are fragmented narratives and appearance of different time experiences in one single poetic moment. By the same token, space is textualized as a corporeal and a living entity which leads to an understanding of time and space as closely linked and being in a dialogical relationship in the text of poetry.

Creeley explores ways of thinking about what writing might be and from what scholarship offered so far us, he is “open to the possibilities of a new world” (Riach, 2005, p. 142). At the background Creeley might have witnessed the pathos and the ruin of the world after World War II which is counterposed with some backlashing movements such as postmodernism, yet as a response to these haunting experiences, Creeley devises his unique ways. The way he handles time is far from seeing it a linear entity, but rather he interweaves present and past with how experiences reflect on the present time with echoes. He focuses on the immediate experience which is in a dialogic relationship with past reminiscences. From this lens, it can be inferred that his work is characterized by a sense of spontaneity and a desire to break away from traditional structures and conventional poetic norms. Displaying modernist sensibilities in the representation of time, Creeley lifts poetic space out of its absolute setting as well. He also juxtaposes these universal issues by creating an outlet in which he still has the urge to make use of his lyric voice, intimately personal in tone and with an angle of suggestion as Alan Riach (2005) would observe (p. 142).

Robert Creeley’s poetry is often characterized by its brevity, directness, and an emphasis on the everyday details of life. With his minimalist and experimental style of language he plays a significant role in shaping the course of American poetry. Creeley believes in the echo of the words, images, and sounds. Delivering these echoes, he exploits self-referentiality of language which reminds one of what Pound names as “the *increment of association*; usage coheres value” (as cited in Herbert & Hollis, 2020, p. 100). In other words, Creeley profits from the potential of sound and structure so successfully. He is, for Heather McHugh, remains “one of American poetry’s great syntacticians” (1997, p.9). He is after the effect of words, syntax, and linguistic devices on the reader; his aphorism like statement “form is never more than an extension of the content” rings true as he is after the effect of the resonances of what has been experienced in mind and body by contemplating the measure of memory in time and space. Charles Altieri (1976) similarly identifies that “writers could now replace interpretive selection from experience with a full and complex rendering of experience as directly as the medium of language would allow when stretched to its limits” (p.101). Creeley seems to secure what Altieri establishes with his mastery in reflecting the experience onto textual space by exploiting the potential of language.

Creeley’s collection titled *Echoes* (1994) includes seven eponymous poems each focusing on how words echo on present moment and life experiences. How we perceive memories and how they transform over time is explored via these echo poems. With his distinctive use of language, Creeley delves into the themes of time and memory and tries to capture the fleeting nature of moments and to explore how memories shape one’s understanding of past. Bernard F. Dick (1995) evaluates the collection as “a conduit to the past” in terms of seeing it “as a bridge of sounds and images that the imagination builds to a world as palpably real as the one the poet inhabits, yet richer and more layered because it exists only within the poet” (p. 373). The exploration of themes is fostered more with

fragmented syntax and lines, breaking down traditional grammar structures. This fragmentation serves to emphasize moments of hesitation, contemplation, or uncertainty. In this sense, his poetry invites his readers to fill in the gaps and actively participate in the construction of meaning, which might put a strain on the reader as time in the form of past and present are interlinked and juxtaposed. Body along with mind has a memory and ways of unique reactions over these immediate experiences in *Echoes*. Thus, Creeley explores cyclical return of memories, the weight of past experiences and the complex emotions associated with passage of time. From this perspective, the use of the word *echoes* more than once in this collection might allude to the reverberation or reliving of memories. This article investigates how past in the embodiment of memory permeates into present with the help of some images, sounds and feelings and how the depiction of time - past and present interlinked in the corporeal space- resonates on memories and experiences.

Limits and Resonances in Robert Creeley's *Echoes*

In *Echoes*, Creeley looks at past reminiscences not from a nostalgic viewpoint or with a romantic sensibility; but he observes how body and mind together react over memories and immediate present experiences. Stripping the poetic space from the grips of dualistic tendencies, he puts the emphasis on how, along with our consciousness our body has a memory. The themes memory, nostalgia and the internal struggle to move beyond certain experiences are explored in the first eponymous poem "Echo" (1994, p.15). The poem starts with the idea that the traces of a memory cannot be obliterated because this state of mind and heart pervades everywhere. It is difficult to ease one's mind out of recollections. The poetic persona in nature is surrounded by memories; and there are such close connections between nature and the poetic persona's recollections. Nature creates such an integrated and vivid space echoing the past reminiscences that it feels impossible to move beyond these experiences. This modernist solipsistic state of mind makes it difficult for the poetic persona to break and move along with the present moment. In the poem, the evocative imagery about nature is consolidated with a strong and organic element as it is stated in the first stanza:

Entire memory
Hangs tree
in mind to see
a bird be – ("Echo", 1994, p.15)

The poem begins with an intense image: "Entire memory / hangs tree" and this metaphorical description suggests that the entirety of memory is suspended like a tree in the mind creating a powerful visual image. Memory is such a strong entity that it can permeate anywhere; it is ubiquitous and the poetic persona cannot stop the effects. If the poetic persona happens to defeat the intention of the visual effects in nature outside and wants to take refuge inside, then memories will manifest themselves inside with peculiar

voices. The effects of the memories might force the poetic persona to close the windows because of the shudders and/or echoes, yet what is more uncanny is that the voice of the memories might be embodied in human language and they might raise voices like stuttering or muttering inside. Thus, memories by the agency of their power make noise and make themselves perceived with any of the five senses. The poetic persona de facto achieves intersubjectivity with nature and anything that takes place in nature. The second and the third stanzas voice how poetic persona cannot nullify these effects more strongly:

but now puts stutter
to work, shutter
the windows, shudders,
sits and mutters –

because can't
go back, still
can't get
out. Still can't. (p.15)

That the echoes of the past make themselves discernible with the help of the entities in nature must have reminded Creeley of the Romantic perception of nature as a divine and sublime being. The reason why this collection starts with S.T. Coleridge's poem is that "Frost at Midnight" puts how memories, past and reminiscences echo on the vicarious and/or sensory experiences which reveal themselves with the way the poetic persona interacts with nature and the outside world. In Coleridge's poem the poetic persona is fascinated with nature late at night in a cottage remembering his youth and he seems to embrace the quiet introspection of nature and the connections between the natural world and his own thoughts and emotions. He is also open to indulge in how memories echo on him and interferes in his thought processes: "every where / Echo or mirror seeking of itself, / And makes a toy of Thought" (as cited in Creeley, 1994, p.1). Coleridge's poetic persona elevates the role of nature to a superior status and that nature can challenge ways of thinking which echoes a romantic heart. Coleridge's poem emphasizes being one with nature; the nature is the only entity the poetic persona can relate to because everyone is to a halt; "[t]his populous village", "Sea, and hill, and wood" are all apparently silent (p.1). The poetic persona is all alone in nature late at night. He has experienced quite a lot of things as he refers to "all the numberless goings on of life" are now "[i]naudible as dreams" (p.1). Yet, still "the thin blue flame" makes itself discernible and relatable (p.1):

Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature

Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
Make it a companiable form (p.1)

It can be observed that memories are so strong and that they make themselves take the shape of anything in nature like quicksilver. Coleridge's poem resonates with so many parallel themes with Creeley's echo poems; the poetic persona is an object surrounded by images evoking memories in space and time that is impossible to break down.

In Creeley's echo poems one might feel the same type of reaction towards nature and how echoes of the past have performative effects on the poetic persona's body and mind together without a romanticizing sentimentality. Creeley's understanding of echoes has a more corporeal and performative dimension as he mentions in his interview with Alan Riach, as well. He alludes to the word *echo* talking about what he experienced in his little apartment on Montgomery Street off Broadway when his marriage fell apart and left Black Mountain. Still, he is not out of spirits as he claims "but the whole world was mine" (1996, p. 32). He adds that what he experienced resonates later on: "The echo for me comes much later" (p.32). What we remember, what our body remembers are the key concepts in his poetry. The modernist idea that one cannot hold onto progressivist nature of time, which has been promoted by the Enlightenment ideology is evident in these echo poems as present time is palpable with past recollections and images and thus does not lead the subject to move forward.

In this line of thinking, Creeley seeks to measure how one's body echo in time and space while struggling to break the enclosures of the mind and enter into the corporeal world fully. This modernist concern is voiced in the second eponymous poem "Echo" (1994, p.19) in which the poetic persona questions the limits and resonances of human experience. The opening of the poem suggests a hindrance to clarity or insight, as if something is preventing the speaker from reaching to a full understanding of his present being:

White light blocked
impulse of repose like
Wouldn't you tell me
what you were doing Couldn't
I go where you go Faith
you kept secretly because it
had no other place to be My
eyeball's simple hole wherein
'the gold gathered the
glow around it' All you
said you wanted fainted
All the ways to say No (p. 19)

The poetic persona associates the “[w]hite light” that “blocked” his “impulse of repose” with that of reflection and/or echo of the past reminiscences that flashes like a white light and preventing him from getting a serene mindset. The poem is like an interpersonal dialogue; but the poetic persona is directing questions to the echoes of his memories. He would like to have access to past, experiences, and feelings; however, the echo of these feelings can only be discernible in the eyes of the poetic persona and they do not have corporeal existence. It is insinuated that one cannot be in a state of rest or tranquility in the midst of the reflection or the echo of the past experiences on the present moment. That the poem’s conclusion is encapsulated in “no” is an indication that a full access to memories is negated, refused or rejected. In both poems bearing the same title, it is observed that memory has direct effects on the poetic persona in all ways and produces echo on time and space which evokes a response on poetic persona’s literal body such as in his eyeballs and mind. Gabrielle T. Raymond (2008), similarly, pays attention to how Creeley creates corporeality as follows: “The creative act is not a singular act but an interrelated acting, thus the poem becomes an *experiencing*” (p.83). Raymond further suggests that Creeley’s poetry “relied on the body, breath and consciousness for its realizations, and thus led to a poetics based on experience” (p. 84). From Raymond’s analysis it can be inferred that in these poems, the poetic persona is appalled to see those memories trigger reactions not only in mind but also on the body. From this respect although Creeley does not silence the lyric voice, his poetic persona is potentially volatile surrounded by any type of stimuli and thus cannot achieve full identification with any entity.

The reflection of memories onto poetic persona’s present moment and current experiences is grieving for the poetic persona in echo poems as he cannot break this cycle and move on. The poetic persona feels like an object in nature; he is agonized and tortured as any sign of memory reminds him of how he neither can have access to those moments nor focus on the present time. In the same vein, in the third eponymous poem titled “Echo” (1994, p.60), the poetic persona seems to be in a defiant mode as he notices everything related to sweet memories disappear due to inaccessible temporal and spatial distances, but anything related to unpleasant realities like the poetic persona’s yellow teeth stay (p.60). The nostalgic reminiscences and/or the existence which is determined by a specific location, time and people cannot be accessed, but can only make themselves seem in the form of echoes and/or reflections with the help of small nuances or signs. The poetic persona calls these instruments “[b]rutish” because they give pain to him:

Brutish recall
seems useless now
to us all.

But my teeth you said

Were yellow
have stayed nonetheless. (p.60)

A blatant example about that is yellow teeth stay yellow; time along with memories has a deteriorating effect making the poetic persona less handsome and makes his girlish indifference at stake:

It was your handsomeness
went sour, your
girlish insouciance,

one said. (p.60)

The poetic persona is in such a state that he cannot have access to this changed version of the persona as it is reflected or reported to him by someone. To highlight this, an anonymous voice or perspective manifests itself, possibly as an external judgment observation which is not eligible for him, but maybe for someone else. The nostalgic reminiscences are like his reference point, and he tries to analyze his emotions with the help of what he has experienced in the past. He forces himself to remember how he used to feel about those experiences.

Was being afraid
neurotic?

Did you talk of it.
Was the high cliff jumpable.
Enough enough?

Fifty years have passed. (p.60)

He was checking the feelings; when he was on the cliff he tried to understand if they used to feel afraid or not. As with modernist revolution and epistemological paradigm shifts, the absolute frozen categories cease to be reference points and time being one of them is observed to rely on space to organize its entities. Thus, he tries to rely on specific places to create meaning out of time. Such great amount of time has already passed like fifty years but the poetic persona still cannot forget and is engaged with the reflections and echo of those moments.

To be able to situate the experiences against the backdrop of a more comprehensive level of existence, Creeley uses deictic words which force the reader to question their position and transfer the experience of reading a poem to a more corporeal basis. As it is the case

in the third eponymous poem, by making use of indexical words like *there* and *here*, Creeley challenges the perception of linear time and memory being associated with a specific time period and a place:

I look back,
while you stand here,
see you there, still
see you there. (“Echo”, 1994, p.60)

Deictic words manage content and indicate a context for their interpretation; like “here” and “there” in this poem. The poetic persona juxtaposes these opaque words and creates a liminal space in which as if one can have two positions at the same time. Thus, the reader is expected to take a position to understand where is *here* and where is *there* to understand where the poetic persona stands. Maria Weinel, in a similar manner notes that “Robert Creeley’s poetry considers language’s capacity to import meaning through the semantic movement of a sentence” (2008, p.62). Creeley problematizes the notion of specific time and place of human experience; and by making use of linguistic devices, he spatializes the experience and thus tries to put it in a corporeal setting. Anyone might undergo these experiences; likewise, Raymond generalizes these experiences and extends them to whole humanity in Creeley’s poetry suggesting that “[h]uman consciousness is a context” (2008, p. 85). By making use of *you* like a deictic word and by not giving specific reference to anyone, the poetic persona generalizes the type of experience and creates a more general lyric I extending the context to anyone. Together with mind, here it is seen that body responds to images and stimuli as well. With the rich imagery the poetic persona can create another chronotope which make the present and the past intermingle with the help of diverse images possible.

Creeley depicts time in the form of a cycle; memories can return at any time and it might seem impossible to break this cycle. The weight of past experiences and the complex emotions associated with the passage of time can be observed in these eponymous poems. In the sixth poem, the bittersweet nature of recollection and the elusive search for what is lost is poeticized, which feels like along with memories time is in a flux:

The return of things
round the great
looping bend in the road

where you remember
stood in mind
greyed encumbrances

patient dead dog

long lost love
till chair's rocking

became roar
sitting static
end of vision

day seems held up
by white hands were
looking for what was

gone couldn't come
back what was with
it wouldn't come looking. ("Echo", 1994, p.100)

The title "Echo" and the first line of the poem emphasize a recurrence or a return and imply the cyclical nature of memory and experience. The understanding of cyclical time suggests closeness to nature which at the same creates a temporal and spatial ambiguity. Highly descriptive imageries commanding over the poem evokes a sense of familiar, recurring location where memories resurface like the "looping bend in the road" that arouses a sense of familiar, recurring location. Wagner's (1978) analysis at this point rings clear as he puts into words: "Creeley rests on an underlying system of images: visual perception as an index to sensitivity, compassion, is common in Creeley's poetics" (p.302). In this poem similarly, once the poetic persona cannot have a clear vision, he seems to be entrapped in this opaqueness. Likewise, the mention of "greyed encumbrances" suggests that the memories might not be that vivid or clear; rather they are tinged with passage of time. The use of "encumbrances" adds a sense of burdensome weight of these memories which are enduring, even if they have faded with time. Chair's rocking at the present could be heard in the past and it could interfere in the immediate moment of present feelings. The concluding lines still convey a sense of searching for something that is gone; the white hands looking for what was lost imply a yearning for the return of the past, even though it may be impossible.

In the echo poems it is difficult to break the cycle of surrendering to the temptation of going back to the past but trying not to lose the connection with the present. The imperative phrase at the very beginning of the seventh eponymous poem "Find your way out / no doubt / or in / again begin" suggests a sense of exploration or navigation in between past experiences and present immediate moments ("Echo", 1994, p.101). Once the persona cannot get out of the cycle of nostalgic reminiscences it might be difficult for him to be back in the track of present. His understanding of time is definitely cyclical rather than a linear one; present and past moments can merge any time as time is relative in the post-Einsteinian world and memory is all constructed by the subject in any time

and space. The spatial imagery in the following lines shows that the pure imagination creates spaces and time together: “Spaces wait / faced / in the dark / no waste” (p.101). There along with space, time is ambiguous as well:

Were there
was here
was
always near

Sit down to see
be quiet be
friend
the end (p.101)

The lines “Were there / was here / was / always near” play with the notions of past and present. Again, with these indexical words but by not revealing the reference point, the poetic persona problematizes the fixed presence of past and present. The proximity of “here” and “there” suggests a constant presence, indicating that the past is always nearby and influential.

Apart from relating memory to time, Creeley exploits space to organize time in the poetic textual space. Time and space are often handled in unconventional and experimental ways reflecting the broader cultural shifts and philosophical concerns of the modern era. The present will be past soon and it will lose its effect, yet the present can at any point be haunted by the past. In the fourth eponymous poem titled “Echoes”; likewise, Creeley puts the emphasis on repetition and reverberation as the title and the first two lines suggest: “In which the moment / just left reappears” (“Echoes”, 1994, p.98). With the second stanza the poetic persona highlights that what we experienced might turn back at one time and we should accept them as they are. The understanding of time at this point is also interesting; time goes up; moves vertically to a higher place which gives the poetic persona a panoramic viewpoint. With the help of this perspective, the poetic persona has a clearer vision and in command of all types of thresholds and could see how unique present and past moments indeed amalgamate:

In which a willing
suspension of disbelief
alters not only the judgment
but all else equally

In which the time passes
vertically goes up and
up to a higher place a

plane of singular clarity (p.98)

This ascent to a “plane of singular clarity” implies a heightened or clearer understanding that comes with reflection. With the last stanza, the poetic persona might feel bitter with the final touches upon the acceptance of endings:

In which these painfully small
endings shreds of emptying
presence sheddings of seeming
person can at last be admitted. (p.98)

The poetic persona describes the acceptance of endings as “painfully small endings” and “shreds of emptying presence”, which might refer to the acknowledgment of the transient nature of moments, and the shedding of the illusion of a constant, unchanging self. The permanent stable lyric I is questioned and the present moment is problematized. Time is not a stable entity and the present time proves to embrace the reverberations of past moments. The very last line of the poem suggests a form of closure or acceptance; that is, through the echoes of the past, one can finally acknowledge and come to terms with the small endings and the changing nature of personal presence.

Lastly, Creeley questions if it is possible to find ways to enjoy the moments of presence and immediate experience in the face of the echoes of the past and reverberations. The fifth eponymous poem focuses on the difficulty of not taking action in the present time and of sitting still. That time is progressivist and pregnant with future opportunities is problematized by putting emphasis on stillness and waiting. As opposed to hectic and motional zeitgeist of the modern world, this poem shifts the attention to not moving, to waiting and to thinking deep. The poetic persona turns his attention to how he would find waiting and sitting quietly difficult in the past:

It was never
simple to wait,
to sit quiet.

Was there still
another way round,
a distance to go- (“Echo”, 1994, p.99)

The opening lines convey a sense of difficulty and complexity associated with waiting and sitting quietly. The simplicity is negated, suggesting that waiting involves more than mere passivity. The poetic persona tries to get some help from past experiences and takes it as a reference point. Exploring the alternative paths by mentioning “another way around” and “a distance to go” introduces the idea of alternative routes or paths to reach a destination. This not only refers to physical distance but also to the emotional or experiential journey and there are still some references to an echo hanging in the air:

as if an echo
hung in
the air before

one was heard,
before a word
had been said.

What was love
and where
and how did one get there. (p.99)

The reference to an echo hanging in the air implies the lingering effects of past experiences and/or the reverberations of emotions. Echo as a metaphor refers to resonances of experiences that shape one’s journey. The poetic persona tries to describe a space in which past experiences resonate and permeate into the present moment; in other words, past experiences echo in the present time by having a dialogic relationship with one another, which can be defined by Bakhtinian chronotope. In Bakhtinian terms, it refers to “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (2020, pp. 84-85). Here, in this poem it can be said that chronotope “expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space)” (p. 85). The lines “before one was heard, before a word had been said” suggest a silence but at the same time they promise a reverberation. In the same vein, Bernard Dick (1995) asserts that Creeley “exploited the potential of sound and structure” and that Creeley’s flexible use of language makes it possible for: “the imagination is free to take words in whatever combination makes the most emotional and rhythmic sense” (p.373). Similarly, the poetic persona here suggests that there is a meaningful existence in the moments leading up to verbal expression.

Conclusion

Robert Creeley in *Echoes* encapsulates the experience of the modern world by reflecting on the epistemological categories like time, space and agency. In line with the title of the collection, Creeley names seven of his poems eponymously, which puts emphasis on the

resonation of past experiences on the present time and space. With the meditative mood over memories, Creeley adopts a gnomic response to linear understanding of time and autonomous lyric I. In modern day experiences depicted in these poems, memories permeate into present time with the help of palpable images, sounds and feelings; thus, time ceases to be a homogenous and progressivist entity. The poetic persona rather is enslaved in a cyclical time zone which is filled with disjointed images, memories and immediate experiences. This fragmentation mirrors the modernist view that present day reality is multifaceted and cannot be neatly ordered. In Creeley's literary topos, memory has proximate reactions over mind and body; that is, memories resonate on human consciousness and corporeality at the same time. In terms of representation, the brevity and fragmented nature of these echo poems allow for multiple interpretations focusing on the subtleties of human experience along with quotidian realities. With linguistic devices, the reader is forced to interact with the poems; the reader has to take a position and respond to it by taking their position as their reference point. By making use of indexical words, through his use of or omission of punctuation, and/or introducing anonymous voices, Creeley creates an expansive context for pluralities or ordinaries. In brief, it can be concluded that Creeley's manifesto commitments on conveying the poetic feeling to the reader seems to be achieved as he rejuvenates past impressions and sensations with the help of his unique way of using language producing echoes of its own.

REFERENCES

- Allen, D. (1960). *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*. Grove Press.
- Altieri, C. (1976). Objective Image and Act of Mind in Modern Poetry. *PMLA*, 91(1), 101–114.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (2020). Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Slavic Series, No. 1, C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press. (Original work published 1981). pp. 84-85.
- Creeley, R. (2020). Define (1953). In W. N. H and Matthew H. (Eds.). *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*. Bloodaxe Books.
- . (1994). *Echoes*. A New Directions Book.
- . "Frost at Midnight" Coleridge, S.T. Creeley 1.
- Dick, B. F. (1995). World literature in review: English. *World Literature Today*, 69 (2), 373.
- Faas, E. (1979). *Towards a New American Poetics: Essays and Interviews*. Black Sparrow Press.

- McHugh, H. (1997). Love and Frangibility: An Appreciation of Robert Creeley [Review of *Echoes; Selected Poems*, by R. Creeley]. *The American Poetry Review*, 26(3), 9–16.
- Olson, C. (1988). Projective Verse. In R. Creeley (Ed.) *Charles Olson: Selected Writings*. New Directions.
- Raymond, G. (2008). Body, Breath, World: Robert Creeley's Phenomenological Poetics. *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 27 , 83-95.
- Riach, A., & Creeley, R. (1996). An interview with Robert Creeley. *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 15(1), 31–43.
- Riach, A. (2005). Robert Creeley. *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 24(1), 142–144.
- Herbert, W. N. & Hollis, M.. (2020). *Strong Words: Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*. Bloodaxe Books.
- Wagner, L. W. (1978). Creeley's late poems: Contexts. *Boundary 2*, 6/7(3), 301-308.
- Weinel, M. (2008). Small Spaces of Existence: Robert Creeley's Poetry. *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, 27 , 59-70.